

# Situational and Verbal Irony, and Paradox Revisited

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**YoungEun Yoon. 2006. Situational and Verbal Irony, and Paradox Revisited.** *Language and Information* 10.2, 67–94. This paper revisits some old issues of irony, i.e., situational vs. verbal irony, and irony vs. paradox, in order to further clarify the issues. Although these issues seem to have been fully discussed, there are still unresolved and/or vague aspects that need to be accounted for. This paper also revisits the issue of theorizing the phenomenon of verbal irony, which has long been scrutinized by many philosophers and linguists including Aristotle, Grice, Sperber and Wilson, and recently, Utsumi and Attardo. (**Ewha Womans University**)

**Key words:** irony, situational irony, verbal irony, paradox, echoic theory, implicit display theory, relevant inappropriateness theory, expectation, contradiction, experiential contradiction, logical contradiction

## 1. Introduction

Irony is a well-established concept in contemporary culture. People often use such expressions as *It's an irony* and *That's ironic*. These expressions are used to describe certain situations or states of affairs. The following example describes the given situation as being ironic:

- (1) The irony is that many officials in Washington agree in private that their policy is inconsistent.

On the other hand, in the following example, recited from Martin (1992), the speaker is being ironic:

- (2) (The speaker has just sprained her ankle.)  
Oh great. That's nice.

The speaker has just run into an unfortunate event, but she is describing it as being *great* and *nice* instead of *terrible* or *horrible*.

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As is well known, irony could be divided into two categories, namely, situational and verbal irony. (1) is an example of situational irony while (2) is of verbal irony. According to numerous definitions of irony available from a variety of sources such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and textbooks, the two ironies are being separately treated. In general, a situational irony is defined as “an odd or amusing situation that involves a contrast,” whereas a verbal irony is “an utterance that means the opposite of or something different from what the speaker says.”

And yet, the traditional definitions of verbal irony like the above one have been especially criticized by numerous linguists as accounting for only a limited portion of verbal irony data. Also, it seems that the basic definitions of situational irony need to be elaborated to be able to account for both the general and merely situational irony examples.

Another interesting related issue is the comparison between irony and paradox. The following is a well-known example of paradox.

(3) More haste, less speed.

That the more you make haste, you will be more late on something seems contradictory in view of our normal reasoning. One definition of paradox is as in the following:

(4) A person, thing or situation that has two opposite features and therefore seems strange. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

(4) seems to be a bit loose definition in the sense that it does not separate irony from paradox well. Furthermore, the following example of paradox also cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* could be regarded as an example of situational irony if its first part is deleted.

(5) It is a curious paradox that professional comedians often have unhappy personal lives.

In this context, the issue of comparison between (situational) irony and paradox also needs to be further delved into.

Given this, the first purpose of this paper is to revisit some familiar issues of irony, i.e., situational vs. verbal irony, and irony vs. paradox. Another purpose of this paper is to revisit the issue of theorizing verbal irony, which has long been scrutinized by many philosophers and linguists including Aristotle, Grice, Sperber and Wilson, and recently, Utsumi and Attardo. In the process of discussing various issues of irony and paradox, we will be able to come up with a better account of paradox and both situational and verbal irony.

This paper is organized as follows: In section 2 various issues of irony will be discussed. First, we will discuss the two kinds of irony, situational and verbal irony. Second, situational irony and paradox will be compared. In section 3 some representative theories of verbal irony will be discussed, including a couple of recent theories by Utsumi (2000) and Attardo (2000). In section 4 we will try to present a comprehensive analysis of situational and verbal irony, together with paradox, based on the discussions of the previous sections.

## 2. Issues of Irony and Paradox

### 2.1 Situational and verbal irony

The well-known Socratic irony, dramatic irony, romantic irony, and extant irony, among others, are all embraced in situational irony in a broad sense. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines Socratic irony as “pretended ignorance in discussion.” It is a method of dialectic adopted by Socrates, which feigns ignorance in order to expose the weakness of another’s position. Here, there exists a contradiction or incongruity between the speaker’s actual attitude and assumed attitude.

Dramatic irony “begins with the idea of a dramatist (speaker) putting words into the mouth of a character (victim) that have one meaning for him but another meaning for the audience; either the audience already knows more than the character or the other elements of the play demonstrate the discrepancy” (Asher and Simpson, 1994, 1777). For example, in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, a dramatic irony occurs when Romeo kills himself thinking that Juliet is dead while the audience knows that she is not, in fact. In dramatic irony, a discrepancy exists between how the character(s) perceive the situation and how the audience do from an omniscient point of view.

Romantic irony, which is defined in many different ways, could be defined, in one way, as contradiction or incongruity in the contrast between the object and the subject, the ideal and the reality, and the finite and the infinite found in the Romantics’ perception of the world. Extant irony occurs when the innate discrepancy in human existence as well as in the world is perceived and found.

Given these various kinds of situational irony, Lucariello (1994) attempts to present a taxonomy of ironic event types. She collected and analyzed situations mentioned as ironic by individuals including newscasters, ordinary conversationalists, literary critics, and a number of examples provided by Muecke (1969), and identified seven major ironic event types according to their typifying characteristics: Imbalances, Losses, Wins, Double Outcomes, Dramatic, Catch-22, and Coincidence. Subtypes within these major types have also been identified, for a total of 28 different types. The followings are one or two examples of each of the seven major ironic event types:<sup>1</sup>

(6) Imbalances:

- a. The wimp who grows up to be a lion tamer.
- b. The poor banker.

(7) Losses:

Bob ridicules a coworker for clumsiness, then trips over the wastebasket.

(8) Wins:

A man is in a car accident with a woman, who as a consequence intends

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<sup>1</sup> For lack of space, the whole taxonomy of ironic event types cannot be presented here. For her more detailed presentation and discussion of the taxonomy, refer to Lucariello (1994, 130–135).

to sue him. They have a meeting and she decides not to sue. A year later they marry.

(9) Double outcomes:

- a. Susan is very gregarious and popular. Despite this, she has always basically felt so lonely.
- b. Bill shops all over for the sweater his mom wants, but cannot find it. Tiredly, he pops into a store right across from his apartment, and finds the exact sweater.

(10) Dramatic:

- a. Romeo killing himself over the “dead” Juliet.
- b. Examiner has already failed the student, whom he overhears expressing a confident hope of passing.

(11) Catch-22:

The harder one tries to think of answers on a test, the more impossible it becomes to think of any.

(12) Coincidence:

Molly had thought about a friend from grammar school just days before she unexpectedly saw her for the first time in 9 years.

Second, Lucariello had 39 subjects produce 5 ironic events each, and coded the produced ironic events by ironic type (subtype) categories. The results were that event types like Imbalances, Losses, and Double Outcomes, which exhibit the important category features of so-called “opposition,” “outcome,” or “opposition in relation to outcome,” were more frequently produced than event types like “Coincidence” and “Catch-22,” which either lack key category features or straddle the border of two categories.

In study 2, she also rated the goodness or typicality of the ironic situation types based on the results of another study carried out with 51 subjects. Its results generally verified the results of study 2, with some differences. One subtype of the Dramatic type was the highest, and the Wins type was rated the next highest. The Imbalances and Losses types were rated next higher with the exception of one subtype of each of them.

