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Cooperation, bona-fide mode of communication, and the violation of Grice's maxims

Questo articolo analizza la relazione problematica tra i concetti di cooperazione, modalità *bona-fide* e violazione delle massime conversazionali di Grice, sottolineando in particolare come i concetti di cooperazione e modalità *bona-fide*, benché molto simili, non siano da intendersi come sinonimi, e come questa coppia di concetti e l'idea di violazione non si escludano reciprocamente. In secondo luogo si discutono i modi in cui la violazione di una massima conversazionale e la rottura della modalità *bona-fide* o cooperativa contribuiscano a definire vari 'tipi' comunicativi (quello serio, quello ambiguo, quello ironico e quello comico), sottolineando il ruolo decisivo dell'intenzione perlocutoria nel processo interpretativo di un testo.

1. Cooperation and bona-fide communication

According to a pragmatic approach, communication has a standard/default way of functioning, that is, respecting a principle of cooperation which establishes itself between the speaker and the listener when the former is (or is perceived as being) committed to the truth, the relevance, and the clarity of his/her message. The criteria which regulate the standard mode of communication are outlined by Grice (1975, 1989) in the theory of the Cooperative Principle, which hinges on the following 'imperative':

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1989: 26)

This cooperative kind of communication results from the articulation of four conversational maxims (see Grice 1989: 26-27), namely: the maxim of quality, which accounts for the truth of the message; the maxim of relation, which accounts for the relevance and saliency of the message; the maxim of quantity, which regulates the level of informa-

tiveness of the conversational contribution; and the maxim of manner, which concerns the clarity, linearity, and conciseness of the message.

The concepts of ‘cooperative’ and *bona-fide* communication, though closely related to each other as well as to the maxims of the Cooperative Principle, are – however – different. The idea of *bona-fide* refers primarily to the semantic level of the message and to its conformity and congruity to the reality/state of affairs which it is intended to transmit/communicate. ‘Cooperation’, on the other hand, is a pragmatic concept and refers to the conditions required for a successful and felicitous informative exchange – depending both on the speaker’s commitment to the intelligibility of the message, and also on the existence of disambiguating pragmatic factors for the receiver’s adequate processing and interpretation of the message.

Such pragmatic disambiguating conditions are accounted for and fit into the scheme of the Cooperative Principle under the concept of ‘conventional’ and ‘conversational implicatures’ (Grice 1975, 1989), which may be inferred or worked out to fill any informative gap.

If adherence to the maxims establishes the default cooperative and *bona-fide* mode of communication, discourse in general (with only few exceptions, for example, very technical kinds of discourse or instances of legal, economic, or scientific discourse, etc.) also allows for and accommodates the non-respect of these maxims, which might be fairly frequent, and might be intended for fluency or cohesion or aimed at some peculiar aesthetic or rhetorical effects.¹

Grice (1989: 30) identifies four ways in which it is possible to depart from or not conform to the maxims:

- by openly ‘opting out’ of a maxim (i.e., choosing not to provide informative material), as is the case in polite interruptions, like the following example:²

(1) A: What happened next?

B: Sorry. I can’t say more. (Adapted from Grice 1989: 30)

¹ It should be noted, in fact, that the avoidance or refusal to provide all *useful* information – once the *necessary* bits are there – while challenging the interlocutor(s), “represents a resource for hearers, and this is very strategic for the speaker” (Poncini 2004: 144).

² All examples are constructed, unless an authentic source is given.

- by ‘coping’ with a clash between maxims (i.e., violating one maxim but avoiding to violate the others in order to be as informative as possible), as in the following example:

(2) A: Where does C live?
B: Somewhere in the south of France. (Grice 1989: 30)

- by ‘blatantly violating’ or ‘flouting’ a maxim in order to exploit it, as in the following examples:

(3) A: Teheran’s in Turkey, isn’t it, teacher?
B: And London’s in Armenia, I suppose. (Jucker 1997: 27)

(4) A: Did you enjoy Nancy’s party?
B: Well, It wasn’t exactly ‘my cup of tea’...

