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Variation parameters in verbal parodic echoing: partiality, inaccuracy, and complexity

Parámetros de variación en el eco paródico verbal: parcialidad, inexactitud y complejidad

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ABSTRACT: Previous studies on verbal parody (e.g., Rossen-Knill and Henry, 1997) have overlooked the importance of variation in understanding its communicative complexity. This article addresses this by examining variation parameters in verbal parody, treating it as a case of echoic mention (Sperber and Wilson, 1981), where an echo conveys speaker's dissociation from the source material (Wilson and Sperber, 2012). While ironic echoes focus on content, parodic echoes focus on form mostly for comic effect. Echoes can vary based on partiality, inaccuracy, and complexity. In irony, partial echoes are used to highlight significant elements, while full echoes are employed when no special focal attention is needed or, if needed, it has been achieved through modification and/or complexity strategies. Parody favors partial echoes to select aspects of source behavior that enhance the comic effect, with inaccuracy and complexity used for emphasis. Both

¹ The order of authorship is determined by the first author's prior work on echoic communication, which forms the foundation for the analytical portion of this paper. Both authors contributed equally to data collection and the writing process. The second author was primarily responsible for the introduction (section 1) and the review of parody examples (section 2), while the first author designed sections 3 and 4, focusing on echoic communication and echoic variation, respectively. The selection and analysis of examples in section 4 were carried out collaboratively by both authors.

irony and parody share three complexity strategies: compounding (combining relatable echoes), cumulation (sequencing meaning or form alternates), and chaining (using a second echo to cancel out the meaning implications of the first).

Key words: echo, echoic complexity, echoic mention, echoic variation, irony, parody, partial echo

RESUMEN: Los estudios existentes sobre parodia verbal (p. ej., Rossen-Knill y Henry, 1997) han pasado por alto la importancia de la variación para comprender su complejidad comunicativa. Este artículo aborda esta cuestión mediante el examen de los parámetros de variación en la parodia verbal. Ésta es tratada como un caso de mención ecoica (Sperber y Wilson, 1981) donde un eco transmite el distanciamiento del hablante respecto a lo originalmente expresado (Wilson y Sperber, 2012). Mientras que los ecos irónicos se centran en el contenido, los ecos paródicos se centran en la forma principalmente para lograr un efecto cómico. Los ecos pueden variar en función de su parcialidad, inexactitud y complejidad. En la ironía, los ecos parciales se utilizan para resaltar elementos significativos, mientras que los ecos completos se utilizan cuando no se necesita una atención focal especial o, si es necesaria, ésta se ha logrado mediante estrategias de modificación y/o complejidad. La parodia favorece los ecos parciales para seleccionar aspectos de la conducta original que potencian el efecto cómico mientras que la inexactitud y la complejidad se utilizan por razones de énfasis. Tanto la ironía como la parodia comparten tres estrategias de complejidad: composición (combinar ecos relacionables), acumulación (secuenciar significados o formas alternativas) y concatenación (usar un segundo eco para cancelar las implicaciones de significado del primero).

Palabras clave: complejidad ecoica, eco, eco parcial, ironía, mención ecoica, parodia, variación ecoica

1. INTRODUCTION

Parody is commonly understood as a “[c]onscious and deliberate imitation, either of content or form, which intends to achieve a mocking, or simply a comic, effect” (Dupriez, 1991, p. 327). Similarly, Cuddon (1998, p. 640), defines this phenomenon as “the imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous”. By contrast, Hutcheon (2000, p. xxi) chooses to define it “as a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity”. The first and second definitions emphasize (ostentatious) imitation and its resulting comic or even mocking effect; the third definition introduces the notion of “distance” from the target of parody, which originates in the difference between the imitation and what is imitated.

These aspects of parody are oriented to its traditional treatment as an art form. In this treatment, parody has been noted to have certain communicative roles. Thus, in connection to literature, Bakhtin (1981) highlights its role in creating a dialogic relationship between texts and their readers. In a more multifaceted view, Hutcheon (2000) sees parody from different perspectives: in intertextual terms, the parodic text

comments on, critiques, or reinterprets the parodied work; in dialogic terms, parody creates a dialogue between the original text and the parodic text, where the latter challenges, subverts, or reinforces the message of the former; in relation to interpretation, parody involves the recontextualization of the original work, often through the use of humor, exaggeration, or incongruity; in relation to its intent, besides a critique, parody can be a form of tribute, celebrating the original text while offering a new perspective on it; finally, in cultural terms, it reflects the fragmented and self-referential nature of contemporary culture, which is why it is also a central feature of postmodernism.

Parody is not limited to artistic creation and culture. It is also present in everyday communication as *verbal parody*. This subcase of parody focuses on imitating someone's verbal output in terms of form rather than content, often with modifications for humorous effect. For example, one may parody oddities in someone's accent, the accidental mispronunciation of a word ("nucular" for "nuclear") or someone's inadvertent use of a malapropism, as in "dance flamingo" for "dance flamenco":

John: My brother danced flamingo when he lived in Spain.

