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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Plenary Speakers

Echoes of Emotion.
Sharing Feelings through Direct Reported Speech

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One of the key challenges for cognitively oriented pragmatic theories—including Relevance Theory—is the adequate integration of emotional phenomena into a general model of communication. While Direct Reported Speech (DRS) is often assumed to aim at the *verbatim*, faithful transmission of propositional content (statements in court, journalistic reporting, quotations in academic papers), in spontaneous conversation it usually serves a different purpose: the expression and communication of emotions.

This presentation examines the strategic use of DRS as a form of echoic interpretive use (Sperber & Wilson 1986; Wilson & Sperber 1992). Direct quotation does not merely *reproduce* a previous conversation; it also *shows* the feelings elicited by that conversation, aiming to induce in the audience an experiential state similar to that of the re-teller. DRS sequences are examples of ostensive behaviour that seeks to trigger affective effects through the intentional and overt simulation and sharing of an experience, rather than simply recovering propositional explicatures and implicatures.

Based on an experimental corpus of reported conversations collected in a homogeneous, emotionally charged situation, the analysis focuses on how speakers restructure dialogue sequences and re-adjust prosodic features to achieve specific affective effects. Particular attention is paid to intentional changes in voice quality and the identification of emotionally salient triggers—what is quoted and how it is framed. All these modifications interact with the hearer's expectations and guide the activation of affective meaning.

From a broader theoretical standpoint, these observations offer insights into attention manipulation, emotional vigilance, and the role of shared experience in affective communication.

Cognitive Disruptions: When the path of least effort is longer than it seems and the cognitive effects fewer than they should

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In relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995), the output of comprehension is the result of an inferential heuristic which yields an interpretation through a series of mutually dependent inferential steps. The fact that this process converges towards the intended interpretation relies crucially on the communicative principle of relevance and its two extent conditions which guide comprehension by constraining the inferential process towards an interpretation that yields positive cognitive effects which satisfy expectations of relevance, while limiting the cognitive effort needed to satisfy these expectations.

It follows from this cognitive comprehension procedure that if some external factor—i.e. a contextual parameter that is not salient in the communicative exchange—would bear a) on the hearer's ability to correctly derive expectations of relevance, or b) on the amount of cognitive resources needed to meet these expectations, then the relevance theoretic model would predict that the comprehension procedure would be likely to be negatively affected. In other words, the inferential path might fail to converge on the optimal interpretation. In this talk, I will review three cases of systematic cognitive disruption which are predicted to impact comprehension negatively.

In the first case, I focus on the *dysfluency effect* which refers to the additional cognitive load induced when a hearer has to process an utterance in a second language (see Foster-Cohen 2004, Padilla Cruz 2013, Ifantidou 2016).

With the second case, I consider emotional states and argue that in some cases they are associated with extraneous cognitive efforts which negatively disrupt the comprehension procedure (see Wharton and Saussure 2023, Maillat 2023).

Finally, I concentrate on what cognitive psychology has studied under the notion of flashbulb memories and related *flashbulb events* (see Conway et al. 1994, Hirst et al. 2015), and argue that they systematically impact a hearer's ability to derive expectations of relevance.

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Speaker Presentations

Exploring the dark side of Incongruity Resolution in multimodal social/environmental/political print advertisements

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Taking a classical Relevance Theoretical perspective (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995), I analyse examples of Incongruity Resolution (IR) (Suls, 1983; Yus, 2016) within political print advertising. According to the literature, IR is one of the main cognitive accounts of humour (Attardo, 2020:59). In IR-based humorous texts, the viewer builds a preliminary context of interpretation, which is then flipped over to a different, second contrast as interpretation proceeds. In this way, Ad-makers intuitively construct IR to create visual and verbal “twists” (Barry, 2010:166) to facilitate an “emotional appeal” (Hackley and Hackley, 2021:154). The appeal’s purpose is to produce an “Aha moment” phenomenology of “feelings of certainty and obviousness, relief, surprise, pleasure, and the drive to act” (Laukkonen et al., 2023:1). This enhances the role of mixed emotional appeals in advertising because their perlocutionary effects increase the chance of generating attention, leading to persuasive behavioural-change (Hackley and Hackley, 2021:56,154). Consequently, emotional messages are considered to be a criterion of creative excellence for the “most successful marketing and advertising interventions” (Hackley and Hackley, 2021:154).