- by ‘quietly’ and ‘unostentatiously’ violating the maxim (i.e., lying, play-acting, joking, see Raskin 1985: 101)³, as in the following examples:

(5) Student to geography teacher: Is Teheran in Turkey?
Teacher to student: Yes, it is.

(6) Teacher to student: What do you call animals that eat only meat?
Student to teacher: Dangerous...
(at <http://www.randomjoke.com/topic/riddles.php?8849>)

Not conforming to the maxims does not necessarily coincide with a disruption of the flow of information, with the breaking of the cooperative principle or with the abandonment of the *bona-fide* mode of communication. This is most evident in examples (1) and (2), where there is

³ In consideration of the examples provided by Raskin (1985) about unostentatious violations, it is useful to add that such ‘unostentatiousness’ may be of three kinds: 1) complete, i.e., the violation within an utterance remains totally undetected by the listener, as in the case of lying; 2) pretended/agreed upon, i.e., when the violation is deliberately accepted or ignored by the listener almost as if it were not there, as in the case of play-acting; 3) partial, i.e., the violation remains covered and unnoticed for most part of the utterance/communication up to a point when some crucial incongruity arises that forces re-interpretation (through the working out of implicatures which are more broadly ranging and less contextually biased than those in standard – *bona-fide* and cooperative – communication), as in the case of joking.

no direct violation of the maxims and the communication remains cooperative (that is, as informative and as intelligible as possible) as well as *bona-fide* (that is, straight-forward and conforming to the meaning – to the concept, the situation, the state of affairs, etc.).

More specifically, in (1) the speaker is truthful and clear in metadiscursively admitting his/her impossibility to provide the (quality and quantity of) information required. A sudden shift is introduced from the old information required (WHAT HAPPENED NEXT) and the new information introduced (B's answer), but this new information about the speaker's position (i.e., his/her impossibility to say more) with respect to that given subject is qualitatively and quantitatively relevant for the advancement of the informative flow to its final stage and meaningful conclusion. In (2) the speaker's utterance is also *bona-fide* and cooperative in that the information is clear, sincere, truthful, and as informative as possible (for the speaker), although not as required (by the hearer).

Examples (3), (4), (5), and (6), on the other hand, deserve a more detailed discussion as instances of direct violation. Examples (3) and (4) – blatant violations – are most peculiar in that they break the *bona-fide* mode of communication but not the cooperative mode. On the one hand, in fact, the disruption of *bona-fide* depends on a striking/noticeable inappropriateness between the utterance and its referent – in (3) an obvious falseness, violating the maxim of quality, in (4) a metaphor, a figurative use of language violating the maxims of quality and relation. 'Cooperation,' on the other hand, resides in the fact that elements within the non-*bona-fide*/inappropriate utterance favour specific implicatures or suggest specific logical mechanisms to resolve the inappropriate bits into a meaningful solution that corresponds to the overall meaning, is contextually appropriate and is useful for the advancement of the informative exchange.

More specifically, in (3) the *bona-fide* negative answer is substituted by an analogy (TEHERAN IN TURKEY like LONDON IN ARMENIA) which clearly – thus cooperatively – implies a negative answer (TEHERAN NOT IN TURKEY). In (4) the negative answer is substituted and implied by a recognizable metaphor: given the meaning of MY CUP OF TEA as SOMETHING RELEVANT TO ONESELF, the negative use of such metaphor stands for a negative answer.

Examples (5) and (6) – unostentatious violations – are different,

breaking both codes. More specifically, example (5) is non-*bona-fide* in that the information is deliberately (if not markedly) false or does not conform to the state of affairs it is supposed to communicate, and similarly it is non-cooperative in that the information is not as true as requested, thus bringing the informative exchange to a non-meaningful (i.e., untruthful and dishonest) conclusion. Example (6) is non-*bona-fide* in that it is deliberately non-relevant to the kind of question and context (if qualitatively possibly true), and it is uncooperative in that it is not as informative as required, thus interrupting the advancement of the meaningful and *bona-fide* informative flow and entailing or producing some humorous effect (Raskin 1985, Attardo 1994).