Paul: Yes, John, he danced "fla-mín-go", a lot!

An initial study in this regard was provided by Rossen-Knill and Henry (1997), who dealt with the role of parody in enhancing indirect speech act meaning, but their analysis underplayed the function of imitation. To address this weakness, it is necessary to understand the communicative aspects of imitation in this phenomenon. An initial step in this direction is thinking of parody as a case of mention, like irony, as Sperber and Wilson (1981, p. 311) pointed out within the context of Relevance Theory. They observed that irony involves mentioning propositions, while parody involves mentioning linguistic expressions. However, they did not delve into the details of echoic activity for either phenomenon, focusing instead on finding a theoretical framework to account for ironic meaning derivation consistent with the basic assumptions of Relevance Theory (see also Wilson, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2012).

The notion of parodic echo is thus in need of development. Our point of departure is an extended version of Sperber and Wilson's (1981) initial observation. First, we define imitation in parody not only as a case of mention of the linguistic expression but, more generically, as a form-oriented case of echoic mention. This extension explicitly brings into the account of parody paralinguistic aspects of communication that cooperate with the lexico-grammatical aspects of linguistic form of the message. Second, we argue that the communicative role of echoic mention in parody is to be studied in terms of three parameters of *echoic variation*: partiality, inaccuracy, and complexity. These three parameters are not exclusive of parodic echoes. They are shared with ironic echoes with the difference that echoes of this kind are oriented to content rather than form. This difference has implications in terms of the communicative role of both kinds of echoes and of their scope of application: the focus on form does not exclude the incorporation into parodic echoes of content-oriented expressions. However, such uses are subsidiary: they are simply intended to contribute to the meaning implications of formal imitation, which remains an invariant property of parodic echoes.

To account for the three variation parameters in verbal parodic echoing, the argumentation in the rest of the present article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the notion of (verbal and non-verbal) parody with a view to determining the essential properties of this phenomenon. This overview is illustrated with a selection

of examples from different artistic domains. Section 3 introduces the notion of echoic mention in communication. This notion is illustrated with reference to ironic and parodic echoes, which are examined in terms of their convergences and divergences. Section 4 examines variation in content-oriented and form-oriented echoes. The article again discusses similarities and differences between the two types of echoes within this analytical dimension. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main proposals made in the present study.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL EXAMPLES

Parody has a long tradition in rhetoric, literature, film, and music (Dentith, 2000; Hutcheon, 2000; Boxman-Shabtai, 2018). This section provides an overview of historical examples to set the stage for an initial characterization that will later be developed and integrated into a broader account.

One central feature of parody is its imitative role. In ancient Greek a *parodia* (literally, a song that is set ‘besides or against’ another song) was a narrative poem that imitated the style and prosody of epics (Dentith, 2000, p. 10). It was used in philosophy. For example, Timon of Phlius’ *Silloi* imitated the style and language of other philosophers while exaggerating their flaws or misrepresenting their ideas. One example is Timon’s parody of Epicurus, who believed in the pursuit of pleasure as the greatest goal in life. Timon mimicked Epicurus’ writing style using a sarcastic tone to belittle his teachings.

Parody has often been used to support satire, as in Aristophanes’ play *The Frogs* (Dentith, 2000, p. 45; Santamaría, 2015), where the god Dionysus descends to the underworld to bring back the recently deceased playwright Euripides so he could rescue Athens from its political and cultural unrest. Dionysus’ journey is a parody of the typical heroic journeys of Greek mythology and literature. Aristophanes also employs parody to ridicule the tragic poets that he finds along the way, emphasizing their shortcomings and distorting their ideas.

There are other notable examples in literature. Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) parodies romantic and chivalric literature (Fishelov, 2002). Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) imitates the style and conventions of travel literature (Lund, 1988) to create fantastic settings and characters to criticize European politics and religious quarrels (cf. Pollard, 1973, p. 36). Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) parodies the conventions of epic poetry by focusing on a trivial event—a woman’s lost lock of hair—to critique the vanity of high society (Dentith, 2000, p. 13, 192; Hutcheon, 2000, p. 11; Al-Sarhed, 2017). Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) parodies the popular adventure stories of the 19th century (Beidler, 1992) while satirizing American attitudes towards race, morality, and religion (Nafi & Daghamin, 2019, p. 37). More recently, Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a feminist parody of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) critiquing the portrayal of women and colonialism in the original work (Herischian, 2012, p. 72).

In non-narrative literature, Jonathan Swift’s satirical essay *A Modest Proposal* (1729) parodies early 18th century Irish pamphlets that offered illogical solutions to all kinds of social problems (Wittkowsky, 1943). Swift proposes that, to solve economic problems, impoverished Irish people should sell their children as food for the rich, thus ironizing the British government’s policies towards Ireland (Booth, 1974, p. 105).

