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Isn’t It Ironic? Or Sarcastic? Or Both? A Study on the Nature of Irony and Sarcasm in Greek Communication

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Isn’t It Ironic? Or Sarcastic? Or Both?
A Study on the Nature of Irony and Sarcasm in Greek Communication

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Abstract

Despite extensive theoretical and experimental research on the form, structure, and function of irony and sarcasm, their relationship remains unclear. One of the reasons is that the phenomena are rarely discussed in non-English contexts. The present study examines the nature of irony and sarcasm and how they are perceived in Modern Greek, aiming to test whether certain criteria, as identified in previous theories, namely overtness, speaker attitude, and the presence of a target, can reliably describe and distinguish the two phenomena. A two-phase questionnaire was administered to 160 native Greek speakers, using vignettes designed to include ironic compliments, ironic insults, and sarcastic remarks, as well as tasks aimed at examining if these criteria could predict their classification of irony and sarcasm. The design incorporated a pre- and post-definition structure, allowing comparison of participants' interpretations before and after being presented with academic definitions of irony and sarcasm. This approach also enabled the investigation of first- (intuitive) and second-order (theoretical) understandings of the two phenomena.

The results revealed that all criteria, namely overtness, attitude, and target presence, were relevant to both phenomena, although not distinct enough to predict their classification. This was also enhanced by the fact that in sarcastic remarks and ironic compliments, the classification differed significantly across the two phases, although the separate criteria remained stable. In addition, the results highlight a high degree of interdependence between the three criteria. The findings accentuate the limitations of existing Anglo-centric models and point out the need for a more inclusive, culturally grounded approach to studying irony and sarcasm across languages, as well as attention to the differences between first- and second-order understanding of the phenomena.

Keywords: Irony, sarcasm, Greek, first- and second-order understanding, tease

I. Introduction

"Oh great, another traffic jam!"

Statements like this are rarely taken or are not supposed to be taken at face value. Instead, they aim to convey a negative evaluation of a situation indirectly. But is this all there is to irony? Or is this comment sarcastic? In reality, although phrases like this are uttered in everyday conversations, political debates, movies, and commercials, it remains difficult to classify them with certainty. The reason is that the parameters of irony and sarcasm remain unclear even after years of research within pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics.

Over the years, scholars have proposed various frameworks to account for irony and sarcasm—from Grice's implicature-based theory of conversational maxims, to Sperber and Wilson's echoic mention model, to theories of pretense, relevance, politeness, and beyond. However, no unified explanation has been universally accepted. Most of the theories are also empirically tested, with contradictory results in most cases. The main issue is that they are unable to explain *irony* and/or *sarcasm* as a whole, but rather provide definitions that can describe some of their characteristics. More recently, Garmendia (2024) gave a minimal description of irony as a "clash" between context and utterance, which expresses an attitude. However, these parameters are not sufficient to describe irony to the exclusion of sarcasm. To that end, the term *sarcasm* is used a lot, both by the general public and scholars, without providing a sufficient definition of the phenomenon, and most of the time it is intertwined with irony, without sufficient reasoning or explanation. This way, *sarcasm's* definition has been described as "fuzzy" and less than clear-cut (Dynel, 2018, p. 137).

Based on this, the present research analyzes previous theoretical accounts of both irony and sarcasm, as well as their use as mocking or humorous devices to provide a unified

account of these phenomena. Similar to Garmendia (2024), I begin by going through the main theoretical accounts of irony namely, the (im)politeness approach, the neo-Gricean account, the Echoic mention/reminder theory and the (Allusion) pretense theory of irony, as well as other proposals that stem from them, identifying their strong and weak points. In addition, the relation of irony and sarcasm will be investigated, as well as their relationship with the terms "mock" and "tease". This will lead to a unified set of criteria for both terms.

These criteria were tested through a questionnaire with Greek-speaking participants. Participants completed a two-phase online questionnaire involving short vignettes and rating tasks, allowing both pre- and post-definition comparisons. The goal was to investigate whether the criteria mentioned, which primarily derive from theories based on English, are universal or there are differences based on cross-cultural factors. It is indeed noteworthy that the two phenomena are rarely discussed in the Modern Greek context, with more research available focusing on Ancient Greek and the etymological aspect of the terms. In addition, it seems most empirical findings on the aforementioned theoretical accounts on irony and sarcasm are also limited to English. Although no exact cross-cultural criteria will be tested, the study aims to highlight whether data from other languages can indeed aid the search for a unified theory on irony and sarcasm.

Last but not least, the design of the study will take into account the fact that people's perception about the two linguistic devices differs from the scholarly perspective that has dominated this far in the literature. Indeed, as Partington (2007, p. 1550) mentions, more often than not in empirical research, the design follows an academic definition of the terms, which may or may not coincide with the general public's understanding, especially in different languages.

In sum, the research questions that this study aims to investigate are as follows:

a) Are there specific criteria that apply to both irony and sarcasm, based on the theoretical accounts proposed so far?
b) Do these criteria apply to Greek native speakers' perspectives?
c) Do irony and sarcasm aim to mock or tease?
d) Does the general public's understanding of the terms differ from the scientific account of irony and sarcasm?

This study aims to provide both theoretical and empirical contributions on how irony and sarcasm are treated within pragmatics. Theoretically, it proposes a more inclusive, minimal account of irony and sarcasm that integrates key insights from multiple pragmatic frameworks while addressing their limitations. Empirically, it provides new data from Modern Greek, a language and cultural context largely overlooked in irony research, thus contributing to a cross-linguistic understanding of figurative language. Moreover, by comparing layperson interpretations before and after explicit definitions, this research also questions the gap between academic theory and everyday language use. The findings may have relevance for linguistic theory, language teaching, translation studies, and even AI models of language understanding, which are based increasingly on cross-cultural pragmatics.

II. Perspectives and Insights on Irony and Sarcasm

In order to evaluate the relationship between sarcasm and irony, it is necessary to review the various theoretical models that have been proposed throughout the years. Indeed, substantial theoretical and experimental research has been conducted on the nature of irony and/or sarcasm, their use and comprehension by the audience, but also the reasons why the speaker employs them. Irony, etymologically derived from the ancient Greek word "εἰρωνεία" (eironeia), has historically been a rhetorical device used to convey a meaning contrary to reality or the speaker's true beliefs. Notably, Socratic irony was used as a pretense of ignorance to entice the interlocutor to make a statement that could then be challenged. On the contrary, sarcasm, derived from the ancient Greek word "σαρκάζειν" (*sarkazein*), literally meaning "tearing apart flesh," is a more recent verbal technique.

Let us begin with the many theories and definitions proposed for (verbal) irony[1]. This will be done mainly to evaluate the nature of ironic language and what seems to be the key characteristics of all ironic utterances. Moreover, I will discuss the four main pragmatic stances on the nature of irony: i) the (im)politeness account of irony, ii) neo-Gricean approaches to irony, iii) echoic (mention) theories, and iv) (allusion) pretense theories. In addition, and since in most of these theoretical accounts extralinguistic variables are rarely mentioned, a separate section is dedicated to criteria that are often associated with irony and/or sarcasm such as facial expressions, gestures, but also the role of emojis in the use of irony in computer mediated communication (CMC). The relationship between the notions "irony", "sarcasm", and "teasing" will also be added as a separate section, since they also have a complicated connection. In the final section, I will propose a comprehensive account

[1] One of the arguments that has been proposed for their separation is that sarcasm can be only verbal, whereas irony can also be situational (Dynel, 2013, 2018; Garmendia, 2018, p. 129). Here, I have chosen not to analyze this argument, and I use "irony" in the sense of "verbal irony" throughout the present paper.

of irony and sarcasm that synthesizes key criteria from existing theories, addresses ambiguities they have left unresolved, and offers a more unified framework for understanding their pragmatic and communicative functions.

1. Theoretical Accounts of Irony

1.1 The (Im)politeness account of Irony

Although not often mentioned as a separate pragmatic account of irony (for example in Garmendia, 2024 or Pexman and Olineck, 2002), the (im)politeness account of irony is discussed, since some interesting points about the function and form of irony, but also sarcasm, are highlighted, especially within mock politeness accounts.

Leech (1983) proposed the Politeness Principle (PP), which overall functions to "maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative" (p. 82) and aims to account for utterances which cannot be accurately explained by Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP). Based on that, he introduces the Irony Principle (IP) as a second-order principle:

> "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive part of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature" (Leech, 1983, p. 82).

In this way, irony is a form of aggression manifested in an indirect way. As Leech explains, irony appears to manipulate the Politeness Principle by exhibiting excessive politeness in a context that contradicts the situation. However, this strategy helps to reduce the conflict between the speaker and the listener, ultimately preserving the Cooperative Principle. Since irony enables the speaker to bypass politeness rules, irony is then deemed as an "antisocial"

use of language, often signaled by exaggeration or understatement (Leech, 1983, pp. 142-143).

Although Leech only accounts for the negative aspects of irony as mock politeness, he also discusses the opposite, namely mock impoliteness, and the Banter Principle, which exploits the Irony Principle (Leech, 1983, pp. 144-145). The Banter Principle (BP) is, in a way, "mock-irony" and includes a double reversal of the meaning:

> "In order to show solidarity with h (hearer), say something which is (i) obviously untrue and (ii) obviously impolite to h" (Leech, 1983, p. 144).

These principles build upon Grice's (1975, 1978) account of irony, which will be discussed below. However, there is little attention to the role of context and other extralinguistic variables that may influence irony recognition. Even in Leech's example (see [1]), an ironic interpretation is not obvious, since no further context is provided.

(1) A: Geoff has just borrowed your car.

B: Well, I like THAT!

(example [3] in Leech, 1983, p. 83)

This means that this utterance may not be perceived as ironic. Although the capitalization of "THAT" to show intonational emphasis is highly indicative, we can also consider the possibility that B is genuinely happy about Geoff borrowing the car, hence the statement can be sincere. Consider two possible situations:

Situation 1: After B begged him, Geoff took the car to be washed.

Situation 2: B had talked to Geoff about being more helpful around the house, and Geoff took the car to go grocery shopping.

Especially if we replace B's response with *"Great!"*, the lack of contextual cues makes it unclear whether the utterance is ironic or not. Leech (2014, pp. 233-234) further explains that indeed irony can be realized by either a non-felicitous interpretation based on context or by signals such as the intonational emphasis on "THAT" as shown above. However, he also acknowledges that something cannot be deemed "polite or impolite" out of context, citing irony as an example (Leech, 2014, pp. 15-16). The role of non-contextual cues such as intonation and gestures in irony comprehension is controversial, as various studies have shown opposing results. This will be discussed at length in section II.2.

The idea of the Irony Principle was later dubbed *sarcasm* or *mock politeness* and classified as a subcategory of impoliteness super-strategies by Culpeper (1996) or off-record impoliteness in Culpeper (2005) and Bousfield and Locher (2008). Culpeper specifically addresses the change of term from *Irony* to *Sarcasm*, since he acknowledges that the former can be used for "enjoyment and comedy" (Culpeper, 1996, pp. 357). In both cases, the same premise applies, meaning that the strategy is the opposite of Banter and has a "desired effect of social disharmony" (Bousfield and Locher, 2008, p. 206).

Leech (2014), while revisiting his accounts of *Irony*, does not distinguish it from sarcasm; he also equates both Irony and Sarcasm with mock politeness and Banter with mock impoliteness. Taylor (2017), on the other hand, disassociated the two, based on corpus data, in online forums in Italian and English, which show that mock politeness seems to contain other types of utterances labelled "condescending" and "patronizing" rather than strictly ironic; hence, according to her, mock politeness should be considered an umbrella term containing more than sarcasm and irony rather than co-extensive with irony. On the other hand, Taylor's (2015, 2017) studies also revealed instances where sarcasm was conveyed without the use of overly polite utterances, also referred to as mock politeness.

In sum, while the (im)politeness account of irony, particularly through Leech's Irony and Banter Principles, offers insights into the indirectness and social functions of ironic and sarcastic speech, it often lacks sufficient consideration of how irony is exactly structured and what criteria differentiate it from other phenomena. This limitation underscores the need to integrate pragmatic, contextual, and cognitive perspectives, which will be further explored in the following sections.

1.2 The neo-Gricean account of irony

Furthermore, the theories in this section have focused more on the "clash" between what is said and what is meant, rather than the effects of irony in (im)politeness terms. In Grice's (1975) account, irony is perceived as a type of figurative language that flouts the maxim of Quality and hence generates an implicature. A key feature of this type of figurative language is the clash between the utterance and the context.

(2) "X, with whom A has been on close terms until now, has betrayed a secret of A's to a business rival. A and his audience both know this. A says: X is a fine friend."

(Grice, 1975, p. 53)

As a supplementary note, Grice (1978, p. 771) adds that irony expresses an attitude, evaluation, and/or feeling, although the nature of those feelings is not discussed. In addition, irony has an inherent element of pretense that the speaker wants to be recognized as such, without, however, revealing its nature to the interlocutor.[2] Although Grice does not provide an example, I will attempt to explain this notion based on example (3):

(3) Maria and Michalis are waiting in a long line, and Maria seems displeased:

[2] *"(i) To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretence to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretence would spoil the effect.*" (Grice, 1978, p. 772).

Maria: *Πόσο μ' αρέσει να υπάρχει μεγάλη ουρά!*

" I love waiting in a long line!"

Here, Michalis understands the irony based on the contradiction between what Maria says and the situation at hand. If Michalis did not understand that Maria "pretends" to love long queues, then the irony would be ruined. In addition, if Maria proceeded with "Just kidding! I actually hate it," the irony would also be spoiled, according to Grice. A final remark is that, for Grice (1978, p. 771), there is no such thing as an ironic tone of voice. Rather, the tone emphasizes the contempt or amusement of the speaker instead of signaling ironic intent. This might indicate that in examples such as (1), where Leech aimed to signal an ironic interpretation with the intonational emphasis on "THAT", the tone might simply hint at an ironic interpretation, but not suffice on its own (more on ironic tone in section II.2)

Grice's claims are foundational, with many theories elaborating on them or focusing on their different elements. While these theories often overlap, given their shared origin in Grice's framework, following Garmendia's (2024) distinction, we will treat certain accounts as specifically neo-Gricean. The label "neo-Gricean" is used here to refer to approaches that preserve the core idea of irony as an implicature, arising from a deliberate violation of conversational norms, but develop it further through refined pragmatic analysis, maintaining its basis in Grice's notion of Quality flouting.

Based on that, Dynel (2014; 2018, p. 94) attributes two main characteristics to irony, namely overt untruthfulness, as a consequence of flouting the maxim of Quality, and the evaluative nature of the implicatures. The overt nature of irony makes it recognizable against the context or applicable social norms and commonsense assumptions (Yus, 2000), or what Clark and Carlson (1982) identified as *common ground*. Here, common ground refers to

sharing the same beliefs or mutual knowledge that allows irony to be recognized (Clark and Gerrig, 1984). We already observe that there is a dichotomy in what we mean by "overt". Since this last account is based on common ground, only specific members of an interaction are eligible for understanding the ironic effects of an utterance, especially in cases where the untruthfulness of the statement is not immediately obvious. For example, consider (4):

(4) Maria and Michalis, who are a couple and have known each other for a long time, are with George, who is visiting their house for the first time. It's raining outside.

Maria: *Μ 'αρέσει πολύ αυτός ο καιρός!*

"I love this weather!"

Traditionally, what Maria says should be considered ironic, because we would expect someone to love sunny weather. But maybe Maria likes the rain. Michalis, who has known her for a long time, might recognize that the utterance is not ironic, due to the common ground they share. However, there is a high chance George might think it is uttered ironically, since they do not share the same likings. We should therefore take "overt" as something obvious to at least one person in the audience.

With untruthfulness, on the other hand, or what Grice (1975, 1978) mentioned as pretense, the speaker "makes as if to say" something they do not believe, leading the hearer to infer the opposite. In a simplified way, irony is (apparent) contradiction, making literal statements that are opposite to what is actually believed (Kreuz and Roberts, 1993). The "as if" element in Grice's account has been further discussed by Garmendia (2011), who grounds the explanation of ironic utterances based on the "As-If Theory". According to this, irony involves the speaker appearing to assert a certain statement while actually conveying a different meaning, which the listener infers through their recognition of irony (Garmendia 2011). The mismatch can be strong or weak depending on the gap between what is said and

what is meant. With this, Garmendia (2011) aims to define the idea of meaning "reversal". Based on this theory, Maria, in example (4) ("I love this weather!" in the case the utterance is ironic), adopts a stance in which she loves this weather, although she does not really like rainy weather. This discrepancy between Maria's actual belief and adopted stance in this utterance is exactly what makes the utterance ironic. It is worth noting, however, that Grice's (1975) original use of the phrase "make as if to say" was a technical term not limited to irony but also applicable to metaphor, where the speaker does not commit themselves to the literal truth of the utterance. The speaker makes as if to assert a proposition (often its literal opposite), thereby flouting the Maxim of Quality and triggering the implicature. Garmendia's use of the term appears broader, aligning it more closely with pretense theories, which conceptualize irony as a form of performance or role-play, as will be shown in section II.1.4.

Moving on to the evaluative nature of irony, as mentioned by Grice (1978), this notion is also debatable. The problem is both the nature of the evaluation itself, specifically whether it can be both positive and negative, and whether the evaluation itself is part of the meaning reversal, neither of which is elaborated by Grice (1978). Regarding this last aspect, Partington (2007, p. 1557) defines irony as an expression of the opposite evaluation of what is actually meant, meaning the untruthful evaluation is expressed in order to convey the truthful one. However, as also mentioned by Dynel (2018, p. 110), this does not account for all ironic statements, for example, when irony takes the form of a question, rhetorical or not.[3] Consider (5) and (6) below:

(5) Maria receives back a test from the teacher, in which she has made many mistakes. The teacher asks:

[3] Interestingly, rhetorical questions are sometimes treated as a distinct category, separate from irony. For instance, Clark (1996) classifies rhetorical questions, alongside sarcasm, understatement, overstatement, and teasing, as distinct types of staged communicative acts. Similarly, Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) also treat rhetorical questions as separate from irony in their analysis.

Teacher: *Διάβασες για το τεστ;*

"Did you study for the test ?"

(6) Maria tries to carry all the plates to the kitchen, but while doing so, they fall and break. Michalis says:

Michalis: *Πίστευες ότι αυτό θα πάει καλά;*

"Did you think this would work?"

Example (6) is clearly rhetorical, and one could argue that example (5) also presents a rhetorical question; however, the teacher might actually want to know if her student had prepared for the test in order to help her prepare better the next time. In any case, both examples are cases of irony, not because they deliver any counterfactual information or because they express an opposing attitude, but because there is a contrast between expectations and reality, which aligns closer with the Allusion Pretense Theory (see section II.1.4). In these cases, questions express failed expectations or contradict the state of being, and do not express "counterfactuality". Athanasiadou (2023) also mentions rhetorical questions as key factors that can not only evoke irony but also highlight it, in a way that is obvious to the hearer. Irony thus runs counter to simply "stating the opposite of what is meant" and "counterfactuality". It should also be noted that not all rhetorical questions are deemed ironic. If a speaker says, "Isn't this sunset beautiful?" there is no irony in the statement, unless the sunset is ugly or absent.

