

Test of the Mention Theory of Irony

Julia Jorgensen and George A. Miller
Princeton University

Dan Sperber
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and
Université de Paris 10
Paris, France

The traditional theory of irony, which assumes that an ironist uses a figurative meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the utterance, is shown to be inadequate; an alternative theory is presented, which assumes that the ironist mentions the literal meaning of the utterance and expresses an attitude toward it. Although the implications for understanding irony are difficult to test, the two theories do make testable predictions about the conditions under which irony is perceived: The mention theory requires antecedent material for the ironist to mention, whereas the standard theory does not. A reading comprehension test was conducted involving anecdotes that satisfied the traditional criterion for irony but could include or omit antecedents for echoic mention. Results favored the mention theory of irony.

Metaphor and irony, the two most important tropes, have been discussed by rhetoricians and literary scholars for more than 2 millennia. Both are common in everyday speech: It is equally unsurprising, for instance, to hear an objectionable person called "a rat" metaphorically or "a nice guy" ironically. Yet metaphor has become a popular topic in psycholinguistics (Ortony, 1979), whereas irony has been neglected. Two considerations might help to explain this imbalance: It has been easier to conceive experimental approaches to metaphor, and the relevance of metaphor to broader psychological issues has been more apparent. Our aim in this article is to illustrate one way in which irony is amenable to experimental treatment and to test a recent theory of irony put forward by Sperber and Wilson (1981), which, if correct, should increase the psychological pertinence of the study of irony.

Theoretical Background

For better or worse, the psycholinguistic study of tropes is heir to classical rhetoric.

Since Aristotle, metaphor has been discussed in terms of mental processes: the ability to perceive similarities, the ability to construct or appreciate analogies, the ability to condense verbal expressions. On the other hand, classical accounts of irony assume a specialized mechanism of meaning inversion that does not seem to govern any other mental process. (An ironic statement is supposed to communicate the opposite of what it says, whereby "the opposite" is a deliberately vague term that can mean either the contrary or the contradictory.) Moreover, many well-described aspects of irony—the stance of moral superiority of the ironist, the victims that ironies often have, the ironic tone of voice—are in no way explained by this mechanism of meaning inversion. As a result, traditional accounts of irony from Quintilian's (first century A.D./1921) to Booth's (1974) consist of an assortment of (often subtle) observations with little internal cohesion and no links to broader psychological issues.

Sperber and Wilson (1981) challenged the basic assumption of this traditional approach. They denied that to speak ironically is to express a figurative meaning that is the opposite of a literal meaning; they denied that to comprehend any irony consists in retrieving such a figurative meaning. They argued instead that the meaning expressed in an ironical utterance is the literal one and no other. However, this literal meaning is not *used* by speakers to convey their own thoughts. Rather, it is *mentioned* as an object of contempt, ridicule, or disap-

Preparation of this article was supported in part by a grant from the Spencer Foundation to Princeton University. The work was planned while Dan Sperber was a visiting member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey.

Authors' names are listed alphabetically.

Requests for reprints should be sent to George A. Miller, Department of Psychology, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08544.

proval. Conversely, the task of the hearer is to reconstruct both the literal meaning of the utterance and the attitude of the speaker toward that meaning. Thus, Sperber and Wilson proposed a *mention theory* of irony, which we shall present briefly before considering means of testing it.

Use Versus Mention

The distinction between use and mention is borrowed from standard logic. Among all the other things that can be talked about are words, sentences, phonetic and graphic strings, meanings, and propositions normally used to talk about things other than themselves. The only way to talk about a nonlinguistic object—a cat, say—is to use some linguistic expression, such as “the cat” or “that animal over there” plus a gesture, that can refer to the intended cat. On the other hand, there are two ways to talk about a linguistic object, such as the word *cat*: One may follow the general pattern and use an expression that can refer to the word *cat* (e.g., “the common name of *Felis catus*,” or “the English word composed of the 3rd, 1st, and 20th letters of the alphabet in that order”); alternatively, one may mention the word *cat*. When mentioned, *cat* refers not to the animal but to the word itself. For instance, *cat* is used in the examples below both when it refers to an animal and when it refers to a word:

