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18 Irony and Satire

Christian Burgers

Introduction

In August 2020, American author Charles Buckley posited that the current political moment could be seen as a “24-carat golden age of satire” (Buckley 2020). To illustrate his point, he referred to work by stand-up hosts and comedians like John Oliver, Stephen Colbert, and Trevor Noah. These comedians are well known for their contribution to the genre of satirical news, in which they present humorous, and, in many cases, scathing commentary on the political news of the day. The popularity of satirical news is not restricted to the United States alone. Satirical news has been created in many countries and become popular across the globe (Baym & Jones, 2013).

The relation between satire and irony has been subject to debate. Some scholars propose that irony is a crucial aspect of satire. For instance, Skalicky and Crossley (2019: 61–62) define satire as “a discursive practice that uses both irony and subtlety to critique a specific (and commonly political) target.” In this approach to satire, irony takes center stage and is one of the core rhetorical means to create the discursive practice of satire. By contrast, other scholars argue that satire and irony are two distinct phenomena. Kreuz and Roberts (1993), for instance, propose that even though irony is often used in satire, the use of irony is not a necessary requirement for satire. In their perspective, satire can operate without using irony.

A further issue for the relation between satire and irony is that the research traditions on satire (e.g., Becker & Waisanen, 2013) and irony (e.g., Athanasiadou & Colston, 2017) have developed independently from each other, with relatively limited overlap or interaction. The goal of this contribution is bringing together these disparate strands of literature to provide an overview of similarities and differences between satire and irony. I start from the assumption that both satire and irony are multifaceted phenomena that are related in various ways. I particularly focus on conceptual relations between satire and irony. First, I describe characteristics of satire and irony, and conclude that some forms of satire can be defined as discourse-level irony. Second, I relate satire to three prominent theories of irony: (1) the Gricean perspective on irony; (2) the pretense theory of irony; and (3) the echoic theory of irony. The contribution closes with a discussion of different types of variation in satire and irony.

Characteristics of Satire and Irony

Satire is a multifaceted phenomenon, which can be expressed through literature (e.g., Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*), film (e.g., Taika Waititi's *JoJo Rabbit*), TV shows (e.g., *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*), images (e.g., political cartoons), and many other media and modalities. To encompass this range of satirical works, some perspectives start from specific conceptual elements that distinguish satire from other genres rather than a conceptual definition of satire. For instance, Test (1991: 15–36) proposes that satire consists of four elements: (1) judgment; (2) play; (3) laughter; and (4) aggression. He argues that, in every satire, each element is present in some way, but specific combinations of these elements may vary between individual works of satire. This implies that some works of satire may be more judgmental, playful, humoristic, and/or aggressive than others, but that, to some degree, all satire is constructed around these four elements.

The four elements that Test (1991) attributes to satire have also been associated with irony. First, scholars have argued that every ironic utterance contains an evaluative judgment, which is often negative (e.g., Attardo, 2000; Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, irony typically contains some form of play or pretense (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Grice, 2008), which is discussed in more detail later. Similarly, irony can be used for humorous purposes (Burgers & van Mulken, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2014) and can be seen as a form of aggressive communication, especially when a speaker is sarcastic (Attardo, 2000; Averbeck & Hample, 2008). Similar to satire, the relation between irony and the elements of judgment, play, laughter, and aggression is not always straightforward. For instance, even though irony can be humorous, not every ironic statement is funny (Gibbs et al., 2014). Furthermore, although irony can be perceived as a form of verbal aggression (Averbeck & Hample, 2008), in some contexts, irony can be perceived as less critical and less harsh than an equivalent literal statement (Dews & Winner, 1995). Nevertheless, the four elements that Test (1991) proposes as central to satire are also important for irony.

Most perspectives define irony[1] at the phrasal level (e.g., Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Grice, 2002; Wilson, 2006). This implies that a specific phrase or section in a text may be ironic, while the text as a whole is not. Very few studies so far have explicitly combined the phrasal-level perspective of irony with research on satire. One exception is the study by Young et al. (2019), who examined effects of irony in satirical monologues.

In satirical monologues in shows like *Late Night with Seth Meyers* or *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, a satirist describes specific (news) events and, simultaneously, makes jokes about these events. Young et al. (2019) conducted an experiment in which participants were exposed to satirical jokes delivered by a professional comedian in the style of a satirical monologue. In one experimental condition, jokes contained irony, while in another experimental condition, jokes contained nonironic hyperboles. Satirical monologues thus match with Kreuz and Roberts' (1993) perspective, in that irony can be added to the satirical monologue (in the form of ironic jokes), but is not necessary for the monologue (because jokes can also be nonironic).

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[1] In this contribution, irony refers to verbal irony. Other forms of irony, such as dramatic irony or situational irony (see Colston, 2017; Kreuz & Roberts, 1993), are not taken into account.