In addition to its semantic content, the perception of humour in (6) is also influenced and favoured by the context and the intentions of the participants. Let us now consider the same sentence in (6) as if uttered in a slightly different contexts than in the example given above: first in a University natural sciences class (6a) and secondly by a child in the first class of a primary school (6b). In (6a) we eventually perceive the violation of the maxim – and the disruption of the *bona-fide* and of the cooperative mode – as ‘deliberate’ on the part of the student, probably aimed at some humorous effect and favouring a humorous response (McGhee 1971) as the ideal. In (6b) little doubt exists about the sincerity of the child’s answer – intended as *bona-fide* and cooperative, and observing the maxims but undermined by the speaker’s little competence on the subject. Such an answer does not intend or imply a humorous response as the ideal one. Yet, not being as informative as required – thus interrupting the meaningful/*bona-fide* informative exchange – it might be interpreted humorously. In other words, the child’s intended *bona-fide* and cooperative answer might be ‘deliberately’ interpreted in a non-*bona-fide* and uncooperative way by the listener, and perceived as humorous.

This last point raises three questions relevant to this paper, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections, and namely:

- the breaking of the maxim as a subjective feature in communication (i.e., either intentional or unintentional, that is, either meant or perceived) (Sections 2 and 3);
- the possibility of miscommunication (Sections 2 and 4);
- the relation existing between the violation of maxims, intentionality and the perception of humour (Section 4).

2. Awareness of the violation

As shown in the discussion above, when and whether a maxim is violated is not a predetermined or objective factor; in fact, the violation might be either intended by the speaker or only perceived by the listener. On the one hand, the speaker might violate the maxims:

- deliberately (when the information he/she is giving does not conform to his/her competence/knowledge of the world) and:
 - ‘blatantly’, in order for the violation to be detected, or
 - ‘non-ostentatiously’, in order for the violation to be either:
 - ◆ completely undetected (the case of undetected lies, as in (5)), or
 - ◆ non-completely (partially or pretendedly) undetected (the case of play-acting and joking, as in (6)); or
- non-deliberately (when the information transmitted by the speaker conforms to his/her competence, but such competence is not adequate/conforming to reality).

On the other hand, the listener might perceive or detect a violation of a maxim either:

- when it is intended by the speaker – i.e., when utterer and listener share a similar competence on a subject and the same background knowledge; or
- when it is not intended by the speaker – i.e., when the listener’s competence is more likely to conform to reality than the speaker’s.

Given these possibilities and possible combinations among them, the ideal pragmatic condition for a felicitous (and possibly cooperative) informative exchange seems to be the case of inter-subjective awareness or ‘mutual manifestness’ (Sperber/Wilson 1986/1995) of the violation, where the speaker and the listener are both aware that a maxim is or has been violated; in other words, when the speaker’s meaning and intention are recognized and his/her utterance is processed accordingly by the listener. Other cases are also possible, like the case of lying, where awareness of the violation needs to be exclusively on the part of the speaker. But if both participants are and remain unaware of the violation, the communicative exchange containing such violation is wrongly processed, and there is a failure in cooperation leading to miscommunication, with the sole exception of lying.

The violation of a maxim produces incongruity. Because of the “biologically rooted human tendency” (Yus 2003: 1311) to find a relevant interpretation for every text, any semantic incongruity encountered activates a problem-solving and inference-making process (on the part of the listener) aimed at minimizing inconsistencies and eventually ruling out incongruities (Ruch 1998a, 1998b, Yus 2003). The main assumptions regarding such problem-solving process are that:

- it is strongly biased by the context of the communicative exchange (Rothbart 1976, Sperber/Wilson 1986/1995) and the participants’ intention (Attardo/Chabanne 1992);
- it may or may not lead to a humorous resolution (Lewis 1989, Ruch 1998a, 1998b).