There is a cat in this room. (1)

There is a *cat* on this page. (2)

Mentions of words, sentences, and phonetic or graphic strings are usually explicit and are set off from the context in which they occur by semantic or syntactic constructions, phonetic pauses, or quotation marks. Mentions of meanings or propositions, on the other hand, are often implicit. They blend into the context, and pragmatic analysis is required to identify them. For instance:

I have spoken with Max. He will be here at 5. (3)

The second sentence of (3) can be understood either as a statement by the speaker (and therefore as a case of use) or as a report of what Max said (and therefore as a case of im-

plicit mention of a proposition). This ambiguity is manifest in the contrast between (4) and (5):

I have spoken with Max. He will be here at 5, which means, since he is always 1 hour late, that we should expect him at 6. (4)

I have spoken with Max. He will be here at 5. He said he would be here at 4, but I am taking into account the fact that he is always an hour late. (5)

Echoic Mention

One type of mention of a proposition is of special relevance here: echoic mention. Consider the following exchanges:

He: I've lost my job.
She: You've lost your job. I'm sorry to hear that. (6)

He: Should I wear a tie?
She: Should you wear a tie? Who cares? (7)

He: I've seen a wolf!
She: You've seen a wolf? Hmm hmm. Are you sure it was a wolf? (8)

In these examples, the propositions used by him are mentioned by her. Her purpose is not to inform him of what he has just said or that he has just said it. Rather, she is echoing him to show that she has heard and understood and at the same time to express her attitude toward the proposition she is echoing: an attitude of concern in (6), of unconcern in (7), of disbelief in (8).

Besides these cases of immediate echo, a great variety of mentions of propositions are echoic in a looser sense. She could, for instance, echo not what she has heard but what she thinks was implied by what she has heard:

He: It's not *my* fault!
She: Then it's *my* fault! Is that what you mean? (9)

Or she could echo thoughts she attributes to her interlocutor without his having uttered or intentionally implied them:

She: You know better, huh? Not this time, pal! (10)

Or she could echo popular wisdom or received opinions:

She: It takes all kinds. But does the world *really* need people like Cuthbert? (11)

Ironic Attitude

Such cases of echoic mention are extremely common and varied in everyday speech. In each case, the speaker's tone of voice (approving, doubtful, admiring, scornful, concerned, unconcerned) together with the immediate context may help to indicate her attitude toward the proposition mentioned and therefore her own beliefs in the matter.

Clearly, the speaker can also express an ironic attitude toward a proposition she is echoing. In the following, (12) is an example of immediate echo of speech, (13) is an example of delayed echo of speech, and (14) is an example of echo of attributed thought:

He: Joe is an honest fellow.

She: Oh, sure, Joe is an honest fellow . . . who just can't help lying, cheating, and stealing whenever the occasion arises. (12)

She: Trust the Weather Bureau! See what lovely weather it is: rain, rain, rain. (13)

He: I assume you forgot to buy beer!

She: I forget everything, don't I? Go look in the refrigerator before making assumptions. (14)

In such cases, in order to analyze the ironic intention of a speaker (and how it is reconstructed by a hearer), there is no need to assume that the literal meaning has to be canceled and replaced by an opposite, figurative meaning. The traditional analysis would be inconsistent and redundant with the observation that the speaker is echoing and ridiculing a remark or a thought *literally understood*. If the echoed proposition were not literally understood, there would be no point in ridiculing it. In mentioning a proposition and making it clear by the context and tone of voice that she considers it ridiculously mis-

taken, the speaker allows the hearer to infer that she believes the opposite of the proposition mentioned. Thus in (12) she implicates that Joe is dishonest, in (13) that the weather is bad, in (14) that she is not forgetful; these implicatures follow directly from her ironic attitude toward the proposition she mentions. To assume that there is a figurative meaning opposite to the literal meaning would be redundant, because the information it would convey is available anyhow as an implicature.