Given these studies’ results, Lucariello discussed that there are three event kinds. One kind is expected nonironic events, another is unexpected ironic events, and the third is unexpected nonironic events. For expected nonironic events and unexpected ironic events, but not for idiosyncratic unexpected nonironic events, Lucariello argues, a “script” or a “culturally recognized pattern” exists. That is how we could perceive unexpected ironic events, which deviate from routine or a script but have a culturally recognized pattern, at the same time.

If an ironic situation is an event which deviates from the normal courses of events, and it has its own conventionalized pattern, then we cannot define situational irony only in terms of concepts such as “deviation,” “incongruity,” or

“contradiction.” We should also be able to account for the so-called culturally recognized or conventionalized pattern of situational irony. Lucariello’s (1994) studies are an attempt to account for this pattern.

On the other hand, the traditional semantic approach defines an ironical utterance as an utterance which says one thing and figuratively means the opposite. Besides, Grice’s pragmatic approach defines it as an utterance that conversationally implicates the opposite of what it literally says.

These traditional definitions of verbal irony are closely related to those of situational irony discussed above. And yet, these definitions have been argued to account for only a limited portion of verbal irony data, as criticized by many linguists including Sperber and Wilson (1981; 1998), Martin (1992), Giora (1995; 1997), Curcó (2000), Utsumi (2000), and Attardo (2000).

The following examples cited from Martin (1992) show that verbal irony examples could mean exactly what they say, contrary to the traditional definitions:

(13) Our friends are always there when they need us.

(14) What tortured me the most in watching this film was boredom.

(13) is perceived as being ironic, meaning exactly what it says. However, it reminds us of a widely-held belief that our friends are always there when we need them. As for (14), what would normally be expected from a horror movie called “Torture” is that the tortures experienced by the characters in the movie keep the audience in suspense. In fact, however, what is experienced by the audience is boredom, instead. Here, a contradiction or incongruity exists between what each of the verbal ironic utterances says and the widely-held belief or expectation derived from the utterance.

Given all these, it seems obvious that concepts such as “unexpectedness,” “incongruity,” and “opposition” are involved in both situational and verbal irony. It seems, however, that these concepts are not sufficient to define irony. Later on, in section 4, we will try to redefine situational and verbal irony from a new perspective, based on the discussions in sections 2 and 3.

## 2.2 Irony and paradox

The *Collins COBUILD Dictionary* defines paradox as “a statement in which it seems that if one part of it is true, the other part of it cannot be true,” and presents (15) as an example.

(15) Although I’m so successful, I’m really rather a failure. That’s a paradox, isn’t it?

It also adds that “[y]ou describe a situation as a paradox when it involves two or more facts or qualities which seem to contradict each other,” and presents (16) as an example:

(16) The paradox is that the region’s most dynamic economies have the most primitive financial systems.

Given these two definitions, unlike the former definition, the latter definition is quite similar to that of situational irony, and (16) could also be regarded as an example of situational irony.

Then, do paradox and irony overlap in some ways? Bredin (1999), however, tries to distinguish irony and paradox. According to him, a paradox is a statement which “on the surface seems false, contradictory, or nonsensical, but which turns out, on further examination, to reveal a hitherto unconsidered truth.” On the contrary, irony does not mean what it says, and a second, unstated meaning must be taken together with the stated meaning. In other words, paradox expresses truths by words alone while irony uses words to show that there are truths beyond language: that is, irony is used not to disguise thought but to effectively reveal truth by extending the limited resources of everyday language.

And yet, what Bredin is comparing here are paradox and verbal irony, not paradox and irony in general. The difference between (verbal) irony and paradox has been quite often discussed in the literature, whereas the common features of (situational) irony and paradox have not been much discussed. Bredin also does not explain the partial overlap between (situational) irony and paradox.

Literarily, paradox is also divided into two kinds, the so-called outer and inner structural paradox. Outer structural paradox refers to the paradox which contradicts the words of the expression, while inner structural paradox refers to the paradox which contradicts or contrasts the contents of the expression and what it really means.

(17) a. It's a bitter-sweet feeling.

b. More haste, less speed.

c. Although I'm so successful, I'm really rather a failure.

(18) 나 보기가 역겨워 가실 때에는, 죽어도 아니 눈물 흘리오리다.

(If you go away because you are disgusted to see me, I'm not going to shed tears even if I die.)

(17a,b,c) are examples of outer structural paradox. In (17a), *bitter* and *sweet* are in contradiction. In (17b), *more haste* and *less speed* are in contradiction, and in (17c), *being successful* and *being a failure* are contradictory to each other. In (18), which is a famous poem of *Soweol*, if the speaker utters it with a cynical or sarcastic attitude, it is an example of verbal irony, not of paradox. However, if the speaker utters it with resignation hiding her true feelings, then it is an example of inner structural paradox.

Then, it seems that inner paradox is similar to both verbal and situational irony, but is exactly the same as neither of them. That is, the concept of inner paradox overlaps with that of both verbal and situational irony in some respects, while it perfectly overlaps with neither of them in every respect.

All in all, irony and paradox do seem to be closely related to each other, and this relationship should be accounted for. This issue combined with what was presented in the previous subsections will be discussed in detail in section 4, in the

process of coming up with a comprehensive analysis of situational and verbal irony, together with paradox.

### 3. Previous Theories of Verbal Irony

Irony is a phenomenon long studied by many philosophers and linguists, and various types of irony including Socratic, dramatic, romantic, extant, situational, and verbal irony discussed in section 2.1. have been studied. And yet, among these various, sometimes overlapping, types of ironies, verbal irony has been the main focus of most of the researches on irony by linguists. One reason for this might be that the utterance itself, not the context, is the focus of analysis in the case of verbal irony. Another reason might be that verbal irony is a challenging research topic since a variety of examples of verbal irony cannot easily be accounted for with some simple concepts and/or mechanisms.

Given this, on the way to a comprehensive analysis of irony, several representative theories of verbal irony will be discussed in the following subsections.

#### 3.1 Traditional theory to echoic theory

As discussed in section 2.1, the traditional semantic approach defines a verbal irony as an ironical utterance that says one thing and figuratively means the opposite, whereas Grice's pragmatic approach defines it as an utterance that conversationally implicates the opposite of what it literally says. Grice (1975; 1978) regards irony as a pragmatic phenomenon and links it with the Quality maxim: that is, the speaker intentionally flouts the Quality maxim when (s)he utters an ironic statement.

Sperber and Wilson (1981) discuss that the traditional semantic approach is problematic in that it does not provide a definition of figurative meaning, a mechanism for deriving the figurative meaning of a sentence, and the basis for explaining why figurative utterances exist. They also point out that Grice's approach fails to explain why an ironical utterance should ever be preferred to its literal counterpart, fails to make explicit how the move from literal meaning to conversational implicature is made in the case of irony, and fails to show that the conversational implicatures involved in irony are of the same type as the more standard cases.

To solve these problems of the classical approaches, Sperber and Wilson (Sperber and Wilson, 1981; Sperber and Wilson, 1998; Sperber, 1984; Wilson and Sperber, 1992) propose a very influential theory of irony called the "echoic" theory. According to this theory, all examples of verbal irony are "echoic" in the sense that "the speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while dissociating herself from it" and "[t]he thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person, or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm" (Wilson and Sperber, 1992, 56). The following counterexamples to the traditional theories of irony are persuasively accounted for by the echoic theory.