Returning to the evaluative nature of irony, Garmendia (2010) argues that irony is solely negative and requires a target/victim, which is also something expressed by Grice

himself (1978).[4] More specifically, Garmendia (2010) argues that this negative criticism is what separates irony from other "as-if" statements like metaphors, and is milder than sarcasm, which is identified as a subcategory of irony (also in Garmendia, 2007). On the other hand, the more common notion is that there are both ironic criticisms/insults, when a positive statement is uttered in a negative context, and ironic compliments when a negative statement is mentioned in a positive context (Attardo, 2000; Clark and Gerrig, 1984; Dews et al., 1995; Ivanko et al., 2004; Kreuz and Gluckberg, 1989; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995, among others). Ironic compliments differ from Banter (Leech, 1983, 2014). While both involve negative statements at the surface level, ironic compliments function as indirect praise and are intended to be interpreted positively. In contrast, Banter operates as a form of teasing designed to express solidarity and reinforce the relationship between interlocutors and sentiment, without necessarily any meaning reversal being involved.

Although I have presented a very simplified version of the neo-Gricean account of irony here, and all theories that will be discussed next have roots in Grice's account of irony, the approaches discussed so far focus on the contradictory nature of irony, the ability of the hearer to reconstruct the intended meaning, and the negative evaluative nature of irony. A common critique of Gricean irony is that it is too narrow, since not all irony involves the opposite of what is meant; hence, it cannot include all examples found in real life. However, as illustrated above with (rhetorical) questions expressing irony, Dynel (2018) has rectified this issue by also including the juxtaposition between utterance, not necessarily statement, and reality or expectation.

The main issue of this approach is that it rarely accounts for the motivation behind speaking ironically and focuses on the mechanics of irony when it is uttered. As a

[4] "*I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment*" (Grice, 1978, *p.* 771).

supplementary point, it should be added that mixed experimental results correspond to the theoretical models described above. For example, if the "as-if" account theory were correct, the cognitive recognition of irony could take longer since the recognition is not immediate but has to go through a secondary stage. This two-stage process was not supported by the findings of Gibbs (1986) and Gibbs and O'Brien (1991).[5] However, more recent eye-tracking studies have revealed that ironic utterances do take longer to be processed, and this time fluctuates depending on the contextual cues given to the listener (Filik and Moxley, 2010; Olkoniemi and Kaakinen, 2021). Spotorno and Noveck (2014), trying to rectify this difference in results, include as the possible deciding factor, "attitude ascription", meaning the ability of the listener to infer the speaker's intended attitude. The results of their study showed that repeated exposure to irony made it less "effortful" over time, which meant that listeners learnt to expect ironic utterances and detect them at similar times as literal ones. In addition, participants with stronger Theory of Mind (ToM) skills adjusted faster to irony. These two factors had not been taken into account in the studies mentioned before. Furthermore, another linking study showed that individuals with higher ToM showed an elevated tendency of using sarcasm (Zhu and Wang, 2020). This also highlights the individual differences affecting the use and processing of irony/sarcasm.

1.3 The echoic mention theory

The echoic mention theory was first proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1981) as an answer to the narrow definition of irony based on contradiction. In it, the authors proposed instead that irony is a case of echoic meaning, with which the speaker aims to express an attitude towards the original utterance. The term "mention" was later replaced by the notion of "interpretive

[5] This is the Direct Access View, which claims that irony does not require any special cognitive mechanisms, or understanding the literal meaning of the utterance first. The DAV opposes other neo-Gricean views like the Indirect Negation View/Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1995, 1997), which describes the processing of first the negated, literal meaning and then the implicated, ironic meaning.

resemblance", which means that ironic utterances do not necessarily repeat the exact words of the original utterance but rather resemble one another in propositional content, while expressing a specific attitude towards it (Wilson and Sperber, 1992).

It is necessary to explain further the notion of "echo", which in a way repeats a previous utterance or state of affairs. A speaker can therefore "echo" a more distant utterance, or even a cultural norm (Wilson and Sperber, 2012), as illustrated in example (7) below:

(7) Sue (pointing to Jack, who has become a total nuisance after drinking some wine): As they say, a glass of wine is good for you!

(example [17a] Wilson and Sperber, 2012, p. 130)

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986, pp. 228-229), every utterance can be either descriptive, representing a certain state of affairs in virtue of its propositional form being true of that state of affairs, or interpretive. Interpretive utterances also have a propositional form, which can resemble another propositional form, such as a thought. Irony belongs to this latter category. Wilson and Sperber (2012, pp. 130-131) specified this even further by adding that, in addition to being interpretive, ironic utterances are also attributive utterances, that is, utterances which convey the content of thoughts or speech attributed to someone, but not necessarily to a specific individual on a specific occasion. Instead, these utterances can reflect general beliefs, social norms, and/or culturally shared ideas. This is the key notion that separates ironic from other types of utterances, specifically through a "dissociative attitude" that is said to always be conveyed through irony (Wilson and Sperber, 2012, pp. 130-132). This attitude basically allows the speaker to reject the idea echoed as false or inadequate to represent the true state of affairs.

Two main experimental studies supported the echoic mention theory, namely Jorgensen et al. (1984) and Gibbs (1986). In the first study, the researchers found that utterances were interpreted as more ironic when an explicit antecedent was available. Similarly, Gibbs (1986) found that sarcastic interpretations were made more quickly and were better remembered if they came after an explicit antecedent. However, in both cases, the same results could apply to the previous views of irony mentioned: if a clashing factor is readily available, the ironic interpretation might be more evident.

A variant of this theory was presented by Kreuz and Glucksberg (1986). Instead of "mention", Kreuz and Glucksberg chose to use "reminder", in which the main focus of irony is to remind the listener of a past belief that turned out to be false. The theories are somewhat complementary:

> "Mention theory, then, is primarily addressed to the issue of how the language itself is used. Echoic reminder theory is perfectly consistent with this account, but it is addressed to a different aspect of the problem, namely, how the communicative goal of expressing an attitude is accomplished" (Kreuz and Glucksberg, 1986, p. 383).

Interestingly, Kreuz and Glucksberg use sarcasm as a subcategory of irony to support their claims. However, unlike the original theory, these authors recognize the possible existence of ironic compliments, meaning that irony can be used in a positive context, by saying something negative, which does not have the intention to mock or ridicule the interlocutor.

The echoic mention/reminder theories, however, have not gained any support in more recent years. The main issue with these theories is the vague definition of "echoic", which can apply to past statements, social norms, and actual situations. In this way, we come across the opposite problem, compared to neo-Gricean accounts of irony: while those accounts restrict irony to contradiction within the discourse, echoic mention theories leave a very

vague idea of what needs to be interpreted. Even with such a vague definition, not all ironic utterances contain "echoes". Consider the following example (8):

(8) Maria walks into the house with wet clothes. Michalis looks at her:

Michalis: *Ήλιος ε;*

"Sunny, huh?"

What Michalis says does not have a direct "echo" in the previous discourse unless we count it as a mention of the weather. We could say that here irony arises because of the contrast of what Michalis says and Maria's wet clothes, or by implying that Michalis fails the expectations of Maria, pretending that it is sunny outside. This is what is proposed by the theories discussed in the next section.

1.4 The (Allusion) Pretense Theory

The first "pretense" theory was proposed by Clark and Gerrig (1984) and meant to be viewed as the middle ground between (neo-) Gricean and echoic views of irony, although some have argued that it is closer to the latter (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). The part highlighted by Clark and Gerrig's theory is that the speaker is not saying but rather pretending to say something. The main idea comes from Fowler's (1965) idea of the "double audience":

> "Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsiders' incomprehension." (Fowler, 1965, pp. 305-306).

Taking that into account, Clark and Gerrig (1984) propose that, when irony is involved, a speaker is playing a role, and says something that is insincere, while the listener must

recognize that the utterance is not sincere. This idea also contains the negative connotations of irony since it must be used against an audience that does not realize the insincerity of the utterance.

The idea of "acting" or "playing pretend" is enhanced by Clark (1996), who lists irony and sarcasm, but also teasing, overstatements, understatements, and rhetorical questions as "staged communicative acts", which have certain properties:

> *"1. Joint pretence.* A engages B in a joint pretence.
> 2. *Communicative act.* The joint pretence is that Ai[6] is performing a sincere Communicative act toward Bi.
> 3. *Correspondence.* A is to be taken as Ai, and B as Bi.
> 4. *Contrast.* A intends A and B to mutually appreciate the salient contrasts between the demonstrated and actual situations.
> 5. *Deniability.* If asked, A would deny meaning for B what Ai means for Bi."
>
> (Clark, 1996, p. 368).

The idea is that, in these types of utterances, there are two layers, one in which a serious communicative act is performed and one in which the speaker and listener pretend that what is said is sincere. I will attempt to show this with example (9):

(9) Maria walks into the house with wet clothes. Michalis looks at her:

Michalis: *Πάλι καλά που έχει ήλιο έξω.*
"Thank God that it is sunny outside."

Layer 2: Michalis believes that it is sunny outside and says the corresponding utterance.

[6] "*Let us denote implied A and implied B by Ai and Bi*." (Clark, 1996, p. 368)

Layer 1: Maria and Michalis jointly know that the utterance is insincere but have agreed to pretend it is sincere.

Returning to Clark and Gerrig (1984), their idea of "pretense" proposed as an answer to Sperber and Wilson's (1981, 1986) "echo" appears in fact close to this latter notion. In the end, "echo" and "pretense" are so similar that they raise similar problems concerning their vagueness and inability to contain all possible versions of irony. Clark and Gerrig's "pretense" lacks clarity when it comes to terms such as "insincerity", "make-believe", and "acting". All three notions contain examples that go beyond irony, for example, "insincerity" could be simply lying, and "make-believe" or "acting" is not always involved in irony. In addition, it is unclear whether the last two terms, similarly to "echo", entail an explicit assumption about someone else's voice. Consider example (10):

(10) Maria and Michalis are talking, and Maria says that she had a very bad day at work. She finishes her narration by saying:

Maria: *Γενικά καλά πήγε αυτό.*
"Overall, that went well."

Maria does not assume someone else's voice in the explicit sense that she takes on someone else's voice or opinion. The self-ironic statement can be accounted for only based on insincerity, meaning that Maria "pretends" her day went well, when in fact she herself has admitted that the opposite has happened. However, then the theory does not diverge much from the neo-Gricean and "as-if" accounts of irony.

Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995) aimed at solving some of the shortcomings mentioned so far, defining in more detail the idea of "pretense". Based on their account, named the Allusion Pretense Theory, ironic utterances are allusive, since they refer to a violation of

predictions, expectations, or norms, while also violating one or more felicity conditions intentionally, or are otherwise pragmatically insincere. Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995) conducted a study that showed that both elements appear to differentiate ironic from literal sentences. They also highlighted that although some ironic utterances contain "echoes", that is not a necessary condition, while on the contrary, both the elements of "allusion" and "pragmatic insincerity" are necessary for the irony to be realized as seen in example (11) below:

> (11) "Would you mind very much if I asked you to consider cleaning up your room sometime this year?" to an inconsiderate and slovenly housemate.
>
> (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995, pp. 4-5)

As the authors explain, this statement is not ironic because it echoes a previous statement or belief, and it is not counterfactual because the sentence is not declarative. It is, however, pragmatically insincere because "The person making the request does not intend the excessive politeness, but instead uses over-polite language in order to express an attitude of irritation toward the recipient of the request" (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995, p. 5).

In addition, this theory highlights the existence of ironic compliments, although they are not that common in everyday discourse. Based on this "asymmetry of irony", irony has a more negative connotation, since ironic insults are more common than ironic compliments (Clack and Gerrig, 1984, p. 122). Given that a variety of communicative goals have been attributed to irony (Gibbs, 2000), with the primary being humorous, Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995) employed a second study to see whether positive irony is also recognized as irony. Indeed, they found that ironic expressions are recognized as such, functioning both as compliments and insults.

Here, I should also include another theory of irony that also utilizes the notion of "allusion" and "pretense", which is Utsumi's (2000) Implicit Display Theory. Utsumi's theory emphasizes the importance of the "ironic environment", which refers to the set of contextual conditions, such as shared knowledge, expectations, and situational incongruity, that enables the hearer to recognize an utterance as ironic. The utterance can then be ironic by again alluding to expectations, including pragmatic insincerity, and express a negative attitude through verbal or nonverbal cues, which is an addition to the Allusion Pretense theory. Additionally, Utsumi defines irony as a prototype-based category, meaning there is a gradient interpretation based on the context in which an expression is uttered. Here, common ground is vital. Considering example (10), if a third person walked in during the conversation and heard Maria's utterance, without knowing she had a bad day at work, they might assume that she had a good day. Moreover, the theory rarely gets any traction since the main points appear to be taken from the previously mentioned theories; hence, it is not novel by any means. The third notion introduced, that irony has only negative connotations, is directly opposed to Kumon-Nakamura et al.'s (1995) findings mentioned.

While studying various conditions that had been proposed as essential to irony, Colston (2000) found that allusion, despite seeming necessary for the recognition of irony, is insufficient, similar to pragmatic insincerity, prompting a return to the violation of Grice's maxims as a third element of irony. This means that, again, it seems this theory captures some correct insights, but it is not exhaustive. Similarly, Campbell and Katz (2012) tested the conditions mentioned in both the Allusion Pretense Theory and the alternative Implicit Display Theory and again found that although each factor seems to play some part in the identification of irony, not all conditions are necessary.

Another argument against the Allusion Pretense Theory is the idea that some expectation has to be violated. The word "expectation" is somewhat loaded and assumes that the expectations of the listener are those of a literal phrase. However, as will be discussed, specific speakers' frequent use of irony and/or sarcasm may have created expectations as such in listeners who interact with them a lot, and thus, when these speakers use these types of utterances, the listeners' expectations are validated and not violated.[7] If we then take away the idea of allusions violating expectations, we fall back to the echoic reminder theory, or the neo-Gricean approaches, both of which predict the violation of conversational maxims and not felicity conditions, focusing more on linguistic contradiction than contextual expectation.

2. Other factors related to irony

So far, I have refrained from discussing any extralinguistic or other criteria of irony that are missing from or not accounted for in the aforementioned theories. First, the issue of the "ironic tone" of voice calls for attention. Kreuz (1996) describes this as heavy stress, nasalization, and slow speaking rate, although it is mentioned that all these are cues but can be fallible. Gibbs and Colston (2001) found that there is a change in the tone of voice when students utter ironic expressions; however, there is no exact pattern that can describe it. Similarly, Hancock (2004) noted that in face-to-face communication, a change of tone of voice was indeed one of the cues of ironic utterances, together with laughter. A more recent study by Caucci et al. (2024) found that participants indeed seemed to have a varied pitch of voice and speak more slowly when uttering spontaneous sarcastic remarks. However, it should be mentioned that the sample of that particular study was fairly limited (29 utterances

[7] For example, Filik et al. (2018) found that some readers/listeners are more prone to sarcastic interpretations in ambiguous utterances.

were measured). On the other hand, Bryant and Fox-Tree (2005), based on a series of experiments that aimed to identify whether there is an ironic tone of voice compared to non-ironic utterances, found that the participants seem to rely solely on contextual cues to arrive at an ironic interpretation (similar results also in Daliens et al., 2018). This study is the reason, as mentioned by Culpeper (2011, pp. 171-173), why the ironic tone of voice is sometimes disregarded as an important factor in the comprehension of irony.

Although most of this research focuses on English, there has been some research in other languages that has not produced clear results either. For example, Laval and Bert-Erboul (2005) studied sarcasm comprehension in native French children and found that although younger children tend to rely on intonation patterns, after the age of seven, most children rely mostly on context. Also, in French, Daliens et al. (2018) found that prosodic features and gestures are less reliable factors in irony detection. On the other hand, a study by Li et al. (2022) in Mandarin Chinese revealed that in a voice-only condition, tone was effective in the recognition of irony, but only to ironic insults and not ironic compliments. This limited consensus on what constitutes "ironic tone of voice" may lead back to what some have mentioned: that a change in intonation works in combination with other elements in order to establish an ironic interpretation (Kreuz and Roberts, 1995; Gibbs and Colston, 2001).

When talking about other cues, one also needs to mention body language and facial expressions. Laughter has already been mentioned as a possible cue for irony detection, but also smiling, lip tightening, and slight nods are reported, especially when the sarcastic utterance is spoken between friends (Caucci and Kreuz, 2012). This last point opposes Kreuz's (1996) claim that people with more common ground, hence people who are more familiar with one another, require fewer extralinguistic cues to understand sarcasm. Again,

studies have not been conducted with English-speaking populations only. For example, Daliens et al. (2018), despite finding body language cues that can be attributed to irony, concluded, based on an act-out task with native French participants, that both body language cues and prosodic cues are unreliable on their own as indicators of ironic utterances, especially in comparison to contextual cues. On the other hand, Li et al. (2022), who showed pre-recorded stimuli to their native Mandarin participants, found that gestural information was crucial to identify ironic utterances from literal ones. However, such a difference might also have to do with other social and/or cultural differences (see also Colston, 2005) or the different methodological tools employed in each experimental study.

Recently, more studies have shifted their focus to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and specifically the role of emojis in irony detection in written sentences. More specifically, the "wink" emoji (😉) and the "tongue" emoji (😜) have been identified as being associated with sarcasm and/ or irony (Filik et al., 2016; Thompson and Filik, 2016; Weissman and Tanner, 2018).

Similar to face-to-face extralinguistic cues, results here are also inconsistent. Related to the "wink" emoji, Barbieri and Saggion (2014) mention that it signals the existence of a hidden meaning, thus aiding the receiver to arrive at an ironic interpretation. In addition to that, Weissman and Tanner (2018) found that ironic utterances were also highlighted when the emoji "clashed" with the content of the sentence, meaning when a negative statement was followed by a "smiley" emoji and the opposite. The validity of these results was confirmed by Bettelli and Panzeri (2023), who, without using any of the aforementioned emojis but simply using opposite emojis (see example [12] below), found that the incongruity may be exactly what triggers an ironic interpretation in the statements.

(12) "It is a really wonderful day ☔"

(Battelli and Panzeri, 2023, p. 486)

This means that there is also some ambiguity regarding how the use of emojis affects the interpretation of statements. It can simply be the case that emojis enhance or complete the valence of the message but are not powerful enough to change it, as found in other studies (Hancock, 2004; Walther and D'Addario, 2001).