Note that this analysis differs from Grice's (1975). Grice assumed that the ironist "must be trying to get across some proposition other than the one he purports to be putting forward" (p. 53). If the speaker is using one proposition in order to get across its contradictory, then the hearer must *replace* the literal meaning by its implicature. In this critical respect, therefore, Grice's analysis and the traditional analysis of irony do not differ (see Wilson & Sperber, 1981).

At this point it might be tempting to assume that there are two kinds of ironies: echoic ironies such as (12) through (14), which are to be accounted for in terms of mention, and standard ironies, which are best accounted for in terms of figurative meaning (Cutler, 1974; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1981). This unparsimonious assumption would be justified, however, only if a unitary treatment of irony were impossible, and it would create the extra task of explaining why two figures of speech based on fundamentally different mechanisms should intuitively appear to belong to one and the same class.

The Mention Theory

A unitary treatment of irony is possible, based on the mention model. As we have seen, besides blatant cases of immediate echo, a variety of utterances are intended and interpreted as more or less remote echoes of past utterances, thoughts, received opinions, or accepted norms. Such intentions may succeed and such interpretations may occur even when the mentioned material has not been presented in the preceding utterances. It is sufficient that hearers be able to identify the mentioned material: They may recognize it or they may identify it by inference. Recognition occurs when received opinions are mentioned, as in

(11). Inference occurs when implications or thoughts are mentioned, as in (9), (10), and (14). Thus it is conceivable that all ironies are instances of echoic mention, instances that differ only with respect to the closeness or remoteness of the echoed material. Compare the following with (13) above:

She: See what lovely weather it is:

rain, rain, rain! (15)

In (13) the echoed material, a report from the Weather Bureau is explicitly alluded to, leaving no doubt as to the echoic character of the utterance. In (15), the speaker might again be echoing such a forecast and be expecting her hearer to recognize it without any explicit cue, or she might merely be echoing an expectation or hope that they had shared that the weather would be good. Under ordinary circumstances, people can be assumed to have such a hope; it can therefore be mentioned and ridiculed when it turns out to be disappointed, without creating any difficulty in interpretation for the hearer.

The standard theory and the mention theory of irony are compared in Table 1, which summarizes the interpretive steps that a hearer must go through in order to comprehend an irony.

Implications of the Mention Theory

Various aspects of irony that are merely listed in lesser or greater detail in traditional accounts are explained and integrated in the mention theory. Three instances are discussed:

1. It is much more common to say ironically of a failure, "What a success!"; of a nasty

fellow, "What a nice fellow!"; of a stupid idea, "What a clever idea!" than the converse: "What a failure!" of a success; "What a nasty fellow!" of a nice fellow; "What a stupid idea!" of a clever idea; and so on. In other words, irony is most often used to criticize, not to praise.

Standard theory provides no explanation for this asymmetry; mention theory leads one to predict it. Expectations of success are intrinsic to any action; culturally defined criteria of excellence and rules of behavior are invoked in most value judgments. Thus it is always possible to mention these expectations ironically when they are frustrated, or to mention these norms ironically when they are violated, and to trust that hearers will share them and so recognize them for what they are. On the other hand, expectations of failure or criticism occur only on specific occasions, and it is only on those occasions that they can be mentioned ironically and serve to bestow praise under the guise of blame. Thus, "What a failure!" could be an effective ironic reference to a success if the hearer knew or could surmise that failure had been expected.

2. Most (but not all) ironies have victims. That fact is yet another puzzle for the standard theory; it is easily accounted for in terms of the mention theory. In ridiculing a proposition, the ironist ridicules whoever holds or held that proposition to be true. To the extent that a specific individual or group is thus singled out, the irony has a definite victim. This explains for instance why "What lovely weather!" used ironically has a victim when it echoes a definite weather forecast (namely the forecaster) but has no particular victim when it echoes everybody's disappointed hope.

Table 1
Comparison of Standard and Mention Theories of Irony

Standard theory	Mention theory
Observe that the tone of voice, the immediate context, and background knowledge rule out the possibility that the speaker might be using the literal meaning of the utterance (or intending the utterance to be understood metaphorically).	
Take the speaker to be using a figurative meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the utterance.	Take the speaker to be mentioning the literal meaning of the utterance.
	Identify the echoed material mentioned and the speaker's attitude toward it.