(19) Ah, Tuscany in May!

(20) Look, that car has all its windows intact.

- (21) The people who have the most money are entitled to the best health care.  
(Giora, In press)

For (19), Wilson and Sperber (1992, 55–56) suppose that you have invited me to Tuscany, saying that Tuscany in May is the most beautiful place on earth, and that I arrive there on a freezing cold, windy, and rainy day and utter (19). This kind of ironic exclamation does not express a complete proposition, so it cannot be true or false. Consequently, (19) does not fit into the traditional definitions of verbal irony. And yet, it is “echoing” your previous remark while dissociating from it.

Wilson and Sperber (1992, 56) also suppose a situation for (20) in which we pass a car with a broken window while we take a walk. In this situation, if I utter (20) merely to draw your attention in an ironic way, my remark is in accord with the traditional definitions, but it is “not” ironic. However, imagine that we set off for a stroll and I complain that my street is being used as a dumping ground for broken-down cars. You say that all the cars look in perfect condition to you and I’m just imagining things. Just then, we see a car pass with a broken window, and I say (20). In this situation, (20) is certainly ironic, “echoing” your previous opinion while dissociating from it.

Ironic utterance (21), which is another poster of the Guerrilla Girls, is echoing the thought of those privileged people while dissociating from the thought.

However, this very dominant theory, which seems to persuasively account for numerous examples of verbal irony, has been attacked by many linguists including Martin (1992), Seto, Hamamoto, and Yamanashi (1998), and Giora (2000). As pointed out by Seto, Hamamoto, and Yamanashi, the most serious problem of the theory is the “vagueness of the echoed source.” Although Sperber and Wilson argue that the notion of echo is broad but has limits, the fact is that in order to be able to account for all verbal irony data, the notion of echo should be broadened, but then, it loses its explanatory power, since it becomes too broad to exclusively explain verbal irony data.

Curcó (2000) has attempted to defend the echoic theory. Consider the following counterexamples to the echoic theory, provided by Giora (1995):

- (22) I think the washing hasn’t dried (said on a very rainy day).
- (23) ‘Do you know any G.M.?,’ my friend asks.  
‘Rings a bell,’ I reply (when the person in question is well known to the speakers).
- (24) I love it when you pay attention to me.

In order to account for the potential counterexample (22) within the framework of the echoic theory, Curcó argues that the speaker may attribute a thought or utterance to someone else, or to himself/herself at another time, providing a situation for (22) in which the speaker is just coming back home. Before leaving, s/he instructed his/her son to get the washing in when it dried or before, if it started to rain. When s/he returns, it is raining, and s/he notices that the washing is



still hanging outside. Curc6 further argues that the speaker utters (22) with an implicit attitude of dissociation, attributing it to his/her son or to himself/herself in a different situation (one in which it is not raining).

In other words, according to Curc6, a potential utterance that someone else or the speaker could have produced in a different situation could be regarded as being echoed. However, this much extension of the notion of echo seems to be too broad and without limitations.

Now consider (23). Curc6 argues that (23) can be accounted for in a similar way. And yet, it doesn't have to echo any previous utterance or any general belief or expectation to be ironic. If it is to be argued as echoing a potential utterance in a different situation as claimed by Curc6, what could possibly be regarded as not being echoic?

Curc6 argues that in (24) the speaker is not dissociating himself/herself from the belief represented by the proposition expressed by his/her utterance, but from the implicature which the utterance would normally give rise to, i.e., (24'):

(24') The speaker is now pleased by the attention the hearer has paid him/her.

Again, this kind of explanation which relies on the notion of implicatures, seems unconvincing and even arbitrary. For instance, (24) can also be analyzed as echoing a potential utterance in a different situation other than the present situation: that is, (24) could have been uttered by the speaker or by someone else in a situation where the hearer is paying attention to the speaker, and the speaker is expressing his/her dissociative attitude to this potential utterance.

Confronted with these counterexamples, Curc6 argues that these types of examples do not prove the echoic view of irony wrong, but that such cases certainly show a need for some reformulation so that its claims are made clearer and more specific.

However, in sum, Curc6's reformulation of the notion of echo in fact retains the same problem. Her reformulated notion of echo also becomes less persuasive by broadening its parameters too much.

Other than the echoic theory, Giora (1988; 1995; 2000) proposes the so-called "indirect negation" theory and "graded salience" hypothesis. According to her "indirect negation" theory, ironic utterances do not necessarily communicate the opposite of what they say, as argued by Grice (1975), but they indirectly negate the propositional content being expressed. Also, her "graded salience" hypothesis process model predicts that nonsalient ironies take longer to read in an irony inducing context than in a literal inducing context, since their ironic meaning is not coded in the mental lexicon, unlike salient ironies as in (25a,b)<sup>2</sup>, which take equally long to read in either context because they are coded both ironically and literally.

(25) a. A precious lot you care about my wallflowers.

b. Fat chance there is of Arsenal winning the Cup.

Martin (1992) also proposes a negation theory of irony and presents the so-called semantico-logical mechanisms of irony.

<sup>2</sup> In (25a), *a precious lot* means 'not at all' and in (25b), *fat chance* means 'lack of chance.'

However, both Giora and Martin's theories have been criticized by Curc6 (2000) that they do not provide an account for the complicated process involved in irony understanding, namely, the second-order metarepresentational capacity.

### 3.2 Implicit display theory

Utsumi (2000) proposes a theory of irony based on two main concepts, "ironic environment" and "its implicit display." First, he argues that every ironic utterance presupposes an ironic environment, which consists of the speaker's expectation, an incongruity between the expectation and the reality, and the speaker's negative attitude towards the incongruity. That is, before an ironic utterance is made by the speaker, (s)he should have some expectation which is not fulfilled in reality, and (s)he should have a negative attitude towards this unfulfillment.

Second, Utsumi argues that the speaker implicitly, not explicitly, displays the above-explained ironic environment through a verbal ironic expression. This implicit display of an ironic environment is achieved by alluding to the speaker's expectation, by violating a pragmatic principle, and/or by being accompanied by indirect cues such as hyperbolic expressions, prosodic features, facial expressions, etc.

Utsumi explains the mechanisms involved in the allusion with the following example:

- (26) [Situation] Candy had baked a pizza to satisfy her hunger. When she was dishing it up, her husband entered the kitchen and gobbled up the whole pizza. Candy said to her husband:
- a I'm not hungry at all.
  - b I'm really happy to eat the pizza.

Given the situation, for both (26a) and (26b), the speaker's expectation is such that she eats the pizza and she will not be hungry. And yet, this expectation is unfulfilled in reality, and the speaker has a negative attitude towards this unfulfillment. Also, the speaker is implicitly displaying her expectation through her ironic utterance, by violating the Quality maxim with indirect cues like hyperbolic expressions such as at all and really.

Third, Utsumi proposes a prototype-based view. That is, he argues that the notion of implicit display provides typicality conditions, which characterize the prototype of irony, and utterances can be measured to be more or less ironic based on these typicality conditions.

He defines the degree of ironicalness as in (28) by adding two more factors, namely, "desirability (or polarity)" and "manifestness," to the three factors of implicit display, as in (27).