The only theory that seems to be somewhat sensitive to these extralinguistic cues is Attardo's (2000) Relevant Inappropriateness theory of irony. In a few words, Attardo dismisses the need for "pretense" or "echo" in irony, but highlights that irony arises from the inappropriateness of the utterance within a context, while remaining relevant. Consider a similar example (13) to the ones we talked about previously:

(13) Maria walks into the house with wet clothes. Michalis looks at her:

Michalis: *Τι ωραία μέρα σήμερα!*

"What a beautiful day, today!"

The comment is relevant, since it comments on the situation that Maria is in, but is clearly inappropriate because it contradicts an obvious (extralinguistic) inference, "wet clothes = rain". This means that emojis in CMC can perhaps be explained as enhancing the inappropriateness of the statements they follow. However, the theory again has some issues of vagueness, and a main criticism has been that those two factors do not seem sufficient to differentiate irony from other utterances. As Dynel (2018) mentions:

"Yet another query is that the notion of relevant inappropriateness could pertain to non-ironic utterances, as long as contextually inappropriate but relevant or

> simply contingent on the Relation maxim floutings. Therefore, Attardo's (2000) proposal fails to address the features unique to (verisimilar) irony, in addition to being convoluted due to the "theoretical mergers" the author proposes."
> (Dynel, 2018, p. 182)

Based on the studies presented for all extralinguistic cues, intonation, gestures and facial expressions, and emojis in CMC, it is difficult to agree on whether these features are essential for irony/sarcasm interpretation. At most, we could say that all seem to be utilized as cues for the detection of irony, but they do not seem to prevail over contextual cues. And since their importance seems debatable, I argue that it is natural for most theoretical accounts not to have relied heavily on them.

3. The relationship between irony and sarcasm

In reality, much of the research in the field of irony uses sarcastic utterances either as stimuli or as examples, making it difficult to address whether irony and sarcasm are considered the same thing. This "thorny" relationship, as Dynel (2018, p. 136) calls it, is created by the fact that most research does not distinguish or define the two before they use them as stimuli in experimental accounts. For example, Camp (2012), despite admitting that sarcasm is a restricted form of irony, proceeds to treat the two notions as the same. Partington (2007, p. 1550) has addressed the issue, mentioning that in the seminal work mentioned so far, many of the examples discussed are taken for granted as "ironic" and/ or "sarcastic", based on the authors' perception. He also continues by pointing out that examples or stimuli created based on the authors' intuitions will obviously yield questionable results. Similarly, in experimental work, some have not addressed the issue of what people's understanding of

"irony" and "sarcasm" is, in what has been addressed as "first-" and "second-" order in politeness research (Taylor, 2017). The assumption that people have the same understanding of the notion as linguists leads to unreliable results (for example, in Jorgensen, 1996, or even the Self Sarcasm Scale Questionnaire as created by Ivanko et al., 2004). Kreuz (1996), for example, mentions the use of "sarcastic" in his experimental work because, for people, it coincides with irony. Attardo et al. (2003, p. 243) describe this issue as "The terms irony and sarcasm are used interchangeably because there seems to be no way to reliably differentiate between the two.".

However, some slight differences have been mentioned throughout the literature and can account for two possible relationships between the two notions, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1

Sarcasm as a subcategory of irony

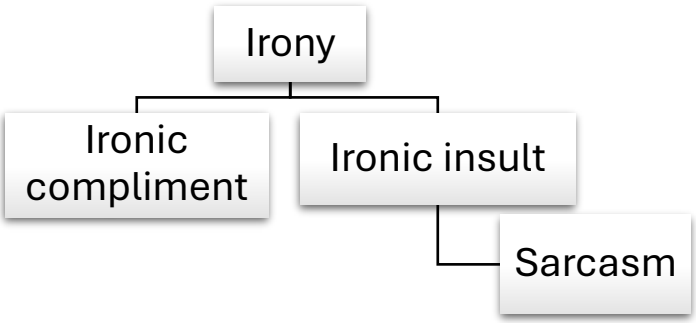
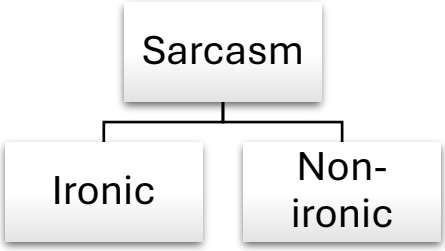


Figure 2

Sarcasm as separate from irony



3.1 Sarcasm as a subcategory of irony

This category is the most common, especially amongst those who have divided ironic utterances into ironic compliments and ironic insults/criticism. A possible configuration is shown in Fig. 1. As mentioned before, ironic insults are positive expressions uttered in negative contexts, whereas ironic compliments are negative and uttered in positive contexts. Example (14) illustrates this difference:

(14) Maria and Michalis encounter a woman who is asking for directions. Michalis offers to walk her to her destination. After they have dropped her off, Maria says:

a. Ironic Compliment	**b. Ironic Insult**
(Maria and Michalis are out on a casual walk, and Maria is smiling.)	(Maria and Michalis are in a hurry, and Maria is displeased.)
Maria: *Είσαι ο χειρότερος!*	Maria: *Είσαι ο καλύτερος!*
"You are the worst!"	"You are the best!"

With the ironic compliment (14a), Maria, while saying something negative, intends to convey that she is impressed and/or happy with how Michalis handled the situation, while the ironic insult in (14b) might convey that Maria did not feel that it was the best choice to accompany the woman to her destination. Many researchers, even if they agree with that distinction, consider that the second type is much more common than the first. In fact, this is often a reason to dismiss the existence of ironic compliments, based on the point that irony is always critical (Dynel 2013, 2018; Garmendia, 2010, 2011, 2024). However, Kreuz (1996) described this "asymmetry constraint" as "a statement that is at odds with the current situation will be

perceived as ironic, as long as it is also at odds with the default assumption inherent in the situation" (p. 33).

Revisiting the ironic compliment in example (14a), the utterance is "at odds" with the current situation. In fact, the ironic insult works here as ironic based on exaggeration, or if Maria is frustrated that they took the time to accompany the woman. However, it indeed sounds counterintuitive to use a negative comment to convey something positive, since the risk of being misunderstood could have a negative impact on their relationship.[8]

An answer to that issue was proposed by Dews et al. (1995) in the form of the tinge hypothesis, which notes that ironic insults are "tinged" positively, so as to be less critical, whereas ironic compliments are "tinged" negatively, so they can be more critical. Dews and Winner (1995) gave some empirical evidence comparing these ironic categories with their literal forms (see also Boylan and Katz, 2013). Similarly, Pexman and Olineck (2002) found ironic criticism to be more polite than literal criticism. In more recent studies, similar findings have been replicated in computer-mediated communication, and while comparing the emotional impact of both categories in comparison to literal ones (Filik et al., 2016, 2018). On the other hand, other research has found the opposite results, especially in sarcastic comments being more harsh than their literal counterparts (Colston, 2002; Leggit and Gibbs, 2000). However, Colston (2002) also examined the situations in which such utterances are uttered and found that indeed the "aggressiveness" perceived has to do with the severity of the situation at hand. In trivial situations, sarcastic comments appeared less critical than in more serious situations. This might give some indication of the opposing results found in the

[8] A general rule of thumb for all figurative language is that the benefits must outweigh the potential costs of being misunderstood (Roberts and Kreuz, 1994, p. 159).

literature. The same goes for social, relational, and individual factors, which seem to have a major impact on how ironic and/ or sarcastic utterances are perceived.

So, does that dichotomy stand, meaning: do both ironic compliments and ironic insults count as irony? I would argue that, since examples of ironic compliments exist, even if they may seem counterintuitive, it is difficult to claim that they are non-existent or inherently critical. Therefore, the dichotomy stands. Now, the reason why in Figure 1 I have separated sarcasm from ironic insults, although many of the examples and stimuli in the literature do not necessarily differentiate between the two, is so as to make the two different relationships nonexclusive. This means that even if sarcasm is accepted as a form of ironic insult, and hence a form of irony, there is debate about whether sarcasm can exist without irony. This will be illustrated in the next few sections.

3.2 Sarcasm as separate from irony

Although the title may seem misleading, this view, shown in Figure 2, allows for sarcasm to be or not be ironic, and thus to exist separately from irony. Indeed, in Fowler's (1969) definition, sarcasm "does not necessarily involve irony, and irony has often no touch of sarcasm" (p. 513). Kreuz and Gluckberg (1989, p. 374) imply that non-ironic sarcasm does not involve any counterfactuality, using the example "Thanks a lot!". The absence of counterfactuality seems to be a key difference, especially for some neo-Gricean theorists who have tried to separate the two notions (Dynel, 2013, 2014). To show this, I provide an example below:

(15) Maria is tidying up the house and finds that Michalis has left his clothes on the floor.

a. Ironic Sarcasm

Maria: *Μ' αρέσουν οι άντρες που πετάνε τα πράγματα τους στο πάτωμα!*

"I love men who leave their stuff on the floor!"

b. Non-Ironic Sarcasm

Maria: *Μ' αρέσουν οι άντρες που μαζεύουν τα πράγματα τους από το πάτωμα!*

"I love men who pick up their stuff from the floor!"

The difference seems to be that the ironic-sarcastic statement (15a) is counterfactual with common sense and the overall norm, whereas the non-ironic sarcastic statement (15b) is not. Simply speaking, if someone who did not know the context simply heard Maria's utterances, in the first case they would infer that she was insincere and ironic, whereas in the second her statement seems plausible. However, that is the problem with the vagueness of counterfactuality, or what is the element that "clashes" when an utterance is ironic: it could be argued that the non-ironic sarcastic comment in (15b) is also counterfactual based on the (extralinguistic) situation at hand, meaning that the clothes are on the floor, and Maria says she loves men who pick up after themselves.

This problem is also commented on by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995, p. 5), who argue that counterfactuality is not a sufficient factor for something to be considered ironic, because it is too restrictive. In that case, based on the Allusion Pretense theory, Maria is uttering something ironic in both cases (15a) and (15b), and it is questionable how the two utterances differ. In the first utterance, Maria highlights a behavior that violated the norm/expectation, which we infer is that it is desirable for people to pick up after themselves, and is pragmatically insincere, because she (probably) does not enjoy picking up things from the floor. The second example violates the expectations of the hearer, who does not expect Maria

to state that she loves men who pick up after themselves, whereas he has not, and is deliberately exaggerating, "pretending" to praise a behavior that a) is considered normal and b) is not practiced by her own partner. Again, the "clash" in the first case is created between the norm and Maria's utterance, whereas in the second case it is between Michalis's behavior and the utterance. But in both cases, there is an incongruity.

The term "incongruity" is reminiscent of humor studies. As Martin (2007) and Warren and McGraw (2016) highlight, the term is problematic since its definition is not clear:

> "The literature discusses four different definitions: (a) something that is unexpected (i.e., surprise), (b) some contrast of concepts or ideas that do not normally go together (i.e., juxtaposition), (c) something that is different than what typically occurs (i.e., atypical), and (d) something that departs from beliefs about how things should be (i.e., a violation)" (Warren and McGraw, 2016, p. 407).

For the purposes of irony, incongruity might be best described with "juxtaposition" and "violation", although "atypical" may also fit in some examples. The term incongruity seems to fit as a general term that is able to describe many forms of antithesis, as opposed to "counterfactual", which is more limited. In other words its problematic aspect in humor studies, of being too general, can be utilized in irony studies.

Another differentiating factor might be the absence or presence of a target. Kreuz and Gluckberg (1989) go on to say that sarcasm requires a victim, whereas irony does not. This was also studied by Lee and Katz (1998), who found that indeed that is true; however, irony also ridiculed a victim, but in a more subtle way. Barbe (1995, p. 28) also mentions that sarcasm is a face-threatening action, which is much more personal and immediately obvious to all participants in a situation, whereas irony functions as face-saving criticism. Moreover, Wilson (2013, p. 43) highlights that although irony is also somewhat targeted, sarcasm has a

more specific target or victim (also in Attardo, 2000). Katz et al. (2004) also imply that the existence of a victim is necessary for sarcasm, although they still categorize sarcasm under the umbrella of irony. Sarcastic irony can be defined as irony that is directed at a specific target, whereas non-sarcastic irony occurs without a particular target.

The main field where irony and sarcasm differ is within humor studies. For example, Long and Graesser (1988) mention both irony and sarcasm under the taxonomy of wit, based on intent and style. However, based on this taxonomy, irony is identified as evaluative, both positively and negatively, while sarcasm is inherently negative towards an individual.[9] For Hanks (2013), both exploit norms; however, irony is humorous, whereas sarcasm is bitter (similar views in Tobacaru, 2019, p. 58). The dichotomy of benevolent/malevolent intent of irony and sarcasm was also studied by Averbeck (2013), who found that indeed a key notion that separates the two seems to be that ironic arguments seem more good-natured than the harsh criticism that sarcasm conveys. A slightly different view is expressed by Bowes and Katz (2011), who claim that the target does not find sarcasm amusing or humorous, whereas the speaker and overhearers may perceive it as jocular. This is also mentioned by Dynel (2013, p. 310), who attributes a humorous attribute to sarcastic irony in multiparty interactions, where the immediate target does not find humor in the sarcastic utterance, but the audience and speaker do.

Apart from that, a main issue in distinguishing sarcasm from irony is that we are unable to define irony clearly; hence, we need to check if sarcasm can exist without being ironic in the different theoretical frameworks proposed. For example, if we take the view that the ironic attitude is always employed to negatively criticize, based on neo-Gricean and Sperber

[9] And not an institution or policy, which is closer to satire (Long and Graesser, 1988, p. 42).

and Wilson's echoic mention theories, then the difference between the two cannot be the polarity, since both irony and sarcasm in these theories express a negative attitude.

However, the aggressiveness and lack of humorous intent of sarcasm can also be questioned. Interestingly, Norrick (1994) mentions that in certain situations, sarcasm may be more appropriate and welcome than a literal response, and that sarcasm can actually show solidarity by abandoning politeness conventions. Norrick (1994) utilizes the Paradox of power and solidarity as described by Tannen (1986), that "a verbal attack can signal solidarity, because it implies a relationship where distance, respect and power count for little" (Tannen, 1986, p. 421). This is similar to Leech's (1983) idea of Banter or mock-irony in which "in order to show solidarity with h (hearer), say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to h" (p. 144). In both cases, the main idea is that the more intimate the relationship, the less polite the speaker needs to be, and the reverse effect of that is that a seemingly impolite ironic utterance can be utilized to signal closeness between the interlocutors. Others have also mentioned humor as a communicative strategy of sarcasm (Huang and Galinsky, 2023; Warren and McGraw, 2016). Ducharme (1994) also attributes both solidarity and humorous aggression to the social function of sarcasm.

3.3 Sarcasm, Irony, and Teasing

Another term that we often come across when studying the various accounts of irony and sarcasm is teasing. We have already seen the three together, as staged communicative acts (Clark, 1996). In this taxonomy, Clark admits that teasing is very similar to irony and sarcasm, since both parties need to be aware of the pretense taking place. However, in teasing, the intent is much more benevolent (Clark, 1996, p. 374). Drew (1987), on the other hand, highlights that teasing, for the most part, is a mixture of hostility and humor, which is mostly reactive. A similar view is highlighted by Martin (2007, p. 124), who describes teasing

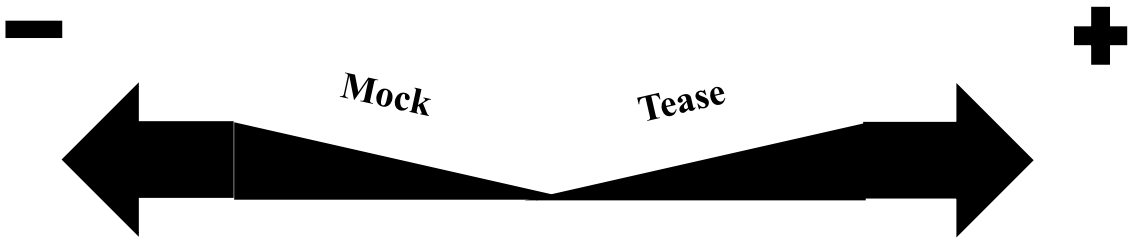
as a paradox that functions both pro-socially and aggressively. Based on that, Martin (2007) mentions that a function of teasing is to achieve group solidarity by "calling attention to the fact that they can say negative things and not take offence" (125). We are clearly reminded of some of the facts about sarcasm as they were stated before, and hence, their relationship becomes even more hazy.

Taking this one step further, Dynel (2008, p. 248) notes that a distinction between teasing and put-down humor is whether the target perceives it as humorous. We could say the same for sarcasm. Keltner et al. (2001) also mention that both notions have elements of aggression and humor, where the relationship of the interlocutors and the context play an important role in their understanding. Even empirical studies have also attributed humorous or "teasing" properties to sarcasm and irony when uttered within solidarity relationships (Pexman and Zvaigne, 2004; Seckman and Couch, 1989).

Based on that, I tend to follow Gibbs (2000), who describes "teasing" as a function of sarcasm, which, according to him, is a form of irony, rather than a standalone notion. This means that someone can "tease" through sarcasm.[10] Because of that, in all examples of irony I have provided so far, there is a gradience based on how the hearer will perceive such statements.

Figure 3

T*he line of "mock" and "tease"*



[10] This has also been mentioned in Dynel (2013, 2014) for irony and Ducker et al. (2014) for sarcasm.

What Figure 3 above shows is that when irony and/or sarcasm is perceived, it can go one or the other way; if it is interpreted as a critical comment, the listener will think the speaker is mocking them. If it is perceived as a humorous comment, then it will be interpreted as a friendly tease. Here we only account for the target of the utterance, since the overhearers may perceive it as humorous either way (based also on Dynel, 2013). We therefore "solve" the question whether sarcasm and irony can be perceived as humorous, and state that it can, under some circumstances, such as individual differences, relationship, and how interlocutors like each other. Furthermore, "teasing" is not treated as a separate category from irony and sarcasm, but rather as a possible function they may have.

I have opted not to talk about individual and social differences that have to do with irony and sarcasm, as well as their humorous connotations, because the literature is extensive and certainly polarizing. When it comes to speaker characteristics, many have found that there is an aggressive and scornful nature to the sarcastic speaker, who opts to condemn (Leggitt and Gibbs, 2000; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Toplak and Katz, 2000). Similar results have been associated with irony, although it must be mentioned that the stimuli only included cases of ironic insults, hence, it is arguable whether they represent all different types of irony (Bruntch and Ruch, 2017). Additionally, users of irony and sarcasm have been associated with using aggressive humor (Bruntch and Ruch, 2017; Veselka et al., 2010). Other studies, focusing on gender, have found that males are perceived as more ironic than females (Bruntch and Ruch, 2017; Dress et al., 2008; Katz et al., 2004; Rockwell and Theriot, 2001, among others). In a more thorough study by Drucker et al. (2014), in which they also examined the point of view of the listener, it was revealed that males also found sarcastic remarks more enjoyable, especially when the speaker was also male. This may also be explained by the fact that sarcastic speakers are also more likely to be sarcastic interpreters (Ivanko et al., 2004). Further individual differences and sociodemographic factors that have

been related to use of irony/sarcasm include ToM ability (Zhu and Wang, 2020), occupation (Katz and Pexman, 1997), place of residence (Dress et al., 2008), and other cultural factors (Rockwell and Theriot, 2001).