In the world of cinema, the movie *Airplane!* (1980) parodies disaster films like *Zero Hour!* (1957), a drama about a group of passengers trying to land a plane after the

pilots become incapacitated. The film is riddled with over-the-top acting and intentionally ridiculous dialogues and situations.² Examples include an air traffic controller becoming overwhelmed and abusing substances and passengers having extreme reactions to an inedible meal accompanied by nonsensical dialogue from the flight attendants. This scene imitates, in a distorted way, characteristic elements of typical in-flight meal services.

In the field of music, an example of parody is the song “Weird Al” Yankovic's *Eat It*, which imitates Michael Jackson's *Beat It*.³ In this song, Yankovic maintains the original melody and general structure of Jackson's hit (i.e., including the setting, attires, and choreography), but replaces the violent gangs and street fights of *Beat It* with humorous lyrics and situations related to food. *Eat It* replicates Jackson's red leather jacket and black felt hat, but adds food-themed clothing, such as a sandwich costume and a cake hat. *Eat It* contains amusing food-inspired dance moves, such as feigning to eat a sandwich or using a fork and knife as props, while *Beat It* has synchronized choreography and Michael Jackson's characteristic dance moves.

From these examples, we can postulate the following properties of parody:

- (i) Parody is focused on the imitation of the formal aspects of its target and, if it imitates non-formal aspects, it does so in so far as such aspects characterize a form of communication (e.g., a literary genre).
- (ii) The imitation in parody is not accurate but contains a deliberate element of exaggeration and/or distortion.
- (iii) Parody can have a comic effect.
- (iv) When it holds, the comic effect of parody arises from exaggeration or distortion.
- (v) Parody can support a critical ironic stance, which, in its literary and other artistic manifestations, can take the form of satire.

It should be noted that properties (i) and (ii) are invariant, whereas (iii), (iv), and (v) are not, despite their perceived productivity. Property (i) aligns parody with other forms of echoic communication (e.g., Galera, 2020; Ruiz de Mendoza & Barreras, 2022; Lozano, 2023). Property (ii) places parody within the purview of hyperbolic communication. The main function of hyperbole is to convey emotional impact (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017), which, in context, can readily have a comic effect. That explains why properties (iii) and (iv) stem from property (ii). Finally, property (v) relates to the echoic and hyperbolic nature of parody specified in (i) and (ii). The use of a distorted echo communicates the parodist's dissociation from the imitated behavior, which, given an ironist's typically critical stance, facilitates additional ironic elaborations of the text.

These properties of parody and its convergences and divergences with irony will be taken up in Section 4. Since imitation in verbal irony and in verbal parody is echoic, it is now necessary to introduce the notion of echoic communication, which applies to irony as a content-oriented case of mention and to parody as a case of form-oriented mention.

² Liebenson, D. (2023) How ‘Airplane!’ became a first-class spoof, The Washington Post, October 18, 2023: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2023/10/18/airplane-movie-book-zaz/> (accessed April 5, 2024).

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcJjMnHoIBI> (accessed April 5, 2024). See Riedl, M. (2020). Weird ai yankovic: Generating parody lyrics. arXiv preprint arXiv:2009.12240: <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2009.12240.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2024).

3. FUNDAMENTALS OF ECHOIC COMMUNICATION

3.1. ECHOIC MENTION

An echo is a form of allusion based on the repetition of previous linguistic material. Echoic communication is grounded in the notion of *mention*, discussed in analytical philosophy in connection to the notion of use. The basic aspects of the use-mention distinction are very simple. Quine (1979, p. 23) gives, among others, the following examples:

- (1) Boston is populous
- (2) “Boston” is disyllabic.

Example (1) is a sentence about Boston. It uses the word “Boston” to refer to the famous city of Massachusetts. By contrast, example (2) is a statement about the word. It does not use the word but only mentions it. Sperber and Wilson (1981, p. 303–306) provide a more detailed discussion of these ideas in their application to the explicit-implicit distinction, which is a central topic in pragmatics. Reported speech is a clear case of mention, which can be explicit as in (3) or implicit as in (4):

- (3) Paul was stressed about the situation. “What should I do?”, he asked himself.
- (4) Paul was stressed about the situation. “What should I do?”

These two examples mention linguistic expressions, but it is also possible to mention propositions, either explicitly, as in (5), or implicitly, as in (6):

- (5) Paul was stressed about the situation. What should he do? he asked himself.
- (6) Paul was stressed about the situation. What should he do?

Sperber and Wilson (1981, p. 306) refer to examples like (3)–(6), which repeat what someone said before, as cases of *echoic mention*. They also argue that implicit echoic mention of propositions is possible beyond the domain of reported speech:

- (7) Mary: I’m tired; Paul: Oh, you’re tired. I’m tired too.