In contrast to irony, satire is typically seen as a discourse-level characteristic (e.g., Kreuz & Roberts, 1993). This means that an entire text[2] should be classified as a work of satire. Good examples of discourse-level satire are the *Cold Open* sketches in *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), or articles from satirical websites like *The Onion*, *The Daily Mash* or *The Beaverton.* In those cases, the satire can be found at the level of the entire text. For instance, one article from Canadian satirical website *The Beaverton* was titled:

> (1) Bank CEO reassures worried Canadians: "I'm going to be okay" (Pearce, 2020).

This satirical piece was published in the spring of 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic in which the world economy was hit hard and many people lost their jobs. The article was structured as an actual newspaper article in which the CEO of a large Canadian bank was supposedly interviewed. The article's literal main point was that the CEO wanted to reassure the general public about his financial wellbeing. By contrast, the satirical critique in the piece implied that, in contrast to the general public, the bank CEO would likely profit from the pandemic. Because the entire article contributed to this satirical position, the satire in (1) is located at the level of the discourse.

Like satire, irony can sometimes be used on the level of the entire text. This particular type of irony has received less attention in the literature compared to phrasal-level irony. According to Gibbs (2012: 110), discourse-level irony implies a discourse in which not necessarily every sentence is ironic, but which conveys an ironic position at the level of the entire text. Discourse-level irony thus invites "ironic processing," in which readers may infer a specific form of higher-order ironic communication (Gibbs, 2012). Gibbs illustrates this example of discourse-level irony through Jonathan Swift's satirical pamphlet *A Modest Proposal*, in which Swift provided a scathing critique on the politics of his time. Such examples imply an overlap between discourse-level irony and satire.

Satirical news articles such as Example (1) can be seen as contemporary variations on Swift's approach. For instance, in the running text of Example (1), the satirist indicates how the Canadian bank CEO

> (2) reminded … customers how the bank is there to help. "As long as this crisis lasts, you'll be able to skip mortgage and credit payments. And we'll collect thousands more on your overdue interest to pay for my collection of Patek Phillippe watches" (Pearce, 2020).

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[2] Here, text is defined broadly and can also encompass a political cartoon, a song, or another work of art.

Ironic processing of this text thus implies that readers who pick up on the satire should not at all feel reassured by the bank CEO's words (which was implied by the literal statement of Example [1]). Instead, the satirist critically describes the bank's corporate language, and paints a bleak picture of a bank profiteering off the crisis. In such cases, satirical news can be seen as a form of discourse-level irony as defined by Gibbs (2012).

Satire and irony share various conceptual elements (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993; Skalicky & Crossley, 2019). Many cases of satire can be seen as a form of discourse-level irony as defined by Gibbs (2012). Most literature on irony, however, has focused on irony at the phrasal level. The novel perspective of this contribution is that many perspectives on phrasal-level verbal irony can be used to describe and explain (some of the) key characteristics of irony and satire on a discourse level. In the following sections, I discuss three influential irony theories: (1) the Gricean view on irony; (2) the pretense theory of irony; and (3) the echoic theory of irony. Even though these theories all primarily aim to describe and define irony on the phrasal level, I argue how their predictions can be applied to satire as a form of higher-order (discourse-level) irony.

Satire and the Gricean View on Irony

Grice's (2002) classic perspective on communication starts from the assumption that most speakers strive to the uphold the Cooperative Principle (CP), which is defined as "[m]ake your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 722). Grice subsequently defines four maxims (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) related to the CP. In this perspective, irony is described as a way of flouting the maxim of quality, which is defined as "do not say what you believe to be false" (p. 722). In Grice's view, the literal meaning of an ironic statement is untrue as in Example (3), uttered during a downpour:

(3) It is great weather, isn't it?

Example (3) contains a statement that is not literally true under the circumstances in which it was uttered, because the weather was far from great. More recent work on irony from a Gricean tradition posits that untruthfulness in some form is a key characteristic of all forms of irony (Dynel, 2016). However, untruthfulness alone is not sufficient for irony, because irony is different from deception. In order to work as irony, addressees need to pick up on the intended meaning and infer that an ironic statement was not made in earnest (Grice, 2008). An ironic speaker can provide cues to help the receiver pick up on the irony (for an overview of such irony markers, see Burgers & Van Mulken, 2017). Thus, even though irony flouts the maxim of quality, an ironic speaker typically aims to let (a part of) their audience recognize the irony, thereby respecting Grice's (2002) CP.

