Relevance Theory
Relevance Theory: 
More than Understanding

Edited by

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. ix  

Introduction ............................................................................................................ 1  
Relevance Theory: More than Understanding  
Ewa Wałaszewska and Agnieszka Piskorska

**Part I: From Procedural Meaning to Epistemic Vigilance**

Chapter One ............................................................................................................ 23  
Modality and the Conceptual-Procedural Distinction  
Deirdre Wilson

Chapter Two ......................................................................................................... 45  
Epistemic Vigilance and the Function of Procedural Indicators in Communication and Comprehension  
Christoph Unger

Chapter Three ..................................................................................................... 75  
Norwegian Translations of *alors*: A Relevance-Theoretic Account  
Astrid Nome

Chapter Four ....................................................................................................... 93  
Spanish *pero* ‘but’ as a Marker of Contrast and its Relation with Focalising Particles  
Susana Olmos

**Part II: Humour**

Chapter Five ......................................................................................................... 117  
Relevance, Humour and Translation  
Francisco Yus

Chapter Six .......................................................................................................... 147  
What RT Cannot Do, IR Can: On the Incremental Interpretation of Jokes in (Non)relevance-Theoretic Terms  
Marta Dynel
Chapter Seven .......................................................................................... 167
Relevance-Theoretic Comprehension Procedure and Processing Multiple Meanings in Paradigmatic Puns
Agnieszka Solska

Chapter Eight ........................................................................................... 183
Humour or Horror? On Propositional Attitudes in Humorous Discourse
Agnieszka Piskorska

Part III: (Im)politeness

Chapter Nine ............................................................................................ 201
Linguistic (Mis)behaviour? On Marked and Unmarked Impoliteness
Anna Wiechecka

Chapter Ten .................................................................................................. 225
Non-Echoic Sarcasm: A Distinction from Irony within Relevance Theory
Anna Muszyńska

Chapter Eleven ........................................................................................ 245
Banter and the Echo/Pretence Distinction
Ewa Nowik-Dziewicka

Part IV: (Mis)communication

Chapter Twelve .......................................................................................... 261
Schizophrenia and Metarepresentational Abilities in Conversation: A Preliminary Analysis of Question Interpretation from a Relevance Theoretic Perspective
Caroline Jagoe

Chapter Thirteen ...................................................................................... 279
Cautious Optimism in Second Language Learning, or How to Make L2 Learners more Competent Hearers
Manuel Padilla Cruz

Part V: Translation and Style

Chapter Fourteen ........................................................................................ 307
Style as Linguistic Resemblance. Translating the “Disjoyned, Broken and Gadding” Style of the Essais
Kirsti Sellevold
Part VI: Philosophical Insights into Relevance Theory

Chapter Sixteen ....................................................................................... 331
Relevance Theory and Direct Reference Philosophy: A Suitable Match?
Thorstein Fretheim

Chapter Seventeen ................................................................................... 353
The Relevance of Aristotle for Relevance Theory: The Case of Metaphor
Ewa Wałaszewska

Contributors ............................................................................................. 367
Name Index ............................................................................................... 369
Subject Index ............................................................................................ 377
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INTRODUCTION

RELEVANCE THEORY:
MORE THAN UNDERSTANDING

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Most of the contributions included in this book originated at the fifth Interpreting for Relevance Conference (IfRC), which took place in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, in June 2010. The IfRC is an international event organized biannually by the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw since 2002 (www.ifr.angli.uw.edu.pl). The contributions represent various views commenting on, applying, or developing Relevance Theory (henceforth RT), an approach to communication and cognition created by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson and first fully described in their now seminal book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* ([1986] 1995). The central notion around which the theory was constructed is that of relevance, understood as a property of inputs to cognitive processes, depending on the balance of cognitive effects and the processing effort needed to gain these effects. Initially, the main interest of RT lay in explaining how communication works and how it is grounded in the cognitive processes of storing and activating assumptions, and combining newly communicated information with contextual information to obtain effects that would justify the effort of engaging in communication at all. Sperber and Wilson adopted Grice’s (1957) view that understanding a message consists in discovering the speaker’s intentions by making inferences about the deliberately used stimulus, verbal or otherwise. Sperber and Wilson argued that, in the case of verbal communication, apart from the process of linguistic decoding, all the other phases of utterance comprehension are inferential in nature, both at the level of the explicit content of an utterance and at the level of its implicatures. The theoretical basis of RT was first applied to selected aspects of verbal
communication, such as speech acts, metaphor, irony, and others (Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995, ch. IV). Since its presentation in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, the theory has developed in a number of directions and hence generated an extensive literature (see e.g. Yus 1998; Wałaszewska et al. 2008). Over the years, it has been expanded to accommodate a host of new ideas and developments put forward by researchers working in the field.