Paul’s remark, *Oh, you’re tired*, is not a case of reported speech since it is not intended to inform anyone of what Mary said. However, it is an example of implicit echoic mention of a proposition. It is used by Paul (i) to indicate to Mary that he has understood her previous utterance and (ii) to express his immediate reaction to its content. This reaction is attitudinal. Imagine Paul’s remark in (7) in a context in which Mary is obviously tired but Paul thinks that she should still attend to her duties. Paul’s echoic utterance can be taken to convey his frustration that Mary is not taking care of her obligations, while he does. In a somewhat different context where Paul thinks Mary is not tired and is simply making up a false excuse, Paul’s reaction could be understood as ironic, that is, one that conveys Paul’s reservations that Mary is telling the truth and his disapproval of her behavior.

Unlike the other kinds of echoic mention, implicit echoic mention of a proposition is often associated to attitudinal reactions. Sperber and Wilson (1981) do not

clarify why this is so, but it can be easily deduced from the distinctions that they offer. Evidently, explicit or implicit echoic mention of linguistic expressions has a metarepresentational function, as revealed by (2)-(4) above, whereas explicit mention of propositional content is focused on factual (or “offstage”) representation, as is clear from (5). The question then is: what is the function of the implicit mention of propositional content? Comparing (6) and (7) yields an interesting insight in this regard. We have already noted how Paul’s emotional reaction to the content of Mary’s assertion in (7) is associated with his echo of such content. Since this echo is not an example of reported speech, the focus cannot be representational, which gears the hearer’s attention to the attitudinal dimension of the utterance. The status of (6), however, is midway between that of representation and the expression of attitude. The reason is that (6) is a case of reported speech, but the utterance “What should he do?” is only implicitly presented as such, thus leaving room for a less factual, more subjective (or “onstage”) interpretation where the speaker places himself within the context of the decision to be made.

3.2. IRONIC ECHOES

One case where the implicit echoic mention of a proposition is clearly associated with the expression of attitude is provided by irony (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Consider (7) again, but in a context in which Paul does not believe that Mary is tired. If Paul provides any evidence that he has reservations about Mary’s tiredness, his remark *Oh, you’re tired* will be interpreted as ironic. In this account, for an utterance to be considered ironic, the hearer requires to detect the presence of the implicit echoic mention of a proposition and to have (linguistic, paralinguistic, or contextual) evidence that the speaker feels detached from the content of the proposition.

In a recent cognitive-linguistic development of the echoic account of irony, Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano (2021) have argued that the function of an ironic echo is to convey pretended agreement. The idea that irony results from an act of pretense comes from Clark and Gerrig (1984) and it has been strongly contested by relevance theorists (e.g., Wilson, 2006, 2013). The arguments they present have been summarized in Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano (2021, p. 217), but these arguments are only applicable if we think of the pretense account of irony as excluding other explanations. For example, the pretense approach postulates that irony results from the speaker publicly pretending to perform a speech act but cannot explain why ironic utterances may not preserve the speech act that they target. This point can be exemplified through the following ironic reactions to Mary’s assertion *I’m tired* in (7). This utterance can be the ironic target of these other utterances, none of which preserves the assertion and/or complaint values of *I’m tired*: *Oh, you’re tired* (assuming), *You are tired, aren’t you?* (checking), *Yeah, right, you couldn’t be more tired* (agreeing). By contrast, in the relevance-theoretic echoic account there is no assumption on the speech act status of either the echoic or the echoed utterances. This is not exactly the case in the cognitive-linguistic development of the echoic account, which argues that echoic mention is the result of the activity of a cognitive operation involving the accurate or inaccurate repetition of a previous utterance or thought. This approach further maintains that ironic echoic mention conveys a generic speech act value, which is that of pretended agreement. Other speech acts conveyed by an echoic ironic expression are secondary to this general value. This observation can be illustrated by the following utterance, where Jeannette’s disappointed boyfriend pretends to encourage her to keep telling the truth: *Yeah, right, Jeannette, just keep telling the truth, as always*. This

pretended encouragement is based on Jeannette's boyfriend supposedly agreeing with her claim that she always tells the truth.

What is interesting about this cognitive-linguistic view of irony is that it integrates the apparently incompatible pretense and echoic accounts of irony. Echoic mention in ironic utterances is used to express pretended agreement that the echoed utterance or thought is true, while the opposite is the case. At the same time, this view of irony is fully consistent with the picture that emerges from the relevance-theoretic account of echoic communication offered above, where the implicit echoic mention of a proposition is used to express attitude, including ironic attitude. This extended account of echoic mention in irony will be used in the following section to contextualize our discussion of parody.

3.3. PARODIC ECHOES

Verbal parody is based on the imitation of the formal aspects of verbal behavior with the intention of communicating some attitude. It is thus similar in function to irony. However, to achieve its purpose, parody, unlike irony, does not exploit the content of what is communicated. When content is addressed in parody, that happens through the combination of parodic imitation and the use of communicative forms that call for the implicit echoic mention of a proposition, as is the case of irony. Let us see how this takes place.