Moving to the relationship between interlocutors, this factor has already been somewhat discussed. Speaker and addressee relationship in terms of whether an ironic or sarcastic comment was found to be humorous had little effect in some cases, and "liking" was deemed as a more important factor (Slugoski and Turnbull, 1988). Further studies, such as those mentioned before, more or less have to do with whether sarcasm is being understood, and not about whether they are perceived as innocent teases. However, there is a general idea that for something to be perceived as humorous, the violation of norms needs to be "benign" (McGraw and Warren, 2010; Warren and McGraw, 2016). In that respect, a degree of closeness, mutual understanding, and trust can make a sarcastic comment feel less hostile. This has been tested concerning sarcasm by Huang et al. (2015), who argue that when the degree of trust is high, sarcasm is perceived as more playful and creative, whereas when it is low, it is perceived as more offensive. Moreover, further research is needed to decide whether the degree of closeness is an independent factor that helps sarcasm to be perceived as "teasing".

3.4 Universality of irony and sarcasm

The theories mentioned throughout the previous sections, are strongly based on English, and most studies for or against them have been conducted in English with native English-speaking populations. Moreover, studies involving other languages have either been comparative to English, related to bilingualism and multilingualism, or related to the pitch and intonation of ironic utterances. What is therefore lacking is the application of the aforementioned theories to non-English speaking populations. Linder (2024) made such an

attempt, trying to compare English examples of irony based on the three main theories mentioned before, namely the (neo-)Gricean account of irony, the echoic, and the pretense theories of irony, and found that not all examples could be replicated in Japanese, nor was one theory a better fit than the others. It should also be noted that the examples were taken from a literary text, and thus, the scope of the research was somewhat limited. Linder's study seems unique in the way that it questions the universality of irony - and, I would add, sarcasm - since no empirical evidence has been given in other languages.

The terms, due to their origin, hold deep connotations and are culturally significant in Modern Greek as well, especially the term *irony* (Athanasiadou, 2017). However, the comparison between the terms *sarcasm* and *irony,* or the applicability of the theories mentioned above, has not been empirically tested in this language. As will be discussed in the following section, to investigate the nature and differences between the two, it is necessary to extract some key criteria, which will then be empirically tested, in order to investigate further the nature of irony and sarcasm in Modern Greek.

4. Can there be a unified theory of irony?

I now return to irony as a whole to explore whether there are some minimal criteria that we can extract from previous theoretical accounts that can adequately describe irony and its relationship with sarcasm. The first criterion that I could establish with some certainty, since it is the only unanimous factor of irony that everyone recognizes, is that irony expresses an attitude.

i) Irony is an expression of an attitude, positive or negative

Now, based on what has been said so far, I tend to agree that irony can be used both to compliment and to insult. In the case of compliments, speakers may choose the strategy of offering more underhanded compliments or teasing the hearer, which we said is a possible function of irony. In the case of ironic insults, irony again can be utilized as a form of aggression or as teasing, to appear humorous and achieve solidarity. This means that ironic comments can be either positive or negative.

But is irony "echo", "pretense", or "counter factuality"? A simple answer would be that it is all three and at the same time none of them. I tend to agree with the minimal description given by Garmendia (2024) that irony is a "clash", which is indirect and certainly intentional and includes aspects of all the terms mentioned above. A more general term like this can therefore include more examples of irony. This "clash" or, as I will call it following mostly humor research, "incongruity", can contain simple counterfactual statements, echo previous statements, or allude to the expectations of the hearer. Again, "incongruity" has been criticized for its vagueness (Martin, 2007; Warren and McGraw, 2016). However, I propose that this "vagueness" in humor research might be utilized here to make irony less limited and resolve some of the issues proposed for each individual theory I have analyzed so far. The idea is to account for all possible examples of irony, and incongruity seems necessary for irony to occur, even if it is also present in other types of figurative language. It is therefore believed that, together with the addition of the rest of the criteria described in this section, incongruity can adequately include all types of irony.

ii) Ironic utterances are incongruous, indirectly and intentionally, but not necessarily overt

Apart from incongruity, I have added the characteristics of "indirectness" and "intentionality", but lack the need for irony to be overt. Although the indirect and intentional

nature of irony is evident, I will explain why I believe not all irony is overt. Calling something "overt" is quite subjective, meaning that irony can be obvious for some but not others, which also creates a degree of plausible deniability for the speaker. Consider example (16):

(16) Maria and Michalis went for a walk after Michalis suggested it. The next day, they are talking on the phone:

Maria: *Ωραίο ήταν το περπάτημα, να το ξανακάνουμε!*

"The walk was nice, we should do it again!"

The irony here is not overt because we cannot pinpoint Maria's ironic intent with certainty; there is a high chance that she is serious about her statement. It may be obvious to her because she had a miserable time walking around aimlessly, or she may actually have enjoyed a quick stroll. If the statement is ironic, it is incongruous, because Maria does not think the walk was nice, or we can say she "pretends" that she likes walking and aims to do it again. It is an indirect and intentional comment that aims to express her negative attitude towards walking. However, Michalis might not recognize her ironic intent, depending on how he has evaluated their shared experience, or his knowledge of Maria's likes and dislikes. This does not deem the irony as "absent" but as "unsuccessful". This goes slightly against the neo-Gricean accounts (for example, Dynel, 2014, 2018), which only accounted for the overt nature of irony. Here, I propose that irony may or may not be recognized, and that may be exactly what the speaker intends.

Irony, hence, takes the form of "plausible deniability" that will also give the speaker a way out if, for some reason, what they say is perceived accidentally negatively by the hearer.

Irony can therefore be a method used to negotiate with the hearer and to establish a common ground by accommodating[11] this information, rather than basing it on a pre-existing one. This works especially well if we consider the mock/tease continuum that I described earlier (section II.3.3). If the utterance in (16) is intended to tease Michalis, because he suggested the activity, but instead he takes it as mocking, Maria has the ability to deny the irony altogether and avoid a possible conflict with Michalis. If she intended to mock him, but he takes it as a literal compliment on his suggestion, she can be more directly aggressive. The bottom line is that covert irony is also possible and may provide communicative merit, enriching the conversation through subtlety or nuanced expression.

Ironic utterances can also take many forms, such as overstatements, understatements, and rhetorical questions, which have sometimes been separated as different categories (Clark, 1996; Gibbs, 2000; Leggit and Gibbs, 2000). It is, however, believed that with the use of all three forms, an utterance can produce a form of incongruity, which triggers an ironic interpretation. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier for rhetorical questions, this does not mean that the sole purpose of these three is to produce irony. I simply highlight the fact that they should not be considered as different categories from irony. This is also showcased in example (17).

iii) Irony can be expressed with overstatements (hyperbole), understatements (litotes), and rhetorical questions

[11] We can borrow van der Sandt's (2012) concept of *accommodation* as a broader mechanism for modelling implicit meaning, extending beyond presuppositions. If no antecedent exists in the discourse, such as a shared, pre-established stance, irony can still function, as the hearer accommodates it, updating the common ground.

(17) Maria and Michalis, who are working together, are talking about the raise that they got in their salaries. When Maria complains about how small her raise was, Michalis says:

a. Overstatement	**b. Understatement**	**c. Rhetorical Question**
Michalis*: Έλα ρε, κότερο μπορείς να πάρεις με τόσα λεφτά.*	Michalis: *Έλα μωρέ, μπορείς να πάρεις μια τσίχλα.*	Michalis: *Μήπως να αγοράσεις κανένα σπίτι με τόσα λεφτά;*
"Come on, you can get a boat with that much money."	"Come on, you can buy a piece of gum."	"Maybe you should consider buying a house with that much money?"

To be more accurate, even the rhetorical question (example 17c) contains an overstatement (hyperbole), but certainly all three expressions appear to be ironic towards the small raise that Maria says she received. And to also exemplify point (i) about irony, all three express a negative attitude towards the small salary; however, one can say a positive attitude to Maria herself, since the ironic comments are in agreement with her complaints, and the interlocutors seem to have a common target. This is a prime case against the point that irony necessarily criticizes someone and hence causes offence. Moreover, there is a vague target, the small salary, or the company manager who decides the raises, but not a direct victim of the utterances. Indeed, irony needs to be directed at something, closer to a referent, but not necessarily to someone specific. The attitude expressed here is towards a situation and probably intends to comfort the interlocutor, rather than offend them.

iv) Irony needs a referent, but does not necessarily have a victim

The criteria set so far are quite broad. However, I tend here to side with Katz (2009) and Pexman (2008) who argue that there is no feature or set of criteria necessary for producing irony. The four points presented above can be considered as criteria that seem to include most instances of irony, but are not meant to be sufficient, meaning I do not imply

that based on these, something can be deemed unequivocally as irony. In fact, if there is indeed a bias based on cultural, social, and relational variables, irony can only be discussed based on the occasion at hand. For instance, the critiques and examples offered in this paper are all based on Greek, as my native language, and English, as my second language, which I have never used within a native community. This makes my critique, as well as previous theories, far from universal. For example, I can judge from experience that irony and sarcasm can be used humorously, based on my native community, and some papers on humor that use ironic expressions as jokes (Archakis and Tsakona, 2005) and in Spanish based on Ortega (2013). However, I am unaware of the impact irony may have in other communities.

But where does sarcasm fit in this account of irony? Based on my experience and findings from previous research that I have discussed, I define sarcasm as always being ironic, since we have broadened the nature of irony as "incongruity". Even in example (15), where Maria expressed her love for men who pick up after themselves, there is an incongruity between the statement expressed and the situation at hand. Hence, I struggle to find an example where a sarcastic comment is not incongruous. In addition, to connect them further with irony, sarcastic comments are also always intentional and indirect, but again, I propose they can also be covert. Additionally, a sarcastic comment indeed falls under the more negative side of irony, meaning an ironic compliment cannot be sarcastic. This means that sarcasm does indeed have some more aggressive elements; however, I will refrain from calling it "hostile" or "malevolent". The reason is that, as discussed, there is a positive function that can be brought out with sarcasm, achieving solidarity, and being humorous, or used as a "tease". In this sense, sarcasm is more personal, criticizing a specific individual or their behavior, and hence sarcasm is different than ironic insults, in the sense that a particular victim is needed. For example, example (17) should be accounted for as an ironic insult, since the irony is used to criticize Maria's raise. But oppose that with example (18):

(18) Maria asks Michalis to buy her a coffee, but instead he buys her orange juice. Maria, in turn, says:

Maria: *Σε ευχαριστώ πολύ! Να 'σαι καλά!*

"Thank you so much! Be well!"

We first need to establish that this example is ironic:

i) Maria expresses a negative attitude since Michalis did not comply with her wishes

ii) The utterance is incongruous, since she is thanking him although he did not buy her what she wanted. The real meaning is also expressed indirectly and intentionally. Here, the irony is also not overt, since Michalis might take it as literal (for example, if he misheard her in the first place).

iii) It is also an overstatement, especially with the use of the additional phrase "Be well!"/ "Να' σαι καλά!".

Moreover, a target/victim is involved, but since it is a specific person and their behavior towards the speaker, we can account for Maria's utterance as sarcastic. In simple words, Maria is targeting Michalis. Whether he will take it as "mocking" or "teasing" is then a matter of him as a hearer and the relationship and history between him and the speaker. In sum:

1. Sarcasm is always ironic, since it contains all elements in (i), (ii), (iii), mentioned above.
2. Sarcasm needs a more direct victim than ironic insults, which simply need a referent.
3. Sarcasm expresses a negative attitude.

4. Sarcasm can achieve group solidarity or offend; it can both "mock" and "tease" similarly to irony.

I have therefore concluded that sarcasm is neither the same as, nor completely different from, irony, but rather should be considered a subcategory of irony; and that it is indeed more "scornful" since it always expresses a negative attitude, but not always with a hostile intent. Moreover, sarcasm seems to coincide with the idea of "ironic insults", with maybe an addition that a particular person or behaviour of a person is criticized.

Based on this theoretical account, I then need to check for three factors:

a) Are the conditions (i), (ii), (iii) always present in irony?
b) Are the conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) always present in sarcasm?
c) Does sarcasm always have a particular victim, which differentiates it from irony?
d) Can both sarcasm and irony be utilized to "mock" and "tease"?

III. Present Study

This brings us to the present study, which aims to a) test the applicability of the criteria (i)-(iii) for irony and sarcasm as identified from past studies and theoretical accounts, and b) examine whether these criteria, extracted from theories based on English, can be applied to another language, namely Greek. This may allow for these minimal criteria to be recognized as always present in ironic and sarcastic utterances, even in a language other than English, which has largely served as the basis for current theories. Simultaneously, addressing the second aim may reveal cultural differences in the conceptualization of sarcasm and irony, a topic that, as discussed in section II.3.4, has been rarely studied. It is therefore hypothesized that although some of the criteria proposed for irony and sarcasm might apply to Greek, others may not. Additionally, the humorous and/or aggressive nature of sarcasm and irony will be investigated to gain insights into the different functions that irony and sarcasm may have in a conversation.

However, the criteria listed above may only respond to purely linguistic and pragmatic accounts and not necessarily reflect how the general public understands these concepts (Taylor, 2015, 2017). As a third aim, therefore, this study considers the first- and second-order understanding of these terms.

To achieve this last point, the study follows a design similar to that of Gibbs and Moise (1997), who examined how people distinguish between what is explicitly said and what is pragmatically implicated. In their study, participants were first asked to interpret various utterances without any theoretical framing. In a second phase, however, they were provided with an academic definition of implicature to assess whether this influenced their interpretations. Their findings showed that participants mostly relied on contextual inferences

instead of strictly adhering to the given definition, suggesting that intuitive pragmatic reasoning frequently overrides formal criteria.

Similarly, the present study employs a two-phase questionnaire: participants first evaluate examples of irony and sarcasm without any theoretical framing, and are then provided with academic definitions in the second phase. While Gibbs and Moise (1997) aimed to investigate the information on which participants rely to distinguish implicatures, the purpose here is slightly different: to assess whether participants’ spontaneous judgments of irony and sarcasm shift when presented with theoretical criteria, and to what extent their responses align with the theoretical framework described.

IV. Methodology

1. Design of vignettes and tasks

To examine the identified criteria of irony and sarcasm in Greek, a questionnaire was devised that made use of vignettes, similar to previous studies (Averbeck, 2013; Drucker et al., 2014; Jorgensen, 1996; Kreuz and Glucksberg, 1989; Leggit and Gibbs, 2000; Pexman and Zvaigne, 2004, among others). Vignettes are widely used in studies of irony and sarcasm, since they can express different perspectives, such as the receiver's, the speaker's, or the observer's, and many elements can be controlled in their creation (Kałowski and Branowska, 2024).

In total, four short scenarios were created, as can also be seen in Greek in Appendix A and translated to English in Appendix B. Each story featured five different versions, based on the construction of the final utterance: ironic compliments, literal compliments, ironic insults, literal insults, and sarcasm. The context of the scenarios was slightly different for compliments versus insults and sarcasm, so that the utterances could appear as natural as possible. Literal responses were included as fillers so that participants would not get used to expecting ironic/sarcastic responses (Spotorno and Noveck, 2014). This resulted in a total of 20 vignettes, 12 in the targeted versions, namely ironic compliments, ironic insults, and sarcasm, and 8 (literal) fillers.

All vignettes were designed so that the participants took the role of the recipient of the utterance. Additionally, in all four scenarios, the interlocutors are friends, conversing alone, without any other participants, for example, overhearers. This was done to maintain contextual consistency, as the presence of an audience could influence how sarcasm and irony are perceived. In addition, different relationships could also yield differences in how the

utterances were perceived (Pexman and Zvaigne, 2004). No further details about the relationship between the interlocutors were provided.

The final utterances across all versions were created based on the criteria described above (section II.4). It is understood that since each of the four stories and final utterances was different, even if they instantiated the same set of criteria, slightly different responses may emerge. Any potential variability due to content will be considered in the interpretation of the results.

Based on the short scenario presented, the participants were asked to complete six tasks:

1. Categorization Task: Participants classified the final utterance as *Ironic*, *Sarcastic*, *Both*, or *Literal*.
2. Clarity Judgment Task: Participants rated how clear the speaker's intent was on a 5-point Likert scale. This task aimed to measure how overt the irony/sarcasm present in the utterance was perceived to be.
3. Justification Task: An optional open-ended response followed Task 2, allowing participants to justify their rating. This could give more insights into the reasons for the perceived overtness or covertness.
4. Attitude Perception Task: Participants evaluated the speaker's expressed attitude toward the listener using multiple-choice options. The options provided were *Positive, Negative, Neutral,* and *Not sure.*
5. Target Identification Task: Participants indicated who they believed the utterance was directed at. This multiple-choice task included four options: *Addressed to someone else, Addressed to me, Addressed to no one in particular,* and *Not sure.*

6. Aggressiveness-Humor Perception Task: Participants rated how aggressive or humorous they found the utterance, using two separate 5-point Likert scales.

The full set of tasks can be found in the Appendices (Appendix A for the original Greek questionnaire and Appendix B for the English translated version).

To further test whether there is a difference between theoretical accounts of the phenomena and the general public's view on them, the questionnaire followed a similar design to Gibbs and Moise (1997). This means that five of the vignettes, one for each version, were presented first, each with the tasks described above. Then, a short definition of irony and sarcasm was presented, which followed the criteria (i)-(iii) as described in section II.4. The definition that was presented is (the original can also be viewed in Appendix A) :

*"**Irony** is a way of expressing where the literal meaning of the words differs from what the speaker intends to say. What they mean can be either positive or negative, but it is not directly aimed at the interlocutor.*

***Sarcasm** is a form of irony where the seemingly positive message carries a negative intent. Unlike irony, sarcasm directly targets the interlocutor."*

With that definition in mind, participants were presented again with five different vignettes, one of each version, and were asked to complete the same six tasks. This two-phase structure allowed me to compare how participants interpreted irony and sarcasm before and after receiving explicit definitions.

It is also important to note that the presentation of the 10 vignettes (5 before and 5 after the definition) was randomized for each participant, and no vignette was repeated within a participant's session. However, the same story, out of the four underlying scenarios, could appear more than once, but always presenting a different version, namely ironic compliments (IC), literal compliments (LC), ironic insults (II), literal insults (LC), and sarcasm (S).

A pilot study was conducted in order to establish that the design was fitting for the aims of the study. Four participants (F = 2) completed the questionnaire and then were interviewed to give feedback. Three of the participants identified an issue with the wording of the instructions in Task 5. As a result, instead of "στοχεύω" ("targets"), which, as they commented, has a more negative sense, the wording was changed to "απευθύνεται" ("addresses"), which was proposed as a more neutral alternative. Further, participants responded as expected to the questions asked; therefore, the design was deemed appropriate for the aims of the study.