Both issues are discussed in the next section.

3. *Violation in context*⁴

In the light of what was stated in the previous section, here we intend to question the following assumption:

If the hearer establishes beyond reasonable doubt that the speaker violates the cooperative principle for *bona-fide* communication, the hearer’s next immediate hypothesis, in our culture, is that the speaker is engaged in humor. [...] Humor seems to be the next most socially acceptable form of communication in our society after *bona-fide* communication. (Raskin 1985: 104)

This claim implies a strong and almost necessary connection between maxim violation and humour. In reality, maxim violation primarily produces semantic ambiguity or incongruity, and, according to incongruity-resolution theories of humour (Suls 1972, Rothbart 1976, Shultz 1976, Lewis 1989, Ruch 1998a, Chiaro 1992)⁵, incongruity alone is not sufficient a condition for humour – producing primarily puzzlement, cu-

⁴ By context we mean both the linguistic/textual material preceding and following the incongruous utterance (i.e., the *co-text* in Halliday 1978) and the non-linguistic environment in which the informative exchange occurs (i.e., the *con-text* in Halliday 1978).

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the incongruity-resolution theories of humour see Attardo 1994 and Brône/Feyaerts 2003.

riosity, fear or even aversive reactions (Lewis 1989, Ruch 1998b) and requiring a re-processing of the information that only under particular conditions⁶ may be resolved humorously. The claim above completely obliterates the rather realistic possibility of a violation simply due to some ‘error’ in communication (i.e., lack of competence or of shared knowledge, the non-recognition of the communicative code or problems in establishing the channel, a simple mistake in pronunciation or in word choice, etc., see Norman 1988, Reason 1990, Woods 1990, Jones 1999) rather than to some humorous intent. As a matter of fact, on a pragmatic level, given the principle that wrong inferences (including inferences about the humorous quality of an utterance) contribute to miscommunication (see Jones 1999, Gibbs/Colston 2001), in the presence of some non-conformity to or violation of a maxim, an utterance is not immediately and necessarily recognized nor appreciated as humorous, but rather processed according to the overall and contextually compatible meaning and mode of the communicative exchange up to that point (Sperber/Wilson 1986, 1995). In other words, implicatures and inferences worked out to process the inappropriate or incongruous bits of information are strongly biased, influenced by and dependent on the context of the exchange. The disambiguating potential of the context has often been claimed when the incongruity is the result of a shift between the literal meaning and its referent, due to a switch to a figurative/metaphorical meaning (Gibbs 1994, Yus 2003). But the same disambiguating potential can be claimed when the incongruity between the literal meaning and its referent is due to some error or mistake in communication.

Consider the following example:

(7) A: I like my cereal with cold *snow*. (Frishkoff/Tucker 2001: 5)

In this case, especially (but not exclusively) if the speaker utters (7) in front of a bowl full of milk and cereals, the highly incongruous bit of

⁶ Among these conditions theorists enlist a “willing suspension of disbelief” (Attardo/Raskin 1991) or a “suspension of critical assessment” (Perlmutter 2002), the presence of an opposition between frames or schemata (Norrick 1986) or scripts (Raskin 1985) and a “local logic” (Ziv 1984) or a “logical mechanism” (Attardo/Raskin 1991, Hempelmann 1999, 2000, Attardo/Hempelmann/Di Maio 2002) justifying such opposition.

information (i.e., SNOW) – violating the maxim of quality – can be easily contextually disambiguated. The incongruity – SNOW instead of MILK – might in fact be due to semantic relatedness⁷ or priming (Holcomb/Neville 1991, Kutas/Lindamood/Hillyard 1984) and, as it is, does not favour a humorous interpretation but rather a meaningful and cooperative accommodation via context-based implicatures.