Within advertising research, IR has only been exclusively associated with humorous emotional appeals (Weinberger et al. 2021:8), but never for eliciting negative emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, disgust and frustration. Based on my preliminary hypothesis, which was yielded from my analyses, I will show examples of IR being used to communicate nonhumorous messages and emotions to induce an Aha effect. This questions whether IR remains adequate in explaining humour alone if the evidence shows it also produces non-humorous non-propositional effects. Yus (2016:38) argues that humour comprehension's cognitive processes “do not differ substantially from the ones we engage in while interpreting non-humorous inputs”. Incongruity Resolution, therefore, has the potential to be broadened and account for how Ad-makers manipulate audience expectations of relevance using high-risk cognitively effortful strategies to produce extra cognitive effects.

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Preliminary remarks on the presuppositional content and the distributional properties of Greek and French aspectual particles

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Aspectual particles like Greek *akoma* and French *encore* (“still”) are common examples of presupposition triggers (Beaver, Geurts & Denlinger, 2024; Geurts, 1999), denoting the temporal continuation of (a) pre-existing event(s) (Δελβερούδη, 2007; Mosegaard Hansen, 2002; Βασιλάκη & Δελβερούδη, 2018).

1) <i>Il y a encore du pain sur la planche!</i> There is still DET bread on the board “There is still bread on the board!”	2) <i>... t’ as encore fait le radin</i> You have again done the stingy “You have been stingy again.”
3) <i>Tote akoma spoudaza sti Nomiki ...</i> Then still I was studying at Law School “I was still studying at Law School then.”	4) <i>Akoma klotsouse tin bala.</i> Still was kicking-3 rd .SING the ball “He/She/It was still kicking the ball.”

Encore has a durative (1) and an iterative interpretation (2), while *akoma* only a durative one (3) (Βασιλάκη & Δελβερούδη, 2018; Hamelin, 2015). However, it is still unknown a) what factors influence the interpretation of both items, b) what the exact nature of the presuppositions triggered by each item is, and c) how sentences including durative *akoma* combined with imperfective aspect and verbs of punctual actions (in examples like 4) shape event representation.

Corpus data reveal that both *encore* and *akoma* can trigger temporal durativity and iteration. This depends on a) their lexical properties regarding the conceptualisation of temporal extension, b) their distributional properties, like the aspect and the aktionsart of the verb under their scope (Comrie, 1976; Rothstein, 2004; Vendler, 1957), and c) other contextual cues. More in particular, both items can generally denote the temporal extension of a presupposed simple event or a presupposed series of the same kind of event up to reference time (*tr*). However, whether the temporal extension regards a simple event or a complex one (involving the bounding of a series of events of the same nature) depends on the combination of the aspect and the aktionsart of the verb under the scope of each examined item. *Encore* can be used with both imperfective and perfective aspect, denoting the durativity or the iteration of an event, respectively. On the other hand, *akoma* combined with imperfective aspect generally denotes the temporal continuation, within the limits of a single temporal phase ending up to *tr*, either of a simple event or of the iteration of an event. When combined with perfective aspect, though, a blocking phenomenon occurs, since no temporal/aspectual meaning of *akoma* is attested, but rather an additive one. Moreover, the unfolding of the presupposed (series of) events through time highly depends on the inherent properties of the events described, leading even to ambiguous sentences, as, for instance, the case is with *akoma* when combined with imperfective aspect and semelfactive predicates (Comrie, 1976; Egg, 2018; Rothstein, 2004). It is, therefore, argued that different kinds of presuppositional content, that is, the anchoring of (a) presupposed event(s) into a single temporal phase, a single temporal super-interval being subdivided into sub-intervals, or multiple distinct intervals, can be triggered through the use of

akoma and/or encore. These presuppositions are believed to be, however, the product of the interaction between these items and the grammatical and lexical properties of their local context.