- (27) a.  $d_a$ : the degree of allusion of an utterance to the speaker's expectation
- b.  $d_i$ : the degree of pragmatic insincerity involved in an utterance
- c.  $d_e$ : the degree of indirect expression of the negative attitude of an utterance

- d.  $d_d$ : the degree of context-independent desirability (or polarity) of an utterance
- e.  $d_m$ : the degree of manifestness of the speaker's expectation which motivates irony ( $d_a = 0$  is equivalent to  $d_m = 0$ , but  $d_a \neq d_m$  when  $d_a, d_m > 0$ )

$$(28) d(U) = d_m \cdot d_a + (1 - d_m) \cdot d_d + d_i + d_e$$

Each of the five degrees in (27) is measured on a scale of 0 to 1. With the following example, let us see how (27) and (28) work.

- (29) [Situation] A mother asked her son to clean up his messy room, but he was lost in a comic book. After a while, she discovered that his room was still messy, and said to her son:
- a. This room is totally clean!
  - b. I love children who keep their rooms clean.

Given the situation, the degree of ironicalness,  $d(U)$ , of (29a) is much bigger than a certain threshold value, since the speaker's expectation is quite manifest so that  $d_a$  and  $d_m$  are 1, and the utterance is obviously false so that  $d_i$  is much bigger than 0. Besides, it is surrounded by an ironic environment, since the speaker, the mother, has an expectation that her son's room is clean, but her expectation has failed and she has a negative attitude towards it such as anger and/or disappointment.

For (29b), it could be argued to be a true assertion. And yet, it could also be argued to be a pragmatically false statement, since it could be interpreted to be an irrelevant assertion about a group of obedient children. Even if the value of  $d_i$  is 0 here, (29b) could be evaluated as an ironic utterance when the values of other elements are big enough.

However, if the degree of ironicalness is too low or the ironic environment is not satisfied, then the utterance is not interpreted to be ironic. For example, instead of the given situation in (29), if we have a situation in which the son cleaned up his room completely, then the speaker's expectation is satisfied and the ironic environment is not formulated, and (29a,b) cannot be interpreted as ironic utterances.

However, despite Utsumi's claim that his theory has a strong expository power, his theory seems to have some defects. That is, as Utsumi himself admits (Utsumi, 2000, 1791), there are cases where the speaker's expectation is not manifest. Given these cases, he argues that the addressee does not have to know the speaker's expectation beforehand, but (s)he could infer the expectation from the utterance which includes an allusion. Hence, if the expectation is not manifest, an allusion must be included in the ironic utterance. So if the value of manifestness is 0 in the following formula (30), which indicates the degree of ironicalness, we get formula (31):

$$(30=28) d(U) = d_m \cdot d_a + (1 - d_m) \cdot d_d + d_i + d_e$$

$$(31) d(U) = d_d + d_i + d_e$$

In formula (31), the degree of allusion is missing. In this context, Utsumi argues that the context-independent polarity of the utterance can facilitate the inference process for the speaker's expectation. And yet, self-contradictorily, Utsumi (2000, 1791) adds a proviso in his definition of the degree of manifestness of the speaker's expectation that  $d_a = 0$  is equivalent to  $d_m = 0$ , but  $d_a \neq d_m$  when  $d_a, d_m > 0$ , as in (27e). This proviso is confusing, since according to his argument, it could be inferred that when the speaker's expectation is manifest beforehand, an allusion is not necessary. That is, it could be possible to have a 1 degree of manifestness and a 0 degree of allusion, contrary to the proviso.

Given this, a question arises for the validity of formula (30) and also for the validity of his argument. That is, it is unclear whether the hearer is able to infer the speaker's expectation from the context before the speaker utters an ironic expression. It seems to be more reasonable to assume that the hearer infers the speaker's expectation by the speaker's utterance. Of course, sometimes, it could be possible that the situation obviously shows the speaker's expectation failure and his/her negative attitude towards it, but mostly, the hearer's inference on the expectation is possible only when (s)he hears the speaker's utterance. Consequently, depending on the degree of allusion of the speaker's utterance, the degree of manifestation of the speaker's expectation should be determined.

Another problem of Utsumi's theory comes from the main concept of his theory, "the speaker's expectation," which replaces the concept of "echo" in the echoic theory. Although, according to him, the speaker should have some expectation which is not fulfilled in reality, towards which (s)he has a negative attitude, there are cases of irony in which the speaker's expectation is actually fulfilled in reality. In (32), the speaker is pretending to be surprised that the hearer has lost his/her temper. Again in (33), the speaker is pretending to have expected the person in question not to commit a fraud. In both (32) and (33), which are taken from Martin (1992, 88–89), in fact, the speaker's expectations are being fulfilled, not failed, contrary to Utsumi's account.

(32) You, a Christian, losing your temper!

(33) He would never commit a fraud, even though he's a personal friend of the Minister of Finance.

The following examples also show that there are cases which cannot be accounted for by Utsumi's concepts, i.e., the speaker's expectation, an incongruity between the expectation and the reality, and the speaker's negative attitude towards the incongruity.

(34) It's a tough life.

(35) Your hair looks great!

(34) could be interpreted to be ironic in a situation where the speaker just lightly teases the addressee that (s)he is having such a good time while the speaker is

not. As for (35), say, the speaker does not really like the addressee. Furthermore, this person's hair style is usually not the speaker's favorite, and today is not an exception. Given the situations, for either (34) or (35), it is not obvious that the speaker's expectation has not been met.

To conclude, the main concept of Utsumi's theory, the speaker's expectation, again seems too narrow to account for a variety of ironic utterances. Replacing the concept of "echo" with the concept of "the speaker's expectation" seems to be insufficient for constructing a complete theory of verbal irony.

### 3.3 Relevant inappropriateness theory

Attardo (2000) defines irony with the concept "contextual inappropriateness" as the following:

- (36) An utterance  $u$  is contextually inappropriate iff it is not the case that all presuppositions of  $u$  are identical to or compatible with all the presuppositions of the context  $C$  in which  $u$  is uttered, except for any feature explicitly thematized and denied in  $u$ .
- (37) An utterance  $u$  is ironical if
- a.  $u$  is contextually inappropriate,
  - b.  $u$  is (at the same time) relevant,
  - c.  $u$  is construed as having been uttered intentionally and with awareness of the contextual inappropriateness by S, and
  - d. S intends that (part of) his/her audience recognize points a-c,
  - e. unless H construes  $u$  as being unintentional irony, in which cases c-d do not apply.

Attardo argues that examples of irony like the following which cannot be explained by Grice's theory, can be readily explained by his theory:

- (38) This is the happiest night of my life. (uttered during the middle of the day) (Katz and Fodor, 1963)

That is, (38) does not violate the quality maxim, since it is neither true or false. According to Attardo, it is, however, inappropriate in that it violates the rules that determine the deictic anchoring of discourse in reality. Furthermore, he argues that (38) does not violate the relevance maxim. He distinguishes "relevance" and "appropriateness" from "truth-sensitivity." Consider the following pair of examples:

- (39) John should leave the room.

- (40) John is in the room.

According to him, (39) presupposes (40), and if (40) is false, (39) becomes inappropriate. That is, if the truth value of a proposition presupposed by an utterance is changed, then the utterance's appropriateness may also change. Furthermore,

from the definition of inappropriateness (36), it follows that appropriateness is a truth-sensitive concept. On the other hand, relevance is argued to be truth-insensitive.