Perception or awareness of a serious context (*bona-fide* and cooperative) inhibits humorous processing of the incongruity and rather favours, requires or leaves space for error correction and repair (either self- or other-initiated) (Jefferson 1974, Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977, Fromkin 1980, Levinson 1983) as a contextually more compatible way of dealing with the incongruity in view of an informative advancement of the communicative exchange. Consider the following example:

- (8) A: I need a new bolt for my oil filter.
B: A BOLT?
A: I mean for my oil PAN.
(at <http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsAnOtherInitiatedRepair.htm>)

Here the lexical item BOLT is incongruous and is questioned by B thus producing a repair (i.e., PAN) which rules out the incongruity and re-establishes a *bona-fide* informative exchange.

It is only when a non-serious, humorous or joking context is instantiated or becomes manifest that the incongruity is processed as non-*bona-fide* and uncooperative, and perceived as humorous. A humorous context may be activated by linguistic and extra-linguistic means. On a pragmatic ground it establishes itself:

- metadiscursively (and retroactively), by such comments as “I’m kidding!” on the part of the speaker, rendering his/her intention patent;
- when incongruous bits of information do not require nor benefit from any repair/error correction, and instead any disambiguation process – other than the humorous – only spoils the peculiar impact

⁷ The concept of relatedness refers to the case of a lexical item (or expression) which is “incongruous with respect to the sentence context, but semantically associated with (primed by) the immediately preceding word (e.g., *snow* in the sentence “I like my cereal with cold”)” (Frishkoff/Tucker 2001: 5).

of the utterance without achieving any progress of the informative exchange;

- when instances of humour (over a text, or a macro-text) are frequent, and/or inter-related (Kolek 1990, Chiaro 1992, Attardo 2001).

Added to these there might also be extra-linguistic elements (intonation, delivery, facial expression, laughter, etc., see Norrick 1993, 2001) helping the instantiation of the humorous context.

In conclusion, singling out the common feature to all the linguistic and extra-linguistic points listed above, it might be claimed that what establishes a humorous context is the recognition and the awareness of a peculiar *intention* to be humorous on the part of the participants, that is, when it becomes evident that “the purpose of the mode [the speaker] is engaged in [...] is not to convey any information contained in the text he is uttering but rather to create a special effect with the help of the text, [possibly] to make the hearer laugh” (Raskin 1985: 101). The question of ‘intentionality’ will be dealt with in linguistic/pragmatic terms in the next section.

4. The role of perlocution

According to the Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1975, 1979), communication functions on three levels of meaning, namely the locutionary, i.e., the literal meaning, what is said, the illocutionary, i.e., the implied meaning, what is meant by an utterance, and the perlocutionary, i.e., the effect that is meant to be achieved through an utterance. Intentionality – the intent of being perceived as ironic or humorous – falls under the third category.

The necessary relationship between humour and perlocution (that views humour as the result of or the response to a specific perlocutionary goal) has been noted in many studies (Shultz 1976, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1981, Roventa-Frumusani 1986, Attardo/Chabanne 1992). But the concept of perlocution, especially in relation to humour, is far from unproblematic. In fact, it should be further subdivided into:

- perlocutionary goal/intention on the part of the speaker when uttering a sentence;
- perlocutionary effect/intention on the part of the listener when inter-

preting a sentence (which normally depends on the recognition/manifestness of the speaker's perlocutionary intention).

If strictly related, the speaker's and the hearer's intention may not always coincide. Consider the following example:

- (9) A: How long does it take by taxi to Piccadilly Circus?
a. B: One minute.
b. B: You don't need a taxi – it's only two minutes' walk.
(Kempson 1975: 163)

As we can see, despite the rather straight-forward question and the clear intention of the speaker seeking information, the possible perlocutionary effects produced on the listener, if not totally dissimilar, vary in significant ways; in fact:

- the effect produced on a.B. is that of being simply informative (a rather 'passive' response to A's request);
- the effect produced on b.B. is that of being as helpful as possible (a more 'active' response to A's request).