We start with a simple real-life example of parody as reported to one of the authors by a fellow parishioner. A 12-year-old boy is taken to church every week by his parents to what he considers are boring Sunday School classes. After church, he gathers with his friends and performs a distorted imitation of the Sunday School teacher's voice, tone, and reading style, especially when he quotes Bible verses. The boy takes John 3:16 (KJV) ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life") and exaggerating the teacher's hand movements and using a deep-sounding voice reads a modified version of this verse with long pauses, emphasis on every syllable, and a small but significant change in the last part (here in *italics*): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him *should perish of everlasting boredom*". The features that characterize this parodic act are in essence the same that we distinguished in the overview of traditional examples of non-verbal parody in Section 2. However, here we see these features in the light of the notion of echoic mention:

- (i) The parodic act focuses on the imitation of verbal behavior; that is, it is a case of echoic mention of linguistic expression and paralinguistic aspects of verbal communication.
- (ii) Echoic mention is inaccurate on account of the (inherently hyperbolic) distortion of a selection of the formal aspects of verbal communication, whether linguistic (the repetition of utterances) or paralinguistic (tone of voice, pitch, volume, pauses, silences, and even facial expressions and gestures).
- (iii) Echoic mention can additionally be inaccurate on account of utterance content manipulation. It must be noted that any changed content still preserves its ability to evoke the original content, so that parallels can be drawn, and variation becomes more meaningful. This is often done by

retaining partial formal lexico-grammatical similarity with what was said by the parodic target. In the example above, the new content, which is a distorted echo (“perish of everlasting boredom”) of the Biblical quote, is intended to reveal the parodist’s attitude, i.e., how he feels about the parodic target (the Sunday School teacher and his classes).

- (iv) In echoic mention, inaccuracy can have a comic effect.

This example does not involve irony, but it could do so by adding the implicit echoic mention of a proposition. In a situation in which part of the boy’s friends believe that the Sunday School class is exciting, the same parodic act would clash against this assumption and convey irony. As we saw in some of the examples of Section 2, a parodic act can support irony. Interestingly, the opposite is not the case (i.e., ironic acts do not support parodic acts) since irony requires a primary focus on the content of utterances, which is secondarily aided by formal issues (tone, pitch, etc.), but parody indirectly embraces content through form, which is primary.

4. VARIATION IN ECHOIC COMMUNICATION

Echoic communication is not necessarily based on a perfect repetition of content or form. Variation is possible. We now examine the role of variation in both ironic and parodic echoes. It should be borne in mind that, as mentioned above, the former are content-oriented (i.e., form is secondary) whereas the latter are form-oriented (i.e., content is secondary).

4.1. VARIATION IN CONTENT-ORIENTED ECHOES

4.1.1. *Partial repetition*

Let us consider these sentences:

- (8) Johan: Jeannette sings like an angel! Paul: Yes. Like an angel!
(9) Johan: Jeannette sings like an angel! Paul: Yes. Jeannette sings like an angel!
(10) Johan: Jeannette sings like an angel! Paul: Yeah, right. Like an angel.
(11) Johan: Jeannette sings like an angel! Paul: Yeah, right. Jeannette sings like an angel.

Imagine for (8) and (9) a context in which it is evident that Paul is impressed by Jeannette’s voice and for (10) and (11) one in which Paul is not impressed at all. Paul’s verbal reaction in (8) and (10) is based on the partial repetition of what Johan has said. In (8) Paul expresses agreement with Johan’s admiration of Jeannette’s singing abilities, whereas in (10) the repetition is used ironically. This ironic meaning is cued by the two consecutive agreement adverbs (*yeah, right*) preceding the echoic utterance. It has been observed that, beyond contextual parameters, an utterance is more likely to be interpreted as ironic if there are enough verbal and non-verbal cues indicating that it communicates pretended agreement (Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2021). Given this situation, it could be thought that a partial echo is weaker as a pointer to irony than a full echo. However, this is not the case. Partial echoes, besides being more economical, draw our attention to

specific elements of the echoed material. This happens whether there is irony or not. In (8), which is not ironic, the simile *like an angel* captures the way in which Jeannette's singing impresses the hearer. In (10) the focus of attention is also on the manner component but this time to express strong skepticism. The question is that, under normal interpretive circumstances, the partial repetition featured in examples (8) and (10) is communicatively more effective than the full repetition exemplified in (9) and (11). It goes without saying that, with the help of marked stress prominence and extra vowel length, (9) could be used to convey irony too.

4.1.2. Modification

Echoic mention can experience unintended alterations due to poor recall but sometimes alterations are intended to convey special meaning effects. Such alterations can combine with partial echoes. Consider:

- (12) Source utterance: It's fun to sit around and listen to people talk.
Echoic utterance: Yeah, right. It's SÓOO much fun!