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Influencers' YouTube Apology Videos: Image Repair & Identity

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The development and affordances of social media platforms have given rise to a new phenomenon in social media communication, namely that of social media influencing. Social media influencers, defined here as “vocational, sustained, and highly branded social media stars” (Abidin, 2018, p. 71) whose success depends on the ‘content’ they produce (Abidin, 2015), frequently face the risk of being “cancelled” as a result of misconduct. This study is concerned with what is commonly referred to as ‘YouTube apology videos’, i.e., videos influencers upload on YouTube to repair their public image and regain or prevent the loss of their following when they are blamed for some transgressive behaviour (e.g., the dissemination of offensive content). More specifically, it seeks to offer preliminary insights into the discursive strategies and identity construction practices employed by influencers, based on an analysis of three apology videos produced by globally recognized influencers. Drawing on the apology strategies model proposed by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and inspired by Norris’s (2011, 2020) multimodal analytic approach to identity, this study aspires to contribute to pragmatic and discourse- analytic research on a topic that remains undertheorized in linguistics (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Georgakopoulou, 2024), despite its virality and growing scholarly attention from various other disciplines (for a comprehensive account see, e.g., Abidin and Brown, 2019:3). Analysing influencers’ strategic use of language may shed light on whether existing understandings of public apologies still hold true in the context of this emerging global phenomenon (Abidin, 2015, 2018). Acknowledging the difficulty of disentangling sincere moral motivations from strategic ones (Origgi, 2017), it is hoped that identifying (some of) the influencers’ apology patterns will contribute to a more nuanced account of their motivations and reputation restoration efforts, as well as a deeper understanding of their intricate face-management tactics.

Keywords: influencers; apology; apology strategies; YouTube; identity

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A Story is Worth a Thousand Lives: The Allegory/Metaphor Distinction and Narratives

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Allegory is a communicative device where a single story can be read as having two layers of meaning: a figurative layer and a literal layer. From classical times, allegory has been treated as a highly extended metaphor. For example, Quintilian comments in *Institutio Oratoria* that “a continued series of Metaphors produces Allegories” (Quintilian, trans. Russel, 2002: 61), and many modern theorists follow suit (see. Wearing, 2022 for a list). However, allegories possess many features not typically found in metaphors and are distinct from metaphors. For example, in allegories, the literal and figurative meanings remain relevant at the end of the comprehension process, which is not necessarily the case in metaphors. Yet, despite these differences in features, it is also true that some metaphors feel more “allegorical” compared to others, suggesting a continuum between the two uses of language. The present study considers why allegories have a special effect on us by focusing on what constitutes the distinction between allegories and metaphors. First, I consider Carston and Wearing’s (2011) claim that allegory differs from extended metaphor as allegory is “entirely coherent” at the literal level. Further, I consider a proposal by Unger (2019) that allegory is processed similarly to fiction, as it communicates through multiple layers and passes through the comprehension procedure multiple times. In response, I argue that what is distinct about allegory is that it is necessarily a narrative, rather than it being necessarily fictional. Narratives are descriptions of two events where one is a consequence of another (Lascarides and Asher, 1993), and the addition of certain features, such as characters and conflicts, makes them more “story-like”. The characterisation of allegory as a story in this way creates a distinction between allegories, metaphors, analogical comparisons, and proverbs, depending on how “story-like” they are. Finally, I argue that stories and narratives occupy a special space in human cognition and play a crucial role in understanding the world around us (see Camp, 2024), which explains why allegory is such a unique and powerful communicative device.

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Motivation and pragmatic production: A mixed-methods study on Chinese EFL learners

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Within the growing area of research on the relationship between learner individual differences and pragmatic competence (i.e., the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts), motivation has received increasing attention. However, most existing studies have focused on pragmatic awareness rather than pragmatic *production* and have relied solely on quantitative data offering little qualitative insight (for a review, see Zhang & Aubrey, 2024). This study employs a motivation questionnaire and electronic discourse completion tasks (EDCT) to investigate the extent to which overall L2 motivation influences Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence, specifically in the context of writing student-faculty emails across three distinct speech acts: requests, invitations and invitation-requests. Furthermore, through semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis, the present study explores learners' perceptions of their own motivation towards learning L2 pragmatics. The quantitative analysis revealed that both the high-motivation and low-motivation groups displayed limited pragmatic ability in email writing, characterised by great directness and low mitigation across all speech acts under investigation. These results confirm that L2 motivation did not significantly affect learners' pragmatic performance. Qualitative findings, however, provided further context: while learners generally acknowledged the importance of L2 pragmatic skills, they were reluctant to take immediate steps to improve their pragmatic ability. Factors influencing this reluctance included the perceived limited applicability of L2 pragmatic skills, the lack of formal pragmatics instruction (i.e., teaching pragmatics in the classroom as part of the curriculum) and heavy academic workloads. The limited impact of motivation on pragmatic production could be attributed to learners' low L2 proficiency, the inherent complexity involved in pragmatic production and the general nature of the motivation examined in the present study.