The discrepancy between the speaker's and the listener's intention might be more drastic when some maxim violation (especially if unostentatious) is part of the utterance. Consider the following example:

- (10) I enjoy avant-guard music – chords are so *passé*!
(at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A700958>)

Unlike in the previous example, the perlocutionary effects of (10) on the listener might be of two very different kinds. That same sentence might in fact be interpreted either as ironic (that is, as if intended for a humorous effect) or as highly pretentious (if meant as a straight-forward consideration). If the context in which (10) is uttered offers no clues as to how the speaker intended it to be, the possibility of misinterpreting the speaker's meaning is high.

'Ideal' and felicitous communication is thus considered to be based on the inter-subjectiveness or mutual manifestness of what is at stake at the perlocutionary level, so that the intention (humorous or otherwise) of the speaker when encoding a message corresponds to the intention of the listener when interpreting the message thus regulating the process of inference-making in meaningful ways. The lack of such shared aware-

ness of the intent necessarily leads to miscommunication (see Jones 1999), and such cases of infelicitous informative exchange lie outside the scope of the present study.

For the purpose of this paper we claim that the recognition/manifestness of the speaker's perlocutionary intention is the prerequisite for any hermeneutic process. Consequently, the recognition of the speaker's humorous intention is the preliminary step towards that suspension of critical assessment (Perlmutter 2002) which is necessary to process (and to humorously disambiguate) the incongruity. Such a process of humorous disambiguation is enabled by inferences that are more broadly ranging and less context-based than those required for *bona-fide* and cooperative communication.

5. *Four types of utterances*

Given the concept of perlocution discussed above, and recovering the concepts of non-conformity to a maxim, of *bona-fide* communication, of cooperation and their ways of interacting discussed in the previous sections (1, 2 and 3), it is possible to provide a framework within which any utterance can be analysed and categorized according to four different types: the serious, the ambiguous, the ironic and the humorous. From a pragmatic point of view, these types are characterized by the following features:

1. The serious⁸ type is found in utterances where:
 - the communicative maxims are respected, making the meaning clear, as in the following example:

(11) Many students failed to hand in their assignment.
(Jucker 1997: 22)

or:

- the non-respect of a maxim is not marked in that:

⁸ The term 'serious' has been deliberately adopted for its vague and broad meaning, being here referred to a communicative type which encompasses all those utterances which, in very broad terms, are easily intelligible and featured by a non-humorous perlocutionary goal.

- it is not detrimental to the advancement of the informative flow, to the process of inference-making for the grasping of the overall meaning of the message: the operation of filling the informative gap or of filtering out the informative surplus is made possible and easy by the rest of the text (or co-text, in Halliday 1978), its context (or con-text, in Halliday 1978), and the respect of the other maxims;
- no other perlocutionary intention (other than being informative, convincing, clear, etc.) is perceivable beyond the locutionary and illocutionary reading of the message.

Consider the following examples:

- (12) Peter: Would you drive a Mercedes?
Mary: I wouldn't drive ANY expensive car.
(Sperber/Wilson 1986: 194)

- (13) The leaves danced in the breeze. (Sperber/Wilson 2002: 587)

Mary's answer in (12) is serious and matter of fact; despite the violation of the maxim of relevance, the utterance is *bona-fide* and cooperative, hinging on implicatures which are easily and conventionally recoverable (i.e., MARY WOULD NOT DRIVE A MERCEDES as A MERCEDES IS AN EXPENSIVE CAR).

Example (13) is serious discourse in that, though *non-bona-fide* as an instance of figurative language (flouting the maxim of relevance), it is fairly intelligible and meaningfully processed once the metaphor and its conversational meaning is recognized (i.e., "The leaves moved in the breeze as if they were dancing", Sperber/Wilson 2002: 587).

2. The ambiguous type (see also Knoeferle/Crocker/Scheepers/Pickering 2003, Knoeferle/Crocker 2004) is found in utterances where the non-respect of a maxim is noticeable in that:

- it is detrimental to the advancement of the informative exchange, as the textual and contextual material available is not enough to substantiate meaningful and disambiguating inferences to fill the informative gap produced by the maxim violation;
- no other perlocutionary intention (other than being informative, convincing, clear, etc.) is perceivable.