Like irony in the Gricean perspective, various satire scholars have analyzed satire's relation to truth. For example, some of the earliest academic pieces on *The Daily Show* (*TDS*) described satirical news as a form of fake news (e.g., Amarasingam, 2011; Baym, 2005). This implies that shows like *TDS* adopt some elements of regular news broadcasts (e.g., a host sitting behind a desk and talking about news events), but should not be held to the same norms and standards as regular news. In *TDS*, this becomes most clear in the use of news correspondents, who are played by comedians, and generally behave in ways that are inappropriate for correspondents in regular news. On its website, *TDS* explicitly acknowledges that its correspondents should not be seen as regular journalists, by describing the show as being hosted by "the world's fakest news team" (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2020).

Satirical online news articles from sites like *The Beaverton*, *The Onion*, or *The Daily Mash* can also be seen as a form of fake news. This type of satire is written in the form and layout of actual news, but contains descriptions of events that did not happen and attributes quotes to social actors who did not actually express these sentiments to journalists (e.g., Example 2). This implies that, in many cases, online satirical news presents information that is not literally true, and thus flouts the maxim of quality.

While classic perspectives used the term "fake news" to refer to satire (e.g., Amarasingam, 2011; Baym, 2005), in contemporary discourse, the meaning of the term "fake news" has shifted. The fake news[3] genre is currently most associated with "pseudo-journalistic disinformation" (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019), such as online hoaxes or conspiracy theories. In such cases of disinformation, the author aims to persuade the reader that their false information is actually true. In the irony literature, such deception has been described as a "covert violation" of the maxim of quality (Dynel, 2016), because the author strives to let the maxim violation go undetected by the addressee.

In a recent review of the fake-news literature, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) propose that the label "fake news" should no longer be applied to satire. They argue that satirical news does not meet a core criterion of fake news, because satire does not intend to deceive its audience. Instead, satirists typically want their audience to be aware of the satirical nature of their work. In the irony literature, this has been labeled as an "overt violation" of the maxim of quality (Dynel, 2016), because the author wants the audience to pick up on the maxim violation.

Gricean phrasal-level irony can be described as flouting the maxim of quality while upholding the CP. This means that an ironic utterance is literally untrue, and that the ironic speaker strives to make this known to their audience.

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[3] Another contemporary use of the term "fake news" is as a derogatory label meant to disqualify or delegitimize regular news stories, journalists, and/or news outlets (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019).

A similar argument can be made on the discourse level for satire.[4] Like irony in the Gricean tradition, satire can contain a level of untruthfulness while at the same time respecting the CP. In this perspective, the distinction between irony and deception is similar to that between satire and fake news (with the latter being defined as disinformation).

Grice's perspective on irony has also been criticized. Some scholars argue that a violation of the maxim of quality is not a necessary condition for irony, because the literal meaning of an ironic statement is not necessarily untrue (e.g., Attardo, 2000; Colston, 2000; Myers Roy, 1978). The same can apply to satire. Consider the following headline from *De Speld*, a Dutch satirical newspaper similar to *The Onion*:

(4) Dutch judge passed away: No consequences for elections whatsoever (Julius & van den Berg, 2020)

The satirical article in Example (4) describes how a Dutch judge passed away after a long illness, that the Dutch prime minister intended to ask an independent selection committee to nominate a replacement judge, and that the judge's death would neither impact the upcoming Dutch parliamentary elections nor Dutch law. This article truthfully describes the Dutch procedure to find a replacement in case a judge passes away, and as such, does not violate the maxim of quality.[5] In order to understand the satire, readers had to be aware that the Dutch satire actually commented on the consequences of the death of US Supreme Court judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg in September 2020. The fact that US president Donald Trump had the opportunity to select a conservative replacement for the liberal Ginsburg was expected to have a large impact on the US elections in November 2020[6] (Wolf, 2020) and on American law, such as the potential overturning of Roe vs. Wade, which legalized abortion in the United States (McCarthy, 2020). In this particular case, the satirists implicitly contrasted the Dutch and the American political systems by saying something true about the Dutch system. Satirical Example (4) thus upholds the maxim of quality[7] and demonstrates that, even though many cases of satire flout the maxim of quality in some way, this is not a necessity for every case of satire.

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[4] Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) distinguish between what they label as (1) news satire, which combines factual information with humor in the form of a TV broadcast (e.g., *Last Week Tonight*), and (2) news parody, which is a satirical piece presented in the form of a news article (e.g., *The Onion*). They argue that the former type does not meet another criterion of fake news, which is presenting information with a low level of facticity. The latter type of satire does meet this criterion.

[5] Although the death of the judge mentioned in the article was fictitious. It can also be argued that the literal meaning of this satirical article violates the maxim of relation, because reporting on an event in which a simple procedure will be followed and that has no impact on the elections hardly seems newsworthy.

[6] At the time of publication of the article in *De Speld*, many people expected the US Supreme Court to potentially play an important part in the resolution of the 2020 presidential elections. However, even though various lawsuits were filed contesting the results of the elections, the US Supreme Court declined to take up any lawsuit related to the presidential election (Hurley, 2021).