Undoubtedly, one important development within RT is due to the work of Diane Blakemore (1987, 2002), who has introduced the idea of procedural, as opposed to conceptual, meaning. While most words encode concepts (e.g. *cat*), which standardly contribute to the explicit meaning of an utterance, some words encode procedures (e.g. *but*), which can be seen as constraints on the process of pragmatic inferencing involved in the interpretation of an utterance. The conceptual/procedural distinction has inspired much research within RT: it has been revisited, modified, applied to new data, or even called into question (e.g. Blass 1990; Wilson and Sperber 1993; Blakemore 2006, 2007; for discussion, see e.g. Bordería 2008).

Another strand of research has emerged from the work of Robyn Carston (1997, 2002), who has postulated a symmetrical treatment of narrowing and loosening of linguistically encoded concepts in the process of utterance comprehension. This idea has inspired extensive relevance-theoretic research in the domain of lexical pragmatics, revolving around the notion of ad hoc concept, understood as a concept constructed pragmatically by the hearer, narrower or broader than the linguistically encoded concept used by the speaker for its communication. Now, ad hoc concepts belong to the mainstream of RT and have recently found application in studies related to phenomena as diverse as: metaphor (e.g. Carston 2002, Sperber and Wilson 2008; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2007, 2008), zeugma (Solska 2008, 2010), joking (e.g. Yus 2008), polysemy (Wałaszewska 2008, Falkum 2010), over- and underextension in child language (Wałaszewska 2011), to mention just a few. The applicability of ad hoc concepts to a variety of domains is still a subject of ongoing debate.

The RT framework has been notably employed in the field of translation studies by Ernst-August Gutt, whose proposal was first fully presented in *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* ([1991] 2000). According to Gutt, faithfulness of translation can be seen as interpretive resemblance between texts and he emphasizes the importance of the mutuality of the original- and target-text audiences’ cognitive environments.

Relevance Theory has moreover been applied to various phenomena such as humour and politeness. Interpretations of humorous discourse and
the pragmatic mechanisms involved in its production and comprehension have been discussed in RT in papers by Jodłowiec (1991), Curcó (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998), and Yus (2003, 2008). Relevance Theory has been introduced to the domain of politeness studies mainly due to the work of Richard Watts (1989, 2003) as a means of explaining how participants in a social interaction infer politeness or impoliteness from utterances (see also Escandell-Vidal 1998; Jary 1998a, 1998b). The growing interest among RT researchers in analyzing (im)politeness phenomena and the theory’s success in this area have shown that RT, cognition-oriented though it is, does not have an anti-sociological bias and can be further developed to account for social aspects of communication.

The chapters of this book are grouped into six parts, which reflect some of the developments and most recent interests of RT. Part I focuses on the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning, which could be further examined in the light of research on epistemic vigilance, i.e. “an ability aimed at filtering out misinformation from communicated contents” (Mascaro and Sperber 2009, 367). Part II contains chapters that pertain to various facets of humour: jokes, puns, and satirical comedies. While three of them aim to enhance the relevance-theoretic understanding of humour, one, as a polemic with the tenets of RT, puts forward an alternative account of humour mechanisms. Part III tackles issues related to politeness and impoliteness: linguistic misbehaviour, sarcasm and banter. The chapters in Part IV are both devoted to problems that may inhibit or impair the communication process between people as a result of cognitive strategies or entertained assumptions. The contributions in Part V are related to problems of translation: adequately representing the meaning and the style of the original and adopting the right translation strategy. Part VI heads in the direction of philosophy, both contemporary and ancient, to confront the relevance-theoretic views on two selected issues, definite descriptions and metaphors, with those subscribed to by Direct Reference theorists, on the one hand, and Aristotle, on the other.

**Part I: From Procedural Meaning to Epistemic Vigilance**

Deirdre Wilson’s paper “Modality and the Conceptual-Procedural Distinction” takes as its point of departure the observation attested in cross-linguistic studies that grammaticalized markers of epistemic modality or evidentiality are acquired by children at an earlier age than the corresponding lexicalized markers. Wilson also notes the suggestion made by Matsui and Miura (2009) that the difference can be accounted for in terms of the relevance-theoretic distinction between conceptual and
procedural meaning, where lexicalized modality/evidentiality markers, such as the English expressions *I think, I know*, would be seen as encoding concepts, while grammaticalized items, such as the Japanese particles *yo* and *kana*, would be seen as encoding procedures.