2. Participants

Participants were recruited through various social media platforms and by word of mouth, and participation was voluntary and anonymous, as stated in the consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire. In total, 161 participants completed the questionnaire as described above. However, one participant was excluded from the analysis because they were under eighteen years old; hence, the scores of 160 participants were analyzed (F = 86). All participants were native Greek speakers, aged between 18 and 79 years old, with a mean age of $M = 46.26$ ($SD = 12.62$).

3. Procedure

The questionnaire was created in Qualtrics (see Appendix A for the original and Appendix B for English translation). Participants were first informed about the aims of the study and had to agree to the terms of a consent form before beginning the study. If participants chose not to agree, the questionnaire automatically ended.

After completing a brief demographic questionnaire, each participant was presented with five vignettes, one for each version, in random order, and asked to complete Tasks 1 through 6 before proceeding to the next vignette. After the initial five vignettes were completed, a brief definition of irony and sarcasm was presented, as mentioned above. Then the participants completed the same tasks for five additional vignettes, also one for each version, presented in random order. It is important to note that the vignettes were different at each stage of the questionnaire. An example of a vignette is provided below.

(19) You and Maria go to a movie theatre. After a dispute about which movie you should watch, Maria agrees to see the one you prefer. After the movie ends, both of you seem displeased. Maria says:

You really have impeccable taste!

(Vignette S1, original can be found in Appendix A)

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were again given the option to opt out or ask any further questions via email.

4. Analysis

The data were analysed using R (version 4.4.3). First, a Chi-square test was conducted to examine whether all four scenarios per version yielded similar results, specifically based on their classification as ironic, sarcastic, both, or literal (Task 1). Moreover, descriptive statistics were applied to each targeted version, namely Ironic Compliments, Ironic Insults, and Sarcasm, across all tasks. Task 3 (Justification Task) was not further analysed, but rather was used to provide examples and notes in the interpretation of the results. In addition, Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humor Perception Task) was also examined inferentially across the four scenarios within each version. Because the data were ordinal and not normally distributed,

Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare ratings across scenarios. When the omnibus test was significant, Dunn's post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction were conducted to identify which scenario pairs differed significantly.

In order to examine whether overtness/clarity (Task 2), attitude (Task 4), and target direction (Task 5) influenced the classification of the utterances as ironic and sarcastic, a multinominal logistic regression was conducted. From this model, predicted probabilities were calculated to estimate the likelihood of each Task 1 category (*Ironic, Sarcastic, Both or Literal*) as a function of the predictor variables. Using this analysis, patterns were revealed regarding whether the criteria influenced the choice of classification. Furthermore, these probabilities were used to better understand how the presence of certain cues affected participants' classification choices.

Additionally, a Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between aggressiveness (Task 6a) and perceived humor (Task 6b) across all scenarios, in the three subcategories of irony and sarcasm. This was done in order to determine whether the mock-tease continuum as proposed earlier (section II.3.3), could be verified, for both ironic and sarcastic utterances.

Finally, to see whether participants reacted differently to the tasks before and after the definition (Pre- vs Post-Definition phases), Chi-square tests of independence were conducted for Tasks 1, 4, and 5 per version, as well as a Wilcoxon rank-sum test to compare the differences in overtness (Task 2), since the data from the Likert scale were ordinal and not nominal.

All data were cleaned and reshaped into long format where necessary. Inconsistencies in column naming (e.g., use of underscores vs. spaces) were standardized to ensure proper variable inclusion. All statistical tests were two-tailed, with an alpha level of .05. It should

also be noted that across the reporting of the analysis versions are indicated by the initials IC (Ironic Compliments), LC (Literal Compliments), Ironic Insults (II), Literal Insults (LI) and S (Sarcasm), while scenarios are indicated by numbers (1-4), for example “S1” means the sarcastic version of scenario 1.

V. Results

1. Descriptive analysis per version

First, it was necessary to ensure that all four scenarios per version produced similar results, meaning they were treated as equivalent by the participants. In order to do that, Chi-square tests of independence were conducted across Task 1 of all scenarios, per version. The results indicate that the four scenarios within the IC (ironic compliment), S (sarcastic), II (ironic insult), and LC (literal compliment) versions did not significantly differ ($p > 0.05$), meaning that responses were statistically similar across these, as shown also in Table 1. This allows them to be analysed as single and distinct categories. However, this was not the case for the LI (literal insult) version, which seems to have some internal differences across the four scenarios.

Table 1

Chi-square test Results per Version

Version	χ^2 (df)	*p-values*
IC (Ironic Compliments)	14.66 (9)	.101
II (Ironic Insults)	16.04 (9)	.066
S (Sarcasm)	6.17 (9)	.723
LC (Literal Compliments)	12.23 (9)	.200
LI (Literal Insults)	56.00 (9)	< .001

Note. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significance

In order to see which scenarios caused the significance in the LI version, a pairwise Chi-Square analysis was employed. It was found that most LI scenarios yielded significantly different results, and the pairs with the most similarity appeared to be LI2 and LI4 ($p = 0.762$) and LI1 and LI3 ($p = 0.659$). Since the literal scenarios employed were used as fillers, the significant difference did not influence the results of the rest of the analysis.

The findings will be discussed per version, namely the Ironic Compliment (IC), Ironic Insult (II), and Sarcasm (S), since they were classified as distinct but internally unified categories.

1.1 Ironic Compliments (IC)

Descriptive statistics were calculated for Task 1 (Classification) across all four IC versions of the scenarios (IC1–IC4), resulting in a total of N = 320 responses. The most frequent classification was *Ironic* (*n* = 118, 36.9%), closely followed by *Sarcastic* (*n* = 117, 36.6%). The classification *Both* (Ironic and Sarcastic) accounted for 9.1% (*n* = 29), while Literal was selected in 17.5% of responses (*n* = 56). This distribution suggests that participants perceived irony and sarcasm at nearly equal rates, with fewer participants classifying statements as purely *Literal* or *Both*.

The average overtness (Task 2) rating across all four IC scenarios was *M* = 3.61, *SD* = 1.33, on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating a moderate perception of overtness overall. In Task 4 (Attitude), the majority of responses indicated a *Negative* attitude (*n* = 114, 35.6%) followed by *Positive* (*n* = 107, 33.4%), whereas *Neutral* (*n* = 55, 17.2%) and *Not sure* (44, 13.8%) were much less likely selected. This means that even if the utterance was constructed as a compliment, participants still perceived the attitude of the speaker as mostly negative. For Task 5 (Target), most participants identified the ironic compliment as being directed at themselves (*Me*) (*n* = 166, 51.9%) or at a *General* audience (*n* = 96, 30.0%). Fewer responses indicated *Other* (*n* = 34, 10.6%) or *Not Sure* (*n* = 24, 7.5%).

Task 6 (Aggressiveness and Humor) was calculated separately for each scenario, and can be shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humour Perception Task) per scenario in version IC

		Task 6a (Aggressiveness)			Task 6b (Humour)		
Scenario	n	Mean	Median	SD	Mean	Median	SD
IC1	79	2.27	2	1.15	2.03	2	1.13
IC2	75	1.49	2	1.49	2.59	2	1.44
IC3	79	1.22	1	0.59	2.68	3	1.37
IC4	87	1.45	1	0.77	3.05	3	1.36

Note. Task 6a examined perceived aggressiveness, and Task 6b examined perceived humour. Ratings were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not at all, 5= Very Much)

A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in aggressiveness ratings (Task 6a) across the four Ironic Compliment scenarios, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 64.14$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction indicated that IC3 was rated significantly less aggressive than IC1 ($p < .001$) and IC2 ($p < .001$), IC4 was rated less aggressive than IC1 ($p < .001$) and IC2 ($p < .001$) as well. These results suggest that IC3 and IC4 were perceived as notably less aggressive than the other two ironic compliment scenarios.

Similarly, a Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in humor ratings (Task 6b) across the four Ironic Compliment scenarios, $\chi^2(3, N = 312) = 22.02$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction indicated that IC1 was rated significantly less humorous than IC3 ($p = .023$) and IC4 ($p < .001$). This indicates that although the scenarios in this condition were classified similarly, their aggressiveness and humorous effects differed significantly.

1.2 Ironic Insults (II)

In Task 1 (Classification) for the II versions of the scenarios (II1-II4), participants most frequently selected *Ironic* ($n = 161$, 50.3%), followed by *Sarcastic* ($n = 107$, 33.4%), *Both* ($n = 38$, 11.9%), and *Literal* ($n = 14$, 4.4%). These results suggest that irony was perceived more

strongly in II scenarios compared to IC, with over half of the responses falling into the *Ironic* classification.

For Task 2 (Clarity) in the II scenarios, the average rating was $M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.12$, indicating that participants generally perceived these statements as moderately to highly overt. Compared to the IC condition, the statements also seem to be slightly more overt, however, a Kruskal-Wallis test, followed by post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction, revealed that the difference was not significant ($p = .066$).

In Task 4 (Attitude) for the II scenarios, the majority of statements were perceived as having a *Negative* tone ($n = 216$, 67.5%), followed by *Neutral* ($n = 61$, 19.1%), *Positive* ($n = 27$, 8.4%), and *Not sure* ($n = 16$, 5.0%). This indicates a strong tendency toward interpreting the II statements as expressing negative sentiment, similarly to the IC condition. Additionally, in Task 5 (Target) for the II scenarios, participants most frequently indicated that the statement was directed at themselves (*Me*) ($n = 158$, 49.4%) or at a *General* audience ($n = 118$, 36.9%). Fewer responses indicated that the target was another person (*Other*) ($n = 35$, 10.9%) or were uncertain (*Not sure*) ($n = 9$, 2.8%). This suggests that the II statements were typically perceived as personally directed or broadly applicable, rather than targeting someone else specifically, similar to the IC condition.

Moreover, for Task 6 (Aggressiveness and Humor), scores were calculated separately for each scenario, as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humour Perception Task) per scenario in version II

		Task 6a (Aggressiveness)			Task 6b (Humour)		
Scenario	n	Mean	Median	SD	Mean	Median	SD
II1	79	1.94	2	1.05	2.90	3	1.29
II2	81	2.30	3	1.15	2.35	2	1.04
II3	84	1.65	1	0.94	2.73	3	1.19
II4	76	2.38	2	1.14	2.62	2	1.28

Note. Task 6a examined perceived aggressiveness, and Task 6b examined perceived humour. Ratings were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not at all, 5= Very Much)

A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in aggressiveness ratings (Task 6a) across the four Ironic Insult (II) scenarios, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 24.29$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction indicated that II3 was rated significantly less aggressive than both II2 ($p < .001$) and II4 ($p < .001$). A similar analysis was conducted again for Task 6b (Humor), which indicated that II1 was rated significantly more humorous than II2 ($p = .040$). No other pairwise differences were statistically significant. Again, this reveals a difference between the humorous and aggressive effects of the utterances.

1.3 Sarcasm (S)

In Task 1 (Classification) for the S versions of the scenarios (S1-S4), participants most frequently selected *Sarcastic* ($n = 135$, 42.2%), closely followed by *Ironic* ($n = 132$, 41.2%). The classification *Both* (ironic and sarcastic) accounted for 12.5% ($n = 40$), while *Literal* was selected in 4.1% of responses ($n = 13$). These results indicate that S statements were interpreted more frequently as non-literal (sarcastic or ironic) than literal. Moreover, mostly in Ironic Compliments and Sarcasm, and less but still significantly in Ironic Insults, there was a split between the "ironic" and "sarcastic" classification in the first Task.

However, for Task 2 (Clarity) in the S scenarios, the average rating was $M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.96$, indicating that participants generally perceived these statements as highly overt and clear in their intention, as opposed to lower scores in the ironic conditions. Again, post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction indicated that Sarcasm scenarios were rated significantly more overt than Ironic Compliments ($p < .001$), but not significantly more overt than Ironic Insults ($p = .133$).

In Task 4 (Attitude) for the S scenarios, a substantial majority of responses indicated a *Negative* attitude ($n = 224$, 70.0%), followed by *Neutral* ($n = 51$, 15.9%), *Positive* ($n = 30$, 9.4%), and *Not sure* ($n = 15$, 4.7%), similar to Ironic Insults. Moreover, in Task 5 (Target) for the S scenarios, participants overwhelmingly identified the target as themselves (*Me*) ($n = 297$, 92.8%). Very few responses selected *Other* ($n = 5$, 1.6%), *General* ($n = 12$, 3.8%), or *Not Sure* ($n = 6$, 1.9%). This indicates that S statements were nearly always interpreted as personally directed, especially compared with the two irony subcategories described above.

Again, for Task 6 (Aggressiveness and Humor), Table 4 depicts the overall scores across scenarios:

Table 4

Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humour Perception Task) per scenario in version S

		Task 6a (Aggressiveness)			Task 6b (Humour)		
Scenario	n	Mean	Median	SD	Mean	Median	SD
S1	72	2.97	3	1.20	2.04	2	1.07
S2	84	2.42	2	1.25	2.79	3	1.27
S3	84	2.40	2	1.18	2.81	3	1.21
S4	80	2.70	3	1.11	2.39	2	1.22

Note. Task 6a examined perceived aggressiveness, and Task 6b examined perceived humour. Ratings were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not at all, 5= Very Much)

Again, a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated a significant difference in aggressiveness ratings (Task 6a) among the four Sarcasm scenarios, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 11.50$, $p = .009$. Post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction showed that the only significant

difference was that S1 was rated significantly more aggressive than S2 (p = .024) and S3 (p = .026). Similarly, for Task 6b (Humor), a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated a statistically significant difference in humor ratings, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 20.68$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction revealed that S1 was rated significantly less humorous than S2 (p = .001) and S3 (p < .001), without any other pairs appearing to have significant differences.

2. Results for Criteria of Irony and Sarcasm

Based on the research questions, a multinomial logistic regression model was fit to the data to evaluate the effect of Clarity/Overtness, Attitude, and Target on irony and sarcasm classification. To interpret the results, predicted probabilities were calculated for each classification outcome based on the model, grouped by levels of the predictor variables. By doing this, we can investigate whether the three criteria proposed in the theoretical framework are significant in determining whether an utterance is classified as ironic and/or sarcastic. The results will be presented separately for each task across the three versions: Ironic Compliments (IC), Ironic Insults (II), and Sarcasm (S). The model fit was acceptable for all three versions: IC (*Residual Deviance* = 376.86, *AIC* = 472.86), II (*Residual Deviance* = 328.17, *AIC* = 424.17), and S (*Residual Deviance* = 238.85, *AIC* = 334.85). These values suggest that the inclusion of predictors improved model fit over the null model. However, AIC values are best interpreted through comparison with alternative models, which was not conducted in this case.

2.1 Clarity Judgement Task

The role of overtness varied across the three versions. In the IC version, sarcasm was most probable at lower levels of overtness (Task 2 = 2, M = .60), while irony peaked at moderate

overtness (Task 2 = 3, M = .45). Literal interpretations increased with higher overtness (M = .24 at Task 2 = 5), suggesting that utterances were rated as more overt as they become more literal.

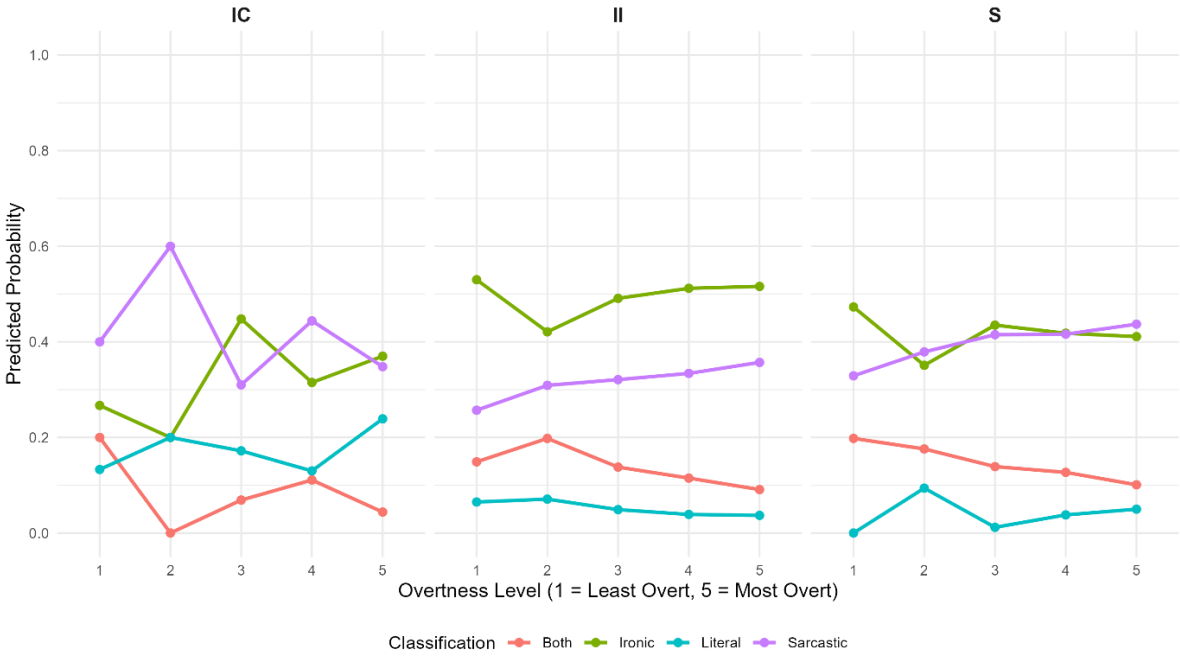
In the II version, irony remained the most likely classification across all levels of overtness ($M \approx$ .50–.53), and literal interpretations remained low, regardless of how overt the statements were. This indicates that ironic insults are consistently perceived as ironic, irrespective of clarity.

For the S version, sarcasm was the most stable interpretation, increasing gradually with overtness and peaking at Task 2 = 5 (M = .44). *Literal* and *Both* classifications remained near zero, suggesting that overt sarcastic statements were still perceived as sarcastic, not literal.

This may suggest that overtness has an unstable role in the classification of sarcasm and irony, close to what was hypothesized in the criteria proposed in section II.4. A visual representation is also shown in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4

Predicted Probabilities of Irony Classifications Across Overtness Levels by Version



2.2 Attitude Perception Task

Across all versions, attitude played a significant role. In the IC version, *Negative* attitude correlated with higher sarcasm classification (*M* = .51), while irony remained relatively stable across all attitude types (*M* = .29 - .38). Noteworthy is also that a *Positive* attitude led to equal chances of the utterance to be perceived as *Sarcastic* and *Ironic* (*M* = .38).