Consider the following examples:

(14) A: Do you like onions?

B: Well, they usually give me indigestion...

(15) Ph.D. student to his/her supervisor: The government has changed the rule for academic competitions. But I will not die.

(Capone 2003: 30)

The utterances are ambiguous: if they are meant as *bona-fide*, they are uncooperative as they hinge on and require implicatures which are not easily recoverable from the text (14) or the context (15). In (14), due to the lack of disambiguating elements, B's answer may be taken either as a positive (i.e., "Yes, but they usually give me indigestion") or a negative answer (i.e., "No. Because/In fact they give me indigestion). Similarly, the Ph.D. student's utterance in (15), and especially its last part, lacking meaningful semantic details or meaningful references to the context, remains open to various interpretations (even for its actual addressee, the supervisor – see Capone 2003: 30 – who ideally shares the same context and background knowledge as the student⁹). Given that no humorous intention is or becomes manifest after the maxim violation, such utterances remain ambiguous unless some (self-initiated or other-initiated) repair, correction or modification is produced. Without such semantic adjustments any further step into the disambiguating process might lead to miscommunication. It is important to note that the awareness of a serious (i.e., informative, persuasive, etc.) perlocutionary intention inhibits the instantiation of the willing suspension of disbelief necessary for a humorous re-processing of the ambiguous/incongruous bits resulting from a maxim violation.

3. The ironic type is found in utterances where the non-respect of a maxim is marked in that:

⁹ Capone (2003: 30) – the actual supervisor to whom the utterance in (15) has been addressed – notes that the student's proposition ("I will not die") can be easily expanded to "I will not die as a result of this", and might imply either "I will not fail to obtain an academic job", but also "I would be grateful if you could write a good reference," which, on a pragmatic ground, are fairly different and hold completely different illocutionary and perlocutionary status.

- it is not detrimental to the advancement of the informative flow, but
- a specific perlocutionary intention (that of being amusing) is perceivable.

In other words, ironic utterances manage to transmit their (truthful, relevant and contextually appropriate) meaning via an inappropriate and maxim-violating codification.

Consider example (3) and its discussion above, as well as the following example:

- (16) Miss X produced a series of sounds that correspond closely with the score of “Home sweet home.” (Grice 1989: 37)

The utterance is ironic in that it is non-*bona-fide* (violating the maxim of manner), but cooperative in that it implies and favours a contextually appropriate meaning. Indeed, the incongruous/inappropriate bits:

- revolve around a logical mechanism which favours the access to the necessary disambiguating implicatures (i.e., the phrase TO PRODUCE A SERIES OF SOUNDS – being a ‘technical’ explanation of the verb SING – implies that ‘TECHNICALLY SPEAKING’ MISS X CAN SING; the phrase CLOSELY CORRESPOND means NOT BEING IDENTICAL TO, etc., all forms implying a difference between Miss X’s ‘action’ and the action of ‘proper singing’);
- reveal a humorous perlocutionary intention favouring the suspension of critical assessment in processing the incongruous/inappropriate bits;
- allow to recover the appropriate meaning (i.e., MISS X CANNOT SING) under the inappropriate presentation, a meaning which is conform to the reality and possibly aimed at the informative advancement.

4. The humorous type is observed in utterances where the non-respect is marked, in that:
- it is detrimental to the advancement of the informative exchange, and
 - a specific perlocutionary intention (that of sounding amusing) is perceivable.

Consider example (6) and its discussion above. Consider also the following example:

- (17) I love defenceless animals, especially in a good gravy.
(at <http://www.coolsig.com/3/7/3>)

The utterance, and particularly its closing section, is humorous in that it is non-*bona-fide* and uncooperative (does not conform to the truth, is not committed to the truth, nor contextually appropriate), thus representing a breakdown of the informative flow. Humorous utterances:

- present the listener with incongruous bits of information (i.e., LOVE FOR ANIMALS + GRAVY) which need to be processed through some logical mechanisms ((17) activated by the double meaning of the verb LOVE as FINDING SOMETHING/SOMEBODY PLEASANT vs. GOOD TO EAT);
- reveal a humorous perlocutionary intention, instantiating a willing suspension of critical assessment on the part of the listener;
- allow the working out of implicatures (i.e., ANIMALS AS FOOD) not in accordance with the overall meaning of the exchange (i.e., LOVE FOR ANIMALS), thus interrupting the informative exchange rather than being aimed at its advancement.