On the standard relevance-theoretic treatment, procedural expressions were seen as semantic constraints on the inferential comprehension process, guiding the hearer towards an optimally relevant interpretation of an utterance. Wilson puts forward the hypothesis that the function of procedural expressions is to put individuals into some mental states by activating domain-specific procedures, which are connected with linguistic communication but not necessarily with comprehension itself. In the light of recent research on epistemic vigilance (Sperber et al. 2010), the function of such expressions can be more plausibly seen as helping the hearer to decide whether to believe an assumption or not.

According to Sperber et al. (2010), the range of epistemic vigilance mechanisms available to humans can be divided into two broad categories: those used for assessing the reliability of the speaker, and those for assessing the content of communicated information. Wilson suggests that linguistic indicators of epistemic modality and evidentiality may be linked to epistemic vigilance mechanisms of the former type. More specifically, the indicators are devices used “to display the communicator’s competence, benevolence and trustworthiness to the hearer.”

Wilson also explains the fact that procedural expressions of epistemic modality and evidentiality are acquired earlier than their conceptual counterparts. As evidenced by experimental research, epistemic vigilance mechanisms appear in infancy, thus, the procedure to be linked with the grammaticalized item is available to the child and it is only natural to make the connection between the procedure and expression. On the other hand, the acquisition of a lexicalized item is more complex: the child has to be familiar with the procedure and, additionally, with the concept encoded by the item.

Wilson’s paper, by working out some of the consequences of the ‘epistemic vigilance’ postulate, sheds new light on the conceptual/procedural distinction in Relevance Theory. The already complex relationship between conceptual/procedural and truth-functional/non-truth functional meaning becomes still more elaborate now, by adding the dimension of understanding/believing.

Christoph Unger’s chapter “Epistemic Vigilance and the Function of Procedural Indicators in Communication and Comprehension” also explores the problem of how particular linguistic items contribute to comprehension and/or argumentation and looks at selected Estonian and
Behdini Kurdish discourse connectives from this perspective. The Behdini Kurdish data include three conclusion indicating connectives, namely \( \text{vêca} \), \( \text{îna} \) and \( \text{lewma/lewra} \). The analysis of numerous uses of the connectives in various contexts indicates that, although the three connectives represent the same type, \( \text{vêca} \) and \( \text{îna} \) activate both the comprehension module and the argumentative module, whereas \( \text{lewma/lewra} \) can only be used argumentatively and its distribution is therefore more limited. The Estonian quotative -vat, which is a kind of verbal inflectional suffix, is typically treated as indicating that a proposition communicated is obtained from hearsay. Unger notes that its function is broader and that the -vat-form more generally indicates that the speaker is not committed to the truth of the proposition expressed. Having analysed a diverse range of the uses of –vat, Unger postulates that the quotative encodes two processing procedures: one located in the comprehension module and indicating that the utterance should be treated as interpretive use, and the other raising the activation level of the argumentative module as a whole. As evidenced by Unger’s thorough analyses, then, discourse connectives which are procedural in nature may activate procedures connected with understanding, or with epistemic vigilance, or both at the same time.

In “Norwegian Translations of \textit{alors}: A Relevance-Theoretic Account”, Astrid Nome analyses the French inferential and temporal connective \textit{alors} and its Norwegian translations on the basis of examples taken from the Oslo Multilingual Corpus, a parallel corpus consisting in part of French texts translated into Norwegian. First, Nome discusses the meaning of the original connective and observes that in some contexts it behaves as a procedural item, while in other contexts it displays some conceptual import. Discarding the claim that \textit{alors} is multiply polysemous with some distinct procedural and some conceptual senses, Nome states that it is best treated as encoding some procedural and some conceptual information.

In the study, 174 occurrences of \textit{alors} are investigated. The connective has several Norwegian counterparts, and is omitted in 25% of cases. Also, the proportion of the conceptual-procedural information encoded by the original is not always preserved in translation. On the basis of these findings Nome concludes that the procedural strength of \textit{alors} is small, since the omissions do not lead to significant loss in meaning, and the considerations of style and emphasis may affect the translator’s choices more than the considerations of relevance.