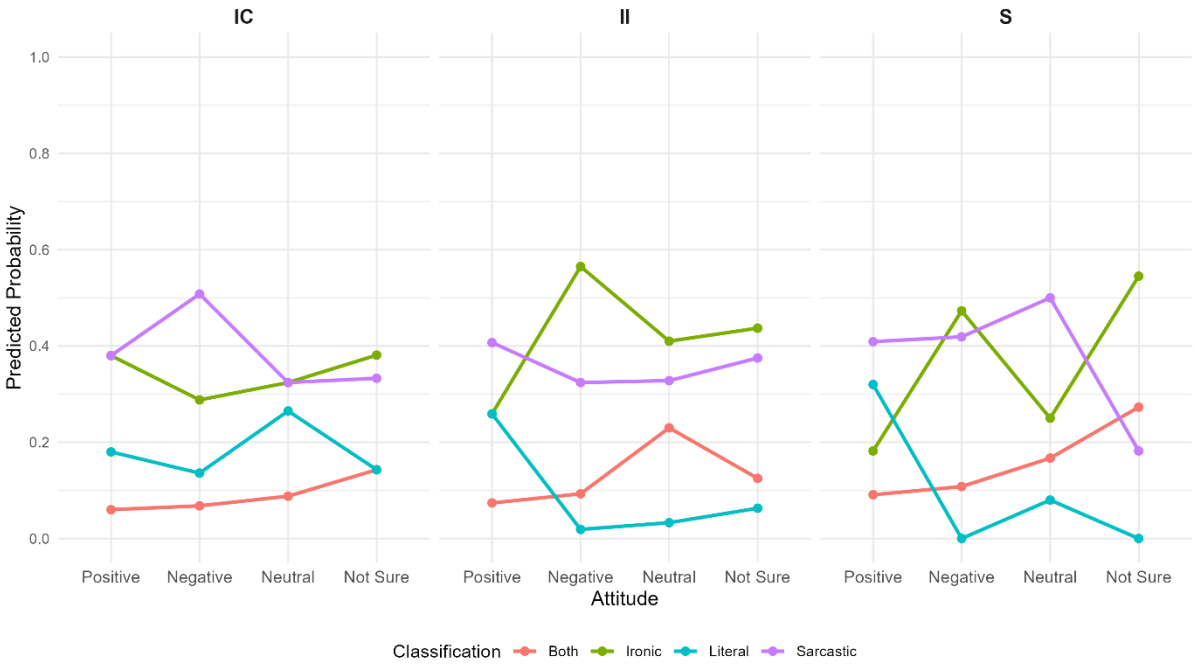
In the II version, a *Negative* attitude predicted the highest probability of irony (*M* = .57), while *Positive* attitudes led to the utterances being most probably classified as sarcastic (*M* = .41). *Neutral* attitudes also produced a blend of responses, including the highest *Both* rate (*M* = .23).

In the S version, *Neutral* and *Positive* tones increased sarcasm classification (*M* = .50 and .41), while irony was predicted by a mixture of *Negative* attitudes and *Not sure* responses

(*M* = .47 and .55). *Both* and *Literal* responses remained low across all attitude options. Figure 5 below depicts these results for all three conditions analysed:

Figure 5

Predicted Probabilities of Irony Classifications Across Attitude Perception by Version



Again, we see that each condition was influenced differently by Attitude Perception. Interestingly, it seems that the perception of a negative attitude tended to increase ironic classifications, particularly in Ironic Insults (II) and Sarcasm (S), but a sarcastic one in Ironic Compliments (IC). In contrast, the perception of a positive attitude was more associated with sarcasm across all three versions.

2.3 Target Identification Task

Target (Task 5) also shaped interpretation patterns differently across the three targeted versions. In the IC version, when participants viewed themselves as the target (*Me*), or when they were *Not sure*, they were more likely to classify the utterance as *Sarcastic* (*M* = .42 and

.59). On the other hand, an ironic interpretation was more likely when the target was viewed as being someone else (*Other*) or a *General* comment (*M* = .47 and .40).

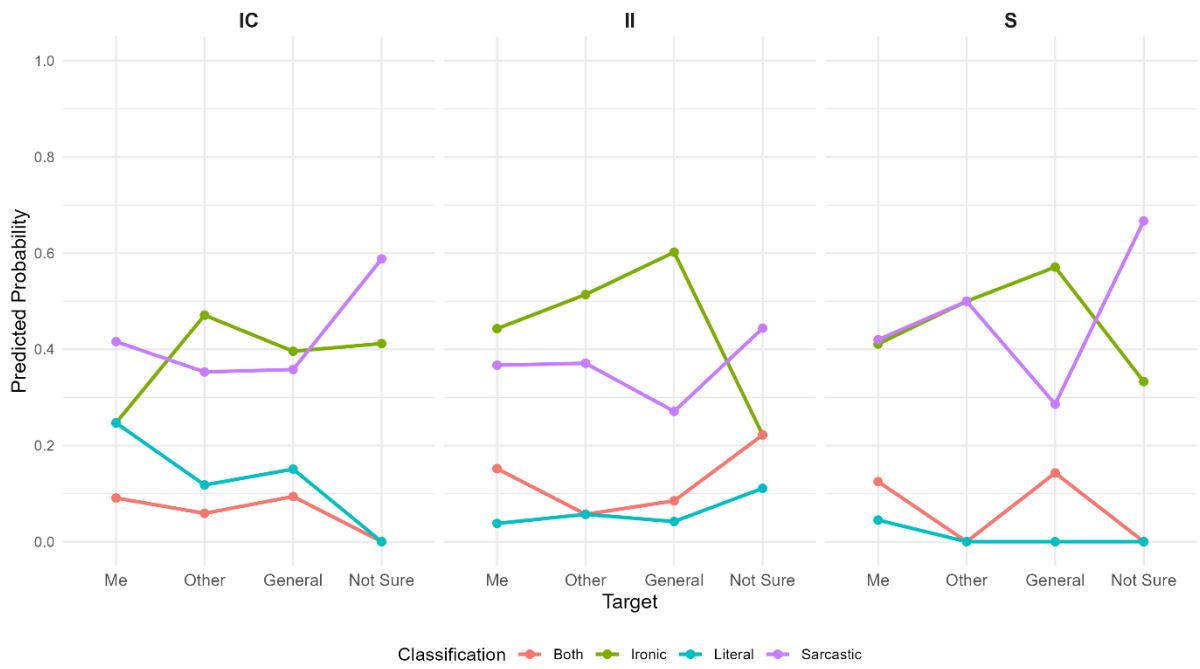
In the II version, irony was interpreted most when the target was identified as *General* (*M* = .60), followed by *Other* (*M* = .51), and *Me* (*M* = .44), and sarcasm was most likely when the participants were *Not sure*. (*M* = .44), which, however, is not very telling since only 2.8% picked that option. *Literal* and *Both* interpretations were lower in all target options.

In the S version, sarcasm peaked at *Not Sure* targets (*M* = .67), while irony peaked at *General* targets (*M* = .57). However, since the percentages of participants who picked these options are extremely low (1.9% and 3.8% respectively), we should only focus on the majority, which identified the target as *Me* (92.8%). When the target was identified as *Me,* sarcasm was most likely identified, but closely followed by irony (*M* =.42 and .41). Again, *Literal* and *Both* interpretations were lower for all possible target options.

Figure 6 below depicts again those results for all three versions. As can be seen for this parameter, the three versions appear to have more uniform effects on the classification of the utterances, especially when it comes to the Ironic Insult (II) and the Sarcastic (S) versions.

Figure 6

Predicted Probabilities of Irony Classifications Across Target Levels by Version



3. Aggressiveness and Humor Correlation

As mentioned before, the study also aimed to investigate whether the utterances were rated as aggressive vs. humorous, as opposite ends of a mock-tease continuum. This means that it was hypothesized that the more aggressive an utterance is perceived to be, the less humorous it would be rated. To investigate that, a Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between aggressiveness and humor across all scenarios in all targeted versions (IC, II, S). The analysis revealed a moderately negative correlation, $r_s = -.38$, $p = .227$, suggesting that scenarios perceived as more aggressive were generally rated as

less humorous, as predicted. However, the results were not statistically significant, probably due to the lack of power with only 12 scenarios.[12]

4. Pre- and Post-Definition Analysis

Based on the final research question, namely, whether there is a difference between the general public's idea of irony and sarcasm and the theoretical criteria that have been described, the questionnaire was split into two distinct phases, the first where participants completed the tasks without a definition and the second after a definition was provided to them. As mentioned before, this method followed Gibbs and Moise's (1997) design and aimed at understanding whether the first and second orders of understanding of irony and sarcasm coincide. In order to do that, a mixture of Chi-square tests of independence for Tasks 1, 4, and 5, and a Wilcoxon rank-sum test for Task 2 was employed. The results are presented per version.

4.1 Ironic Compliments (IC)

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether the distribution of classification responses (Task 1) changed. The test revealed a statistically significant shift in response patterns, 3(3, N =320) = 8.95, p = .030. This suggests that the definition influenced how participants interpreted Ironic Compliments. Notably, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of responses classified as *Ironic* in the Post phase (+24), and a corresponding decrease in *Sarcastic* classifications (−20), as can also be seen in Table 5. This suggests that the provision of the definitions may have clarified the conceptual distinction for participants.

[12] Here, only the three targeted subcategories, namely Ironic Compliments (IC), Ironic Insults (II), and Sarcasm (S), per the four distinct stories created, were analyzed, hence 12 scenarios total. The literal fillers were not analyzed.

Table 5

Change in Classification Task (Task 1) in Ironic Compliments Version

Classification	Pre-Phase	Post-Phase	Change
Ironic	47	71	+24
Sarcastic	69	49	-20
Both	14	15	+1
Literal	30	25	-5
TOTAL	160	160	

Moreover, a Wilcoxon rank-sum test revealed that overtness (Task 2) scores did not change after the definition was given ($W = 7368$, $p = .928$). In addition, two different Chi-square tests were conducted for Attitude (Task 4) and Target (Task 5). However, both revealed no significant changes after the definition was given ($\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 4.49$, $p = .214$ and $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 1.14$, $p = .767$). This means that although the other parameters remained stable, the classification of *Ironic* and *Sarcastic* slightly changed after the provision of an explicit definition of the two phenomena. This means that the three criteria, namely Overtness, Attitude, and Target, were not enough to predict the classification of these utterances, and the source of the change might lie in a different feature.

4.2 Ironic Insults (II)

The change in the Ironic Insults (II) version was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 5.76$, $p = .124$. Again, no significant change was observed in the overtness task ($W = 12476$, $p = .681$). No change was also observed in the Chi-square tests for Attitude (Task 4) and Target (Task 5), similarly to the other versions ($\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 1.14$, $p = .767$ and $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 0.38$, $p = .945$). Overall, this reveals that, contrary to the IC version, this version remained stable after the definition was given.

4.3 Sarcasm (S)

In the Sarcasm (S) version, the distribution of responses changed significantly following the definition, $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 18.36$, $p < .001$. Most notably, the proportion of responses classified as *Sarcastic* increased by 36 in the Post phase, while *Ironic* classifications decreased by 34, as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Change in Classification Task (Task 1) in Sarcastic Version

Classification	Pre-Phase	Post-Phase	Change
Ironic	83	49	-34
Sarcastic	50	86	+36
Both	20	19	-1
Literal	7	6	-1
TOTAL	160	160	

Similar to the other versions, no change was observed in the second task for overtness, after the definition was given ($W = 7707.5$, $p = .156$) and no significant changes were observed in Task 4 and 5 for Attitude and Target respectively ($\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 2.19$, $p = .534$ and $\chi^2(3, N = 320) = 0.92$, $p = .821$). This means that, similarly to the Ironic Compliment version, the classification may have changed, but the other criteria remained stable after the definition was given. It should also be noted that this version presented the most significant change in classification after the definition.

VI. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate whether the theoretical criteria, as described in section II.4, are necessary elements of irony and sarcasm. To further explore whether these transcend the English language, which is the primary language used in this research area, the study examined these phenomena in Greek, specifically through an online questionnaire using vignettes completed by native Greek speakers. In addition, the study's design allowed shedding light on the aggressive and/or humorous nature of irony and sarcasm, and more specifically, whether it follows the “mock-tease” continuum as described in section II.3.3. Last but not least, the questionnaire was split into two phases, separated by my theoretical definition of irony and sarcasm, following Gibbs and Moise's (1997) methodology, to investigate whether there is indeed a first- and second-order difference in the understanding of these phenomena, as proposed by Taylor (2017).

1. Criteria of Irony and Sarcasm

1.1 Overtness

The first criterion examined is that ironic utterances are incongruous, indirectly and intentionally, but not necessarily overt, which also applies to sarcasm. Based on the predicted probabilities that were calculated, as hypothesized, overtness is not a necessary element of the understanding of sarcasm or irony. This means that participants did not necessarily choose a high level of clarity in the utterances associated with irony and sarcasm, although they classified them as such. In reality, this was only the case in the Sarcastic versions, where the sarcastic interpretation peaked in the highest level of overtness. However, in the case of the Ironic Insults version, irony was interpreted even with lower levels of overtness, and in the case of the Ironic Compliments version, a mixture of results was produced. This means that

irony can be expressed covertly, thus being more "hidden" than obvious, whereas sarcasm may be recognized as more overt, which was not a difference predicted by the criteria, as listed before (section II.4).

This allows us to deduce that overtness may not be a stable factor in the prediction of irony and sarcasm, as opposed to neo-Gricean approaches of irony, especially as proposed by Dynel (2014, 2018) and Yus (2000). Irony seems to be recognized even in situations where it is not overt, based on context and social assumptions. Consider some of the comments for various scenarios, taken from Task 3 (Justification Task).

Table 7

Examples of comments given in Task 3 (Justification Task)

Scenario	Classification	Overtness Rating	Comment (Original)	Comment (Translation)
II2	*Ironic*	3	*Ακόμα κ αν όντως η μετακόμιση δεν ήταν δύσκολη, η φράση αυτή μπορεί να παρεξηγηθεί.*	*Even if the move was not difficult, this phrase may be misunderstood.*
IC1	*Ironic*	1	*Αναφερει θετικα σχολια και μετα λεει αυτο?*	*Mentions positive comments and then says this?*
IC2	*Sarcastic*	2	*Επειδή είναι φίλος δεν καταλαβαίνω αν το εννοεί ή κάνει πλάκα.*	*Because he is a friend, I don't understand if they mean it or if it's a joke.*

The comments reveal multiple aspects that may disrupt the overtness of the utterances. First, for II2, the participant recognizes the possibility that the comment might not be intended as ironic, but it is still perceived as such by them. This means that there are other factors, for example, common ground, that may justify a different response. Similarly, for

IC2, a different participant recognized that because of the friendly relationship between the interlocutors, the clarity of the utterance is less transparent, although the comment is still classified as *Sarcastic*. Because the information given to participants about their relationship with the interlocutors was described simply as "friends," it is difficult to suggest that common ground is not enough for the utterances to be considered ironic or sarcastic. However, the results provided allow us to confirm the hypothesis that for an utterance to be perceived as ironic or sarcastic, a high degree of overtness does not seem necessary.

What could enhance the overtness of the irony of these utterances is an "ironic tone" of voice, which, as it was discussed, has been a common topic of research (Caucci et al., 2024; Hancock, 2004; Kreuz, 1996). Although the results of the present study are not particularly telling on that aspect, it seems that the absence of auditory cues did not hinder participants' ability to distinguish between ironic/sarcastic and literal utterances. This follows the lines of previous research, which found contextual cues to have a stronger influence on the interpretation of irony and sarcasm, and elements like intonation and pitch to be more aiding rather than determining factors (Bryant and Fox-Tree, 2005; Daliens et al., 2018). I therefore suspect that if the utterances were recorded with a particular change in pitch and intonation, utterances would again be classified as ironic or sarcastic but with a higher overtness level.

Before I move on to the rest of the parameters tested, I must comment on the interesting cases of Ironic Compliments. As depicted with the Task 3 examples above (Table 7), Ironic Compliments appeared to be the most unclear, among the three targeted versions, and as stated in one of the participant comments, often this had to do with the clash between a positive context and a negative comment, which, as I stated before in section II.3.1, seems counterintuitive. Indeed, Ironic Compliments in general were again classified as *Ironic* or *Sarcastic*, which means that participants indeed perceived the incongruous nature of them,

but were rather confused by their positive evaluative nature. This, however, makes them less overt but not less ironic. This again enhances the idea that irony can be subtle and less overt.

Finally, although the difference was not that strong, in the Sarcasm version, utterances seemed to be overall more overt than both irony versions, and the predicted probabilities showed that the higher overtness level correlates with their classification as sarcastic. Indeed, Boylan and Katz (2013, p. 206) also mention that sarcasm is more transparent. This result might also have to do with the identification of a clear target/victim, as it was also revealed in the analysis (see more in section VI.1.3). This also hints at a possible correlation between the three criteria that has not yet been discussed, namely that the three are not independent, but rather highly dependent on each other. In cases where the target/victim was clearly identified as a specific person, rather than a referent or a general comment, utterances were more overt.

1.2 Attitude

Attitude corresponds to the evaluative nature of irony, which was stated as one of the criteria for its identification. We therefore expected Ironic Compliments to be rated as positive and Ironic Insults and Sarcasm to be rated as negative. The latter seems to be happening, since for both Ironic Insults and Sarcasm, the majority of participants found that the interlocutor had a negative attitude. However, again, Ironic Compliments were split between a *Positive* and a *Negative* attitude. Again, this strengthens the counterintuitive nature of Ironic Compliments, and adds to the "asymmetrical" nature of irony (Clark and Gerrig, 1984, p. 122), meaning that people are more likely to utter or encounter a case of ironic insult than an ironic compliment, hence the latter becomes stranger and thus it becomes more difficult to distinguish the nature of the evaluation made by the irony. This is again rather logical, since the effort and risk of uttering an ironic compliment is not necessarily beneficial to the speaker, especially compared to ironic insults. Ironic Compliments may also not be that

common within Greek communication patterns, and thus may seem stranger to this target audience.

Similarly, and although I have not attempted to compare them with their literal counterparts, the "tinge hypothesis" (Dews et al., 1995; Dews and Winner, 1995) also seems to explain why ironic compliments are rated as expressing a negative attitude, even if the utterance is meant to be taken as a compliment. It seems that ironic compliments are therefore "tinged with negativity," a result also found in Pexman and Olineck (2002).

When it comes to the predicted probabilities calculated, the results also seem to indicate that although Ironic Insults and Sarcasm exhibited similar patterns, with the *Negative* attitude attached to irony and the *Positive* attitude to sarcasm, Ironic Compliments differed significantly, and *Positive* attitudes yielded a mixture of *Sarcastic* and *Ironic* classifications. Although this does not give a clear indication of the correlation between the phenomena investigated, it shows that Ironic Compliments are indeed harder to classify and judge, at least for Greek-speaking participants.