And yet, first of all, it is not clear what is included in “the presuppositions of the context  $C$  in which  $u$  is uttered” in the definition of “inappropriateness.” Could it be interpreted to be the assignment functions in the sense of Kamp’s (1981) and Kamp and Reyle’s (1993) DRT (Discourse Representation Theory) and Heim’s (1982; 1983) FCS (File Change Semantics)? But, it is still unclear what and how much information is contained in the presuppositions of the context. Furthermore, the concept of presupposition seems to be loosely defined by Attardo (2000). For one thing, the presuppositions of  $u$  should be included in the contextual information. It seems that the concept of inappropriateness could be better defined as the following:

- (41) An utterance  $u$  is inappropriate iff it is not the case that all the contextual information of  $u$  is compatible with what  $u$  asserts.

Consider the following example:

- (42=13) Our friends are always there when they need us.

First, (42) does not violate the quality maxim, since the speaker means exactly what (s)he says. If we analyze (42) in terms of Attardo’s theory, (42) should be contextually inappropriate in order to be interpreted as an ironic utterance. Then, what presupposition of the context is incompatible with the presuppositions of (42)? More correctly, what contextual information is incompatible with the assertion of (42)? As discussed above in section 2.1, Martin (1992) argues that (42) is ironic since it reminds us of a widely-held belief that our friends are always there when “we” need “them.” If so, this widely-held belief should be part of the contextual information, which is not compatible with the assertion of (42). So far, so good. But, consider the following pair of irony examples, both of which could be uttered in the same situation:

- (43) I love people who don’t signal.

- (44) I love people who signal.

First, for (43), which is uttered referring to a driver who ignores giving turn signals, the speaker is not saying what (s)he means. Hence, (43) violates the quality maxim. Besides, it is incompatible with the common sense or general belief that people in general including the speaker love people who signal. Hence, (43) could be well explained by Attardo’s theory.

On the other hand, (44) is compatible with this common sense or general belief. Then, what is incompatible here? (43) and (44) seem to go together. You cannot explain (43) by the incompatibility with the general belief, and (44) by some other incompatibility. Or you cannot explain (43), say, by the incompatibility with the speaker’s belief, and (44) by something other than the speaker’s belief.

If (43) is explained to be incompatible with the speaker's belief, then the speaker's belief should also be part of the contextual information. Then, for (42), which shows a contradiction between the general belief and the speaker's belief, we end up having contradictory propositions in the context. The following examples, recited from section 3.2, are similar examples to (43):

(45=33) He would never commit a fraud even though he's a personal friend of the Minister of Finance.

(46=35) Your hair looks great!

In both (45) and (46), the speaker's belief is incompatible with the assertion of each utterance.

All in all, Attardo's main concept "inappropriateness" is a quite vague notion. Part of the notion, "the presuppositions of the context  $C$  in which  $u$  is uttered," or rather "contextual information," should be defined generally enough to cover various kinds of irony, but should also be defined narrowly enough to cover all and only irony examples. And yet, as we have discussed above, the concept is too vaguely defined so that it seems difficult to judge the validity of the theory.

#### 4. A New Approach to Situational and Verbal Irony

Based on what have been discussed in the previous sections, we will try to account for the phenomena of situational and verbal irony along with paradox, all together, in this section.

##### 4.1 Situational irony

First, consider the following examples:

(47) A detective who had been after a run-away criminal got held as a hostage by the criminal.

(48) Martha, a highly-educated feminist, married to Phil, an uneducated chauvinist.

(49) a. A 20 year-old man married to a 50 year-old woman.  
b. A 20 year-old woman married to a 50 year-old man.

Intuitively, (47) and (48) are perceived as ironic situations, whereas (49a,b) are perceived as nonironic, or, at least, as much less ironic situations. However, general definitions of situational irony, including that of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, discussed in section 2.1, and of Lucariello (1994), as in the following, do not seem to clearly differentiate ironic situations from nonironic or less-ironic situations.

(50) Situational irony is a condition of events opposite to what was, or might naturally be expected, or a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

- (51) An event can be classified as situationally ironic when it deviates from routine in certain ways. (Lucariello, 1994)

That is, the definitions (50) and (51) are based on concepts like “natural expectation” or “routine,” but these concepts seem a bit vague. What does it mean by “natural” expectation? People tend to expect things based on various sources of information. Then, are all expectations based on either “individual” or “general” knowledge “natural” expectations here? Also for the concept “routine,” the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines it as “a customary or regular course of procedure” and as “a regular, unvarying, habitual, unimaginative, or rote procedure.” And yet, most events sometimes deviate from routine, but not all these deviated events are interpreted to be ironic.

Furthermore, given the situations (49a,b), what natural expectations or routines can be derived from them? And, do we have any natural expectations or routines derived from these situations in the first place? The answers seem quite unclear. Given this, it seems that these concepts need to be more elaborated, in order to effectively account for ironic situations.

Have a look at more examples:

- (52) The golden bell and magnolia blossom before their leaves come out.
- (53) We had snow in March, in Seoul.
- (54) John didn’t clean his room, despite the fact that his mother warned him that he’d be punished if he didn’t clean his room.
- (55) The movie has allured such a big number of people during this March, which is the worst slack month of the year in the box office.

First, for (52), it seems that many kinds of flowers blossom after their leaves come out, but there are also quite a few kinds of flowers such as the golden bell, magnolia, and azalea which blossom before the leaves come out. Hence, we cannot really set it as a norm that flowers blossom after the leaves come out, and cannot perceive the situation described in (52) as being “ironic.” There are all kinds of plants and animals all over the world that come in different colors, shapes, and characteristics, which is a general knowledge.

For (53), at a glance, it seems quite unusual to have snow in March in Seoul. However, both in 2005 and 2006, we did have snow in March, so that we cannot set it as a norm anymore that we do not have snow in March in Seoul. A few might call the situation ironic, but most others would not, especially nowadays, when numerous abnormal changes of weather are being reported all over the world.

Also for (54), generally, children tend to disobey their parents over miscellaneous things including their parents’ order to clean their room. Hence, John’s disobeying his mother is not something that is unexpected or unusual, and (54) is not perceived as being ironic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> However, if John is such a boy who always behaves and never disobeys his parents, the situation might be different. And yet, the contents of (54), especially the “warning” part, does not agree with this. The possibility of John’s being a well-behaving boy doesn’t seem to apply in (54).



As for (55), although luring a large crowd to the movie theatre during March is not common in Korea, that does happen from time to time, depending on the movie. Furthermore, most people do not have this knowledge about the worst slack month of the year in the box office. Only those who are in or are very much interested in film business have this information. Hence, we can hardly have a general expectation that movies shown in March do not draw a large crowd, and can hardly interpret (55) as an ironic utterance.