[7] In the irony literature, similar examples have been observed for phrasal-level irony, such as the ironic statement "I love people who signal," uttered to a driver who did not signal when turning a corner (Myers Roy, 1978).

Satire and the Pretense Theory of Irony

A second influential theory of phrasal-level irony is the pretense theory. Clark and Gerrig (1984: 122) propose that, in irony, an ironic speaker S speaks to an addressee A, while pretending to be an injudicious speaker S′ speaking to addressee A′. Speaker S′ expresses a literal opinion that is worthy of ridicule that is nevertheless taken in earnest by addressee A′. However, addressee A is expected to see through the ironic pretense, and recognize that speaker S is actually mocking the views held by S′ and/or audience members like A′ who would take these views seriously. In this perspective, irony is typically directed at a target like S′ and/or A′.

Various types of satire are likewise constructed around some form of pretense (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993) or fictive interaction (Fonseca et al., 2020), and some scholars have proposed that play is central to satire (Test, 1991). Following blending theory, Fonseca et al. (2020) propose that the rhetorical strategy of fictive interaction blends is central to satire. In their perspective, fictive interaction blends involve imagined conversations through which the satirist delivers commentary on real-world political or social events. This is most clearly visible in the case of satirical imitations, in which a satirist targets a real-life politician or other social actor, and often places this target in a (at least somewhat) fictionalized scenario.

A well-known example of satirical imitation can be found in SNL's *Cold Open* sketches, which often feature famous guest stars portraying social actors who were in the news in that particular week. Such satirical imitations are often caricatures or exaggerated versions of the real-life persons being imitated. Comedian Tina Fey's satirical imitation of Sarah Palin, the Republican candidate for vice president in the 2008 US presidential elections, has received particular empirical attention. In her sketches, Fey portrayed Palin as uninformed about political issues. A survey study showed a "Fey Effect," which means that voters who had viewed Fey's SNL spoof held more negative views about Palin's candidacy compared with voters who had not seen the sketch (Baumgartner et al., 2012).

In satirical imitations like SNL spoofs, social actors are portrayed in sketches in which satirists put words into their mouths. American comedian Sarah Cooper demonstrated that satirical pretense can be constructed through lip-syncing and nonverbal communication only. In a series of satirical sketches originally posted on the social-media platform TikTok, Cooper provided a satirical imitation of President Trump. In contrast to SNL sketches, however, the audio track in Cooper's sketches was solely made up of snippets from Trump's real-life press conferences and interviews, and only contained Trump's actual words in his actual voice (Poniewozik, 2020). Cooper's sketches showed her satirical take on Trump only through nonverbal communication, combined with cut-backs to baffled-looking listeners and the use of props to undermine Trump's original words. For instance, in a sketch called "How to cognitive," Cooper (2020) used audio from an interview in which Trump boasted about passing a cognitive test. At the end of the clip, Trump stated that doctors were very surprised with his performance on this test and that these doctors told him:

> (5) That is an unbelievable thing. Rarely does someone do what you just did (Cooper, 2020: 00:00:27).

In the sketch, Cooper's Trump persona undermined Trump's words in Example (5) by simultaneously holding up a page from a coloring book in which the picture was crossed out rather than colored in. In these types of satirical imitations, the satirist lip-syncs the satirical target's words and only provides a satirical reading through nonverbal communication.

Social actors targeted through satirical imitation may respond in different ways. In some cases, social actors collaborate in the satire. For instance, American politicians like Gerald Ford, Sarah Palin, and Hillary Clinton (Chozik, 2015; Symons, 2019) have all actively participated in SNL sketches in which they were satirized. By contrast, other social actors actively reject the satire and disparage the satirists involved (Symons, 2019).

Empirical evidence suggests that, in some cases, disparagement can counter (part of) the negative effects of a satirical sketch. One study focused on a case in which President Trump attacked American actor Alec Baldwin on Twitter over the way Baldwin portrayed Trump in SNL, which led to a back and forth between Trump and Baldwin on Twitter (Becker, 2018). In this study, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups in which they only watched the SNL sketch, watched the SNL sketch followed by Trump's initial tweet attacking Baldwin, or watched the SNL sketch after which they read an article documenting the lengthy Twitter exchange between Trump and Baldwin following the sketch. Results demonstrate that participants who read the article after viewing the SNL sketch felt that Trump was more authentic, well-informed, and experienced, but less honest, than participants who only saw the sketch (Becker, 2018). These results imply that satire targets themselves can also impact the effects of satire by publicly engaging with the satirists involved.