In addition, and against our predictions, *Positive* attitude had a higher probability of being associated with a *Sarcastic* classification in both the Ironic Insults and the Sarcasm versions. This is an interesting finding, and several assumptions can be made about it. To begin with, this may have to do with Colston's (2002) suggestion that the "aggressiveness" of sarcasm depends on the severity of the situation in which it is uttered. In reality, all of the scenarios described are trivial situations. However, if we look at the results of Task 6a (Aggressiveness), we see that in the Sarcastic version (Table 4 in section V.1.3), utterances were rated more aggressive than in the Ironic version (Table 5 in section V.1.2), even if the situation and context were the same. This suggests that participants could distinguish between the intent of the speaker and the aggression conveyed by what they uttered. It also shows the

opposite of what has been described in humor studies, namely that sarcasm is not more bitter and malevolent than irony (Averbeck, 2013; Hanks, 2013; Tobacaru, 2019).

This leads to a second possible explanation, which is that this may occur due to cultural differences. As mentioned before, the criteria that were extracted from the theories and findings were primarily from English-speaking populations, whereas the present study was conducted with Greek native speakers. Although there are no prior findings that could explain the difference between the two cultures, it might be that the classification *Sarcastic* may have more positive connotations in the Greek language than in English. Apart from the situation, the setting has been shown to have some impact on how "aggressive" irony can be, especially in Greek culture. Tsakona (2011), for example, found numerous communicative functions in ironic remarks uttered within the Greek Parliament, which, as she states, may have been taken differently in other settings, or in the same setting in other cultures.

The conflicting results found do not mean that attitude is not a necessary parameter of irony and sarcasm. In fact, the evaluative nature of both is clearly evident. However, the results might indicate that there are socio-cultural differences in how the phenomena are perceived, and how negative and positive attitude is attributed to them.

1.3 Target

The third and final criterion that this study examined, which was also the most prominent criterion to distinguish between irony and sarcasm, is the presence of a target or the lack thereof. Specifically, it was hypothesized that in ironic versions, a referent or more general target is necessary, but there does not need to be a direct victim, which is a criterion of sarcasm. In a way, this would mean that irony is more subtle than sarcasm (Lee and Katz, 1998).

However, the results of the present research do not unambiguously confirm this hypothesis. Based on the descriptive statistics calculated, it seems that indeed in both ironic versions, most participants still identified the target as themselves (*Me*), even though the second most common answer was indeed *General*, which corresponds to an unidentifiable entity, closer to a referent, in both cases, and with a higher percentage in Ironic Insults. On the other hand, *Me* dominated the Sarcastic versions. Although this seems to confirm the hypothesis somewhat, indicating that sarcasm appears to be more victimizing to the interlocutor, the predicted probabilities in the *Sarcastic* version reveal that the *Me* target did not lead to that classification. On the contrary, participants appeared to be again split between *Sarcasm* and *Irony.* This is explained if we consider the change between the classifications in the *Pre-* and *Post- phase* of the questionnaire, meaning that participants acknowledged that victim presence was an element of sarcasm, only after they were explicitly told so in the definition. On the other hand, in all three versions, a *General* target did indeed lead to more classifications of *Ironic*.

The results are therefore puzzling. On the one hand, we can conclude that irony does indeed seem more general or subtle, whereas sarcasm has a more identifiable victim (Kruz and Glucksberg, 1989; Wilson, 2013). However, that aspect does not seem to be key or enough to separate the two, especially in participants' first-order understandings of these terms. Although more on that comparison will be discussed later (section VI.3), participants did not seem to attribute the presence of a direct victim to sarcasm before the definition was given. Even more perplexing is the classification as *Sarcastic* was more common for the Ironic Compliment versions in the *Pre*-definition phase of the questionnaire. This means that, against my hypothesis, which was based on past literature, an explicit victim does not seem to be the major difference between irony and sarcasm, at least in the population studied in this experiment.

This, again, in combination with the Attitude results that were discussed earlier, could indicate cultural factors that differentiate the definition of irony and sarcasm in the Greek community. Combining the results obtained so far, the only hypothesis confirmed is that irony and sarcasm are incongruous statements, since all utterances "clashed" with the context given and were indeed classified as *Ironic* or *Sarcastic,* but are not necessarily overt. In addition, attitude does indeed seem to play a role in that classification, maybe not as a defining criterion but rather as an attributing feature, confirming the evaluative nature of the two. When it comes to the target, things might not be as clear-cut as has been suggested by past literature. In the *Sarcastic* version, utterances did indeed seem more personal and obvious, as suggested by Barbe (1995). However, they were acknowledged as *Sarcastic* only after the explicit definition was given.

Unfortunately, since this study has a limited scope, it is difficult to suggest any other tropes that could complete the requirements of irony and sarcasm tested. Based on the findings so far, it seems that the incongruity or the "clash" between context and utterance is already enough to at least hint to the interlocutor that the utterance, and the other factors analyzed so far, may be tropes of irony and/or sarcasm rather than criteria that define it, thus making them insufficient for describing the phenomena completely. In this way, I again fall back on Katz's (2009) and Pexman's (2008) analyses, who claim that there are no exact criteria that define irony holistically. As Pexman (2008) highlights, understanding irony may be more dependent on social, emotional, and cognitive inferences rather than a specific set of language-based criteria that can define an utterance at face value. A view that also very well describes what this study also shows is that "irony is a very stretchable concept, rejecting the ambition to find a theory that covers all or even most of what goes by that name" (Currie, 2023, p. 27). In other words, irony seems to be a very malleable language tool that works by employing different and not always cohesive features.

2. The Mock-Tease Continuum

The study also measures the Aggression and Humorous nature perceived from the utterances in Task 6. Based on what was discussed in section II.3.3, I hypothesized that neither is necessarily an aspect of irony and sarcasm, but rather that both can convey aggression and humor, or rather, they can both "mock" or "tease" the interlocutor, based on how they are perceived. As described, a negative correlation was found, meaning that the more aggressive an utterance was perceived, the less humorous it was rated, and vice versa. Since we only analyzed 12 scenarios, and power was relatively low, these results should be taken with caution.

Furthermore, in all three versions, some scenarios were perceived as more aggressive or humorous, meaning that despite their similar construction, there were still instances where some scenarios were found to be more mocking or teasing than others. For example, IC1 was rated as overall more humorous than other scenarios in the IC version, and S1 was rated as more aggressive (see Appendix A for the original scenarios and Appendix B for English translations). This underscores the fact that there is a mixture of factors that contribute to how utterances are perceived that exceed the presence of sarcasm and/ or irony. This may have to do with the situation described by the context, although no such analysis was made in the present research. However, again, we are reminded of Colston (2002), who attributed the "aggressiveness" perceived to the severity of the situation at hand. However, this would mean that the story (scenario 1, 2, 3, or 4), despite the version and the utterance uttered, would dictate the aggressiveness perceived. This was not the case in this study, meaning that although the Sarcastic version of scenario 1 was found to be more aggressive than the other four, the Ironic Insult version of the same scenario was found as significantly less aggressive than the other scenarios in the same version. Unfortunately, since the study was not

constructed to focus on that aspect, I am unable to evaluate what made one scenario more aggressive than the others.

Another factor that makes us suspect that the vignettes are responsible for this outcome is the differences found in the Literal Insults version, which, as mentioned before, was utilized as filler, and so did not factor in the analysis conducted thus far. However, I cannot ignore that two pairs were formed, scenarios L1 and L3, and scenarios L2 and L4 (see section V.1). Interestingly enough, L1 and L3 both have a male interlocutor, whereas in L2 and L4 the recipient is a woman (see Appendices for exact scenarios). This is reminiscent of many studies that have found that male interlocutors are commonly perceived as more ironic than females (Bruntch and Ruch, 2017; Dress et al., 2008; Katz et al., 2004; Rockwell and Theriot, 2001). Colston and Lee (2004) indeed found that males are assumed to be more sarcastic than females, due to the fact that they are less concerned with being misunderstood, an assumption that has also been confirmed by Dress et al. (2008). Hence, it might be assumed that the differences found in the tasks in the LI version may have to do with gender. However, this "pair" formation was not found in any other version, which actually suggests that the gender of the interlocutors did not play a major role in the interpretation of irony and sarcasm in the present research, although it should be added that the design of the study does not allow for any in-depth analysis on that aspect.

In addition, in all three versions, both aggression and humor were rated relatively low (below 3 on the 5-point Likert scale). This can be justified by the lack of information about the context, and relationship information between the interlocutors, which was limited to "friend", and thus we cannot confirm that irony and sarcasm can have a Banter effect as Leech (1983) described or what Tannen (1983) mentioned as the Paradox of power and solidarity. However, we can acknowledge that even if in all three versions the *Negative* attitude was dominant, utterances were still perceived as somewhat humorous.

Finally, scenarios in the *Sarcastic* version were found to be overall more aggressive than both the ironic conditions, even if, as mentioned before, that did not necessarily lead to a *Sarcastic* classification by participants. However, we should also mention that there were instances where utterances were classified as *Sarcastic* with comments on the Justification Task (Task 3) saying that the speaker is being humorous (*Κάνει χιούμορ* or *Επειδή ξέρω το χιούμορ του, αφού είναι φίλος μου)*. Moreover, we can attribute the more aggressive nature of sarcasm to the identification of the victim, following past research (Barbe, 1995; Long and Graesser, 1988, among others). What does this tell us? When the target is more prominent and the utterance obviously targets the interlocutor to criticize them, then the utterance is perceived as more aggressive. However, that sequence is not necessarily identified as sarcastic by participants. This leads to the discussion of the first and second order of understanding the terms *irony* and *sarcasm*, which follows.

3. Pre- vs Post-Definition Variation

Comparing the results between the two phases of this study, two major points need to be addressed. First, the difference in classification in Ironic Compliments and Sarcasm, but not in Ironic Insults, and second, the change in classification in combination with the stability of the other factors. To repeat, it was found that there was a shift towards the *Ironic* classification in the Ironic Compliment version and towards the *Sarcastic* classification in the Sarcastic version only after the definition was given.

I have thus far extensively highlighted the confusing nature of ironic compliments, and this result is another indication that a clear definition was needed to classify them as ironic. However, interestingly, in the pre-phase, in the IC versions, the classification *Sarcastic* was chosen by the majority of participants, although not by a huge margin (see Table 5 in section

V.4.1). This might indicate a difference in what *irony* and *sarcasm* are in this population's minds. In combination with the attachment of the *Sarcastic* classification with a *Positive* attitude, we see again that sarcasm is attributed to a more positive context. This might also be suggested considering the *Sarcastic* version's difference in classification, which is even more drastic. In the *Sarcastic* version, the majority of participants chose *Ironic* in the Classification Task (Task 1) before the definition was given and changed to *Sarcastic* in the post-phase of the questionnaire (see Table 6 in section V.4.3). This again indicates that the more positive characteristics of ironic compliments might fit better in the classification of sarcasm in participants' minds, while irony is considered to be more negative. This suggestion is also enhanced by the fact that the classification in the *Ironic Insults* version did not change in the different phases. This means that it is possible that, in a first-order understanding, irony is condemned as something negative, whereas sarcasm is not, which is in direct contradiction with what has been discussed in the literature so far (for example, in Averbeck, 2013; Cambell and Katz, 2012; Katz et al., 2004; Leggitt and Gibbs, 2000; among others). Based on the present results, irony could be deemed as more malevolent than sarcasm.

The difference between first- and second-order understandings of these terms was discussed by Taylor (2017), who investigated differences between these terms in English and Italian online conversations. Differences between the uses of "ironic" and "sarcastic" were found, with the Italian use of the terms differentiating significantly from the theoretical understanding of the term. This suggests a strong Anglo-centric bias in the theories I have also analyzed so far, highlighting the cultural differences in the understanding of those terms. Here, I am inclined to suggest the same. Unlike Taylor's metalinguistic label study, mine was a perception study that did not investigate the use of the terms but how Greek participants characterize instances of these phenomena based on previous literature. What emerged is that Greek speakers seem to make a more negative correlation with irony than sarcasm, and

sarcasm might even be labelled as the "well-meant" version of irony rather than the opposite. Furthermore, it was revealed that at least for this population, the requirements listed might be necessary but are not sufficient to decode the nature of irony and sarcasm or to fully differentiate between the two.

I now return to something suggested earlier (namely in section VI.1.1) that the three criteria of overtness, target presence, and attitude are co-dependent. We saw two indications of this being the case. First, higher overtness was present when the target was also clearly identifiable, which also more commonly resulted in a negative attitude being attributed to the speaker. This also worked when overtness was lower and the target was identified as more general. Secondly, the fact that the three criteria remained stable in the Pre- and Post- phase also indicates that they influence one another. When one does not change, then all remain stable. However, these clusters are not clearly attributed to irony or sarcasm, especially if we consider only the Pre-phase of the study, where participants relied solely on their intuitions to classify the utterances. This shows that some common practices in the studies of these phenomena might need to come into question, and other factors or a singular underlying factor might affect the way utterances as such are perceived.

VII. General Discussion

The premise of this study was to examine whether distinct criteria could define irony and sarcasm, as can be deduced from previous theories of and approaches to irony. In addition, the aim was for them to be tested with Greek native speakers, to see whether they, deriving from a primarily Anglocentric viewpoint, could be applied to a different population, which has hitherto been unstudied in this regard. In addition, by employing a two-phase stage in the study, the aim was to see whether there is a first- and second-order difference in understanding these terms as suggested by Taylor (2017). The findings allow us to deduce that indeed, the criteria proposed for irony and sarcasm are hardly enough to define these linguistic devices. More significantly, the referent/victim distinction, as described in section II.4, was hardly a reason for differentiation between irony and sarcasm. It was also found that attitude and overtness, are highly influenced by victim presence, meaning that these requirements are not independent from one another; when the utterance is more explicitly directed at the interlocutor, the overtness was higher, the attitude was rated as negative, and the aggression levels were higher. All these were criteria of the Sarcastic version, which, however, was not strongly identified as such before participants were given the explicit definitions of sarcasm and irony. This also reveals a problematic aspect of theoretical models for irony and sarcasm, namely that factors that are described as separate entities, in fact, correlate and might be manifestations of a deeper mechanism. This might lead us to a more holistic thinking that acknowledges that these separate criteria might be expressions of a singular, context-sensitive process to perceive irony and sarcasm.

The findings highlight that maybe the term *sarcasm* has been used too freely in both theoretical and experimental work in the past. For example, let us consider the implementation of the Self Sarcasm Report Scale (SSS, Ivanko and Pexman, 2003), which has been used in plenty of research (Banasik-Jemielniak et al., 2022; Tiv et al., 2019).

Suppose we were to use the same here with an exact translation, results might not be representative of the truth, since the "scientific" and "general public's" definitions seem to differ significantly. Interestingly, the questionnaire has been used in other languages, for example, Polish, where "sarcasm" was translated as "verbal irony" based on the fact that the latter term seems better to approach the "scientific" definition of sarcasm as this has been described (Zajączkowska et al., 2024). This indeed strengthens the point of Partington (2007, p. 1550), namely that past research sometimes has used the terms arbitrarily, and experimental work is heavily guided by the researchers' understanding of the terms.

If we were to use such a measurement tool in Greek, it is unclear which term would be better suited. The utterances that were classified mostly as *Sarcastic* were those in the Ironic Compliment version, in the Pre-phase of the questionnaire, where participants employed their own knowledge of the terms. It is therefore suggested that *σαρκασμός* may have a more "positive" hue in Greek than what *sarcasm* carries in English. However, since the difference in classification was not that strong, I am inclined to think that the terms have more fine-lined differences that unfortunately we were unable to explore in the present research.

In addition, my findings suggest that individual, cultural, and social cues may be more important than the strictly linguistic criteria. As Katz (2023) describes, irony and sarcasm may reside in the cognitive level of understanding, combining numerous elements, and not just linguistic, allowing many art forms such as dance, music, and images to explore ironic meanings. This is not a surprising idea, since as we have covered thus far, Theory of Mind (Zhu and Wang, 2020), occupation (Katz and Pexman, 1997), place of residence (Dress et al., 2008), and other cultural factors (Rockwell and Theriot, 2001) have been shown to affect the tendency to use, and the perception of, irony and/or sarcasm.

Regarding the cultural parameters, Athanasiadou (2017) discusses how a network of the historical and cultural connotations of the term *irony* has affected the perception of the term by L1 Greek speakers nowadays, highlighting the power and superiority that the irony user has over their target. This may explain my prior theory that *ειρωνεία* (*irony*) in the Greek context may indeed be perceived as more negative than *σαρκασμός* (*sarcasm*). The lack of similar research on sarcasm however, limits our understanding of that difference. In addition, cultural connotations may shape the form of irony. For example, Baider and Constantinou (2020) found that Cypriot Greeks often use particular dialects, in the context of ironic hate speech, as a way to promote solidarity and simultaneously disparage outside groups. This shows that both the encoding and the perception of irony are influenced by cultural parameters.

This last point also connects with the theories discussed in the first sections of this study, meaning that some of the aspects, such as "echo", "relevant inappropriateness", or "ironic tone" may be evident in one language community but not in another, and can also play a more pivotal role is some cases. Based on the data I gathered for the Greek perception of irony and sarcasm, "echo" and "ironic tone of voice" may not be required criteria, but may simply aid the interpretation process regarding irony and sarcasm. To be more exact, when it comes to the theories discussed in the first part of this study (section II), none were able to account for all the utterances used in the empirical part, which were deemed as (more or less) ironic or sarcastic by the participants. For example, although some utterances contained "echoic mentions" of the context (see scenarios S1 or II4 in Appendices), and not a previous utterance (since no dialogues were given) and some did not, still all of them were classified as *Ironic* and/or *Sarcastic* (see S1 or S4 in Appendices). I already noted (section II.1.2) the "overt untruthfulness" of an utterance required from a neo-Gricean perspective; however, based on these results, overtness is not a necessary element for irony to be communicated.

In addition, our results showed that counterfactuality is not solely responsible for an utterance to be characterized as *ironic.* In fact, and according to criterion (iii) as mentioned in section II.4, namely that utterances that are overstatements (hyperbole), understatements (litotes), and rhetorical questions can be characterized as *ironic,* it was found that utterances like those were classified as *Ironic* and *Sarcastic*. For example, II1 was an overstatement and S4 a question. Lastly, the (Allusion) Pretense theory is not clearly evaluated, since it is difficult to analyze whether the utterances correspond to failed expectations for the hearer. It should be noted that the individual theories were not explicitly tested in the experimental part of the study; however, the points mentioned above are deductions from the available data.

Therefore, this study highlights the importance of studying how irony and sarcasm work in a particular language. More research is needed on different languages, apart from English, to realize the slight differences between irony and sarcasm in different cultures, if they exist. Even superficially, it is easy to see that based on other languages there is much more to investigate on that matter; Japanese only has approximations of the term, such as *hiniku* (literally meaning cutting bone from skin and flesh, which is etymologically more reminiscent of *sarcasm*) (Linder, 2024), whereas Tangalog uses both *ironiya* and *pambabaligtad,* which are used differently in discourse (Tagalog.com, n.d.). The way irony and sarcasm are formed, expressed, and perceived is bound to be diverse, too.