However, compare (52–55) to the following ironic examples (56–59):

- (56) When Leonardo Da Vinci painted *The Last Supper*, the model of Judas and that of Jesus were the same man.
- (57) John has been laid off from the company, to which he had moved last year thinking that it is a more secure job.
- (58) The wimp who grows up to be a lion tamer. (Lucariello, 1994)
- (59) Bob ridicules a coworker for clumsiness, then trips over the wastebasket. (Lucariello, 1994)

Given the contrast between the ironic examples (47–48) and (56–59), and the nonironic or much-less-ironic examples (49a,b) and (52–55), we propose the following definition of situational irony:

- (60) An utterance is a situational irony
  - i) if a general, widely-shared, and non-trivial expectation, belief, or standard of a group of people is derived from the contents of the utterance, and
  - ii) there exists a contradiction or incongruity between the general, widely-shared, and non-trivial expectation, belief, or standard and the actual situation described by the utterance.

As described in (60i), first, from the contents of an ironic situation, the hearer should be able to derive an expectation, belief, or standard which is general and widely-shared by people in general or by the people in a community. This expectation, belief, or standard should be something that is general enough to be accepted by a group of people, and also non-trivial enough to be set as a generally agreed-upon and worth-mentioning expectation, belief, or standard. Here, “a group of people” is intended to mean a group of people that share a language, culture, occupation, etc. Depending on which group of people is involved, the perception and interpretation of irony could be different. For example, a group of people who live in an isolated area where all flowers blossom after their leaves come out, could accept (52) as an ironic situation. Likewise, the concept “general, widely-shared, and non-trivial expectation, belief, or standard” in (60) is a concept that applies differently to each group of people. That is, each group of people could have their own “general, widely-shared, and non-trivial expectations, beliefs, or standards.”

At the same time, there are also “general, widely-shared, and non-trivial expectations, beliefs, or standards” shared by people in general.

Second, as described by (60ii), if the hearer perceives a contradiction or incongruity between this expectation, belief, or standard and the actual state of affairs described by the utterance, then the utterance is interpreted to be ironic.

If we analyze all the above examples based on the definition (60), first, for (47) and (48), from these two utterances, we can easily derive general and widely-shared expectations or beliefs that police detectives are supposed to arrest run-away criminals, and highly-educated feminists do not like chauvinistic men. Contradictions between these expectations or beliefs and the actual situations described by (47) and (48), respectively, also exist, and they are perceived as ironic situations.

On the other hand, for (49a,b), there do not seem to exist any general and widely-held expectations or beliefs about the relationship between a 20 year-old man and a 50 year-old woman or between a 20 year-old woman and a 50 year-old man, in contrast to the relationships between a detective and a run-away criminal, and between a highly-educated feminist and an uneducated chauvinist.

As for (52–55), as discussed above, a general and widely-shared expectation, belief, or standard could be derived for none of these examples.

When it comes to the ironic examples (56–59), general and widely-held expectations, beliefs, or standards could easily be derived. First, for (56), it is generally expected that the models of Judas and Jesus should be two totally different-looking men. That is, one should be one of the most vicious-looking men and the other the most good-natured-looking. In (57), it is also generally expected that John has moved to land on a more secure job, so that he will not easily be laid off. A general expectation derived from (58) is such that the wimp will at least grow up to be a person far different from a tough lion tamer, whereas a general expectation derived from (59) is such that Bob, who ridicules a coworker for clumsiness, must be a cautious person. Contradictory to these generally-derived expectations, all the situations described by (56–59) fail to satisfy the expectations, which leads to their ironic interpretations.

Now consider the following examples:

- (61=47) A detective who had been after a run-away criminal got held as a hostage by the criminal.
- (62) A cop just passing by the place that night got held as a hostage by a run-away criminal.
- (63) A man just passing by the place that night got held as a hostage by a run-away criminal.

Comparing to the ironic example (61), (62) is non-ironic or much less ironic. Also, (63) seems to be nonironic. As for (62), it is not easy to derive a general and widely-held expectation or belief about a run-away criminal and a cop who just happened to be passing by the spot. Also for (63), it is almost impossible to derive any expectation or belief concerning a run-away criminal and an ordinary man just passing by the spot.

As we can observe from examples (61–63), including the examples discussed above, ironicalness seems to be a scalar concept. As discussed in section 3.2, Utsumi (2000) proposes a prototype-based view of irony and tries to define the degree of ironicalness based on several factors. Refraining from a detailed but rather un-persuasive definition of ironicalness based on specific numbers of degrees, we simply propose the following:

- (64) A situation is more ironic
- i) if a general and widely-shared expectation, belief, or standard of a group of people is more easily derived from the utterance,
  - ii) if the expectation, belief, or standard derived from the utterance is more general, widely-shared, and non-trivial, or/and
  - iii) if the contradiction or incongruity between the expectation, belief, or standard and the actual situation described by the utterance is more contrasted.

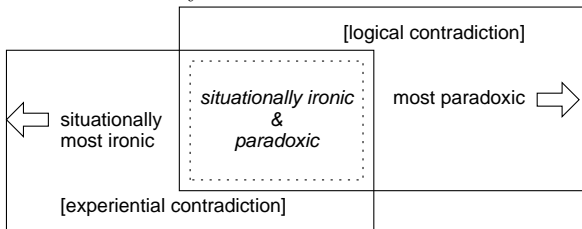
As described above, (i) the degree of difficulty in deriving a general and widely-held expectation, belief, or standard from the utterance, (ii) the degrees of generality, prevalence, and non-trivialness of the expectation, belief, or standard, and (iii) the degree of contrast between the expectation, belief, or standard and the actual situation described by the utterance, are proposed to determine the ironicalness of the utterance.

#### 4.2 Situational irony and paradox

Now, let us move on to another issue, namely, the relation between situational irony and paradox. As discussed in section 2.2, situational irony and paradox are closely related concepts, which are also overlapped in some cases.

Based on what we have discussed in sections 2.2. and 4.1, it could be summarized that basically, situational irony involves experiential contradiction while paradox involves logical contradiction, as the following diagram (65) illustrates. What we mean by experiential contradiction is the contradiction based on our experience, world knowledge, common sense, etc, while logical contradiction is based on our logical judgments. However, as indicated by the inside dotted line, the boundary between experiential and logical contradiction seems quite fuzzy. Furthermore, some ironic situations involve logical contradiction in addition to experiential contradiction, while some paradoxes involve experiential contradiction in addition to logical contradiction.

(65) Situational Irony vs. Paradox



To show more clearly what the diagram indicates, let us divide the situational irony and paradox examples discussed above into three kinds, (i) exclusively situationally ironic examples, (ii) exclusively paradoxical examples, and (iii) both situationally ironic and paradoxical examples. However, as discussed above, it should be pointed out that the boundary between experiential and logical contradiction is quite fuzzy, so that this three-way division is not a definite and clear-cut division.

First, utterances (66a-1) are all compatible with conditions (60i,ii) and are interpreted as situational ironies, which involve experiential contradictions.

(66) Exclusively situationally ironic examples:

- a. Many officials in Washington agree in private that their policy is inconsistent.
- b. A man is in a car accident with a woman, who as a consequence intends to sue him. They have a meeting and she decides not to sue. A year later they marry.
- c. Bill shops all over for the sweater his mom wants, but cannot find it. Tiredly, he pops into a store right across from his apartment, and finds the exact sweater.
- d. Romeo killing himself over the “dead” Juliet.
- e. Examiner has already failed the student, whom he overhears expressing a confident hope of passing.
- f. Molly had thought about a friend from grammar school just days before she unexpectedly saw her for the first time in 9 years.
- g. A detective who had been after a run-away criminal got held as a hostage by the criminal.
- h. Martha, a highly-educated feminist, married to Phil, an uneducated chauvinist.
- i. Bob ridicules a coworker for clumsiness, then trips over the wastebasket.
- j. John has been laid off from the company, to which he had moved last year thinking that it is a more secure job.
- k. (It’s ironic that) nowadays our friends are always there when they need us.
- l. When Leonardo Da Vinci painted *The Last Supper*, the model of Judas and that of Jesus were the same man.

