

A Study of Irony in Political Discourse

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Abstract

This study examines the ideological and evaluative nature of irony in discourse. It aims to reveal the linguistic constructions involved in ironic utterances and to uncover ideologies underpinning such structures. It draws upon the echo and pretense theories to account for utterance representation along with Wodak's (2007) framework of self and other presentation strategies. The study examines the incongruous construction of an attitude, and the objectives attempted to achieve by taking a cynical stance. The main research questions center on the role played by ironic utterances and how they contribute to preserving the image of the speaker and to the negative representation of the other. The study reveals the way politicians mark their verbal irony, i.e., to classify and categorize the co-textual markers including hyperboles, and repetitive follow-up commentaries. The findings in this study support Bertuccelli (2018) view that irony is not merely saying the opposite of what one means but instead communicating an attitude. It adds to the existing literature that irony involves not a reversal of evaluation, but a reversal of attitudes about social actors to draw a positive self-image. Furthermore, the study shows that echoing the opponent's utterance involves a representation of acts and speech acts along with free direct and indirect speech.

Keywords: discourse, echo, irony, negative other representation, pretense, positive self-presentation

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1. Introduction

The study argues that the meaning of irony is not always saying something while implying the opposite. It presents instances where the ironic utterance refers to the truth of some previously stated situation, statement, or thought lies in the opposite proposition. The study shows that ironic statements in political discourse help (de) emphasize negative/positive traits attributed to Them/US leading to positive self-presentation and negative other-representation. The fundamental aim is to illustrate the complementary role of both pretense and echo in constructing ironic utterances to emphasize attitudes and to legitimize the ironic labeling of social actors. Wilson (2013, p. 4) claims that although echoes and pretense seem ‘indistinguishable,’ it is the echoing not the pretense that “explains the distinctive features of irony.” So the researcher argues that communicating an evaluative attitude implied in an ironic utterance is the product of the intersection of both echoing and pretense.

The data used are personal anecdotes as they are means through which speakers provide the audience with information about themselves and their own life (Kalbermatten, 2010, p. 74). Personal anecdotes are “true reports of funny events experienced by the teller” (Norrick, 2003, p. 1339); therefore, they involve speakers’ evaluation in the form of reported speech, hyperboles, understatement, paradox and sometimes ambiguity and an absurd conclusion. Previous studies show that speakers present their propositions with an opposite evaluation of the utterance they produce, while this study examines ironic statements where the evaluation reversal is at the level of the speech produced earlier by the object of irony. For example, in *Romney is a very talented person*, the intended meaning is the opposite of *talented* as attributed ironically to Romney based on his previous acts or sayings as in example 2A and 2 B. Thus, the attitude is communicated via echoing a thought. In this case, Obama disassociates himself from Romney’s utterance by pretending that he believes him, thereby inviting the audience to notice the inconsistency between his statements as he keeps changing his positions based on his self-interest.

2. Literature Review

Studies investigating irony state it is the opposite of what is said (e.g. Attardo, 2000), and some moved from the notion of oppositeness to suggest it involves contradiction (Alba-Juez & Attardo, 2014; Gornostayeva, 2016) through which speakers communicate a negative evaluation while attacking others. Therefore, we assume the existence of an evaluative gap filled by appealing to the linguistic and social context of the utterance. Studying irony in political campaigning discourse, the researcher suggests that the present definition best illustrates the concept in question within the political context. Irony is an evaluative message communicating an attitude about the opinion and the action of an opponent- the addressee of ridicule- but mainly addressed to a third party independent of the victim being present or absent. Thus, the current study accounts for the various ways relations of power, exclusion and inclusion are manifested via ironic statements.

Gornostayeva (2016) and Nuolijärvi and Tiittula (2010) have shown that irony in political debates serves in aggression and defense represented through several mechanisms, among which is a paradox and reversing the communicative expectation, providing absurd conclusion, and ambiguity. Both studies have illustrated that hyperboles, litotes and understatements as forms of irony while the present study adds to the list repetition and paraphrasing reported utterances for highlighting the speaker’s attitude and his attempt to gain power and legitimating policies. Employing repetition and echoing enhance the strength of the argument and highlight the US /THEM boundaries strategies. In

support of this, Nuolijärvi and Tiittula (2010) state that ambiguity can be exploited for self-display and support the positive self-image. Their findings reflect the speakers' struggle for dominance by presenting their antagonist self, enhancing one's position about the opponent, and illustrating that ironic utterances used in conversations involve evaluating a prior turn. Similarly, the present study shows that echoing and pretending function as an evaluative commentary on the opponent's reported utterances produced previously before the time of the given speech.