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Expectations, relevance and emotional effects in non-tonal music

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Research on musical expectations has recently been integrated into modern cognitive science frameworks. Nevertheless, most research tends to focus on tonal music (Meyer, 1956; Huron, 2006; Margulis, 2014). In contrast, in non-tonal music, the correspondence between the composer's intention and the listener's interpretation is often unclear or misunderstood, particularly for inexperienced listeners, leading to an interpretive gap and a failure to activate structured expectations about the overall form of the piece.

This presentation, as part of my current doctoral research, aims to examine the applicability of *Relevance Theory* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95; Ifantidou, 2014; Escandell Vidal, 2016) to expectation formation in the processing of non-tonal music. In musical communication, the effects pursued are non-propositional-affective or emotional rather than informational (Wilson and Carston, 2019; de Saussure and Wharton, 2020; Olteanu, Golani, Eitam and Kron, 2019; Dezecache, Mercier and Scott-Phillips, 2021; Wharton, Bonard, Dukes, Sander and Oswald, 2021). Since the processing of music is based on the identification of patterns that help identify global coherence and predict future events, my goal is to analyse which parameters are likely to contribute to forming those patterns in non-tonal music, so that the overall structure, the future musical events and their respective import can be predicted and understood more clearly by listeners.

To this end, I have conducted an empirical experiment in March 2025 with three different groups: (i) non-musicians, (ii) musicians with no proficient experience with contemporary music and (iii) musicians with proficient experience with contemporary music. The experiment involved recordings of various versions of specific passages from Helmut Lachenmann's work *temA* (1968). In addition to the original excerpts, several modified versions were presented in which certain parameters of expectation generators were altered, in order to measure and analyse how these changes influence the listeners' expectations and their affective and emotional responses.

The results of the main experiment suggest that coherence and pleasure ratings were clearly oriented in favor of some of the samples studied. Additionally, these ratings appear to be influenced by different motivations in the case of naïve listeners compared to those experienced in contemporary music.

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Investigating typically developing and ASD children's ability to understand irony in Greek: Design, methodology, and some preliminary results of an experimental study

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This presentation is based on our ongoing doctoral research which investigates how irony, an understudied phenomenon in the acquisition literature (for reviews, see Fuchs, 2023a, b; Lampri et al., 2023), is processed and understood by Greek-speaking children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in comparison with typically developing peers. More specifically, we wish to test various forms of irony, such as expressions of criticism and praise (e.g. Athanasiadou, 2017; Kapogianni, 2016; Witek, 2022), through off-line experimental methods focusing on both comprehension and metalinguistic/metapragmatic skills (cf. Banasik-Jemielniak & Bokus, 2019; Filippova, 2014; Fuchs, 2023a, b; Köder & Falkum, 2021). In this talk, we will present our experimental design and methods adopted, including our language evaluation tools and *ad hoc* created stimuli, the latter depicting via audiovisual means various scenarios involving irony. The rationale behind our choices will also be described. Preliminary data from typically developing Greek children seem to align with findings from other languages suggesting that the ability to understand irony emerges in the preschool years but more time is required to develop fully (e.g. Fuchs, 2023a). Finally, we speculate about what may drive development, including factors such as Theory of Mind (e.g. Fuchs, 2023a; Lampri et al., 2023) and epistemic vigilance (Milosavljevic et al., 2025).

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Victim or Survivor? Identity construction in victim narratives

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This paper examines the discourse of sexual harassment victims through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a particular focus on victim narratives. By employing Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Multimodal Analysis, this research aims to explore how events are represented in victim testimonies, the discursive strategies used to construct victim identities, and the role of multimodal elements in shaping these narratives.

Presenting findings from an ongoing analysis, the paper initially focuses on the case of Sofia Bekatorou, a key figure in Greece's #MeToo movement. Through an in-depth examination of her public testimony, the study identified patterns in relational and experiential processes, transitivity structures, and lexical cohesion strategies that contribute to the representation of victimhood. These preliminary findings indicate that language choices and discursive strategies play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of agency and identity within the victim-survivor spectrum.

Building upon the above analysis, the paper also examines other narratives, including those of Zeta Douka, who was verbally and psychologically abused by a colleague of hers during a play. Following the analysis of the first case study (concerning Sofia Bekatorou), in the case of Zeta Douka, relational and experiential processes, transitivity structures, semantic fields and lexical cohesion strategies are employed to analyze the various identities of the victim, such as woman, mother, victim, survivor. Furthermore, by applying Labov's narrative framework, the study investigates how the structure and delivery of these testimonies contribute to broader societal understandings of victimization and survival.