Susana Olmos’s contribution “Spanish \textit{pero} ‘but’ as a Marker of Contrast and its Relation with Focalising Particles” analyses the
connective mentioned in the title as a marker of contrast, showing how it is distinct from contrastive focus and from other focalising particles, such as sólo and incluso/hasta (Spanish equivalents of ‘only’ and ‘even’, respectively). The author takes a cross-linguistic perspective, focusing on the Spanish lexical items but comparing them with their English equivalents. According to Olmos, pero, the Spanish equivalent of but instructs the hearer to contrast a given representation with some alternative ones, accessible in the context. As such, the connective is seen as constraining higher-level explicatures rather than, as in previous relevance-theoretic accounts, the implicatures following from an utterance. The contrast introduced by pero is seen as different from contrastive focus in several ways, such as being more flexible. Also, in some cases, pero is incompatible with contrastive focus. On the other hand, the focalising particles sólo (‘only’) and incluso/hasta (‘even’) may freely co-occur with pero. In such cases, these focalisers, whose meaning has been accounted for in many different ways, including within Relevance Theory, make an independent contribution to the meaning of the utterance. Thus, the analysis throws light on the ways in which all these items expressing contrast achieve relevance, both alone and in combination with one another.

Part II: Humour

Part II opens with Francisco Yus’s paper “Relevance, Humour and Translation” voicing the opinion that interpretation of humour is like any other instance of interpreting ostensively-communicated verbal stimuli in that it relies on the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristic. It also has some special features which distinguish it from non-humorous utterances, in that it distracts the hearer from the matter-of-course processing, it does not enhance the cognitive environment in the way informative utterances do, and it involves ‘covert intentionality’ on the part of the speaker, as the real intended interpretation giving rise to humorous effects is hidden until the punchline is produced.

Yus presents a classification of jokes based on the types of linguistic, inferential, and contextual information exploited by the humorist. The boundaries between joke types are admittedly fuzzy rather than sharp, but what the classification shows is that humour-generating mechanisms can be found in every component of utterance meaning.

The assumption underlying the analysis of joke translatability is that resemblance between a translated joke and the original can be described in terms of three parameters called ‘linguistic props’, or scenarios: a cultural, semantic, and pragmatic one. The cultural scenario relies on a sense of
Relevance Theory: More than Understanding

unity between the humorist and the audience who share a number of background assumptions. The humorous effect may involve the realization on the part of the audience that some assumptions they held as private are in fact widespread in the community. The semantic scenario refers to the linguistic properties of words, such as polysemy, homophony, the literal reading of idioms, etc., and the way these are coded in the target language. The pragmatic scenario comprises two elements: the inferential mechanisms leading to a humorous interpretation and the balance between cognitive effects and mental effort. According to Yus, it is essential to preserve the pragmatic scenario in translation, even at the cost of the cultural and/or semantic scenario, if something has to be sacrificed.

The combination of the four factors (i.e. the cultural and semantic scenarios, and the two elements of the pragmatic one) leads to a translatability chart, on the basis of which three levels of translatability emerge: transferrable jokes, replaceable jokes, and challenging ones. Having illustrated each category with examples, the author concludes by providing an itinerary for the translation of jokes based on the three levels of translatability and on the assumption that the contribution of the pragmatic scenario outweighs the other scenarios with respect to what constitutes the joke’s meaning.

Marta Dynel’s paper called “What RT Cannot Do, IR Can – On the Incremental Interpretation of Jokes in (Non)relevance-Theoretic Terms” critically addresses the relevance-theoretic classification of jokes offered by Curcó (1995, 1996) and Yus (2003, 2008). Dynel argues that these proposals “suffer from a dearth of theoretical rigidity” for two reasons: on one hand, the criteria for distinguishing types of jokes are not strict and a single joke can often be assigned to more than one category; on the other hand, some jokes seem not to fit any category at all. As an alternative to the RT analyses, Dynel offers a description of a cognitive mechanism responsible for humour interpretation and joke typology rooted in the incongruity-resolution (IR) framework (Suls 1972, 1983; Shultz 1972; Dynel 2009). On this approach, the humorous effect is believed to be triggered by a ‘cognitive rule’ that solves the incongruity encountered in the punchline of a joke by rendering it congruent with the initial part of the joke.