Gornostayeva (2016) illustrates that speakers may communicate attitudes with an implicit evaluation of the self or the other. Gornostayeva (2016) suggests the existence of a distinct connection between what is said and what is implied stated in a way that none can replace the other. This finding justifies viewing irony as speech genre presupposing a meaning different from the literal one based on the communicative intention. The reverse is merely part of the contradictory proposition enriched with a complex set of attitudes contributing to inferencing the appropriate meaning. Bertuccelli (2018) explains this point as follows:

if we say *p* (You are a big help) and communicate $\neg p$ (You are not a big help), and if *p* may be explicated like $\text{att}(p)$, where *att* is the set of (positive) mental states and feelings which cluster to conventionally produce the illocutionary force "praise" then by communicating $\neg p$ we detach the positive attitude from the content, and we transitively turn the illocution into its negative counterpart ("blame.") (p. 68)

Irony is the outcome of a set of attitudes communicated with paradox or contrast and exhibiting varying degrees of speakers' involvement understood from "the contextual combination of propositional and non-propositional attitudes with variable components of the communicative act" (Bertuccelli 2018, p. 60).

Following Yus (2016, p. 94), the present study does not merely identify ironic utterances in the selected texts; it attempts to illustrate self-representation in relation to a significant other achieved by communicating attitudes evaluating the acts and the utterances of the opponent, i.e. the identification of the speaker's feelings and emotions (affective attitude.)

The key research questions addressed in this study are: 1) what role can ironic utterances play in political discourse with a particular emphasis on Obama's speeches? How can they contribute to preserving self-image and to representing the other? 2) As irony is a form of stance-taking, what are the linguistic resources drawn upon in constructing ironic utterances? Answering these questions, the present study contributes to the available literature through providing an account in which both pretense and echo collaborate to better explain the manifestation of power relations, exclusion or inclusion in discourse and self-selling with regard to the significant other at the discourse level of positive and negative presentation.

3. Theoretical Framework

The framework adopted to achieve the aim of this study triangulates two theories of irony: pretense theory and echo theory along with Wodak's (2007) model of self and other presentations. Combining these theories resulted from identifying an intricate relation between the echoing and pretense implied within a single utterance which emphasizes the need for a framework involving the two concepts. Pretence means attitude communication as speakers, according to this theory, pretend onstage thoughts regarding the specific acts of the object of irony (Clark & Gerrig, 1984) to attract attention

not to the act itself but to the speaker's attitude regarding it (Bertuccelli, 2018, p. 66). According to echo theory, the speaker of an ironical utterance does not necessarily say the opposite of what he/she means, but echoes a thought, i.e. "meaning something different from what he says" (Haverkate 1990, p. 89). More specifically, echoing involves communicating a reaction towards a thought. The thought and the proposition of the ironic utterance need not be identical (Wilson, 2013, p.11).

Pretense theory is suitable for the aim of the present study as attitudes play a significant role in this model (Bertuccelli, 2018). Speakers convey their views through pretending that the interlocutor's utterance is true as in examples 2A and 2B. Obama, in these examples, pretends to perform an act of assertion, and invites the audience to examine the pretense and detect the implied viewpoint. Wilson (2013) describes the necessity of adopting pretense and echo theories stating:

Several pretense theorists share the intuition that irony is tacitly attributive, but also maintain that irony involves the simulation or imitation of a (real or imagined) speech act, and is therefore a case of pretense. Hybrid echoic-pretense accounts differ from simpler versions of the pretence account by claiming that irony is necessarily attributive, and from the echoic account by claiming that irony also necessarily involves pretense (p. 15).

To account for the way irony functions at the discourse level of self and other presentations, the researcher uses Wodak's (2007) framework as it involves echoing utterances and labeling social actors. Wodak's (2007) model proves useful for this study in presenting or labeling the object of the irony and the utterances and actions attributed to him or her. Additionally, one of the discursive strategies in this model is justifying the labeling of social actors which is useful for the goal of the present study.

Wodak (2008) sets the following questions as relevant to theoretical and methodological approaches to inclusion/exclusion. These questions are:

1. How are persons named and referred to linguistically?
2. What are the traits, characteristics, qualities, and features attributed to them?
3. By what argumentation schemes do speakers or social groups try to justify the inclusion/exclusion of others?
4. From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attribution, and arguments expressed?
5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified, or are they mitigated? (p. 302).