The proposed paper contributes to the critical understanding of how victims articulate their experiences and how these narratives impact public discourse on primarily sexual harassment. The case studies will be analysed and eventually compared in order to identify points of convergence and difference and ultimately, draw conclusions that can lead to generalising hypotheses on the perception of this public discourse.

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From problem-solving to word meaning: Understanding the world with affordances

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Relevance theory views cognition as a means to “improv[e] the individual's knowledge of the world” (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995: 47), differing from ethology, which sees animal cognition as goal-oriented processes aimed at action (Pezzulo & Cisek 2016). Integrating this view into relevance theory can enrich it and address non-propositionality in communication. We propose that encyclopaedic information in ad hoc concept construction (Wilson & Carston 2007) should be understood as ‘affordances’—possibilities of action offered by the environment to organism (Gibson 1979). Glenberg and Robertson (1999; 2000), suggest word meaning results from a “meshing of affordances under the guidance of syntax.” (2000: 1) We propose that affordance selection is instead driven by the search for relevance, applicable to both communicative and non-communicative cases such problem-solving. Considering meaning as affordances allows relevance theory to encompass comprehension as preparation for action.

We argue that relevance theory benefits from including memory organization involving goal hierarchies. While “cognitive activity is not always task- or goal-oriented” (Sperber & Wilson 2024:19), we support the view that virtually all processes are goal-driven as assumed in animal cognition studies. Similar to neural networks, multiple comprehension procedures unfold in parallel and serially, competing for activation to satisfy relevance expectations set by goals. These goals recursively compete for higher-order goals. This architecture implies cognitive effects are computed toward general goals, fitting an evolutionarily plausible picture. To promote interdisciplinarity, we propose that cognitive effects are obtained through activation and inhibition of activation patterns.

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Feeling closure: Relevance and affect in music and poetry

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Fabb (2016) presents ‘closure’ as the content of a central thought around a poem or a piece of music. Departing from Smith (1968), according to whom “terminal modification of a formal principle” in a poem creates a “sense of closure”, Fabb suggests that closure triggers an increase in the reader’s processing effort. His claim is that the thought “this poem has closure” is a response to the increase in processing effort produced by a change in form within the poem. Though he hints at notions such as ‘gratification’ to justify the increase in processing effort at the end of a piece, considerations around emotional responses are conspicuously lacking from his account. This, despite emotion surely being fundamental to the interpretation of music and poetry.

Music psychologist David Huron highlights the emotional effect of a piece of music in the anticipation of closure (2006). While certain chord progressions produce closure, the magnitude of musical impact for a listener is determined by other co-occurring techniques in the piece. Similarly, in poetry, it is not simply the form of a poem that creates a sense of closure, but also its meaning, which relies on emotional resonance with a reader. Expanding on Fabb’s account, this presentation explores the relevance of emotion in producing closure in both poetry and music, based in a progressive relevance-theoretic framework that considers not only cognitive effects but also affective ones (Wharton & Saussure 2023).

Keywords: Relevance theory, closure, music, poetry, affect

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Combining Pragmatics with CDA for the analysis of Greco-Turkish Political Discourse: The Davos 2023 Incident

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The critical analysis of political discourse appears to be a crucial research topic in an era of geopolitical instability and destabilization (Partington, 2003). Linguistics can provide tools for describing and interpreting the linguistic choices of politicians, shedding light on the rhetorics they use and the assumptions they make. This paper focuses on the political dialogue between Greece and Turkey, which is studied in the light of CDA, in combination with pragmatics. Several aspects of CDA intertwine with those of Pragmatics (e.g., language as use, language as a representation of reality with impact in the real world), and their combination makes up for a strong methodological tool (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969, Fairclough, 2013). The analysis focuses first on the ideology (hierarchy, social roles, representation of social actors, Leeuwen, 1996, Moschonas, 2005), then on the psychology (context, dialogue, polyphony, Rigas, 2022), and finally on the exact language (types of sentences, transitivity system, rhetorics, modality, deixis, speech acts, theme – rheme, Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) of the political representatives of Greece and Turkey. The first text is an interview with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, conducted by journalist Fareed Zakaria, during the 36th World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 19, 2023. The second text is a media statement in response to the Prime Minister's comments, made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the day after the interview. Two journalistic articles covering the events from two Greek media outlets, Kathimerini and Insider.gr, complete the corpus of texts analyzed. The texts mentioned above constitute a communicative interaction event, entitled: 'The Davos 2023 Incident'. The analysis reveals interesting findings about the use of language in a real context and its political impact.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Political Discourse, Language and Ideology.