The preceding examples all target individual social actors, but satirical pretense can also target wider groups. In many cases, satire addresses how news media report on specific political or social issues (Brewer & Marquardt, 2007). This can be seen in online satirical outlets like the American satirical website *The Onion* or the Dutch satirical website *De Speld* that take on the form of regular online journalism, while simultaneously criticizing their functioning. In some cases, the news media are targeted explicitly, as in:

> (6) Puerto Ricans without power for month can only assume this leading story across national news media (The Onion, 2017).

Example (6) is a headline from a satirical article from *The Onion* that was written about five weeks after the US territory of Puerto Rico was hit by the devastating Hurricane Maria and was still mostly without electricity. The satirical article targeted American mainstream news media which paid relatively little attention to Puerto Rico at the time, even though the territory is part of the United States and the situation was dire.

Even though pretense is an integral part of satirical imitation, satirical imitations do not necessarily have to follow all requirements for ironic pretense set out by Clark and Gerrig (1984). For instance, a satirical speaker S′ does not necessarily need to express a "patently uninformed or injudicious opinion," as mentioned by Clark and Gerrig (p. 122) as a requirement for ironic pretense. In one SNL sketch aired during the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, American actor Brad Pitt portrayed Dr. Anthony Fauci, who was one of the lead members of President Trump's Coronavirus Task Force at the time. In the sketch, Pitt's Fauci satirically commented on clips showing some of Trump's real-life statements about COVID-19. In response to Trump's promise that a COVID-19 vaccine would be available "relatively soon," Pitt-as-Fauci remarked:

> (7) Relatively soon is an interesting phrase. Relative to the entire history of earth, sure, the vaccine is going to come real fast. But if you were to tell a friend "I'll be over relatively soon," and then showed up a year-and-a-half later, well, your friend may be relatively pissed off (*Saturday Night Live*; Che & King, 2020, 00:00:42).

This SNL sketch meets the requirements for satirical imitation, as it contains an actor (Pitt) portraying a real-life social actor (Fauci) in order to criticize contemporary political events (President Trump's COVID-19 response) through humor. Furthermore, Pitt was the only satirical actor appearing in the sketch. Nevertheless, Pitt's satirical imitation does not imply criticism leveled at Fauci, but rather at Trump. At the end of the sketch, Pitt made this explicit by removing his Fauci wig, and, as himself, thanking Fauci and other medical workers for their hard work and dedication during the pandemic. Thus, the SNL sketch demonstrates that Clark and Gerrig's (1984) requirement that S′ should communicate an uninformed opinion applies to some, but not all cases of satirical imitation.

Satire and the Echoic Theory of Irony

An important discussion in the literature on phrasal irony is between proponents of the pretense view (e.g., Clark & Gerrig, 1984) and the echoic view (e.g., Wilson, 2006). In the echoic view, a speaker expresses a "dissociative attitude to a tacitly attributed utterance or thought (or, more generally, a representation with a conceptual content, for instance a moral or cultural norm), based on some perceived discrepancy between the way it represents the world and the way things actually are" (Wilson, 2006: 1724). Example (7) reflects this element of echo. Pitt-as-Fauci repeated Trump's original quote that a vaccine would be available "relatively soon" to indicate that, at the time of speaking, it would likely still take quite some time before a vaccine would become available.

Thus, under the echoic view, addressees need to hold multiple representations in mind (Wilson, 2006). That is, to fully appreciate the irony, addressees need to recognize the original "source" of the ironic statement (e.g., Trump's original quote) and see how the echo (e.g., Pitt's SNL sketch) provides a negative commentary on this original source.

An important difference between the pretense and the echoic views of irony is that the former targets a (specific or imagined) faulty speaker, while the latter targets a specific statement, thought, or norm. Recent research suggests that satire can have different potential targets. On the one hand, satire can offer criticism of a specific politician or other social actor (Gilbert, 2019). In case this criticism is expressed through a satirical imitation of the satire target, the pretense view may fit the situation well. On the other hand, satire can be directed toward specific social or political issues (Boukes, 2019). In those cases, satirists like John Oliver (in *Last Week Tonight*), Hasan Minhaj (in *Patriot Act*), or Arjen Lubach (in *Zondag met Lubach*) discuss complex or underreported issues. For instance, in one episode of his show, John Oliver spoke about how some organizations in the nineteenth-century post-Civil War American South responded to a critical perspective of the South's role in the Civil War:

> (8) One organization, called the United Daughters of the Confederacy campaigned for schools to adopt textbooks that would "accord full justice to the South," telling librarians to write "Unjust to the South," on the ones that didn't. Which is clearly absurd. It would be like a librarian writing "Unjust to Voldemort" on *Harry Potters* one through seven, or "Unjust to whale" on *Moby Dick*, or "Unjust to L. Ron Hubbard" on Leah Remini's *Troublemaker: Surviving Hollywood and Scientology* (*Last Week Tonight*; Iwinski & Werner, 2020, 00:06:59).