Strategies for the discursive construction of positive self-presentation and the negative presentation of others (Wodak, 2011, p. 40) provide answers to the above-mentioned questions. Utilizing these questions as a toolkit in analyzing a text, a researcher can approach the representations of social actors and individuals (Qaiwer, 2016), by identifying the speaker's stance and his evaluative attitude. As systematic ways of using languages, strategies of self and other presentations are means towards achieving a social and political goal (Qaiwer, 2016). See Table.1 from Wodak (2008):

Table1. *Discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other presentation (Wodak, 2007, p. 663)*

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	Membership categorization, Biological, naturalizing Depersonalizing, Metaphors, and metonymies, Synecdoches
predication	Labeling social actors, more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	Stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits Implicit and explicit predicates
argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	Topoi used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speakers' point of view	Reporting, description, narration or quotation of events and utterances
intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	Intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of utterances

Examining utterances at the local level, the researcher then moves towards studying the surrounding context to identify the role of irony in serving speakers' aim of exclusion/or inclusion of social actors.

4. Methodology and Data Collection

The data collected for this study are narrative extracts of political speeches delivered during the American election campaign in 2012. Identifying narrative extracts, the researcher examined the representation of the political self and the opponent as a significant other. That is to say, in election texts, Obama presents himself as the best candidate in comparison to his rivals. The study aims to show how Obama sells himself as the best candidate by studying his ironic utterances exhibiting his criticism of his opponent.

Following Partington (2013), the researcher used Wordsmith to generate concordances of the word *laughter* as it is usually placed between brackets in political speeches to mark the audience reactions to the utterance. Laughter is a typical response to irony (Clift, 1999; Kotthoff, 2003; Eisterhold et al., 2006); it usually follows ironic comments in television debates, conversations, and political speeches. Moreover, this procedure can reduce the researcher's subjective judgment as episodes are sometimes coded as ironic simply because the author thinks so (Partington, 2006: 203). Wordsmith yielded a small number of concordance lines, the original texts of which are all included in this study. Wordsmith is used only to help identify laughter files to achieve some degree of objectivity by localizing ironic utterances. Then the concordance lines are read to check if the preceding utterance is ironic or not via identifying irony factors and irony markers (Attardo, 2000). To achieve a higher account of objectivity, the researcher followed the verbal identification procedure (VIP) proposed by Burgers, *et al.* (2011). After identifying ironic utterances, the researcher conducts a qualitative analysis to account for linguistic resources drawn upon to construct the unexpected meaning. Ironic statements involve implicit evaluative stance about social actors since speakers narrate stories with evaluative remarks through which people present their 'selves' (Ochs and Capps 1996, p. 21-22).

The present study sheds light on the usage of verbal irony in election campaign speeches due to their binary nature, i.e., politicians attempt to praise themselves and undermine their opponents to persuade the electorate to vote in their favor.

5. Analysis

Following the VIP procedure, the researcher identified ironic utterances for further scrutiny. The study shows the representation of ironic statements and the way they contribute to drawing Obama's positive image.

Example 1:

1. Now, some of you may have heard, last night we had our first debate. (Applause.) And I just flew in from Denver, and I was telling folks there, when I got on the stage, I met this very spirited fellow who claimed to be Mitt Romney. (Laughter.) But I know it couldn't have been Mitt Romney -- because the real Mitt Romney has been running around the country for the last year promising \$5 trillion in tax cuts that favor the wealthy. And yet, the fellow on the stage last night -- who looked like Mitt Romney -- (laughter) -- said he did not know anything about that. It was all news to him.

[Madison, Oct 4th, 2012]

Very spirited fellow is ironic labeling referring to Romney who, as the context of the speech suggests, has restated his presidential plans due to the strong wave of criticism he faced. The word *very* is a hyperbolic expression describing the speaker's claim so that the audience will not take it at face value. It signals the recipient to elicit an interpretation other than the one conveyed by the following adjective *talented*. Carston and Wearing (2015, p. 84) state that hyperbole conveys and elicits mockery towards the thought implied in the proposition. They (2015, p. 88) further state "The excessiveness of the meta-represented propositional content plays a very helpful role in cueing the dissociative attitude of the speaker."