In (12) partial echoing draws our attention to the speaker's attitude of complaint, which results from the contrast between what is said in the anticipatory "it" part of the underlying construction: *It's fun to X* underscores the speaker's attitude to the propositional content conveyed by X. Focal prominence is then enhanced through the modification of the partial echo. The agreement adverbs act as conventional indices of irony (Attardo, 2000) by pointing to the pretense aspects of the act of echoic mention provided by the utterance. The echoic part of the utterance is then modified by inserting the adjectival emphasizer *so much*, which is further strengthened through a shift in its default prosodic contour consisting in marked accentual prominence (graphically shown by stress marks and small caps) and vowel lengthening (graphically shown by reduplicated vowels). This modification is intended to emphasize the attitudinal aspects of the utterance captured by the *It's fun to* part of the construction. Note that the propositional content part can also be modified. However, when this happens the meaning effect is different. Compare:

- (13) Echoic utterance: It's fun to sit around and, oh my boy, LÍISTEN to people talk.
(14) Echoic utterance: It's fun to sit around and, oh my boy, STÁAAND people talking.

The modification of the propositional content can be carried out through such communicative resources as extraclausal hedges (*oh my boy*), and other resources like the ones used in (12) (e.g., stress, vowel lengthening). The rationale behind strategies of this second kind is not to put emphasis on the speaker's general ironic attitude but to modulate some of its specific aspects. In (13) and (14) the speaker shows that he specifically resents having to listen to people talk. In (13) the resentment is implicated by the ironic tone of the utterance, while the lexical choice of (14) makes it explicit thus conveying a greater degree of annoyance.

4.1.3. Hyperbolic enhancement

Traditionally treated as a rhetorical exaggeration, hyperbole is a case of overstatement used for attitudinal emphasis. For example, in the sentence *I have a ton of homework to do*, the word *ton* is used to denote an unrealistic, virtually impossible amount of pending work. It implies that the speaker feels overwhelmed by the excess of homework. Ruiz de Mendoza (2014) has argued that this implication arises from interpreting the speaker's attitude to the real-world situation in terms of the imaginary attitude that the impossible task in the counterfactual scenario would generate. Scholars have noted that hyperbole interacts frequently with irony thus acting as a potential index of irony besides serving to enhance its attitudinal (or affective) meaning (Barnden, 2020). Consider again example (11) in a context where it is clear to the speaker, but not to the hearer, that the person in question sings rather poorly. The hyperbole in *like an angel* is more powerful than other laudatory expressions such as *very well*, *great*, *beautifully*, etc. Because of this, it serves to enhance the speaker's ironic attitude much like modified echoes. Hyperbole can also enhance the attitudinal component of ironic meaning when operating from outside the main irony-bearing unit. Consider (15), uttered by a frustrated speaker who feels that he has wasted an excess of time on a tedious task:

(15) [a] I'm so excited to spend long hours on my income tax report. [b] Nothing better than this!

Example (15) contains an initial ironic sentence (part [a]) followed by a reinforcing comment (part [b]). Part [a] is based on the construction *I'm so excited to X*, which, in its non-ironic use, creates the expectation that the speaker likes what X denotes. The fixed part *I'm so excited to* is echoic of what people exclaim when X holds true, but in (15) this echo clashes with the real-world scenario depicted by X. The ironic meaning implication is that the speaker is not excited to engage in X. In this ironic context, the inherently hyperbolic expression in part [b], which is external to the previous ironic sentence, is also echoic of what people say when they really like something, thus reinforcing the negative attitudinal inference arising from part [a].

4.1.4. Complexity

Complexity in irony has been investigated in Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2019). We summarize three basic strategies used to produce complex ironic echoes. One is *compounding*, where the speaker uses syntactic mechanisms (e.g., interclausal paratactic coordination) to bring together into a single ironic utterance two separate but potentially relatable echoes:

(16) Yeah, sure, John, you do all the hard work and I just hang around with my friends!

In (16) imagine a situation where both the speaker, Paul, and the hearer, John, work very hard but John, although aware that Paul also works hard, seems to ignore his efforts. In this context, *you do all the hard work* echoes John's belief that he is the one that puts in the most effort, while *I just hang around with my friends* echoes the potential (and erroneous) implication that Paul's efforts are irrelevant. This echo is intended to

make John aware of this potential implication and of how unfair it is. Adding the second echo involves greater echoic complexity but it makes the resulting ironic act more powerful.

A second strategy, *cumulation*, is based on the consecutive appearance of different but semantically related echoic terms which apply to the same target situation: *Yes, sure, she's an angel, a gem, a real treasure!* The communicative impact of this strategy rests on the enhancing effect of successive addition.

The third option is *chaining*, a rebuttal strategy where the speaker echoes a previously echoed thought. Imagine that Jeannette fantasizes about her neighbor having a secret identity as a spy. Her best friend, Elizabeth, ironizes: *Yeah, right, she surely is the new Mata Hari!* To their surprise, one day, as they watch the news, Jeannette and Elizabeth are shocked to learn about Jeannette's neighbor's arrest on charges of espionage. Jeannette then ironizes back on her friend's previous remark: *Yeah, right, she surely is the new Mata Hari!*

4.2. VARIATION IN FORM-ORIENTED ECHOES

Verbal parody imitates the form of messages. However, the way in which this is done, with meaningful variations in terms of the selection of the features to echo and in their realization, can direct our attention to some aspects of the content. Unlike ironic echoing, where partiality can work independently of other variation dimensions, verbal parodic echoing is selective, which disfavors the use of full echoes. In addition, either partial or full echoes will generally be weak unless combined with other forms of variation.