Example (8) contains an ironic echo of the words "Unjust to the South" as propagated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The echoic argumentation first introduces the original source of the statement, followed by a rebuttal analogy (Colston, 1999) in which Oliver ironically echoes the words "Unjust to" three times and places them in three distinct absurd scenarios. This invites the reader to also apply a similar absurdity evaluation to the original phrase of "Unjust to the South," thereby undermining the source statement. In cases like Example (8), satire can echo some of the statements made earlier by political actors about the issue in question.

Satirical echoes can be ironic, but do not necessarily have to be so. In some cases, satirical echoes can even include a call to action to its audience, which gives that satire an activistic character (Waisanen, 2018). Boukes and Hameleers (2020) report on an episode from the Dutch satirical show *Zondag met Lubach* (ZML) in which host Arjen Lubach critically discussed the election promises of Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders, the party leader for the Freedom Party. Lubach argued that Wilders continued to remain vague and unspecific on how he would enact his campaign promises when elected. At the end of the clip, Lubach encouraged viewers to ask Wilders to become more concrete about achieving his policy proposals, and encouraged them to use the hashtag #HoeDan ("#ButHow") in response to each tweet posted by Wilders. In this way, Lubach encouraged a nonironic repetition ("echo") of #HoeDan to express a critical attitude toward Wilders. In their study, Boukes and Hameleers (2020) demonstrate that support for Wilders decreased among viewers of the ZML episode, especially among those viewers who previously indicated support for Wilders' party. The ZML episode thus demonstrates that echoes do not necessarily have to be ironic to serve the goals of satirists.

A more recent perspective on irony has argued that the pretense and echoic view are not as opposed as assumed in earlier publications (e.g., Colston, 2017). Popa-Wyatt (2014) proposed an integrative account that is based on both pretense and echoic views of irony. She argues that an utterance is ironic if a speaker "U *pretends* to have a limited/defective perspective/thought *F*, and by doing so she *echoes* a real/conceivable perspective/thought *G*, which is *similar* to *F*, thereby implying that *G* is similarly limited/defective, and thus mocking those who are likely to entertain *G*" (Popa-Wyatt, 2014: 163). In this perspective, an example of irony contains both echo and pretense. In some cases, this also applies to satire. An example can be found in a recent article from *De Speld.* The article contained a fictitious interview with Hugo de Jonge, who was the Dutch minister of health, welfare and sport at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The title of the satirical article was:

(9) We asked Hugo de Jonge how he combines the pandemic with fatherhood (De Speld, 2020).[8]

The satirical interview subsequently showed how De Jonge wanted to inform the journalist about the Dutch response to COVID-19, while the journalist continuously asked irrelevant questions about De Jonge's personal life and clothing choices such as:

(10) Really have to say this, sorry, but what a nice jacket! Do you want to share what your lucky outfit is, for instance, for an important press conference?[9] Which item in your wardrobe really makes you feel like a power man? (De Speld, 2020).[10]

Examples (9) and (10) contain elements of pretense, because the author pretends to be an interviewer having an interview with a Dutch minister. At the same time, the examples also contain ironic echoes of different norms used by journalists when interviewing men or women. A message at the end of the article acknowledges this explicitly:

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[8] Original Dutch text: "We vroegen Hugo de Jonge hoe hij de pandemie combineert met het vaderschap."

[9] Hugo de Jonge was one of the government ministers who was highly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, by participating in the widely televised governmental press conferences in which the Dutch government's COVID-19 policies were introduced and explained.

[10] Original Dutch text: "Moet het echt even zeggen sorry maar wat een leuk jasje! Wil je met ons delen wat je geluksoutfit is voor bijvoorbeeld een belangrijke persco? Door welk item uit je kast voel jij je nou echt een powerman?"

(11) Were you also surprised when you read this article? No wonder, it is quite unusual that men get these questions during an interview. But for women, this happens all the time. (De Speld, 2020).[11]

Example (11) argues that the satirical article echoes the way in which women in positions of power are often approached in interviews, having to argue how they combine their job with motherhood and/or being judged on their physical appearance. Example (11) thus makes explicit what Colston (2000, 2017) labels as an ironic contrast in interview norms for female and male leaders: in order to understand the satire, the reader has to see that the author echoes media stereotypes of women, and applies these to a male politician. Thus, by echoing such stereotypic ways in which female leaders are approached, the author of the satire hopes to make the reader aware of implicit (gender) biases in aspects of communication. In that way, Examples (9) and (10) combine aspects of both pretense and echo to construct the satire.