Second, (67a,b) are examples of paradox, which involve a logical contradiction. *Bitter* and *sweet* in (67a) and *successful* and *failure* in (67b) are logically contradictory to each other, respectively. Also for (67c), *more haste* and *less speed* logically contradict each other.

(67) Exclusively paradoxical examples:

- a. It’s a bitter-sweet feeling.
- b. Although I’m so successful, I’m really rather a failure.
- c. More haste, less speed.

Third, the following examples mostly involve a contradiction between the words of the expression, which could be interpreted as both a logical and experiential contradiction:

- (68) Both situationally ironic and paradoxical examples:
- a. The poor banker.
  - b. The wimp who grows up to be a lion tamer.
  - c. Susan is very gregarious and popular. Despite this, she has always basically felt so lonely.
  - d. The harder one tries to think of answers on a test, the more impossible it becomes to think of any.
  - e. The region's most dynamic economies have the most primitive financial systems.
  - f. A loner who loved to chat to strangers.
  - g. Professional comedians often have unhappy personal lives.

For (68a), *poor* and *banker* are contradictory. In (68b), *wimp* and *lion tamer* are in contradiction. In (68c), *gregarious* and *lonely* conflict with each other, whereas in (68d), *trying harder to think of answers* and *becoming more impossible to think of any answers* are incompatible to each other. For (68e), *dynamic economies* and *primitive financial systems* are in contradiction, while for (68f), *loner* and *loving to chat to strangers* clash with each other. When it comes to (68g), *comedians* and *having unhappy personal lives* don't agree with each other.

Then, based on all the above discussions, paradox could be defined as follows:

- (69) A person, thing, or situation is a paradox if it involves a logical contradiction between its qualities or characteristics, which is described by logically contradictory expressions or concepts of an utterance, and the logical contradiction could also be interpreted as an experiential contradiction, in that it is also based on our experience, world knowledge, common sense, etc.

### 4.3 Verbal irony

As discussed above, verbal irony has long been researched by numerous philosophers and linguists. Compared to this, situational irony seems to have drawn much less attention. The reason for this could be that ever since Grice's theory of verbal irony came out, numerous different kinds of verbal irony data which cannot be explained by Grice's and other traditional definitions, have been presented, and numerous attempts to come up with a comprehensive theory to account for all these various data have been made. That is, for linguists, verbal irony seems to have been accepted as a much more complex phenomenon to tackle to.

Then, first, consider the following example, which is one of the numerous counterexamples to the traditional theories and the echoic theory of verbal irony presented by many linguists including Martin (1992):

(70=13) Our friends are always there when they need us. (Martin, 1992)

In (70), is the speaker being ironic? Is (s)he sarcastic? Is (s)he displaying a dissociative attitude to some concept or idea? What concept or idea? Is it the general belief of people that our friends are always there when we need them? Does it make a difference whether the speaker utters (70) with an ironic tone of voice or not?

As discussed earlier, in (70), the speaker means exactly what s/he says, and the answer for the first question seems to be negative. It seems that rather than the speaker is being ironic, the situation is ironic. It does not seem to matter whether the speaker utters (70) with an ironic tone of voice or not, or whether s/he is displaying a dissociative attitude to the general belief that our friends are always there when we need them or not. That is, it does not seem to be correct that if the speaker utters (70) to describe a contradictory situation, then (70) is interpreted as a situational irony, while if the speaker utters (70) to display his/her dissociative attitude to the general belief, then it is interpreted as a verbal irony. Either way, (70) is an utterance that describes an ironic situation which is in contradiction to a general and widely-held expectation, belief, or standard. In (70), the speaker could be critical or sarcastic, but does not seem to be ironic in any way.

Martin (1992, 81–83) presents the following examples including (70) as counterexamples to the echoic theory, which are argued to be ironic cases, despite the fact that they describe actual states of affairs and are not themselves “mentioned”:

(71) I have to say that what tortured me most in watching this film was boredom.

(72) the Christmas and New-Year tribulations (instead of celebrations)

(73) He blessed their coupling and promised them fertility, then preached the matrimonial virtues to them. (A quotation from Maupassant)

(74) The Marquis is inordinately vain, and extremely powerful. The best advice about how to treat him is the following: *When you're with him, be filled with silent wonder.*

In (71), the speaker means what (s)he says. Again, (s)he could be sarcastic, but not ironic. The situation is ironic in which a thriller, expected to have the audience spell-bound, in fact, bored them. For (72), Martin provides a situation in which Peter dislikes the Christmas and New Year celebrations, all his in-laws arrive and stay for two weeks to create a chaos, and he describes this, philosophically, as (72). Martin adds, “[t]he description seems to me to contain a hint of irony towards the intruders.” Here, the speaker seems to be critical of and sarcastic about the intruders, and showing his dissociative attitude towards the general belief or expectation that Christmas and New Year are seasons of celebrations. And yet, the speaker is not ironic. He is saying what he means, and describing a situation which is ironic.

As for (73), it is describing an ironic situation in which the preacher talked about the matrimonial virtues after he blessed the coupling and fertility. That is,

this situation is ironic in that marriage is essentially a coupling while people see it as a sacred institution. Here, again, the utterance is not an example of verbal irony, but of situational irony.

For (74), Martin argues that the advice is serious, making a statement about reality. That is, he argues that the speaker is ironical and sincere at the same time. However, we argue that the “wonder” described by the speaker is not something that is really meant by the speaker. Here, the “wonder” means a negative kind of sarcastic wonder about the person’s excessive vanity and power. That is, he makes us be filled with “wonder” how inordinate, obnoxious, and powerful a man could be, and makes us do nothing about him. Furthermore, this could be the best “passive” advice, but not the best sincere advice. Hence, (74) is an example of verbal irony in which the speaker means something a bit deviated from what s/he literally says.

Given these discussions, what we would like to argue is that most of the counterexamples to the traditional theories and/or the echoic theory of verbal irony could be explained as situational ironies, while the rest could be accounted for by extending the concepts of the traditional definitions.

Consider more examples:

- (75) a. (Referring to a nose stud) It’s a revolutionary outrage. (Bredin, 1999)
- b. (In a downpour) It seems to be raining. (Sperber and Wilson, 1981)
- c. (Referring to a man who is dumb) He is not exactly a genius.
- d. (Asked whether to know a person who is, in fact, well known to the speaker) Rings a bell. (Giora, 1995)
- (76) (Upon noticing the washing is still hanging on the line in rain)  
I guess the washing hasn’t dried. (Giora, 1995)
- (77) A: Bank managers are robbers!
- B: Really? I’d never have thought it was so widespread. (Martin, 1992)
- (78=32) You, a Christian, losing your temper! (Martin, 1992)
- (79=33) He would never commit a fraud, even though he’s a personal friend of the Minister of Finance. (Martin, 1992)

(75a) is an example of hyperbole, whereas (75b–d) are examples of meiosis or understatement. These kinds of hyperboles and understatements are argued to be well accounted for by the echoic theory according to Wilson and Sperber (1992), while these kinds of examples are presented as counterexamples to the echoic theory by Giora (1995). On the other hand, the traditional definitions of verbal irony cannot explain any of these examples, since in (75a–d) the speaker does not mean “the opposite” of what s/he literally says. Here, again, we argue that the speaker means “something different from,” instead of “the opposite of,” what s/he literally says.