4.2.1. *Partiality and modification*

Parodists tend to be selective in imitation. The example of the 12-year-old boy provided above is a case in point. The boy chooses the aspects of the Sunday School teacher's manner of teaching that he thinks are more likely to elicit laughter. The same holds for the stock examples of verbal and non-verbal parody overviewed in Section 2, all of which select only some aspects of the parodic target. The question, then, is not when parodic echoes are partial but when and why they are sometimes a complete imitation of everything someone says including voice, tone, and mannerisms.

In principle, a non-partial parodic act, based on full imitation of form, is possible, but, when that happens, other dimensions of inaccuracy, such as modification and hyperbole, can be recruited to make this kind of act communicatively relevant. The following parody sketch of a famous TV host illustrates this parody type:

- (17) TV host: Welcome back to the show! We've got an exciting lineup of guests and performances for you today. Our first guest is the one and only Will Smith, the talented multi-award-winning actor and film producer. Let's give him a big welcome!

Parody host: Welcome back to the show! We've got an exciting lineup of disgusts and grievances for you today. Our first disgust is the one and only Will Smith, the talented multi-award-winning hitter and havoc-wrecker. Let's give him a big unwelcome!

In (17) the parody results in acid humor. Beyond formal imitation and possible paralinguistic distortions, central to its humorous effect is the meaningful substitution of some words for others (sometimes similar sounding ones) that evoke the infamous incident in which Will Smith slapped Chris Rock during the 94th Academy Awards. In this case, modification is carried out through *simple substitution*, which is based on a one-to-one replacement. But substitution can be complex, as will be discussed in connection to cumulative parodic echoes in the next section.

4.2.2. Complexity

Parodic echoes are sensitive to compounding, cumulation, and chaining. Let us take compounding first. Compounding occurs when two parodic acts are combined into one. Consider the situation in which a teacher usually starts her lessons at school by saying *Waiting to start* while impatiently waiting for her students to stop making noise. Then, she usually finishes by saying *Homework for tonight*. One day before the teacher arrives at class a student imitates her saying *Waiting to start* with an exaggerated tone and pitch. Another student responds by repeating her finishing remark. A third student combines the two parodic utterances into one:

(18) Waiting to start! Homework for tonight!

Compounded parodic echoes can have a higher impact than their contributing echoes in isolation. This happens because each echo highlights complementary behavioral aspects of the target of the parody. This form of combining parodic echoes runs parallel to compounding in ironic echoes, with the only difference that in the case of irony the focus is on the content and its associated attitudinal implications. However, given the many aspects of form involved in parody, there are other ways of integrating parodic echoes. For example, we can adapt a movie character's way of speaking to that of another character. Imagine using the deep, mechanical, authoritarian voice of "Star Wars" character Darth Vader on the lips of "The Godfather" character Don Corleone to utter the latter's famous catchphrase:

(19) I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.

This catchphrase occurs when Corleone's godson Johnny Fontane asks him for a favor. Fontane, who wants to become a film actor, has been rejected by the producer, so he needs Corleone's help to get the role. The phrase is a warning and a promise, suggesting that rejecting the offer could have dire consequences. This line is often used as a shorthand reference to the power of organized crime and the lengths to which criminals will go to achieve their goals. Using Darth Vader's voice features adds to the seriousness of the warning.

Parodic compounding can be a useful strategy to convey contrasts in content that are subsidiary to the humorous effects produced by the contrasts in form. For example, consider the political rivalry between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Trump's slogan *Make America Great Again* aimed to evoke a sense of nostalgia for a perceived better time in American history, which he associated with restricting immigration, reducing government regulation and taxes, increasing military spending, and projecting a more assertive foreign policy. By contrast, Biden's slogan, *Build Back Better*, conveyed the

idea of not just recovering from the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also creating a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable society in the process. The parodic compounding of both slogans into *Make America Great Again, Build Back Better*, accompanied by an exaggerated gestures and voice tone, is potentially humorous. However, the second element of the compound can be interpreted as specifying the way to carry out the goal stated in the first, thus criticizing Trump's message and suggesting that America will become great through improved focus on infrastructure, clean energy, education, healthcare, and social welfare. Since parody generally involves mocking imitation, the criticism involved in the content of the parodic expression should be interpreted from this perspective; that is, parody provides the attitudinal element necessary to understand the implied message.

The second complexity strategy is cumulation. In parodic echoes cumulation requires the sequencing of successive alternates of an element of form, optionally accompanied by exaggerated tone and pitch, to create a feeling of disproportion (like the one created by hyperbole in content-oriented echoes) with enhanced humorous effects. Consider the following variant of the parody in (17):

(20) Our first disgust and our worst distrust is the one and only Will Smith, the talented multi-award-winning hitter, walloper, spanker, and havoc-wrecker.