Variations in Satire and Irony

An important element for both satire and irony is the range of variation that can be adopted by satirists and ironic speakers. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Lozano-Palacio (2019) propose that ironists can be divided into two types: solidary and hierarchical ironists. Solidary ironists strive to make their remarks clear to interpreters, while hierarchical ironists aim to show their superiority. Similar to irony, satirical speakers can also take either a solidary or a hierarchical position.

First, satire can have an explanatory function, which corresponds to the perspective of the solidary ironist as described by Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Lozano-Palacio (2019). Satire has been labeled as an "experiment in journalism" (Baym, 2005: 273). Satirists like John Oliver and Arjen Lubach present relatively lengthy segments in which they explain complex and underreported issues like net neutrality (Becker & Bode, 2018) or complex trade agreements (Boukes, 2019). In that way, satirists can place such topics on the public, media, and/or political agendas (Boukes, 2019). One study demonstrated that segments from *TDS* contained an equal amount of information as regular television news of the same length (Fox et al., 2007). In addition, experimental research demonstrated that viewers learn as much from satirical programs like *Last Week Tonight* as from television news on the same topic (Becker & Bode, 2018). As such, this type of explanatory satire seems comparable with a solidary ironist.

Second, satire always has an evaluative element, in which a satirical target is ridiculed. This corresponds to the perspective of the hierarchical ironist as defined by Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Lozano-Palacio (2019). This negative evaluation can take different forms and vary in harshness. In the satire literature, different distinctions are made between types of evaluation, on the level of both the entire satire and an individual target. On the discourse level, a distinction is made between Horatian and Juvenalian satire, named after the Roman satirists Horace and Juvenal (Holbert et al., 2011). Horatian satire is more geared toward the use of humor and laughs, while Juvenalian satire is more savage and acidic. As such, the evaluation of satire targets is typically harsher in Juvenalian (vs. Horatian) satire.

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[11] Original Dutch text: "Moest jij je ook achter de oren krabben toen je dit interview las? Niet gek, het is namelijk ongebruikelijk dat mannen dit soort vragen voorgeschoteld krijgen. Maar bij vrouwen gebeurt dit continu."

Another distinction in evaluation types can be seen on the level of individual satire targets. In those cases, the intensity of a satirical evaluation has been described through the folly-vice-sin-quotient (Droog et al., 2020; Holbert, 2016). In this hierarchy, a perceived relevant transgression or inappropriate behavior (Attardo, 2000) of a satirical target is classified in intensity. Folly is seen as the "lowest" transgression, and can for instance refer to a political gaffe (e.g., a politician who misspeaks). Vice can refer to a bad habit or negative quality of a satirical target (e.g., a politician who breaks an election promise). Sin, finally, refers to behavior that is seen as morally wrong (e.g., a politician who colludes with a foreign enemy). The folly-vice-sin-quotient predicts that, going from folly to sin, satirical evaluations will decrease in humor and play, and increase in judgment and aggression (Droog et al., 2020).

Even though solidary and hierarchical ironists are seen as two distinct groups (Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez & Lozano-Palacio, 2019), satirists can actually combine the two goals in one segment (Droog et al., 2020). Consider the following example in which John Oliver talks about a health-subsidy plan from then-Republican congressman Tom Price:

> (12) The real risk here is subsidies ending up too small for those who need them the most. Tom Price once proposed a credit … which is roughly a third of the cost of the most bare-bones plans on the market today. A tax credit that small helps cover your health insurance the way a thong covers your dad's ass: it doesn't and there is something that is fundamentally wrong about that (*Last Week Tonight*; Maurer et al., 2017: 00:11:24).

Example (12) demonstrates that Oliver explains the size of the proposed tax credit and places the credit in context by explaining why it does not cover the costs of health insurance, and it also includes a scathing evaluation of this plan ("fundamentally wrong"). In this way, the satirist combines the solidary and hierarchical functions of ironists within one segment (see also Droog et al., 2020).

On a discourse level, satire can also combine the solidary and hierarchical functions. Young (2019) describes that, in the United States, satire is seen as a typically liberal genre, and most satirical shows have a liberal signature.[12] Research has also demonstrated a confirmation bias in the selection of satirical news, with Republicans being less likely to seek out liberal (vs. conservative) satire (Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017).[13] Furthermore, and similar to irony (van Mulken et al., 2010), satire can sometimes go undetected by viewers. This is particularly the case if audience members subscribe to the ideology that is the target of the satirical attack. For instance, conservative viewers of the satirical TV show *The Colbert Report*, in which host Stephen Colbert satirically imitated a right-wing talk show host, were more likely to misconstrue the satire than liberal viewers (LaMarre et al., 2009). In those cases, viewers felt that Colbert confirmed their beliefs, even though he was in fact criticizing them.

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[12] Even though some conservative satirical outlets can be found, such as *Gutfeld!* on FOX News or the satirical news website *The Babylon Bee* (https://babylonbee.com/).

