Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého
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Effects of Language Proficiency on Irony Detection in a Second Language

(diplomová práce)

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Vliv jazykové pokročilosti na odhalení ironie v druhém jazyce

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Olomouc 2022

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vlastnoruční podpis

"The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated."

--- Wittgenstein

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Abstract

This diploma thesis focuses on intercultural pragmatics by analysing the effects of second language proficiency level on irony detection in a second language. It investigates the relation between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence in a second language in terms of success rate of irony detection and examines two cues, namely context and prosody, which interlocutors rely on in the process of recognizing irony by analysing interpretation of communicative situations by native speakers of Czech with different levels of language proficiency in English. It aims to provide answers to the questions of whether more proficient language users are more successful in revealing the ironic intent of utterances presented to them and whether any difference can be observed between the two groups in terms of the cues they give preference to in order to interpret ironic utterances.

Key words: irony, intercultural pragmatics, second language, linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, language proficiency level, context, prosody, communicative intent

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá interkulturní pragmatikou, přičemž analyzuje vliv úrovně jazykové pokročilosti v druhém jazyce na odhalování ironie v tomto jazyce. Zkoumána je souvislost mezi jazykovou a pragmatickou kompetencí v druhém jazyce s ohledem na úspěšnost rozpoznání ironie, rovněž jako dvě vodítka, konkrétně kontext a prozódie, na která účastníci komunikace při odhalování ironie spoléhají, a to pomocí analýzy interpretace komunikačních situací rodilými mluvčími českého jazyka s různými úrovněmi pokročilosti v anglickém jazyce. Práce si klade za cíl poskytnout odpověď na otázku, zdali jsou pokročilejší uživatelé jazyka úspěšnější při odhalování ironického záměru promluv, jimž jsou vystaveni, a zdali je možno vysledovat rozdíl mezi dvěma zmíněnými skupinami z hlediska vodítek, která při interpretaci ironických promluv upřednostňují.

Klíčová slova: ironie, interkulturní pragmatika, druhý jazyk, jazyková kompetence, pragmatická kompetence, úroveň jazykové pokročilosti, kontext, prozódie, komunikační záměr

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1   INTRODUCTION

Human language is an intricate system of signs the interpretation of which may in some situations pose certain challenges. The problem is, contrary to what the frequently quoted diagram by Shannon and Weaver (1949) assumes, that our talk exchanges are not characterized by conventional encoding and decoding (Shannon and Weaver 1949) but by implicating and inferring. While the code model of communication predicts that what is needed for successful communication is a code, it is not the case that a speaker chooses a message, sends it to the hearer, who uses the same strategies for decoding as the speaker has used for encoding, and thanks to the fact that both interlocutors share knowledge of the conventional meaning of the words uttered, communication is successful. Quite the opposite; pragmatics is a linguistic discipline which revolves around proving how a great deal of what is understood as communicated is actually not linguistically encoded at all. There are many instances in which what a speaker means fails to be determined by the meaning of the expressions he or she uses. There are many instances in which we mean a lot more than we say and there are also many instances in which we mean something else than what we say. The code model fails to reflect these phenomena, assuming, inter alia, that we always speak directly and literally. Yet this is plainly not the case.

This thesis is concerned with irony, which can be classified as an instance of a situation in which we mean something else than what our words mean explicitly. It follows that certain linguistic competence is necessary in order for the hearer to be able to correctly recognize and interpret speaker's intent, all the more so if the intent is ironic. Hearers draw upon different types of communicative knowledge and rely on various cues the presence of which facilitates understanding and suggests that the intended reading of an utterance is ironic. This is no less true for a situation in which communication is conducted in a language other than the mother tongue of the interlocutors, which is the main focus of this thesis. To put it another way, this thesis is concerned with the way language users whose native language is Czech detect irony in English, which constitutes their second language.

There are two main variables the effects of which will be studied in this thesis, namely the level of language proficiency in English and cues which language users rely on in order to communicate and recognize irony. The cues the impact of which is the subject of this thesis are extended context and prosody typical of irony. The