In this utterance, the reversal of evaluation does not entirely fit because an ironic representation of a speech act verb *claimed* follows it. Obama mitigates the illocutionary force of this verb ironically to intensify his evaluative proposition implied in *spirited*. He reverses his communicated attitude in this context. This reversal is justified argumentatively by the legitimating clause starting with '*because the real Mitt Romney...*' Reporting Romney's previous acts highlights the proposition involved in the ironic statements where Obama pretends that the content of the utterance is exact. Here, Romney's change of attitude in the reported utterances is evaluated as his voice is foregrounded within an ironic statement *said he did not know anything about that. It was all news to him*. In this statement, the evaluation reversal theory may work as the implication is that *Romney knows about that*. Yet, Obama intends the proposition to ironically re-evaluate *the very spirited fellow* as a man who changes his position according to his interests to negatively represent Romney. Qaiwer (2016) states

"*claimed* implies multiple utterances in which Romney has contradicted himself. Thus, *who claimed to be Mitt Romney* does not mean that Romney claimed who he is in the debate as his identity is already known. The illocutionary force of *claimed* indicates a transparent interpretation that 'what is assumingly said' is not identical to Romney's previously reported policies. Here,... his choice of the verb *claimed* is meant to affect the way the narrative is received and interpreted by listeners." (p.196)

In this example, Obama employs a set of discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other –representations to enhance his altruistic political self. Firstly, there is a prediction expressed to label Romney as a social actor implying the evaluative attribution of negative traits. Obama further justifies his attribution via reporting Romney’s contradicted utterances about changing political plans and distances himself away from Romney’s to highlight his positive political image.

2. A. But the fellow on stage last night, he said he loves teachers -- can’t get enough of them. (Laughter.) B. The Mitt Romney we all know invested in companies that were called "pioneers" of outsourcing jobs to other countries. But the guy on stage last night, he said he’d never heard of tax breaks for companies that shift jobs overseas. Never heard of them. (Laughter.) C. And he said, if that’s true, he must need a new accountant. So now we know for sure that wasn’t the real Mitt Romney, because the real Mitt Romney is doing just fine with the accountant that he already has. (Laughter.)

A. he said he loves teachers -- can’t get enough of them. The discrepancy is between the literal meaning of the word *love* and the knowledge shared by participants in the debate and people familiar with his planned policies. Romney’s remark of changing his economic plans about education triggers the irony in this context. Romney previously promised to cut jobs for firefighters, police, and teachers if elected. The ironic utterance *cannot get enough of them* is an internal evaluative comment reflecting on the semantic proposition of *love* as the main verb reported in free indirect speech. Here, Obama’s comments on Romney’s claim functions as an assertion of the contradictory proposition and communicates a negative meaning. According to Recanati (2007, pp. 223-227), both irony and free indirect speech are tacitly attributive varieties of mimicry or pretense i.e. “the act of assertion is precisely what the speaker does not perform when she says that p ironically: rather, she plays someone else’s part and mimics an act of assertion accomplished by that person.”

Based on this and other examples, it seems that echoic irony has two forms: repeating the same words, or producing an evaluative comment on the content of the report. These two forms function as an elaboration, or paraphrases of the original message; therefore, “gives way ... to the wider and more flexible concept of *interpretive resemblance*; the echo in an ironic statement now may only resemble an original statement” (Partington 2006, p. 185). The resemblance in this example indicates an implicit negation of the real proposition, i.e., comprehending an ironic utterance involves retention of the literal meaning and text receivers may compare and contrast between two narratives or state of affairs referred to literally. Therefore, in this example, the dictum is: Romney loves teachers while the implicatum is: Romney is a liar. Thus, the semantic proposition of *love* is already reversed. Obama uses the phrase *cannot get enough of them* to highlight the shift in position about the economy plans. The humorous effect of Obama’s comment lies in the attitude expressed via echoing an utterance, identifying its source, and highlighting the rejection or disassociation from the stance echoed by the speaker’s comment as supported by (Sperber and Wilson, 1995).

B. Never heard of them is an echoic mention of the reported content in the preceding sentence starting with *he said*. Here, Obama disassociates himself from the content echoed with ridicule as it contradicts the available knowledge about Romney who is known to have run the Bain. Bain is a company that shifts jobs outside the US (Kessler, 2012). Here, the reported utterance may not be the exact words uttered originally. The echoic mention here functions as an evaluative comment on the truth of the reported content in which Obama distances himself from both believing the utterance and from the action. Repeating the statement here highlights Romney’s actions. By such a reporting,

Obama represents the discourse highlighting his own position about the prediction, and at the same time, the report functions as a justification for the label stated earlier, *the guy on the stage*. The word *guy* usually used to refer to a person whose identity is not known. Yet, it is used in this context to intensify the degree of doubt on Romney's truthfulness and shift in ideological (attitudinal) positioning (Partington 2006, p. 185). Here is a skillful example where Obama expresses the moral evaluation of his opponent as unreliable personas. The contradiction is between an expected state of affairs and the one reported in the context of the debate, i.e between what is said and what is already known about the object of irony (Attardo, 2000).