Given that satire can sometimes go undetected by viewers (LaMarre et al., 2009), an important question is how satirists mark their speech to alert readers to the satire. Previous research on this topic has demonstrated the importance of social context in responses to satire, comparing how audiences respond when regular news sources engage in satire (Peifer & Myrick, 2021). This study was based on a real-life case study in which the regular news outlet *Boston Globe* published a completely satirical front page during the 2016 presidential primaries, imagining what a Trump presidency would look like. Results demonstrate that such satire is a risky choice for regular news outlets: readers had less trust in the source after reading a satirical (vs. regular) news item (Peifer & Myrick, 2021). One explanation could be that participants did not expect a regular news outlet to engage in satire, and thus did not appreciate it. This finding aligns with previous irony research demonstrating that irony recognition is dependent on social factors like source expectations (Katz & Pexman, 1997).

In those ways, satire could, on the one hand, work as a solidary genre, by explaining and contextualizing complex news events for audience members who already agree with the satirist, while, on the other hand, work as a hierarchical genre, by aggressively judging social and political actors. However, a point of note is that this research on confirmation bias has mostly been conducted in the United States. In other cultural contexts, satire may not be exclusively liberal, but more mixed in its political ideology.

Conclusion

Irony and satire share various commonalities, but have mostly been analyzed in different strands of literature. This contribution has brought these different strands together and provided an overview of the relationship between irony and satire. Where most irony literature focuses on the phrasal level, satire literature typically emphasizes the discourse level. In some cases, satire scholars emphasize the phrasal level, for instance when distinguishing ironic from non-ironic jokes in satirical monologues (Young et al., 2019). In many other cases

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[13] Knobloch-Westerwick and Lavis (2017) did not find evidence for a reverse confirmation bias, in that Democrats did not select liberal satirical more often than conservative satire.

(e.g., satirical imitations, satirical news sites), satire can be seen as a form of discourse-level irony (Gibbs, 2012). In those cases, theories that were originally developed for phrasal-level irony such as the Gricean perspective, the pretense theory, and the echoic theory of irony can also clarify aspects of satire at the discourse level.

Bringing together literature on irony and satire also raises new questions for future research on irony and thought. Even though irony and satire share many similarities, insights from the irony literature have seldom been applied to the satire literature (and vice versa). For instance, various studies in the irony literature demonstrate that irony is often marked in some way, to alert a reader to the speaker's ironic intentions (for an overview of irony markers, see Burgers & van Mulken, 2017). Recent research has demonstrated that satire is also linguistically different from other, related genres, as it has a distinct linguistic register from regular news, opinionative news, and fiction (Brugman et al., 2022). Future research could focus on more in detail on the marking of satire, and investigate when and how irony markers serve as satire markers (see Brugman & Burgers, 2021), and whether differences can be found between different satire types (e.g., Horatian vs. Juvenalian satire).

A second promising avenue for future research lies in connecting research on political satire to other forms of figurative language like hyperbole and metaphor. Previous research has demonstrated that satire often contains exaggerations (e.g., Skalicky & Crossley, 2014) and metaphors (e.g., Droog et al., 2020). Droog et al. (2020) introduced the Humoristic Metaphors in Satirical News (HMSN) typology, which shows that satire regularly contains examples of direct and creative metaphors (like Examples 8 and 12 from this chapter). This makes satire a prime genre to investigate the occurrence and effects of figurative frames (Burgers et al., 2016) in which one or more figurative devices are used to describe and evaluate social issues.

A third opportunity for future research lies in the real-world context that satire provides for research on irony. Gibbs (2021) analyzed the use of ironic call-outs during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which speakers explicitly labeled an event as ironic. In these ironic call-outs, speakers alerted their audiences to discrepancies between their prior expectations and their present realities. As we have seen in this chapter, such call-outs are common in political satire, in which a satirical target is criticized by a satirist. For irony scholars, this makes satirical news a valuable outlet to test theories of irony usage in real-world contexts.

Finally, please note most examples in this contribution come from American and Western European satire. Nevertheless, satirical news has become popular across the globe. Thus, future research could focus on satire from different cultures. This is particularly relevant for effect studies, most of which have been conducted in the United States (although some effect studies of satire have been conducted in other countries, e.g., China – Shao & Liu, 2019; the Netherlands – Boukes, 2019; Switzerland – Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013). After all, it may be the case that satire is received differently in countries in which humor preferences and/or political landscapes are distinct from the United States. Such research could demonstrate whether satire effects on audiences are universal or different across cultures.

I hope that, by bringing together irony and satire research, this contribution can serve as a springboard for future research on both irony and satire, which can analyze in which contexts and for which audience members use and effects of irony and satire converge or diverge.

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