evaluation of them with respect to which of the two contributes more to recognition of irony seems problematic as evidence obtained from different studies points in different directions (see chapter 2.3 for a discussion on individual cues and their relationship). In spite of that, this thesis takes the viewpoint that it is context and specifically context incongruity that is a more reliable marker of irony. Because of that, it assumes that the lack of linguistic context will pose an obstacle in recognizing irony. The effect of the presence of context is assumed to be greater for more proficient language users as opposed to less experienced ones for whom ironic prosody is assumed to be a greater facilitator of irony detection. This relation is expected to hold with reference to a study by Deliens et al. (2018), which is discussed in greater detail in section 2.3.3. The assumption is that prosody is a more readily available marker of irony for less proficient interlocutors than context which may (although it is a more reliable cue) require higher linguistic competence and which may place a heavy burden on these language users' cognitive resources. Borrowing terminology from Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995), according to whom human cognitive processes are geared to maximizing relevance, which is a matter of balance between cognitive effects achieved by processing a stimulus and the processing effort required to do so (Sperber and Wilson 1995), it is assumed that less experienced communicators will give preference to prosody in interpreting language as this will cost them less processing effort. The other variable which is considered in this thesis is the level of proficiency in a second language, which has been also already shown to influence the success of interpretation of ironic utterances (previous research on the role of language proficiency in irony detection is outlined in section 2.4.3). This thesis adopts the standpoint that more advanced language users are generally more successful in detecting irony.

The manner in which this thesis attempts to investigate the abovementioned phenomena is by looking into the way Czech native speakers recognize irony in English. Attention is paid to the two abovementioned issues, i.e. the cues which encourage hearers to search for ironic interpretation of utterances and the hearers' linguistic competence. In order to investigate the relationship between these variables, two groups of subjects were chosen for the study. One group, which is referred to as the high-level group, consisted of 8 participants all of whom were former students of English at Palacký University in Olomouc and subsequent language practitioners. All of them had passed a C2 level English language exam during their studies, making it possible to classify them as fully proficient in English. The other group was comprised

of 8 former or at the time of conducting the study current students of various programmes at universities in Olomouc or Brno. None of the low-level group members studied English on a university level, nor did they hold any widely accepted and respected internationally recognized certificate proving the level they had attained in English. In order to determine the level of English, all of the participants in the low-level group had to take an English assessment test, the results of which showed that none of them had attained greater than B2 level in English. This criterion was crucial for the participants in this group to take part in the study.

This thesis aims to shed light on the question of whether greater proficiency in English entails greater pragmatic skills in English as far as Czech native speakers are concerned in the first place and whether more experienced language users give preference to other cues than less advanced communicators. In so doing, it aspires to fill in the void that had been found in this area, since several studies undertaken so far have focused on markers of irony as well as the effect of mother tongue on the level of pragmatic competence in a foreign language, but none has been, to the best of my knowledge, concerned with both of these issues at the same time nor with native speakers of Czech.

The practical part of this thesis can be best thought of as an experiment design, the aim of which is to put forward a suggestion as to how research on this topic could be done in the future. The relation that holds between language and pragmatic competence and the question of whether interlocutors who are more adept at English rely on different cues than less experienced language users was examined by way of six communicative situations. Each of the situations could be accompanied by extended context, which was expected to facilitate detection of the ironic intent of the speaker, or by prosody typical of irony, which was provided by means of a recording made by a native speaker of English. Each participant, irrespective of their language proficiency in English, was exposed to the six communicative situations that constituted different combinations of the cues. All the subjects were instructed to make themselves familiar with the situation; listen to the recording, which contained the target utterance, the interpretation of which was at the core of the study; and answer two immediately following questions. The first of them always asked about a single piece of information which was mentioned in the description of the situation and its aim was to verify that the subjects had read the text. The other question was then concerned with interpretation of the target utterance and was formulated in such a way

as to ensure the answer to it would make it clear whether the participants had recognized the ironic intent of the author of the utterance or not.

Based on whether the subjects were able to reveal that the intended reading of the utterance was ironic, as a result of the cue(s) provided, it was anticipated that it would be possible to assess how successful the two groups are in detecting irony and to determine the way in which they recognize it.

With respect to that, following research questions have been formulated:

1) Are there differences in the success rate concerning detection of ironic utterances between the more advanced and the less advanced participants?
2) Are there differences between the two groups of participants in terms of the cues they rely on in order to interpret talk exchanges and reveal that the communicative intent of the speaker is ironic?

Three hypotheses follow:

- Hypothesis 1: High-level subjects will outperform the low-level subjects in detecting irony in the communicative situations, i.e. they will be more successful in recognizing the ironic intent communicated by the author of the utterance.
- Hypothesis 2: Presence of extended context will be crucial to high-level subjects' irony detection.
- Hypothesis 3: Low-level subjects will rely on prosody in interpreting the communicative situations rather than on context.

2   THEORETICAL PART

As has been already asserted, irony is an instance of nonliteral communication in which a speaker means something else than what is linguistically encoded in the explicit linguistic form they utter. In being ironic, a speaker implicitly communicates propositions that are antithetical to those communicated by the words themselves. Having stated that, it seems appropriate to mention at the beginning of this thesis that there is no general agreement on what irony is and what principle it works on. This thesis follows the ideas worded by Herbert Paul Grice – whose insights led to the development of the field of pragmatics and who is thus perceived as one of the founding fathers of the discipline of pragmatics – and perceives irony as a trope in which a speaker wants to communicate the opposite of what is linguistically encoded (Grice 1975).