It is worth mentioning that the negative markers in this example and the preceding one, *never* and *can't* are hyperbolic expressions maximizing the level of evaluation reversal. Therefore, the meaning of 2 A and 2 B is the opposite of what Romney has said rather than the opposite of what Obama himself says. This extract illustrates the function of irony in representing the other negatively. It communicates a subjective evaluation of the situation, highlights the incongruity of two narratives and invites the addressees to recognize the attitude behind it. In these examples, Obama is expressing a contemptuous attitude towards his expectations about Romney's reported utterance regarding creating jobs overseas and education policies. Here, the ironic statement reminds the hearer of Romney's speech echoed by Obama.

The referential strategy involved in nominalizing Romney in phrases such as *the fellow/ guy on the stage* is an echoic utterance implying a negative commentary in which Obama dissociates himself from the thought echoed. Some scholars, such as Clark and Gerrig (1984, p. 121), Kumon-Nakamura *et al.* (1995), and Recanati (2004, p.77-78), describe them as implicit distancing comment on staged utterance addressed to one's audience. These phrases, along with others that follow a reported statement, more specifically, *it was all news to him* and *can't get enough of them* intensify the humorous effect. Fetzer and Weizman (2015) refer to such phrases as follow-ups since they are communicative reactions to the preceding reported statement which becomes, in this context, the object of continuous reinterpretation.

C. And he said, if that's true, he must need a new accountant. So now we know for sure that wasn't the real Mitt Romney, because the real Mitt Romney is doing just fine with the accountant that he already has. (Laughter.)

'So now we know ...' appears after an argument that justifies the proposition of the negative phrase *that was not the real Mitt Romney* since there is an implied contradiction between two states of affairs highlighting the 'inappropriateness.' This statement performs the functions of the coda that concludes the argument presented about Romney's change of reports. Here, the irony appears at the presupposition level as the proposition remains unchanged under the contradicting statements *He must need a new accountant*, and *Romney is doing fine with the accountant*. The negative assertion in *that was not the real Mitt Romney* provokes laughter since Romney's real identity is intensified by *real* and by the constancy of the presupposition under negation. Presumably, *real* implies the existence of some fictitious character with the same name. In this context, Obama communicates a thought about Romney as the audience shares knowledge about the referent *guy* mentioned earlier in the text. Obama echoes an idea of the norms and shared views about how things should be. Therefore, in this and the above examples, the normative bias of the irony is that Romney should be trustworthy and honest, and Obama is ironically reporting a norm-based expectation. This statement appears in a context justifying the use of the word *guy* in the preceding utterance and, at the same time, attributing

the cause of labeling Romney as an evaluative thought about his reported speech in *And he said, if that's true, he must need a new accountant*. The evaluation reversal in this utterance is about the ironical attitude about Romney.

Based on the examples analyzed so far, echoes are not always ironic in their interpretation. They may introduce paradoxical statements as a premise representing what can be called echoic irony i.e., speakers repeat the same words followed by a comment on them.

3. We've also got to ask the wealthiest Americans to go back to the tax rates they paid when Bill Clinton was in office. And by the way, we can afford it. I haven't talked to Bruce, but I know he can afford it. I can afford it. Mr. Romney can afford it (laughter).

[Madison, Wis., Nov. 5, 2012]

This example supports the researcher's hypothesis that politicians use irony to communicate group solidarity and affiliation serving two purposes: inclusive and exclusive one. Bruce Springsteen is a music icon who opened the rally for the president's speech in Wisconsin the day before the presidential election. In this speech, Obama is trying to legitimize his Buffet rule bill requiring higher tax payment depending on incomes. The goal of the irony is criticizing Romney for cutting tax for the wealthy including himself, as he paid \$ 1.9 million in taxes on \$13.7 million of income in 2011 for a 14.1 percent rate. Obama distances himself from such acts by adopting the Buffet Rule while depicting Romney as failing to be fair since the middle-class families will have their taxes go up (Rucker, et.al 2012).