The humorous type is mostly the case of jokes, which have peculiar semantic structures, self-contained and self-sufficient, containing all bits of information and clues (as of implicatures) for their processing (see Sala 2004: 53).

Given the similar status of irony and humour, both being laughter-eliciting linguistic phenomena and sharing the same perlocutionary intention, it is useful to stress that the necessary and sufficient condition to distinguish the two phenomena is the contextual compatibility of the meaning arrived at after the process of disambiguation. As a matter of fact:

- the inappropriate bits in ironic utterances require and favour a disambiguation which is semantically compatible with the old information, that is the rest of the text and especially its extra-linguistic context (i.e., TEHERAN IS NOT IN TURKEY in (3), MISS X CANNOT SING in (16));

- the incongruous bits in humorous utterances require a re-processing of the incongruity leading to a resolution which is not compatible with the old information presented in the text (i.e., LOVE FOR ANIMALS in (17)) and its context (i.e., the DEFINITION OF ANIMALS THAT ONLY EAT MEAT in (6)). (See also Raskin 1985, Attardo 1994)

Concluding this section, we can claim that by condensing the concept of *bona-fide*, of cooperation and of maxim violation under the idea of detrimental/non-detrimental violation, and by resorting to the concept of perlocution, we have the necessary and sufficient variables according to which each communicative instance can be effectively analysed as of its relation to truthfulness, its intelligibility, its level of informativeness and humorous quality, and according to the combinatory possibilities of such features it is easy and meaningful to distinguish the four types of communicative instances presented above.

6. Conclusion

In this article we have discussed the concept of cooperation, of *bona-fide* communication, of maxim respect/violation and of perlocution, and their relation to the truthfulness and informativeness of the informative exchange. In the first section we have distinguished the concept of *bona-fide* communication from the related but utterly different concept of cooperation. More specifically, we have shown that the idea of *bona-fide* communication depends mainly on the conformity between the message and the state of affairs it is meant to communicate, whereas the concept of cooperation refers to the most appropriate, effective and intelligible way to communicate that truth. This is an important distinction, as it allows a two-dimensional approach to the analysis of the meanings and mechanisms behind various kinds of utterances, ranging from truthful and serious texts, to lies, to instances of play-acting or jokes. Resorting to the concept of communicative maxims (Grice 1975, 1989) we were able to analyse the pragmatic possibilities brought about by the violation of a maxim, either when it entails the disruption of the *bona-fide* mode of communication alone or when it interrupts both the

cooperative and the *bona-fide* modes. Having shown how maxim violation may lead to semantic ambiguity/incongruity, we have questioned the assumption from a semantic theory of humour that claims a necessary interdependence between incongruity and humour perception, discussing the important and disambiguating role played by the context of the communicative exchange and by the intentions of the participants. We have also seen how perlocution affects the hermeneutic process of a message and how it may lead to a serious or non-serious processing/disambiguation of any incongruous bits. With these pragmatic tools (the concepts of maxim, of cooperation, of *bona-fide* mode of communication and of perlocution) – and their combinatory possibilities – it has thus been possible to provide a framework with which to categorise all kinds of utterances into four types, according to a two-level approach measuring both the level of noticeability/markedness and relevance of the maxim violation (as detrimental or non-detrimental violation) and the perlocutionary intention (serious or humorous) of the speaker. With such analytical tools it has thus been possible to provide reliable definitions of the following utterances: serious (– detrimental violation, + serious intent); ambiguous (+ detrimental violation, + serious intent); ironic (– detrimental violation, + humorous intent); and humorous (+ detrimental violation, + humorous intent).

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