As argued by Geoffrey Leech (1983), the use of irony is related to politeness. He states that in being ironic, "[speaker] appears to make an innocent assumption which is patently untrue, and by that means implicates that the opposite assumption, which is impolite, is true" (Leech 1983, 143) and thus defines irony as "an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock-politeness)" (ibid., 144). In other words, what is linguistically encoded is overtly polite and not offensive, while what is implicated is offensive and impolite. The fact that it is by means of an implicature (the notion of implicature is discussed in chapter 2.1.2) that the intended meaning is to be recognized has two advantages for the speaker. In the first place, thanks to the fact that the hearer is expected to make the intended inference which would lead them from what the speaker has said to what they have implicated, a burden of proof is shifted to the hearer. Hence, it is solely the hearer's job to determine the speaker meaning, despite being provided with an utterance the literal meaning of which might be poles apart from that, and it is thus solely the hearer who is eventually responsible for the interpretation. Secondly, due to the fact that impoliteness is only implicated but not asserted and thanks to the features of a conversational implicature, one of which is defeasibility, the speaker can always cancel the implicature either by changing the context or adding some extra linguistic material. In other words, it is always possible to say e.g. *You are so smart!,* while being ironic and implicating the opposite, but subsequently claim you did not mean to suggest the person was actually dunce. The magic of irony, if it can be put this way, is in the fact that a speaker can always refer to what they have said

explicitly, the encoded meaning of which is in no way offensive. That is why Leech claims that "the IP [Irony Principle] keeps aggression away from the brink of conflict" (Leech 1983, 144).

2.1 Towards the Definition of Irony

By way of introduction, the question of basic distinction needs to be dealt with. As mentioned by Attardo (2000), irony can be divided into two main types, namely verbal and situational irony. While the former is a linguistic phenomenon, the latter constitutes a state of affairs which can be understood as ironic. Most works focus purely on verbal irony, to the detriment of situational irony, which is a subject of a considerably smaller number of them (Attardo 2000, 794). Other kinds of irony are irony of fate, dramatic irony, Socratic irony, and Romantic irony, to mention just a few. It should be pointed out that this thesis will deal exclusively with verbal irony and will ignore the other types.

Given the fact that irony is present in our everyday lives to a smaller or greater degree, it is not surprising that it has been the subject of debate of many linguists and researchers. Starting with the traditional account, which was then followed and further developed by H. P. Grice, through the ideas proposed by Wilson and Sperber and other echoic-mention theory supporters, to the pretense theory and the neo-Griceans, irony has gained significant attention of specialists from various fields. As a result of that, there are many approaches which can be adopted with respect to its nature and definition. The following sections will try to provide an overview of some of the existing accounts.

2.1.1 Traditional Account

The roots of research on irony go back to ancient times, which is the period to which we date the first approach to irony. The name that is most frequently associated with the introduction of irony as a figure of speech is Socrates. As Kierkegaard says in his book, "the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates" (Kierkegaard 1992, 9). Colebrook argues that it was Socrates for whom irony was no longer an instance of pure lying like it was for Aristophanes (Colebrook 2004, 6). Irony might be also found in the works of Aristotle, namely *Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. For him, though, irony was a matter of virtue, rather. This can be inferred from his description

of a "proud man" (Aristotle translated by Ross 1999, 63) who "is given to telling the truth except when he speaks in irony to the vulgar" (ibid.).

The ideas of these very early thinkers would be rather cases of the so called Socratic irony, though. Since this thesis is concerned with verbal irony, the traditional rhetoric approach to irony definition refers here to works by authors belonging to later times, namely DuMarsais, Fontainer, and Quintilian. According to Quintilian, whose insights have been translated and provided in a book by H. E. Butler, irony is a trope and belongs to the sub-class of allegory. Quintilian, as translated by Butler, argues that "[irony] is made evident to the understanding either by the delivery, the character of the speaker or the nature of the subject. For if any one of these three is out of keeping with the words, it at once becomes clear that the intention of the speaker is other than what he actually says" (Butler 1966, 333). For DuMarsais, irony is "the figure used to convey the opposite of what is said: in irony, the words are not taken in their basic literal sense" (DuMarsais as cited in Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54).