The classification is based on three general patterns, called garden-path, red-light, and crossroads mechanisms. In garden-path jokes, as the joke text develops, the hearer makes initial predictions concerning the joke interpretation and then is forced to cancel them upon hearing the punchline which brings about a different understanding of the text as a whole. The red-light mechanism is the broadest of all and can have numerous specific
manifestations. It covers all the cases in which the joke’s ending comes as a surprise to the interpreter. Unlike in the garden-path type, however, the initial interpretation is not necessarily cancelled. The crossroads pattern, in turn, is believed to include incongruity at more than one level. Here, the very set-up of the joke already implies absurdity, i.e. incongruity with a typical, real-world scenario, and then another incongruity comes with the punchline. The three patterns, although originating in the IR model, are also compatible with the theoretical apparatus of Relevance Theory, which, as Marta Dynel claims, would benefit from adopting them for the sake of joke analysis.

In the chapter “Relevance-Theoretic Comprehension Procedure and Processing Multiple Meanings in Paradigmatic Puns”, Agnieszka Solska probes an apparent contradiction between the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (Wilson and Sperber 2004) and the interpretation of paradigmatic puns, i.e. ones in which the punning element occurs only once. First, Solska examines the relationship between the two senses of the punning element with respect to the type of ambiguity exploited (e.g. homonymy, literal and idiomatic reading, etc.) and the interaction of the lexical, logical, and encyclopaedic entries for the concept(s) involved. Then, following the observation that the punning effect hinges not only upon the punning element, but also on some other contextual factor, she goes on to discuss the interaction of the various types of punning elements (or conjunctors) and enabling factors (or disjunctors).

Within the class of paradigmatic puns, two subcategories can be further distinguished: double retention puns, in which both readings are communicated with equal strength, and single retention puns, in which one meaning is communicated clearly and the other as if incidentally, though also intentionally. Keeping in mind that Relevance Theory posits that possible interpretations vary in accessibility and only the most accessible one is consistent with the Principle of Relevance, Solska asks a question, which seems especially puzzling with regard to single retention puns: If the ‘right’ interpretation is the more accessible one, why is the other one ever worked out? If, on the other hand, the ‘wrong’ interpretation occurs first, why is it not abandoned when the right one becomes accessible?

According to Solska, in the case of double retention puns, when the comprehender arrives at the most accessible interpretation, the contextual, pun-enabling information in the text renders this interpretation not relevant enough and makes the comprehender re-apply the comprehension procedure to discover the other interpretation. In fact, the same is true of single retention puns, in which the absurd meaning may not be ‘relevant’ in the common sense of the word, but it is relevant in the technical sense,
i.e. in terms of the balance between positive cognitive effects and processing effort. Thus, given the ostensive stimulus chosen by the punster and the amount of processing effort it requires, the extraneous interpretation emerges to ensure satisfying positive cognitive effects. Solska concludes her paper by stating that interpreting a pun is not an exercise in disambiguation, since the punster intentionally activates two interpretations, which form a single message.

Agnieszka Piskorska’s “Humour or Horror? On Propositional Attitudes in Humorous Discourse” deals with humour of social comedy films and illustrates her analysis with the Polish film Miś (‘Teddy Bear’), mocking the absurdities of the communist era. She takes up Yus’s (2008) idea that humour can be generated by mechanisms related to deriving explicatures, implicatures, accessing the contextual information, and additionally, by creating an impression of common experience with the audience. Next to the four mechanisms mentioned by Yus, Piskorska adds propositional attitude assignment. Its role in interpreting humour is vital in comedies, in which realistic elements intermingle with intentionally-exaggerated, or satirical, elements of the plot. The viewer has to assign the right propositional attitude to each assumption, i.e. to recognize the intention of the filmmaker whether it is communicated as a realistic background element, or as a parodic element targeted at society or some individuals. This corresponds to treating an assumption as an ‘intuitive belief’ or ‘reflective belief’, embedded under some propositional attitude in terms of Sperber (1997), or to representing or metarepresenting this assumption (Sperber 2000).

Both realistic and satiric elements contribute to a relevant interpretation. Piskorska claims that the humorous effect may be spoilt if the propositional attitudes are misplaced, and what was intended as an exaggerated scene is taken to be a realistic scene (humour becomes horror) or too much effort is expended on recovering the right propositional attitude, which blocks the humorous response.