3. Within the standard framework, the existence of an ironic tone of voice is puzzling. Why not speak of a "metaphorical tone of voice," a "metonymical tone of voice," and so on, for other tropes? When irony is seen as an instance of mention, the ironical tone falls quite naturally into place. It is merely one of a variety of tones of voice (doubtful, approving, contemptuous, etc.) that speakers may use to indicate their attitudes toward the propositions mentioned.

Tests of the Theory

As far as generality and explanatory power are concerned, mention theory has the advantage over standard theory. Both theories, however, suffer from the fuzziness of their empirical foundations. They belong more to literary studies than to experimental psychology. Given an ironic utterance, they provide different descriptions of the way in which it is interpreted. But the interpretation process is not observable; our knowledge of it is introspective and hazy. Moreover, introspection can be influenced by knowledge of the theories. The standard theory has become part and parcel of Western culture, so most subjects' initial understanding of their own interpretive processes are likely to be mere restatements of this theory. On the other hand, it becomes equally easy to have intuitions that are in accord with mention theory once it has become familiar. Either way, such data are inconclusive.

Luckily, standard theory and mention theory differ not only in the way they describe the interpretation of irony but also in their predictions about which utterances will be interpreted as ironic. According to standard theory, the following is a sufficient condition for an utterance to be interpreted as ironic:

The speaker's communicative

intention could not be to assert the proposition literally expressed by the utterance, since the speaker manifestly expects the hearer to realize that the speaker believes the opposite of that proposition. (16)

According to mention theory, (16) is not a sufficient condition, but the conjunction of (16) and (17) is:

The propositional content of the utterance literally understood matches at least in part that of some identifiable utterances, thought, intention, expectation, or norm which it can be taken to echo. (17)

Although subjects' introspective judgments as to what goes on in their minds when they interpret an ironic utterance are vague and inconclusive, their intuitions as to whether some given utterance is ironic or not can provide more reliable data. In particular, if it could be shown that subjects perceive irony in all utterances that satisfy condition (16), whether or not condition (17) is also satisfied, that result would provide evidence in favor of the standard theory. If, on the other hand, subjects failed to perceive irony in sentences that satisfy only condition (16) but did perceive it when both condition (16) and (17) are satisfied, mention theory would be vindicated.

Method

A kind of reading comprehension test was used to compare the two theories. Short descriptions of simple episodes were written in such a manner that condition (16) was always satisfied, but the antecedent for an echoic mention could be present or absent. These stories, with and without the echo, were presented to subjects who then answered questions about what they had read.

Subjects

The subjects were 24 male and female undergraduates at Princeton University; they were tested in two groups. Participation was part of a laboratory requirement for a course in psychology. None of the students was familiar with the mention theory prior to the experiment.

Materials

The six anecdotes used in the experiment are reproduced in the Appendix. The main problem in devising experimental materials along these lines is the difficulty of ensuring that condition (17) is not satisfied inadvertently. This difficulty is not insuperable, however, and working on its solution is itself instructive.

The following criteria guided construction of the stories:

1. Each anecdote portrayed a situation involving dialogue between two characters in which the final utterance in the anecdote echoed an earlier utterance. A second, nonechoic version of each anecdote was then constructed, which was identical with the echoic version except that the antecedent for the echo was deleted.

2. In both the echoic and nonechoic versions, the final utterance expressed an opinion that the speaker and the hearer both knew to be false.

3. The final utterance did not (in the judgment of the experimenters) echo any conventional norms or opinions, or any views or intentions implicit in the anecdote.

4. Stylistic cues were eliminated so that comprehension of content alone would cause subjects to identify irony. Because in natural conditions irony is nearly always accompanied by stylistic or intonational cues, it was to be expected that subjects' performance would be less than perfect in both experimental conditions but, one could hope, not to the point of jeopardizing the significance of the results.