Moving on to examples (76–79), in all these utterances, the speaker is pretending to believe something different from his/her real belief. In (76), the speaker is pretending to believe that the washing is still hanging on the line because it hasn't dried in a sunny weather. In (77), B is pretending to share A's belief, but in fact (s)he does not. For (78), the speaker is pretending to believe that Christians do not lose their temper, but in fact she does not. Also for (79), the speaker is pretending to believe that the man would never commit a fraud, which is in fact not true. Consequently, (76–79) are well explained if we extend the traditional definitions to "the speaker means the opposite of or something different from what s/he literally says."

Consider a couple of more examples, which are argued to be counterexamples both to the traditional theories and the echoic theory of verbal irony:

(80=29b) I love children who keep their rooms clean. (Gibbs and O'Brien, 1991)

(81) (Referring to a driver who just changed lanes without giving a signal) I love people who signal.

These examples are generally regarded to be problematic to the traditional theories in the sense that each of them means exactly what the speaker says. Also for the echoic theory, (80–81) are presented as utterances whose echoic sources are not clear. However, (80–81) have been arguably explained to echo the desirable expectations of people in general. On the other hand, as discussed in section 3.2, the implicit display theory arguably explains them as pragmatically false statements in that they could be interpreted to be irrelevant assertions about a group of obedient children and about a group of rule-abiding drivers, respectively. The relevant inappropriateness theory also arguably explains them as relevant, but contextually inappropriate utterances.

Then, how could the traditional theories account for (80–81)? In order to answer this, let us ask a couple of questions. First, does it make a difference in interpretation whether they are uttered in a sarcastic or cynical tone of voice, or in an exaggerated polite and/or kind tone of voice? Second, what if they are uttered in a normal tone of voice?

Answering these questions, we argue that in a verbal conversation, if (80–81) are uttered in a sarcastic or normal tone of voice, meaning exactly what they say, they are just descriptions of the speaker's opinion. In this case, what is meant by each of them is as follows, respectively:

(80') I love children who keep their rooms clean, but I don't love children like you who do not keep their rooms clean.

(81') I love people who signal, but I don't love people like him who do not signal.

On the other hand, if (80–81) are uttered in an exaggerated polite and/or kind tone of voice, then they are verbal ironies, each of which is intended to mean the following, respectively:

(80'') I love children like you who keep their rooms clean.



(81'') I love people like him who signal.

That is, in this case, the speaker says the opposite of what (s)he really means.

Consider another similar example:<sup>4</sup>

(82) (Referring to a restaurant where the speaker was upset by the salty foods they served)

I love restaurants which serve foods that are not salty.

Again, similarly, (82) could be interpreted as either a non-ironic utterance or an ironic utterance, respectively, as in (82') and (82''):

(82') I love restaurants which serve foods that are not salty, but I don't like restaurants like this one that serve salty foods.

(82'') I love restaurants like this one that serve foods which are not salty.

(82') is describing the speaker's opinion, whereas (82'') is saying something opposite to what the speaker really has in mind.

Lastly, consider a couple of examples recited from section 3.1, which were presented as counterexamples to the traditional theories of verbal irony:

(83=19) Ah, Tuscany in May! (Wilson and Sperber, 1992)

(84=20) Look, that car has all its windows intact. (Wilson and Sperber, 1992)

First, in (83), which is not a complete proposition, the speaker is pretending to agree with the inviter's remark that Tuscany in May is the most beautiful place on earth, by repeating the inviter's praising tone of remark about Tuscany, but, in fact, (s)he doesn't agree with the remark. That is, the speaker does not mean what s/he says. In other words, by uttering (83), the speaker says that Tuscany in May is the most beautiful place on earth, but what s/he really means is that the actual state of affairs does not live up to this remark. Although (83) is not a complete proposition on the surface, it could be regarded as a proposition with a complete truth condition.

As for (84), it could be uttered as a verbal irony which is intended to mock a passing car with all of its windows broken, tampered, etc, depending on the context. Also, as discussed in section 3.1, it could also be intended to mock the addressee by repeating his/her opinion. In both cases, the speaker means the opposite of what s/he literally says.

To recapitulate, we propose that if we extend the concepts of the traditional definitions of irony, all verbal irony examples could be accounted for, and all the various counterexamples presented for previous theories of verbal irony including the traditional theories and the echoic theory, in fact, do not count as counterexamples, as explained above. Our revised definition of verbal irony could be summarized as in the following:

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<sup>4</sup> (82) is my own example.

- (85) An utterance is a verbal irony  
 if it means something deviated from or the opposite of what it literally  
 says, and  
 if the speaker intends to communicate more effectively by means of both  
 mild ridicule and serious scorn.

#### 4.4 Situational and verbal irony, and paradox

The difference between situational and verbal irony is that the former is a factive description of a situation which contradicts a general and widely-shared expectation, belief, or standard of a group of people, whereas the latter is a counter-factive, or exaggerated or understated statement which is again in contradiction with what is really meant by the speaker. In other words, as for a situational irony, the situation is ironic, whereas in a verbal irony, the speaker is ironic. Here, being ironic means being in contradiction with something. Furthermore, situational irony and paradox are also closely related concepts, which are overlapped in some cases. Situational irony involves experiential contradiction, whereas paradox involves logical contradiction.

In sum, the three concepts, namely, situational irony, verbal irony, and paradox, are closely related to each other in that all of them involve a contradiction. Furthermore, the first two concepts, situational and verbal irony, involve basically the same kind of contradiction, i.e., experiential contradiction, while paradox involves logical contradiction, although, as discussed above, some situational ironies and paradoxes involve both experiential and logical contradiction. Situational irony and paradox are also closely related in the sense that both describe contradictory situations.

As discussed in section 4.3, it seems that the concept of verbal irony came out before that of situational irony. The disguise that the speaker of a verbal irony is putting on explains the origin of the concept “irony.” From this disguise, a contradiction occurs between what the speaker says and what (s)he means. This ironicalness based on a contradiction on the part of the speaker also came to apply to situations involving a contradiction.

### 5. Conclusions

To summarize, the main purpose of this paper has been to provide a comprehensive analysis of situational and verbal irony, together with paradox. It has been shown that these three mechanisms are closely related to each other, based on notions such as “contradiction,” “experiential vs. logical contradiction,” and “contradictory situation.”

We have also presented a new definition of situational irony which could, hopefully, cover both all and only situational irony examples. Furthermore, we have critically discussed previous representative theories of verbal irony including a couple of recent theories by Utsumi (2000) and Attardo (2000). We have argued that the traditional definitions of verbal irony are sufficient to account for all and only verbal irony examples, if we eliminate the non-verbal-irony examples which have falsely been treated as counterexamples to the traditional theories.

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