This type of research is also needed, even if we account for irony and/or sarcasm as cognitive rather than linguistic phenomena (Katz, 2023). To do that, future research should include more cross-cultural designs that also incorporate social variables. Research should focus on the first-order understanding of these terms, since, based on the findings of the present study, there might be differences in the theories that have been proposed thus far in a dominantly Anglo-centric field and how different populations understand and use these terms.

In terms of limitations, it is recognized that the present study did not define the phenomenon for Greeks but rather highlighted differences and a need to redefine these terms and examine how they are utilized more in depth. The study, therefore, only examined a limited number of participants in specific types of scenarios, and thus, I was not able to investigate how contextual or other cues may "tip off" participants to interpret utterances as ironic or sarcastic. The participants also had to choose from a specific set of labels. It would be interesting to explore what labels the participants themselves would attribute to the utterances, and how aware they are of the factors discussed in the present study.

In addition, the spontaneous production of ironic/sarcastic speech was not included. It would be valuable to explore irony and sarcasm and their differences in greater depth, since indications were found that the phenomena are interpreted somewhat differently than previous research has suggested. It would also be interesting to see whether there are social or individual differences that alter those interpretations, which were unfortunately not investigated in the present research.

In conclusion, although the research on irony and sarcasm seems extensive, especially within theoretical pragmatics, the subject should be broadened and examined within different language communities. As was showcased in the present research, it is unclear whether some standard criteria and rules could define the phenomena adequately, especially when it comes to languages that diverge from the Anglocentric point of view that has been the primary focus in past literature. People's perceptions should also be considered, especially the way they diverge from the stricter theoretical perspective. In the end, this study may have been unable to give a clear answer to the question posed in the title. Yet I hope I pointed out some of the possible directions future research needs to proceed in order to find an adequate answer to it.

Isn't it ironic? Or sarcastic? Or both? We still do not know.

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Appendix A

Below, the original questionnaire is provided. The translated version is provided in Appendix B.

1. Consent Form

Παροχή Συναίνεσης

Σκοπός

Το παρόν ερωτηματολόγιο συντάχθηκε στο πλαίσιο διπλωματικής εργασίας του μεταπτυχιακού προγράμματος Linguistics (research) του Leiden University, σχετικά με την ειρωνεία και τον σαρκασμό. Απαντώντας στις ερωτήσεις που ακολουθούν θα βοηθήσετε στο να απαντηθούν σημαντικά ερωτήματα σχετικά με το πώς αντιλαμβανόμαστε και χρησιμοποιούμε την ειρωνεία και τον σαρκασμό, συμβάλλοντας έτσι στην καλύτερη κατανόηση αυτών των επικοινωνιακών φαινομένων.

Διαδικασία

Η μελέτη περιλαμβάνει τη συμπλήρωση ενός ερωτηματολογίου, το οποίο θα διαρκέσει περίπου 10 λεπτά. Σας ζητείται να απαντήσετε σε σειρά ερωτήσεων που σχετίζονται με την ειρωνία και τον σαρκασμό, χωρίς να υπάρχει σωστή ή λανθασμένη απάντηση. Παρακαλούμε σημειώστε ότι το ερωτηματολόγιο αυτό διεξάγεται αποκλειστικά για ερευνητικούς σκοπούς.

Εμπιστευτικότητα

Οι απαντήσεις σας θα καταγραφούν και θα χρησιμοποιηθούν μόνο για ανάλυση δεδομένων. Μόνο η συντάκτης της διπλωματικής εργασίας και ο/η επιβλέπων καθηγητής/τρια θα έχουν πρόσβαση στα δεδομένα της μελέτης. Κανένα προσωπικό σας αναγνωριστικό στοιχείο (π.χ. όνομα) δεν θα συνδέεται με τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας. Όλα τα προσωπικά στοιχεία θα αφαιρεθούν και οι συμμετέχοντες θα ταυτοποιούνται με ψευδώνυμα ή άλλα αναγνωριστικά (π.χ. αριθμούς). Με τη συμμετοχή σας, δηλώνετε ότι αποδέχεστε τις παραπάνω διαδικασίες.

Κίνδυνοι και Οφέλη

Η έρευνα δεν εμπεριέχει κινδύνους πέραν εκείνων της καθημερινής επικοινωνίας. Ενδέχεται ωστόσο, κατά τη διάρκεια της συμπλήρωσης του ερωτηματολογίου, να προκύψουν ερωτήσεις που θα σας φανούν δυσάρεστες ή περίπλοκες. Διατηρείτε το δικαίωμα, οποιαδήποτε στιγμή, να αποχωρήσετε από τη μελέτη και να ζητήσετε να διαγραφούν τα δεδομένα σας, χωρίς καμία αρνητική συνέπεια ή επίπτωση στη σχέση σας με τους ερευνητές.

Δικαιώματα ως Εθελοντής

Η συμμετοχή σε αυτή τη μελέτη είναι απολύτως εθελοντική. Εάν έχετε οποιαδήποτε απορία σχετικά με την έρευνα, τα δικαιώματά σας ή οτιδήποτε αφορά τη μελέτη, μπορείτε να επικοινωνήσετε με την συντάκτρια της διπλωματικής εργασίας (z.m.matsouka@umail.leidenuniv.nl) ή με την υπεύθυνη Καθηγήτρια, Μαρίνα Τερκουράφη

(m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

Συγκατάθεση Συμμετέχοντα

Μου εξηγήθηκε η φύση της έρευνας και ο ρόλος μου σε αυτήν. Γνωρίζω ότι μπορώ να σταματήσω τη συμμετοχή μου οποιαδήποτε στιγμή. Επιπλέον, αντιλαμβάνομαι ότι, σε περίπτωση που έχω ερωτήματα ή ανησυχίες, μπορώ να επικοινωνήσω με την ερευνήτρια ανά πάσα στιγμή.

Options: *Συμφωνώ να συμμετέχω στην έρευνα/ Διαφωνώ στο να συμμετέχω στην έρευνα*

2. Demographic Questions

Παρακαλούμε σημειώστε την ηλικία σας.

Open Answer Box

Παρακαλούμε σημειώστε το φύλο σας.

Options: *Γυναίκα/ Άντρας/ Άλλο/ Προτιμώ να μην απαντήσω*

3. Instructions

Θα σας δοθούν κάποια σύντομα σενάρια, στα οποία συμμετέχετε εσείς και ένα άλλο άτομο. Κάθε σενάριο ολοκληρώνεται με ένα σχόλιο του συνομιλητή σας. Απαντήστε στις ερωτήσεις σχετικά με το σχόλιο αυτό, λαμβάνοντας υπόψη ολόκληρο το σενάριο που σας παρουσιάστηκε.

4. Vignettes

Scenario 1

Εσύ και η Μαρία πάτε στον κινηματογράφο. Μετά από μια διαφωνία για το ποια ταινία θα δείτε, η Μαρία συμφωνεί να δείτε αυτή που προτιμάς εσύ. Αφού η ταινία τελείωσε και οι δύο αναφέρετε θετικά σχόλια. Η Μαρία λέει:

IC1: Αναρωτιέμαι, έχω δει χειρότερη ταινία;

LC1: Από τις καλύτερες ταινίες που έχω δει εδώ και καιρό!

Εσύ και η Μαρία πάτε στον κινηματογράφο. Μετά από μια διαφωνία για το ποια ταινία θα δείτε, η Μαρία συμφωνεί να δείτε αυτή που προτιμάς εσύ. Αφού η ταινία τελείωσε και οι δύο φαίνεστε σαφώς δυσαρεστημένοι. Η Μαρία λέει:

II1: Πάει για Όσκαρ σίγουρα!

LI1: Από τις χειρότερες ταινίες που έχω δει εδώ και καιρό!

S1: Έχεις πραγματικά όμως άψογο γούστο!

Scenario 2

Έχεις πάει να βοηθήσεις τον φίλο σου τον Μανώλη με μία μετακόμιση, και επειδή εκείνος έχει την μέση του, προσφέρεσαι να κουβαλήσεις τις πιο βαριές κούτες. Τότε ο Μανώλης σου λέει:

IC2: Μάλλον διάλεξα τον πιο τεμπέλη άνθρωπο γι' αυτή την δουλειά!

LC2: Δεν θα μπορούσα να έχω καλύτερη βοήθεια!

Έχεις πάει να βοηθήσεις τον φίλο σου τον Μανώλη με μία μετακόμιση, αλλά επειδή έχεις την μέση σου μπορείς να κουβαλήσεις μόνο τις πιο ελαφριές κούτες. Τότε ο Μανώλης σου λέει:

II2: Πραγματικά πολύ ξεκούραστη η μετακόμιση!

LI2: Δεν βοηθάς και πολύ! Μπορείς να πάρεις λίγα περισσότερα.

S2: Γεννήθηκες για μεταφορέας, έτσι;

Scenario 3

Κανονίζεις να πάτε μια εκδρομή με την φίλη σου την Μάρθα στον Παρνασσό. Ενώ όλες τις προηγούμενες μέρες έβρεχε, την ημέρα της εκδρομής ο καιρός είναι ηλιόλουστος. Η Μάρθα τότε λέει:

IC3: Α χτες έπρεπε να έρθουμε, που είχε τέλειο καιρό!

LC3: Πάλι καλά που ήρθαμε σήμερα, που έχει τέλειο καιρό!

Κανονίζεις να πάτε μια εκδρομή με την φίλη σου την Μάρθα στον Παρνασσό. Ενώ όλες τις προηγούμενες μέρες είχε ηλιόλουστες μέρες, την ημέρα της εκδρομής ο καιρός χαλάει και ξεκινάει να βρέχει. Η Μάρθα τότε λέει:

II3: Πιο κατάλληλος καιρός για εκδρομή δεν νομίζω να υπάρχει!

LI3: Κρίμα που μας τα χάλασε έτσι σήμερα ο καιρός!

S3: Ο πιο τυχερός άνθρωπος στον κόσμο! Να σε παίρνω μαζί και στο καζίνο.

Scenario 4

Είναι τα γενέθλια του Γιώργου και του δίνεις για δώρο μια καφετιέρα. Ο Γιώργος λατρεύει τον καφέ και πίνει τουλάχιστον δύο καφέδες την ημέρα. Τότε σου λέει:

IC4: Μα ρε συ εγώ ελάχιστες φορές πίνω καφέ!

LC4: Μα πόσο καλά με ξέρεις ποια; Ευχαριστώ πολύ!

Είναι τα γενέθλια του Γιώργου και του δίνεις για δώρο μια καφετιέρα. Ο Γιώργος δεν πίνει ποτέ καφέ. Τότε σου λέει:

II4: Τέλειο δώρο! Δεν ξέρω πως ζούσα χωρίς καφετιέρα.

LI4: Ξέρεις ότι δεν πίνω ποτέ καφέ, σωστά;

S4: Φημίζεσαι για την παρατηρητικότητά σου, ε;

5. Tasks

Task 1 (Categorization Task)

Η φράση είναι :

Options: *Ειρωνική/Σαρκαστική/Και τα δύο/ Τίποτα από τα δύο (Κυριολεκτική)*

Task 2 (Clarity Judgment Task)

Πόσο ξεκάθαρο θεωρείτε ότι είναι αυτό που λέει [όνομα ομιλητή];

1-5 Likert Scale

1- *Καθόλου ξεκάθαρο*
2- *Λίγο ξεκάθαρο*
3- *Μέτρια ξεκάθαρο*
4- *Αρκετά ξεκάθαρο*
5- *Πλήρως ξεκάθαρο*

Task 3 (Justification Task)

Μπορείτε να δικαιολογήσετε την απάντηση σας; (προαιρετικό)

Open Answer Box

Task 4 (Attitude Perception Task)

Ποια είναι η στάση [όνομα ομιλητή] με αυτή την φράση;

Options: *Θετική/ Αρνητική/ Ουδέτερη/ Δεν είμαι σίγουρος-η*

Task 5 (Target Identification Task)

Νιώθεις ότι αυτή η φράση:

Options: *Απευθύνεται σε κάποιον άλλο/ Απευθύνεται σε μένα/ Δεν απευθύνεται σε κάποιον συγκεκριμένα/ Δεν είμαι σίγουρος-η*

Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humor Perception Task)

Θεωρείς την φράση:

a. Επιθετική

1-5 Likert Scale

1- Καθόλου
2- Λίγο
3- Μέτρια
4- Πολύ
***5-** Πάρα πολύ*

b. Χιουμοριστική

1-5 Likert Scale

1- Καθόλου
2- Λίγο
3- Μέτρια
4- Πολύ
***5-** Πάρα πολύ*

6. Definitions

Πριν συνεχίσετε το ερωτηματολόγιο, λάβετε υπόψιν σας τους παρακάτω ορισμούς της ειρωνείας και του σαρκασμού:

Η **ειρωνεία** είναι ένας τρόπος έκφρασης όπου το κυριολεκτικό νόημα των λέξεων διαφέρει από αυτό που θέλει να πει ο ομιλητής/τρια. Αυτό που θέλει να πει μπορεί να είναι θετικό ή αρνητικό, αλλά δεν στοχεύει άμεσα στον συνομιλητή.

Ο **σαρκασμός** είναι μια μορφή ειρωνείας όπου το φαινομενικά θετικό μήνυμα έχει αρνητική πρόθεση. Σε αντίθεση με την ειρωνεία, ο σαρκασμός στοχεύει άμεσα τον συνομιλητή.

Appendix B

Below the translated version of the items in the questionnaire is shown.

1. Consent Form

Consent Form

Purpose

This questionnaire was created as part of a Master's thesis in the *Linguistics (Research)* program at Leiden University, focusing on irony and sarcasm. By answering the following questions, you will contribute to addressing important issues regarding how we perceive and use irony and sarcasm, thereby helping to improve the understanding of these communicative phenomena.

Procedure

The study involves completing a questionnaire, which will take approximately 10 minutes. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions related to irony and sarcasm. There are no right or wrong answers. Please note that this questionnaire is conducted solely for research purposes.

Confidentiality

Your responses will be recorded and used only for data analysis. Only the author of the thesis and the supervising professor will have access to the study data. No personal identifying information (e.g., name) will be linked to the research results. All personal information will be removed, and participants will be identified using pseudonyms or other identifiers (e.g., numbers). By participating, you agree to the above procedures.

Risks and Benefits

The study does not involve any risks beyond those encountered in daily communication. However, you may come across questions that seem unpleasant or complex. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and request the deletion of your data, without any negative consequences or impact on your relationship with the researchers.

Your Rights as a Volunteer

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you have any questions about the research, your rights, or any other aspect of the study, you may contact the author of the thesis (z.m.matsouka@umail.leidenuniv.nl) or the supervising professor, Marina Terkourafi (m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

Participant Consent

The nature of the study and my role in it have been explained to me. I understand that I may withdraw from participation at any time. Furthermore, I understand that if I have any questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher at any point.

Options: *I agree to participate in the study/ I do not agree to participate in the study*

2. Demographic Questions

Please enter your age.

Open Answer Box

Please indicate your gender.

Options: *Female/ Male/ Other/ Prefer not to answer*

3. Instructions

You will be given some short scenarios in which you and another person participate. Each scenario ends with a comment from your interlocutor. Answer the questions about this comment, taking into account the entire scenario presented to you.

4. Vignettes

Scenario 1

You and Maria go to a movie theatre. After a dispute about which movie you should watch, Maria agrees to see the one you prefer. After the movie ends, both of you comment on it positively. Maria says:

IC1: I wonder, have I seen a worse movie?

LC1: One of the best movies I have watched in a while!

You and Maria go to a movie theatre. After a dispute about which movie you should watch, Maria agrees to see the one you prefer. After the movie ends, both of you seem displeased. Maria says:

II1: Will be nominated for an Oscar, for sure!

LI1: One of the worst movies I have seen in a while!

S1: You really have impeccable taste!

Scenario 2

You are helping your friend Manolis with his move, and because he has some back pain, you offer to carry the heaviest boxes. Manolis then says:

IC2: I probably chose the laziest person to do this job!

LC2: I couldn't have had better help!

You are helping your friend Manolis with his move, but because you have some back pain, you carry only the lightest boxes. Manolis then says:

II2: An effortless move!

LI2: You are not helping much! You could carry a bit more.

S2: You were born to be a mover, right?

Scenario 3

You arrange for a trip to Mount Parnassos with your friend Martha. Although all the days leading up to the trip it was rainy, the day of the trip the weather is sunny. Martha then says:

IC3: Ah, we should have gone yesterday, when the weather was perfect!

LC3: It's a good thing we came today, because the weather is perfect!

You arrange for a trip to Mount Parnassos with your friend Martha. Although all the days leading up to the trip it was sunny, the day of the trip the weather is rainy. Martha then says:

II3: I don't think there is a more suitable time for an excursion!

LI3: It's a shame the weather spoiled it for us today!

S3: The luckiest person in the world! I'll take you to the casino with me.

Scenario 4

It’s George’s birthday, and you give him a coffee machine as a gift. George loves coffee and drinks at least two cups per day. Then he says:

IC4: But hey, I rarely drink coffee!

LC4: But how well do you know me? Thank you very much!

It’s George’s birthday, and you give him a coffee machine as a gift. George never drinks coffee. Then he says:

II4: Amazing gift! I don’t know how I lived without a coffee machine.

LI4: You know I never drink coffee, right?

S4: You're famous for your observation, huh?

5. Tasks

Task 1 (Categorization Task)

The phrase is:

Options: *Ironic/ Sarcastic/ Both/ None of them (Literal)*

Task 2 (Clarity Judgment Task)

How clear do you think what [speaker name] is saying?

1-*5 Likert Scale*

1- Not at all clear

2- A little clear

3- Moderately clear

4- Quite clear

5- Completely clear

Task 3 (Justification Task)

Can you justify your answer? (optional)

Open Answer Box

Task 4 (Attitude Perception Task)

What is [speaker name]'s attitude towards this sentence?

Options: *Positive/ Negative/ Neutral/ Not sure*

Task 5 (Target Identification Task)

Do you feel that this sentence:

Options: *Addressed to someone else/ Addressed to me/ Addressed to no one in particular/ I'm not sure*

Task 6 (Aggressiveness-Humor Perception Task)

Do you consider the phrase:

a. Aggressive

1-5 Likert Scale

1- Not at all

2- A little

3- Moderate

4- A lot

5- Very much

b. Humorous

1-5 Likert Scale

1- Not at all

2- A little

3- Moderate

4- A lot

5- Very much

6. Definitions

Before continuing with the questionnaire, please consider the following definitions of irony and sarcasm:

Irony is a way of expression where the literal meaning of the words differs from what the speaker wants to say. What he wants to say can be positive or negative, but does not directly aim at the interlocutor.

Sarcasm is a form of irony where the seemingly positive message has a negative intent. Unlike irony, sarcasm is aimed directly at the interlocutor.