In (17) substitution was based on simple one-to-one replacement. In (20) the parodic modification meaning effect created by substitution is enhanced by adding *worst distrust* to *first disgust* as a more elaborate substitute for *first guest* thereby giving rise to *complex substitution* through cumulation. In addition, *walloper* and *spanker* combine with *hitter* to create a *substitute complex* for *actor*. Cumulation is thus a mechanism to contribute to modification. Like simple substitution, it is based on formal manipulation. However, the alternate formal elements are chosen not only to produce form-oriented imitation but also as a way of using content to contribute to the overall humorous effect of the parody. This contribution is secondary to form, which is the primary object of imitation.

Another example of the meaning impact of complex versus simple substitution in the context of cumulation is provided by the contrast between (21) and (22) as parodic variants of the famous *Star Wars* quote *May the Force be with you*, used by Obi-Wan Kenobi throughout his career as a Jedi:

(21) May the Sauce be with you.

(22) Yeah, may this tangy, zesty, irresistible Sauce be with you, as you embark on this savory quest.

The context for these two examples is a group of friends gathering for a barbecue. One of them is in charge of preparing the sauce for the grilled meat and, as they begin cooking, another member of the group playfully passes the remark in (21) and another friend reacts by uttering (22). The parody in (21) goes beyond humorous substitution by incorporating a metaphor that draws a parallel between the importance of the Force in the *Star Wars* universe and the significance of sauce in enhancing the flavor of meat. Just as the Force, when harnessed by gifted individuals, ensures favorable outcomes in various situations, a good sauce plays a crucial role in elevating the taste of meat. This metaphor adds depth to the parody, highlighting the essential nature of both

elements within their respective contexts. Then, the reaction in (22) uses a cumulation strategy, returning the parody to its primarily humorous role partially lost in (21) while emphasizing the required properties of the sauce.

Finally, parodic echoes can acquire complexity through chaining. As with ironic echoes, where interlocutors can ironize over each other's ironies, a parodic act can be the target of another parodic act. This requires the imitation of a previous imitation. Reconsider the first echo of example (18) again, which parodied a teacher's way of showing her apparent indifference to her students' unruly behavior. One student imitates her by reproducing her typical initial remark: *Waiting to start*. Another student, tired of his classmate's habit of mimicking their teacher decides to mock his classmate's imitation by repeating the same utterance while distorting the distinctive elements of the classmate's parodic performance (e.g., voice tone, pitch, facial expression, and gestures). It must be noted that parodic chaining may also exploit modification and complexity strategies. To illustrate this point, consider the famous line *I am the king of the world!*, uttered in the movie *Titanic* by excited third-class passenger Jack Dawson (played by Leonardo DiCaprio), who shouts it while standing with his arms outstretched on the railing of the Titanic. During a casual gathering of friends in the backyard of one of their houses, one of them stands at a picnic table, spreads his arms and shouts out *I am the king of the backyard!* This parody replaces *world* with *backyard* to humorously bring the grandiose statement down to a more mundane setting. Later, when the group moves inside the house, another friend decides to parody the first friend's imitation. He stands on a chair in the living room, raises one arm, and proclaims *I am the emperor of the living room!* This second parody takes the imitation a step further by changing *king* to *emperor* and *backyard* to *living room*, further exaggerating the contrast between the original grand statement and the ordinary domestic setting.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has addressed two aspects of echoic communication that have largely gone unnoticed in the literature: (i) the focus on content or on form and (ii) echoic variation. We have discussed parallels and differences between two characteristic examples of echoic uses of language in relation to both aspects of echoic communication: ironic echoes and parodic echoes.

Both types of echoes convey attitudinal dissociation, which in irony is perceived as criticism (from mere skepticism to acid disparagement) that may or may not combine with humor. In parody its primary role is to achieve a comic effect, which, because of deliberate exaggeration, tends to be felt as mockery. In parody the echoed content is largely irrelevant but not so the content changes arising from variations in form, which are intended to enhance the comic effect.

Echoic variation involves the production of partial and/or otherwise modified echoes (e.g., through hyperbolic enhancement). In irony, partial echoes have a focal function, which can be complemented with modification and complexity strategies. Full echoes are used when no special focal attention is needed or when modification is enough to highlight the elements of the utterance that need special attention. By contrast, in verbal parody full echoes have no clear role since the parodist only imitates those aspects of someone's verbal behavior that are relevant for comic effect. In this situation, variation has a greater enhancement role than in irony, since it adds to focal attention to place special emphasis on the elements of the echo that are particularly meaningful. Echoic

complexity is also used for emphasis, both in irony and in parody. The two phenomena share the same complexity strategies: compounding, cumulation, and chaining. In irony, compounding creates a single ironic utterance by combining two relatable echoes. In parody, compounding involves the combination of two parodic acts into one. Cumulation sequences meaning alternates in irony and form alternates in parody. Finally, chaining consists of echoing a previous echo to question its content (irony) or its attitudinal implications (parody).

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