How these criteria were satisfied can best be indicated by example. The following is the nonechoic version of an anecdote entitled "The Party":

The party was at the Clarks', but Joe didn't know where Mr. Clark lived.

"It's on Lee Street," Irma told him. "You can't miss it."

But Joe did miss it. He never would have found it if Ken hadn't seen him wandering down the street and led him to the Clarks' apartment. They lived over a store, and their apartment door was right on the sidewalk.

Irma was already there when they arrived. "You're late," she called to Joe.

"The Clarks have a beautiful lawn," he replied.

This version satisfies condition (16), and so, by the traditional account, the final utterance should be interpreted as ironic. Mention theory makes no prediction about the interpretation of this final utterance, but the simplest assumption is that without an antecedent utterance to echo, the final utterance would seem odd or puzzling.

In order to satisfy both conditions (16) and (17), the echoic version of the same anecdote was used in which the antecedent is provided in Irma's first utterance. The echoic version begins:

The party was at the Clarks', but Joe didn't know where Mr. Clark lived.

"It's on Lee Street," Irma told him. "It's the house with the big maple tree on the front lawn. You can't miss it."

But Joe did miss it. . . .

In this version, Joe's closing remark can be understood to echo the misinformation that Irma had given him earlier. Both theories predict that the echoic version will elicit judgments that Joe was being ironic.

Procedure

Subjects were tested in two groups. The anecdotes were presented in written form, which eliminated any cues that might have been given by tone of voice. Each subject received the anecdotes as a set of typewritten pages bound in prearranged order; a story was written on one page, followed by its respective questions on the next page, then the next story followed by its questions, and so on. Subjects were given 45 s to read a story before the experimenter signaled that it was time to turn the page and answer the questions about it. Subjects were allowed unlimited time

to write their answers to the questions. Questions for "The Party," for example, were:

Q1. Where was the party held?

Q2. Why did Joe say, "The Clarks have a beautiful lawn"?

The answer to the first question indicated that the subject had read the anecdote. The second question was intended to elicit judgments of irony or sarcasm.

All subjects saw all six anecdotes, three echoic and three nonechoic. No subject saw both the echoic and nonechoic versions of the same anecdote.

Results

A subject was judged to have perceived irony in the final utterance if he or she answered the second question by saying that the speaker intended to be ironic, sarcastic, or facetious or if the speaker was said to be trying to ridicule the listener by an "I told you so" taunt. All other answers were counted as failures to perceive irony.

Responses judged as failures to perceive irony included "I don't know"; indications of confusion about how to answer; elaborate explanations based on imagined motives or circumstances not written into the story; suggestions that the speaker was joking, teasing, fooling, humorizing, amusing, or playing a game; suggestions that the character said the opposite of what he or she meant; suggestions that the character was mimicking or being obnoxious to someone; and statements of something inferred or imagined that the character could have been echoing without any indication of a particular attitude. This last category, which was infrequent, is illustrated by a subject who read the nonechoic version of "The Party" and answered the question about Joe's final remark, "Because it was physically impossible to have a lawn."

The results obtained by scoring the responses in this manner are summarized in Table 2. Chi-square tests indicate a statistically significant interaction for four of the six anecdotes, thus supporting the mention theory of irony. Results for the other two anecdotes were not significant.

The answers of two subjects who read the echoic version of "The Typewriter" anecdote had to be discarded, because they took Amy's saying "Mine is the blue one" to mean that Amy's office was blue, not that her typewriter was blue.

Table 2
Numbers of Subjects (N = 24) Judged to Have Perceived Irony

Anecdote	Nonechoic		Echoic	
	Irony	No irony	Irony	No irony
The Lecture	5	7 (5)	7	5 (5)
The Party**	3	9 (4)	10	2 (1)
The Computer*	2	10 (10)	7	5 (4)
The Typewriter**	4	8 (6)	9	1 (0)*
The Hotel**	1	11 (11)	7	5 (2)
The Animal	1	11 (0)	1	11 (0)

Note. Parentheses indicate number of *don't know* responses.

* Answers by two subjects were discarded.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results tend to support the claim that people do not perceive an implausible non-normative utterance as ironic unless it echoes some antecedent use, which is the outcome predicted by the mention theory of irony.