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Rethinking echo and dissociation: The revised echoic theory of verbal irony

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This paper addresses a challenge to the echoic theory of verbal irony as presented by Garmendia (2015). She identifies instances of ironic utterances where the essential elements of verbal irony, according to the echoic theory – namely, an echo and a dissociative attitude towards it (Wilson & Sperber, 2012) – either do not seem to be present, or even if they were, they are neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for interpreting verbal irony, thus posing a serious explanatory constraint for Sperber and Wilson’s theory. To resolve this issue, this paper proposes a modification of the echoic theory in light of Garmendia’s criticism. It acknowledges that there are certain ironic utterances where the speaker may not dissociate from the content of the irony, but it also argues that, in these cases, the speaker’s critical intent can only be inferred if the speaker is taken to echo a *norm-based expectation*, i.e. an expectation based on socially shared ideas about how things should be (Wilson, 2017, p. 210). Here, the ironist would not be expressing a dissociative attitude towards the content of the echoed expectation, as considered in the traditional version of Relevance Theory, but towards the failure of a particular person or collective to have fulfilled the social expectation echoed by the ironist. In this way, the proposed Revised Echoic Theory extends the theory’s applicability by recognizing that the target of dissociation in verbal irony may sometimes be the unfulfillment of an endorsed social expectation, rather than the echoed content or any individual or group that may entertain it as true. By expanding the focus of dissociation in this way, the Revised Echoic Theory demonstrates, contrary to Garmendia’s proposal, that an echo can not only be identified even in these disputed cases but also remains a necessary condition for verbal irony identification and interpretation.

Keywords: *Echo, implicature, Neo-Gricean pragmatics, Relevance Theory, verbal irony.*

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Defining Toxic Discourse: Towards a Typology of Terms for Online Toxicity

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The concept of “toxic discourse” has been widely discussed in the literature; however, a unified definition, that can capture the complexities of the term among different digital environments, does not yet exist. The presentation will seek to address this gap by examining major issues of online toxicity, focusing mostly on toxicity in social media and toxicity in gaming. Major issues surrounding toxicity include the matter of intentionality, the concept of disruptive behaviour, and the role of anonymity, among others. Additionally, toxicity is defined based on the speaker’s intention or by the receiver’s perception and evaluation; some scholars argue that toxicity should be assessed based on the communicator’s deliberate intent to harm (e.g., Blackburn & Kwak 2014; Kordyaka 2020; Kowert 2020; Monge & O’Brien 2021), while others highlight the subjective nature of offense, where even unintended comments may be perceived as toxic depending on the context and the recipient’s experience (e.g., Beres et al. 2021; Kwak & Blackburn 2015; Kwak et al. 2015; Tung & Libre Njak 2020). Since toxic discourse is commonly used as an umbrella term including a range of harmful behaviours, like harassment, (cyber)bullying, aggression and hate speech (e.g., Jaeheon et al. 2022; Kou 2020; Lapolla 2020; Monge & O’Brien 2021; Saarinen 2017; Türkay et al. 2020), it is essential to develop a common terminology for what constitutes toxic behaviours in order to properly comprehend and address them. By reviewing existing definitions and studies on online toxicity, the presentation will propose a more comprehensive conceptualisation of toxic discourse, by highlighting the challenges and issues involved in defining this term. The ultimate goal is to establish a solid foundation to guide my research on toxic discourse in gaming and to contribute to a better understanding of online toxicity, by revisiting the definitions proposed in existing studies.

Keywords: online toxicity; toxic discourse; gaming; intentionality

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Some Words Sound Bigger Than Others: A Pragmatic Approach to Sound Symbolism

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Is the relationship between words and their referents entirely arbitrary, or is there something inherently natural about the relationship between words and their meanings? Recent work in psychology suggests some linguistic expressions have a natural, non-arbitrary relationship with their referents – a phenomenon known as sound symbolism. But research into sound symbolism has tended to focus on enumerating, classifying and categorising various examples of sound symbolism across languages (Hinton et al., 1995; Johansson et al., 2020; Johansson & Zlatev, 2013) and much of it fails to recognise that the relationship between words and their meanings does not exist in isolation to the minds of the speakers who utter them. My research aims to situate sound symbolism firmly within one theory of intentional pragmatics – Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995) – and focusses on two questions:

(1) *How* do words which involve sound symbolism communicate?