On the one hand, the ironic utterance *Romney can afford it* in the underlined phrase builds in-group affiliation by referring to the connection between Bruce, the president *I* and the opponent Romney. On the other hand, it expresses negative judgment of Romney's economy plans and at the same time excluding Romney through indicating a shared evaluation of Romney by Obama and the people represented by Bruce. The evaluative expression of this attitude is the "point of using irony" (Attardo 2000, p. 13). This instance involves an ironic inclusion of the opponent to emphasize the negative image drawn throughout the argument presented in the same text. In *Mr. Romney can afford it*, the reversal of evaluation theory does not entirely fit. Instead, it is a reversal of the stance expressed as the audience share knowledge that Romney opposes the bill in question. In *I can afford it. Mr. Romney can afford it*, Obama implies that Romney argues in favor of himself and the wealthy- which is an implicit evaluative comment since Obama as a storyteller "may assume that actions speak for themselves" (Riggen 1997, p. 16). Representing the opponent ironically in this and similar contexts is a narrative shift which takes the audience back to the interactional and/or the story world providing a useful strategy of gaining the upper hand in a discussion.

4. Maybe they'll say we need a moat. Or alligators in the moat. They'll never be satisfied. And I understand that. That's politics.

[Comprehensive immigration in Texas Oct. 5th, 2011]

They refers to the Republicans and critics of Obama's immigration policy. Here, Obama assigns the responsibility for delaying immigration reform to the Republicans as they are the ones blocking the new bill. The dictum is: *We provided more border agents and security equipment along the Mexican border* and the implicatum is: *Republicans remain unsatisfied* (the communicated attitude). Again, a speech report is involved in the form of a hypothetical free indirect speech. The first two examples analyzed involved free indirect speech used in historical present tense. According to Recanati (2007, p. 223-227), both irony and free indirect speech are tacitly attributive varieties of pretense. Here,

Obama echoes a predicated thought while committing himself to it through assertion. With such a prediction again, Obama disassociates himself from the blocking of the immigration reform bill and blaming the other by a hypothetical report of speech. Here, Obama combines a predicated speech act and an echoic account to intensify his attitude towards the predicted thought or precisely towards the kind of people who would perform such an action.

5. Gov. Romney is a very talented salesman and so in the campaign he's tried as hard as he can to repackage the old ideas that did not work as new ideas. In fact, he's offered them up as change- says he's the candidate of change.

[Madison, Wis., Nov. 5, 2012.]

The evaluation in the underlined phrase is a form of intensifying the force of the utterance as exemplified by *very*, which highlights the contrast in the semantic implication of the adjective *talented*. In other words, Obama marshals the following information where he justifies the ironic attribution *very talented*, signifying the difference between the arguments in *he's tried as hard as he can to repackage the old ideas that did not work as new ideas* and the evaluation *very talented*.

Two readings or interpretations are involved in this example:

1. A talented salesman sells new good stuff/ a skilled campaigner sells new good policies
2. Romney sells old and bad ideas *the old ideas that did not work* (dictum).
Romney is not a very talented salesman (implicatum).

Obviously, the readings listed above are in contrast. The humor is triggered by the incompatibility between *talented* and the shared knowledge about what a political campaigner should offer. Kalbermatten (2010, p. 70) indicates the humorous effect of the irony results from the discrepancy of the two readings or interpretations implied in the text. Therefore, a text is ironic if it matches two scripts opposing each other. More specifically, the irony lies in the opposition implied between the literal and the intended sense of the utterance. Here, the concept of incompatibility is at work since the opposite meaning is justified in the follow-up argumentative commentary *repackage the old ideas that did not work as new ideas*. The positive propositional meaning *talented* is incongruently highlighting the reversal of Obama's evaluative attitude. This expression enhances the possibility of the audience's perception of Obama's contradictory proposition since the acts described contradicts with the meaning of *a talented salesman*. This incompatibility reflects an evaluative gap between the intended and the literal meaning of an utterance and is called inappropriateness (Attardo, 2000); and contrast (Kotthoff, 2003). In this context, the researcher follows Yus (2016) in using the term 'incompatibility' due to the incompatible connection between the referential prediction and the argument in the follow-up commentary.

6. Refusing to answer questions about your policies until after the election that's definitely not change (laughter) that's the oldest game in the book. [Madison Nov. 5th, 2012]

In this example, no reference is made to the object of criticism, so the conclusion is ambiguous without contextual information. Criticizing an opponent becomes more effective if ironic ambiguity is involved which can be understood by those familiar with extralinguistic situations (Gornostayeva, 2016, p.185). Obama refers in this example to an occasion when Romney refused to answer a reporters' question about how he would handle the Federal Emergency Agency, and he kept ignoring the question (Terkel, 2012). Also, Romney refused to answer questions about his support of Richard Mourdock, an Indiana Senate candidate, and he refused to participate in a Nickeldo en special to

avoid answering questions in that show. He skipped the chance to take part in a ‘kids pick the president’ that included his opponent, while Obama participated. It seems that Obama indicates in a context such as this that Romney is afraid of taking questions from children.