Part III: (Im)politeness

Anna Wiechecka’s contribution “Linguistic (Mis)behaviour? On Marked and Unmarked Impoliteness” focuses on the problem of misbehaviour in linguistic interaction which she discusses on the example of the linguistic behaviour of the controversial Polish pop singer nicknamed Doda. Wiechecka analyses samples of two televised interviews with Doda: one of them comes from an episode of a talk show hosted by a contentious and disrespectful Polish male journalist, the other a more formal interview
conducted by a female journalist from a Polish daily newspaper. For her analysis, Wiechecka adopts Locher’s (2004) and Locher and Watts’ (2005, 2008) relational work-based approach to politic (expected and typical), polite, and impolite behaviour. This approach rests on the notions of relational work (understood as work people invest in negotiating their relationships in interaction), frames (norms and expectations concerning (in)appropriate behaviour) and power relations, as well as taking into account the interactants’ judgements on what can be polite or impolite. The relational work-based approach is, as Wiechecka emphasises, fully compatible with Relevance Theory, which, as a theory of communication, may profit from the inclusion of the social aspect of communication.

Wiechecka pays special attention to the type of impoliteness, marked or unmarked (Locher 2004; Locher and Watts 2005, 2008), exhibited in the analysed interactions since only marked impoliteness seems inextricably linked with misbehaviour. Marked impoliteness involves a behaviour which is regarded as negatively marked in a certain frame of expectations, whereas unmarked impoliteness can even be interpreted as part of politic behaviour. Thus, Wiechecka tentatively concludes that there is no misbehaviour in the context of a controversial talk show since linguistic impoliteness is part and parcel of such shows and it is even considered to be politic. In the context of a more formal TV interview, which activates a different frame of expectations, linguistic impoliteness is marked and it will be regarded as misbehaviour.

In her paper “Non-echoic Sarcasm – a Distinction from Irony within Relevance Theory”, Anna Muszyńska challenges the relevance-theoretic claim that sarcasm is a subtype of irony, and as such can be explained in terms of echoic use. Echoic use is understood as a subtype of metarepresentation (i.e. representation of a representation) used by the speaker to attribute a certain aspect of the form of a representation or its content to someone other than herself at that moment and to express an attitude to that aspect (e.g. Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995; Carston 2002). In irony, the attribution may be explicitly marked or left implicit, and the speaker’s attitude is always that of dissociation, which can be achieved in a number of ways such as weak ridicule or severe scorn. The borderline between irony and other forms of echoic use is far from clear-cut, since there is a continuum of echoic uses which depends on the explicitness of the attribution made and the attitude expressed (Wilson 2006).

Following some researchers (e.g. Fowler 1994; Muecke 1969; Utsumi 1996), Muszyńska claims that sarcasm may involve irony, though – more importantly – it does not have to. To support this claim, she analyses some examples of non-ironic sarcasm which are mostly slogans printed on T-
shirts sold online, categorized by the seller as sarcastic. The analysis argues that echoic use is by no means a defining feature of pure sarcasm. Apart from the lack of echo, there are other features that distinguish sarcasm from irony – for example, unlike irony, pure sarcasm is an on-record speaking strategy in which the speaker’s intention is clear, it is serious and aggressive, it is used for establishing one’s superiority over the victim or it is straightforwardly impolite. As predicted by Relevance Theory and emphasised by Muszyńska, sarcasm and irony form a continuum of uses with both sarcastic irony and ironic sarcasm only to be expected. It is indeed the multiplicity of cases of sarcasm combined with irony, as Muszyńska argues, that has blinded both ordinary language users and scholars to the difference between sarcasm and irony.

In the chapter “Banter and the Echo/Pretence Distinction”, Ewa Nowik-Dziewicka investigates the notions of echo and pretence with a view to assessing their applicability in the analysis of banter, a linguistic phenomenon of ‘mock impoliteness’ (e.g. Leech 1983). Undoubtedly, banter is, in some ways, related to irony since the latter is often used for conveying impoliteness. This shows that characteristic features of irony can also be found in banter, which may bring about some confusion with respect to the two phenomena, for example, it may lead to the erroneous conclusion that banter is a subtype of irony. Nowik-Dziewicka claims that the notion of echo postulated by Wilson and Sperber (1992; see also Wilson 2006) in their echoic mention theory of irony may not be sufficient for distinguishing banter from irony, and that it is the notion of pretence developed in the pretence theory of irony (originated by Clark and Gerrig 1984) that may help separate cases of banter from cases of irony. For Nowik-Dziewicka, the key feature of banter is pretended impoliteness since by pretending to be saying something impolite, the speaker aims to strengthen close relations between him-/herself and his/her addressee(s). For banter to be understood as intended, the addressee has to see through the pretence. In the case of irony, on the other hand, impoliteness is only a side effect; it is the presence of echo and the speaker’s dissociative attitude to the thought or utterance echoed that necessarily trigger an ironic interpretation. As Nowik-Dziewicka argues, banter does not require echoic use or the speaker’s dissociative attitude; the only element it necessarily involves is pretence. Therefore, it is possible to have cases of non-echoic banter, which involves no irony (no echo, no dissociative attitude), only pretence. However, there are also cases of echoic banter with no ironic reading, in which the speaker echoes the thought or utterance attributed to someone else but does not express the attitude of dissociation. Obviously, there are also cases of banter which exploit irony via its inherent
impoliteness; in other words, an ironic remark is likely to be perceived as banter if its apparent impoliteness is interpreted as involving pretence and consequently rejected. The types of banter identified and analysed by Nowik-Dziewicka’s support her assumption that the notions of echo and pretence should be kept distinct.