Shown in Table 2 are the numbers of subjects whose responses clearly indicated that they did not know why the final speaker said what he or she did say. Although a proponent of the standard theory of irony might be able to interpret differently some of the responses that we categorized as showing no appreciation of irony, these *don't know* responses are unambiguous. Note that nonechoic anecdotes received three times as many *don't know* responses as did the echoic anecdotes. In short, under conditions in which standard theory predicts an ironic interpretation, many people find only inexplicable non sequiturs. Not only did these subjects miss the point, but it also did not occur to them that irony might have been intended.

Two of the six anecdotes did not yield the predicted interaction. In the case of "The Lecture," irony was perceived about half the time for both versions. In the case of "The Animal," irony was seldom perceived for either version. These exceptions merit special comment.

The results for "The Lecture" are puzzling on either theory of irony. That is to say, standard theory does not explain why half the subjects failed to perceive irony in either version. On the other hand, mention theory does not explain why half the subjects perceived irony

in the nonechoic version. A mention theorist might speculate that tedious lectures are the norm for many Princeton students and that the anecdote had inadvertently echoed that common expectation. Of the five subjects who perceived irony in the nonechoic version, one wrote, "Anne and the boys had expected the lecture to be tedious," and another wrote, "He saw Anne, who was a boring person, and he was telling her that obliquely." All that can safely be said, however, is that, for reasons unknown, this anecdote provided no evidence in favor of either the standard or the mention theory.

The results for "The Animal" suggest that Princeton undergraduates do not expect parents to use irony or sarcasm in speaking to their children, at least in the kind of situation depicted. They preferred to see the father's utterance as a kind of play, a game of "let's pretend," perhaps: Of the 22 responses we categorized as "no irony," 7 were judgments that Daddy was playing a game, and 14 more said that he was joking, fooling, or teasing. Again, our results with this anecdote proved indecisive with respect to the two theories being compared.

If we set aside the results from these two anecdotes and look only at the four showing the interaction predicted by mention theory, we still find that irony was perceived in the nonechoic versions on 10 out of 48 answers. These results seem to support only the relatively weak claim that the probability of perceiving irony is increased by echoic mention, not that echoic mention is necessary. Before weakening mention theory in that manner, however, one should consider two possibilities: (a) These 10 subjects may have imagined some antecedent to the echo that the experimenters did not anticipate, or (b) they may have identified irony through elimination rather than through comprehension; that is, they may have concluded that the last utterance in the anecdote must be intended as ironic (for what else could it be?) without, however, getting the point of the irony.

When the verbatim responses of those who perceived irony in nonechoic anecdotes are studied, they prove no more than suggestive. In the case of the "The Typewriter," three subjects said that Mac's final remark alluded to the fact that he had trouble picking out the typewriter, and the fourth wrote that Mac

"thought Amy knew about the two black typewriters," although that inference is not derived from the anecdote; thus, mention theory could account for all four responses. In the case of "The Party," where three subjects perceived irony in the nonechoic version, the opinion was expressed that Joe said "The Clarks have a beautiful lawn" because the Clarks did not have a lawn, which seems to satisfy the requirements of the standard theory. Perhaps future studies should show a subject a single anecdote and then systematically interrogate the basis for the response given.

Those parts of the present results that are inconclusive merely illustrate how such an experiment on irony can run into difficulties that are genuine but not insuperable. The main outcome of this experiment is to increase the domain of empirical evidence that is better accounted for on the assumption that irony is a kind of echoic mention. If that assumption is maintained, then the study of irony can be expected to throw light on two important aspects of verbal production and comprehension: echo phenomena and expressions of attitudes, which have been central issues in literary stud-

ies. We have tried to suggest that they are also open to an experimental approach.