The non-finite verb phrase involves a representation of a speech act i.e. ignoring the question and suppresses the identity of the agent responsible for the implied action of *refusing*. Obama refrains from naming his rival; instead, he nominalizes Romney’s actions as a strategy of negative-other presentation. Obama does not refer to Romney as it is clear that any campaign is about attacks and defense, and there are only the two of them. The use of nominalization in such a context highlights the negatively evaluated policies that Romney is selling as a *candidate of change*.

The tacit criticism is indirect, that is, it only informs that a state of affairs exists (Partington 2006, p. 200), and the example reflects “the rhetorical effect of using a form with no personal subject as an actor” (Partington 2006, p. 200). Here, Obama creates a critical gap between two descriptions to formulate a critical argument: refusing to answer questions in a context of marketizing policies and between the narratives of what *change* in politics means. The audience can infer the contradictory proposition since they share knowledge and background assumptions about Romney. The rhetorical effect lies in the fact that it is not the object of irony that the speaker cares about; it is the attitude communicated that goes beyond the words and their negative integration that attracts the audience to compare between the literal meaning and its inconsistency with the context of the election. The evaluative stance involves a contradiction between an expected state of affairs and the one stated; i.e., inappropriateness in Attardo’s (2000) terms.

7. (a) There is a bad story about me in the New York Times (laughter). (b) I was much more sensitive at that time to bad stories (laughter). I am more accustomed to bad stories.

[Final campaign rally, De Moines Nov 6th, 2012]

This instance involves a marker of identity construction as Obama both presents himself positively as a man of experience in this context. Speaking of an unpleasant experience in such a setting enables speakers to “show themselves in control of their emotions” (Dews *et al.* 1995, p. 347), and hence superiority (Attardo, 2000). The historical present in the existential sentence (a) reflects the time of an unplanned event happening in the mid of habitual activities. The tense shifts into the past and then to present to communicate an internal self-evaluation and to describe different states of being at different times signifying the experience of the political self. Grice (1989, p.53) claims that irony is expressing evaluation, feeling, and attitude while Attardo (2000) supports Sperber and Wilson’s (1986, p. 239) claim that such an evaluation is mainly negative. This example reports positive self-evaluation with a particular reference to a given situation reflecting the ironic stance at the interactional world. The utterance might mean both ‘I was a sensitive sort, but I managed to cope on that day’ and the implicature ‘I could not care less about criticism.’ Obama’s rhetorical skill appears in showing two states of affairs: one temporary at the story world and the present state where he is an elected president and running for a president for the second time. Therefore, the implicature can be rephrased to suit the current state in ‘whatever you write, I do not care.’

8. He thought that, in America, the *wealthiest should pay their fair share*, and he said so. I know that position might disqualify him from the Republican primaries these days -- (laughter) -- but what Ronald Reagan was calling for then is the same thing that we’re calling for now.

[Madison, Wis., Nov. 5, 2012]

Here, there is a narrative representation of Romney's thought with ironic intention. The predicate is a relative clause with modal expression in *italic*. Note the combination of thought representation with a speech representation *said* as a comment emphasizing the epistemic subjectivity. The irony is evident in reporting the thought *pay fair share*, and Romney's contradicting policies. *Fair* is incompatible with 'real' Romney's thought and with Obama's plan. The modal marker *I know* is co-selected with predicting a future state of affairs and implies the certainty of one's governmental competence. The irony lies in the fact that a campaigner needs to marketize his political policies on reasonable grounds. Here, Obama implies that Romney is doing the opposite. Two narratives are involved in this utterance:

The dictum: Romney is a Republican candidate, and his policy is against their ideology

The implicatum: Romney is not calling for the same rule, so he is disqualified.

So the utterance reported is incompatible with the presupposition of the election context; hence, casting doubts on Romney's worthiness of policies implied by *disqualify*. *Disqualify* indicates that Romney does not know what everybody should know and mitigates this representation along with his ironic stance via *these days*. The reference to Ronald Reagan, as an expertise and role model, is a legitimating strategy to further elaborate on Romney's negative representation.