Part IV: (Mis)communication

Caroline Jagoe’s article “Schizophrenia and Metarepresentational Abilities in Conversation: A Preliminary Analysis of Question Interpretation from a Relevance-Theoretic Perspective” examines the performance of schizophrenic patients in conversation, focusing on their responses to questions. Persons suffering from schizophrenia are expected to have problems in language use, or pragmatic competence, which, according to Frith (1992, 2004), may result from their impaired ability to be aware of their own mental states and to attribute such states to others (known as theory of mind or ToM), or to form complex metarepresentations. This hypothesis has been generally confirmed by the performance of schizophrenics on structured experiments designed to test either interpretation of utterances or attribution of mental states. However, little research has been done to test the ability of people affected by this disorder to participate in conversation. That such research is needed is shown by the results of a study of conversational data by McCabe, Leudar and Antaki (2004), which suggest that schizophrenics may have no impairment in the theory of mind module, but also by theoretical considerations resulting from the recent developments within Relevance Theory. According to Sperber and Wilson (2002), there exists, within the general mind-reading module, a specialized ‘comprehension module’ for processing verbal communication. Jagoe accordingly analyzes her own conversations with schizophrenics, focusing on the interpretation of questions, which she assumes to be “inherently metarepresentational”, since, in Relevance Theory, regular interrogatives in general represent relevant answers and echo questions additionally involve attributed thoughts or utterances. Contrary to what might have been expected, the analysis shows, on the basis of selected extracts of conversations, that the schizophrenics were indeed able to interpret questions correctly most of the time, and even though they did have more problems with echo questions these problems may have resulted from other factors than metarepresentational complexity, such as the presence of delusional assumptions.
Manuel Padilla Cruz in “Cautious Optimism in Second Language Learning, or How to Make L2 Learners more Competent Hearers” applies the idea of cognitive strategies used in the interpretation of utterances (Sperber 1994) to second language learning. He argues that by using the right strategy the learners may avoid many communication failures in the course of learning a second language. The author points out that failures involving learners as hearers are often equally serious and important as errors and misunderstandings due to deficient speaking skills. Failures to derive the intended meaning, either at the explicit or implicit level, may come from many sources, such as ambiguity, deictic expressions, as well as irony, the speaker’s mispronunciation or use of difficult vocabulary. Furthermore, misunderstandings may result from either accidental relevance or accidental irrelevance of some interpretations (Wilson 1999). Learners may arrive at the wrong interpretation because of inefficient processing but also, Padilla Cruz suggests, because of the use of the simplest and often inappropriate processing strategy of naïve optimism, putting excessive trust in the speaker’s good intentions and abilities to facilitate comprehension. By adopting a more sophisticated strategy, that of cautious optimism, learners will perceive more contextual data and interpretative possibilities, which will guide them to the right interpretations and in the long run will enhance their pragmatic competence in the second language. This hypothesis should be seriously taken into consideration not only by second language learning theorists and methodologists but also by teachers and learners.

Part V: Translation and Style

Kirsti Sellevold’s essay “Style as Linguistic Resemblance. Translating the ‘Disjoynted, Broken and Gadding’ Style of the Essais” deals with the problem of defining style for the sake of interpreting and translating texts. Sellevold observes that a number of existing theoretical accounts of style separate form from content thereby failing to grasp the impact that form can have on interpretation. The relevance-theoretic notion of poetic effects as an array of weak implicatures is free from this flaw, since it shows how stylistic devices contribute to the truth-conditional content of utterances. Thus “RT bridges the gap between form and content”, which, as Sellevold writes, hinges crucially on two RT postulates: one that figurative meaning is processed in the same way as literal meaning, and the other that poetic effects may arise out of the use of figurative and literal language alike.
The contribution that style makes to interpretation is illustrated by a passage from Michel de Montaigne’s *Les Essais* and its translation into English by John Florio (Montaigne [1965] 1988, [1603] 1910, respectively). Sellevoold argues that Montaigne’s mode of thought is conveyed by such stylistic means as syntactic structure and the choice of metaphor, and Florio’s successful rendering of this mode of thought in English was possible due to employing stylistic devices parallel to those of the original, which recreated the weak implicatures Montaigne intended to communicate.