(2) *What* do words which involve sound symbolism communicate?

To answer these questions, groundwork must be laid, and this paper presents three key points which guide the proposed account and are missing from previous work. Firstly, humans use whatever tools are available to them to convey meaning: even word meanings vary according to the speaker's intention (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). Secondly, communication involves the presentation of various kinds of evidence. On the one hand, there is 'meaning', in which the evidence provided is indirect and coded. On the other, there is 'showing', where the evidence is direct and interpretation is based on inference (Sperber & Wilson, 2015). Thirdly, speaker meaning is not always easy to pin down – it can range from determinate to indeterminate (Sperber & Wilson, 2015). Recent work in pragmatics has shifted the focus from purely propositional aspects of language use to so-called 'non-propositional effects' (Wharton, 2021; Wilson & Carston, 2019), and this paper argues that, together with the first two points, these effects are especially important to the study and understanding of sound symbolism.

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Bridging: Discourse operation or implicature?

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Bridging is a linguistic phenomenon that stands among three different domains: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. In bridging sentences, speakers are allowed to use a definite noun phrase without previous mention to a corresponding indefinite noun phrase. This can be observed in examples such as: “We saw a house in Pangrati. The rent was high and we didn’t book it.” or “Steven read a book yesterday. The author has been awarded the Nobel Prize.” Therefore, when the listener cannot find a direct antecedent, she/he will be able to form an indirect antecedent by building an inferent bridge from something she/he already knows (Clark, 1977). So, basically bridging is a type of anaphora. The term was introduced by psycholinguists Haviland & Clark (1974), who referred to bridging structure and bridging implicatures, which are considered essential for communication. Since then, bridging has been studied for the following three decades, although no consensus has been reached among researchers regarding its definition. It has been extensively studied in language acquisition as one of the properties of the definite article (Chondrogianni & Marinis, 2014; Schafer & de Villiers, 2000; Maratsos, 1976) and also as a distinct discourse operation (Avrutin & Coopmans, 2000). However, in pragmatics, bridging is considered a type of implicature (Clark, 1977; Matsui, 2000) and a type of anaphora (Cornish, 1996). A broad range of approaches to bridging anaphora resolution have been proposed in earlier literature, such as Given-New Contract (Clark & Haviland, 1977), Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Matsui, 2000) and the Accessibility Theory (Ariel, 1990). The purpose of the present study is to investigate the nature of bridging in order to arrive at an adequate definition. To achieve this, we will attempt to identify the characteristics of implicatures, such as their cancellability, reinforcability and measurability, in bridging sentences, and further explore whether the acquisition of implicatures shares similarities with the acquisition of bridging sentences.

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“Showing and nothing more”: Where does the animal mind stop?

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How do nonhuman animals form and associate concepts, and how can pragmatics account for the differences and commonalities between human and nonhuman communicative and cognitive systems? Sperber & Wilson (2024, preprint) propose a distinction between basic and mentalistic ostension to explain these differences within Relevance Theory (RT). Basic ostension is a feature of metacommunication in general, while mentalistic ostension requires uniquely human metarepresentational abilities as a higher-order inferential step. We explore this distinction by discussing conceptual examples such as the pointing gesture, as well as other examples of variations along the Showing *versus* Meaning axis both in humans and in other animals.

Building on studies of non-propositional effects in RT, such as perceptual (Kolaiti, 2020) and affective effects (Wharton & de Saussure, 2020, 2023), we challenge the view of cognition as strictly modular and of communication as domain-specific (Fodor, 1983, 1988), as well as the assumption that concepts are at least partly encapsulated (Stokes, 2015). Without excluding connectionist models (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986; Churchland, 1988), we propose an associative account of cognition and of communication - grounded in conditioning and affective-perceptual salience - which emphasizes the top-down and bottom-up mutual interconnectedness of conceptual, perceptual, and affective information in both human and nonhuman brains, going beyond rule-based propositional encoding as well as the strict *modus ponens* inferential structure (Mazzone, 2018; 2021).