6. Discussion

The study has made several far-ranging methodological and theoretical points. At the methodological level, the researcher attempted to achieve a high level of objectivity in data selection and following the generation of laughter files with a theoretical approach of irony identification. At the theoretical level, the study better approaches a careful analysis by triangulating three theoretical models to account for the construction of irony to communicate the speaker's attitude. It attempts to reveal the complementary role of pretense and echoes in ironic utterance and shows how speakers employ them to emphasize the positive and negative attributes of the Us/Them. It shows that echoes involve pretense, but not necessarily vice versa. Echoes cannot only be ironic themselves but also they can introduce ironic utterances as follow-up comments. As a form of discourse representation, an echo, according to the data analyzed here, can take the form of mere repetition of the content as in 2B, paraphrase as in 2A and as a simple reported speech or a representation of speech act as in 2C. The study shows that echoes and pretense as perspectivation strategies are not the only linguistic resources employed in ironic communication; naming and labeling social actors suggested by Wodak (2007) can be used for a similar effect. This finding indicates the suitability of Wodak's framework to encompass the other two models for the present study and suggests its restatement to fit ironic communication. Hopefully, this discussion justifies triangulating these models.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of what the data analyzed can tell us about campaigning discourse, but the findings can provide some powerful indication of their interpretive potential. The present study has advanced the claim hypothesized earlier about the necessary combinability of echoes and pretense in communicating an attitude with a reversed evaluation. Thus, the study shies away from supporting the earlier studies claiming that irony is the opposite of the literal meaning of words.

Furthermore, the present study has necessarily had a focus on the role of irony in constructing in-group and out-groups. Through this practice, an evaluative gap exists between the evaluation implied in the other's utterances or acts, and the evaluation implied by the speaker's ironic follow-up comment; hence, inviting the audience (third party) to fill it by appealing to the linguistic and social context of the utterance. The gap can be a paradox as in example 8 and 5, reversing the communicative expectation as in 7, providing absurd conclusion and ambiguity as in 6. The analysis of these examples yielded an agreement with those of Gornostayeva (2016) and Nuolijärvi and Tiittula (2010) and adds that instead of communicating one's thought with a face-threatening act, speakers appeal to creating an evaluative gap to mitigate the aggression and produce a powerful self-defense and self-image. In line with Bertuccelli (2018), the findings also suggest that speakers express involvement or detachment via reporting discourse or representing actions and by prediction or labeling which result from mental states, feelings, and social representation. So by stating X is positive, we detach the positive attribute and communicate its negative illocution. The discussion presented so far provides an adequate and comprehensive answer to the first question addressed in this study based on what it agrees about and what it adds to the existing literature. Answering the second research question, the researcher presents an argument of a set of linguistic features drawn upon while constructing an ironic message. It includes rhetorical strategies of hyperbole, and understatements, repetition and paraphrase, discourse representation of acts, speech acts and speech, affirmative and negative statements. It is worth mentioning that these features interact to achieve stronger impact; for example, the analysis revealed instances where negation markers, involving hyperboles and affirmative statements, reflect acts represented earlier in a given speech. Affirmative assertion, similar to the negative assertion, as shown in this study, is in an ironic context with a communicative goal "of correcting the hearer's misguided beliefs" (Givon 2001, p. 372).

The present study illustrates the prominent role of irony in discourse. It proves that ironic phrases can be much better at revealing the discursive practices of inclusion /exclusion and self and other presentations. The analysis has been crucial in highlighting possible associations between discursive strategies, linguistic resources, and attitudinal stance. Thus, the study is an invaluable aid to uncover relations of power and domination through elucidating the phenomenon of irony.

7. Conclusion

This article discusses the significance of ironic utterance from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. It builds on the assumption that ironic meaning is treated as a contextually adjustable meaning filling a gap between an echoed utterance and an observed contradiction between the report and the expected norm.

The study aims to examine the role of irony in Obama's speeches and draw a conclusion about whether it helps them to create a positive image and achieve their goals. The study shows that echoing and pretense may combine in a context where the speaker reports an utterance and repeats it to highlight the contradiction between the report and actions taken, based on background knowledge shared with the audience, or paraphrases the utterance for achieving the same goal. With repetition and paraphrase as markers of irony, the ironist attempts to communicate his evaluative attitude while justifying the stance he takes and implicitly invites the audience to adopt.

To conclude, the sequential analysis brings out the nature of irony as an evaluative attitude expression for politicians. Irony is an essential rhetorical means for self-presentation as the present

study shows that verbal irony is a form of speech presentation with an evaluative attitude implicating an opposing stance.

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