References

- Booth, W. C. (1974). *A rhetoric of irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cutler, A. (1974). On saying what you mean without meaning what you say. In M. W. LaGaly, R. A. Fox, & A. Bruck (Eds.), *Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 117-127). Chicago: Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Volume 3. Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, C. (1981). L'ironie comme trope. *Poétique*, 41, 108-127.
- Ortony, A. (Ed.) (1979). *Metaphor and thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Quintilian, M. F. (1921). *The institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, with an English translation by H. E. Butler (Vol. 3). London: Heinemann. (Original work written first century A.D.)
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1981). Irony and the use-mention distinction. In P. Cole (Ed.), *Radical pragmatics*, (pp. 295-318). New York: Academic Press.
- Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (1981). On Grice's theory of conversation. In P. Werth (Ed.), *Conversation and discourse* (pp. 155-178). London: Croom Helm.

Appendix

The following six anecdotes were used to test the mention theory of irony. The nonechoic versions deleted the material in parentheses; the echoic versions included it. Following each anecdote are the two questions that were asked about it.

The Lecture

The instructor asked the whole class to attend a special evening lecture by a visiting professor.

"How tedious!" Anne complained to Harry and Tom.)

Harry and Tom attended together and were both impressed by the high quality of the lecture, which was both educational and amusing. As they were leaving the lecture hall, they bumped into Anne.

"Tedium, wasn't it?" Harry said.

Q1. Who attended the lecture with Harry?
Q2. Why did Harry say the lecture was tedious?

The Party

The party was at the Clarks', but Joe didn't know where Mr. Clark lived.

"It's on Lee Street," Irma told him. ("It's the house with the big maple tree on the front lawn.) You can't miss it."

But Joe did miss it. He never would have found it if Ken hadn't seen him wandering down the street and led him to the Clarks' apartment. They lived over a store, and their apartment door was right on the sidewalk.

Irma was already there when they arrived. "You're late," she called to Joe.

"The Clarks have a beautiful lawn," he replied.
Q1. Where was the party held?
Q2. Why did Joe say, "The Clarks have a beautiful lawn"?

The Computer

The new computer was scheduled to take over many of the bookkeeping tasks that Henry had performed manually.

"It's what the business needs," Henry told his boss. ("But I'm afraid that the one you're buying is much too large.")

(*Appendix continued*)

When it arrived, Henry was put in charge and given new administrative responsibilities. The new operation was so successful that Henry soon had to ask his boss to investigate ways to expand the computer.

"I guess that the one I bought was much too large," his boss commented.

Q1. Who was put in charge of the new computer?

Q2. Why did the boss say that the computer he had bought was much too large?

The Typewriter

Amy asked Mac to move her typewriter to her new office on the third floor. ("Mine is the blue one," she told him.)

Mac found two typewriters in Amy's old office, both of them black. It took him and the inventory clerk nearly an hour to identify Amy's.

When Mac delivered Amy's black typewriter, she said, "Yes, that's mine. Did you have any trouble?"

"Of course not," he replied. "Yours was the blue one."

Q1. What did Amy ask Mac to do?

Q2. Why did Mac say, "Yours was the blue one"?

The Hotel

"Shall we walk back to the hotel or take a taxi?" Sally asked.

"Let's walk. It's not far. Just follow me," answered Carol.

Sally felt she could have found the way herself. (At one point she thought Carol had taken a wrong turn; she muttered, "We are getting lost!" and Carol heard her.) But Carol seemed so self-confident that Sally followed her. They quickly reached the Campo San Stefano, and there stood the hotel.

"We are definitely lost!" Carol said.

Q1. Who led the way back to the hotel?

Q2. Why did Carol say, "We are definitely lost"?

The Animal

Little Jackie called, "Daddy, Daddy, come here! There's an animal in the barn."

"What kind of animal, Jackie?"

"I can't see it, but I don't think it's a dog. (Maybe it's a bear. Yes, it must be a bear.) Hurry up, Daddy!"

Jackie and Daddy entered the barn. It was dark. Something was moving behind the cart. Suddenly they saw Bugs, Jackie's all white bunny, hopping toward them.

"Oh," Daddy said, "It's a polar bear!"

Q1. Where did Jackie find the animal?

Q2. Why did Daddy say, "It's a polar bear"?

Received March 25, 1983

Revision received June 27, 1983 ■