Piotr Szymczak’s “Whose Line Is It Anyway? A Jewish Translation of the New Testament as a Challenge to the Notion of Foreignization as an Inert Context Marker” investigates the elusive nature of the concepts ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’ as applied to the translation of the Bible, a text for which the idea of originally envisaged context may be seen as disputable. In the Jewish translation of the New Testament the translator, David H. Stern, takes every effort to bring into prominence the Jewishness of the setting in which Jesus and his disciples lived. The strategy employed to this end includes providing theological explanations, leaving most of the proper nouns in their original transliterated forms, or using the traditional Hebrew names of clothes, or forms of greetings, the notable example of which is ascribing to Jesus the words *Shalom aleikhem!* Having discussed selected examples from the Jewish New Testament, Szymczak takes a stance against the views expressed by Venuti ([2000] 2004) and Gutt (2010) and demonstrates that the translator’s foreignizing interventions can have an impact on the text interpretation by imposing a context for processing.

**Part VI: Philosophical Insights into Relevance Theory**

Thorstein Fretheim in his paper “Relevance Theory and Direct Reference Philosophy – a Suitable Match?” analyzes definite descriptions in an attempt to confront some crucial relevance-theoretic assumptions about logical form and language of thought with the Direct Reference theory (DR) advocated by such philosophers of language as David Kaplan (1989), John Perry (1988) and François Recanati (1993, 2010). According to those philosophers, the descriptive meaning of noun phrases does not contribute anything to the truth-conditional content of the utterance. What these phrases contribute to truth conditions is the referent, whereas description merely provides context-relative “modes of presentation”. Thus, referential noun phrases are treated like indexicals and even false descriptions may contribute the intended referent to truth conditions. Such
a hypothesis appears to be in conflict with the concept of logical form as postulated by Relevance Theory, where logical form is construed as semantically incomplete output of decoding to serve as input to pragmatic inference.

Trying to resolve the conflict between the two approaches, Fretheim points out that the two-component analysis of reference as proposed by DR theory is based on the assumption that the proposition expressed is the same for speaker and hearer. Such an assumption makes little sense in RT, which assumes a more psychologically realistic perspective of overlapping, rather than identical, thoughts entertained by the two parties to the communication process. Thus, from the perspective of RT, there are at least two reasons to reject the hypothesis that descriptive meaning of noun phrases fails to enter the truth conditions of the utterance. First, such a hypothesis entails intrusion of pragmatic factors at the level of LF; second, the hypothesis is based on the assumption of the same propositional content between speaker and hearer and this underlying assumption is inconsistent with the picture of communication assumed in RT. Considering these two reasons, however, the author produces and analyzes intriguing linguistic evidence to show that the DR hypothesis about nil contribution of descriptive meaning of definite NPs to truth conditions makes perfect sense, which suggests that it necessary to introduce modifications to the relevance-theoretic conception of logical form. Such descriptive meaning, rather than being dismissed as providing “mode of presentation”, is hypothesized to form a second, subsidiary proposition.

Ewa Wałaszewska’s article “The Relevance of Aristotle for Relevance Theory: The Case of Metaphor” attempts to destroy the well-established image of Aristotle as the originator of the so-called traditional approach to metaphor, according to which metaphor is treated as a linguistic ornament. It turns out that Aristotle’s views, reconstructed on the basis of representative quotations and examples discussed by the ancient philosopher, show a remarkable convergence with some basic assumptions of Relevance Theory. It might come as shock to learn that cognitive linguists and pragmaticists were not the first to recognize the omnipresence of metaphor in everyday speech. There are further, more telling similarities, though, as the Aristotelian typology of metaphor not only suggests the continuum embraced by the relevance-theoretic concept of loose use but also indicates specific processes corresponding to broadening and narrowing used in the formation of ad hoc concepts. It appears that insights gained from a close reading of Aristotle’s writings may enrich contemporary theories, and those researchers who have relied
on simplified accounts will certainly benefit from (re-)reading these classical texts, even though they would rather, as Twain famously suggested, have already read them.

References


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