Drawing on neuroscience and comparative cognition, we explore non-propositional accounts of knowledge generalizable across species (Spelke et al., 2007) and the treatment of conceptual content at abstract levels in nonhuman animals (Zentall et al., 2014). We argue for a difference in degrees rather than in nature between how humans and other species use metacognitive abilities, suggesting a continuum of metarepresentational steps from direct to indirect evidence, with no clear-cut distinction in what can be propositionally represented across species.

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A relevance-theoretic model of aesthetic experience

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Due largely to the influence that logic has had as the primary tool in the analysis of what we broadly call ‘meaning’, the pragmatics literature has tended to focus on objects that can be either true or false: propositions. Emotions, feelings, attitudes and moods, which are often related to art and aesthetic experiences, are ineffable. When these are communicated, they cannot be paraphrased without loss. They are *non-propositional* and, as a consequence, have been largely overlooked.

This paper examines a type of vague communication, which is associated with literature and art and will be referred to as art-related meaning. Due to its idiosyncratic nature and that it is often associated with aesthetic experiences, the interpretation of this type of meaning is considered to be aesthetic. Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) offers new ways of dealing with vague communication and therefore, creates a venue where the extent to which the theory can account for the ineffable unparaphrasable content conveyed by literature and art might be explored. By employing the core mechanism of the theory, cognitive effects, and the new notion of affective effects (Wharton & Strey, 2019; Wharton & Saussure, 2023), I will examine the interplay between cognition and affect in the aesthetic interpretation of art-related meaning.

This will be followed by a tentative proposal of a model of aesthetic experience. This model draws on the work of Marr’s (1982) proposal on vision. Marr’s model on visual information processing is accepted as the gold standard when it comes to explaining the kinds of levels an account of the workings of any cognitive system needs to consider. The relevance-theoretic model is comprised of different levels that reflect Marr’s account. It illustrates how affective responses occur in tandem with visual processing and inferencing, and lead to an aesthetic experience.

Keywords: relevance theory, ineffability, aesthetic experience, non-propositionality, Marr

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A relevance-theoretic analysis of 4chan's /pol/ board discourse dynamics

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This presentation examines discourse dynamics on 4chan's /pol/ board within a relevance-theoretic framework (Sperber and Wilson 1995), focusing on its unstable and ambiguous context. 4chan is an anonymous, image-based forum launched in 2003, known for its ephemerality, minimal moderation, and subcultural influence. The /pol/ board ("Politically Incorrect") usually hosts politics-related discussions characterized by provocative arguments. The platform's chaotic, multi-threaded structure favors fragmented exchanges that reinforce common assumptions, which is in line with findings by Yus (2011) and Scott (2015) that the search for relevance online often centers on fleeting cognitive rewards derived from participation itself rather than coherence or information-sharing.

The analysis draws on data from two 2022 threads comprising over 300 comments on unrelated topics: Catholic religion in Mexico and Elon Musk's role within the 4chan community. A relevance-theoretic qualitative approach was applied to examine this discourse, with a focus on the echoic character of many of 4chan's utterances and the role they play in whether irony can be detected.

A key feature of /pol/ communication is its reliance on assumed or imagined common ground, with users frequently responding by echoing unrelated discourse. This fosters tenuous, continually renegotiated shared meaning. Users tend to rely on language aimed at subverting any authority and rely on phrasings that are often meant to shock and offend outsiders. Such language is also often coupled with irony, both intended and accidental (Gibbs 2012), which complicates utterance interpretation, contributing to an opaque communicative environment where non-intended non-propositional effects (Yus 2019) may in fact play a significant role in the hearers' search for relevance. The board's contributions emphasize quick contextual commentary over substantive dialogue, focusing less on exchanging meaningful information and more on affirming one's place in the conversation.

As a result, interactions resemble fragmented small talk, reinforcing in-group dynamics while remaining opaque to outsiders. The frequent use of echoic speech appears central to sustaining group cohesion and a sense of conversational continuity. On /pol/, many utterances function as echoic speech, in which speakers echo a representation while simultaneously expressing an attitude toward the attributed thoughts (Wilson and Sperber 2012). The weak implicatures generated by such utterances become relevant not through explicit content, but through stylistic familiarity and the evocation of shared internet history, such as memes, recurring themes, or board-specific cultural references. In this way, seemingly disjointed contributions serve less to convey information than to affirm group membership.

In conclusion, /pol/ discourse prioritizes speaking over listening, driven by immediacy rather than coherence. The study highlights the implications of such ambiguous and identity-focused dynamics for understanding communication in complex, modern digital ecosystems.

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