The major claim of the traditional account therefore is that irony works on the basis of reversing the meaning, since what it is used to communicate is the opposite of what is said literally. The idea is that a speaker says something while intending the hearer to understand that what the speaker has said is not true, for what he or she actually means is the exact opposite of their utterance. The simplest and clearest examples of irony can be explained on this account:

(1) Good job. (said to a friend after he or she has crashed your car)

(2) "MARY (AFTER A BORING PARTY): That was fun." (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 123)

(3) "SUE (TO SOMEONE WHO HAS DONE HER A DISSERVICE): I can't thank you enough." (ibid.)

The encoded meaning of all of these utterances is overtly that of an appreciation. In (1) the speaker is commending their friend for crashing their car, in (2) Mary literally says that the party she was at was entertaining, in (3) Sue expresses her biggest thanks to someone who has not done anything to be thanked for. In all these cases it is clear that the encoded meaning is different from what the speakers intend to communicate. The speakers want to express indirectly how dissatisfied they are with the current state of the world and want the addressees to perceive their remarks as criticism rather than praise. In other words, their intended meanings really are the opposites of the literal, encoded, propositional meanings of their utterances.

2.1.2 Grice's Account

The idea that a reversal of meaning is the essential mechanism of irony was later adopted and elaborated by a logician from the Oxford School Herbert Paul Grice. He builds his ideas on the classical rhetoric foundations and therefore treats irony as a type of trope. In his opinion, irony should be included in the group of "[e]xamples that involve exploitation, that is, a procedure by which a maxim is flouted for the purpose of getting in a conversational implicature by means of something of the nature of a figure of speech" (Grice 1975, 52). Unlike the traditional account, however, which is concerned with semantics and the oppositeness of meaning only, Grice's approach is pragmatic. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Wilson and Sperber, it seems, that the only feature that makes the classical rhetorical approach different from the approach of Grice is that while the traditional account talks about figurative meaning, Grice's analysis is built around figurative implication or implicature (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54). That Grice was searching in the domain of pragmatics to shed light on the phenomenon of irony becomes self-explanatory when we consider the fact that Grice is undoubtedly the one who has so far contributed the most to the study of pragmatics and the relation between what is said and what is meant (which is more than relevant to irony) when he introduced the Principle of Cooperation and the notion of implicature.

Grice's central claim is that "our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts" (Grice 1975, 45). He goes on to state that all the participants to an exchange are aware of the fact that a common purpose or at least a direction of the communication which both participants agree on apply to the exchange (ibid.). As a result of that, participants are expected to follow certain rules, which can be subsumed under the label "Cooperative Principle". These are namely: "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" (ibid.). Besides this general Principle of Cooperation, which according to Grice should be always in operation in communication, he also introduces four maxims of conversation. Specifically, these are the maxims of Quality with a supermaxim (Try to make your contribution one that is true), maxims of Quantity (Make your contribution as informative as is required; do not make your contribution

more informative than is required), maxim of Relation (Be relevant) and maxims of Manner (Be perspicuous; avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly) (ibid., 45–46).

Even though Grice (1975) states that interlocutors should always observe all of these, he himself admits that the maxims may not always be fulfilled, for several reasons. A speaker may decide to violate a maxim, he or she may opt out from the operation of the Cooperative Principle completely, they may be unable to fulfil one maxim without having to violate another (a clash), or they may simply flout the maxim, blatantly violate it, in which case they give rise to an implicature (Grice 1975, 49). It is the notion of implicature whose understanding is unavoidable if we want to grasp Grice's conception of irony. Simply put, implicature can be thought of as building the bridge from what a speaker says (what the words they use literally mean) and what the speaker actually means (what their intended meaning is and what they really want to communicate). As has been pointed out by Horn, "[w]hat a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what she directly expresses; linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood" (Horn 2006, 3). In other words, very often, in fact much more often than we realize, we convey our messages by nonliteral or indirect means – we usually do not tell someone directly that we want them to leave the room or to open the window, we rather express our intentions indirectly. We say something which differs a lot from what we want to get across and rely on our interlocutor's ability to infer what was meant and to correctly interpret the utterance. As mentioned above, Leech explains this communicative behaviour by introducing the Principle of Politeness, according to which it is our intention to be polite that drives us and makes us be indirect so often (Leech 1983). Whether it is politeness or something else that determines our choice, our talk exchanges are frequently characterized by indirectness and nonliterality, in which case it is the implicature that helps us reconstruct the speaker meaning.

The reason why Grice's Cooperative Principle, the maxims of conversation and the phenomenon of implicature are mentioned here is that these issues cannot be omitted when discussing Grice's account of irony. "Grice's brief discussion of tropes proposed a modern pragmatic variant of the classical account, in which the 'figurative meanings' . . . are reanalysed as implicatures triggered by blatant violation of the first Quality maxim (*Do not say what you believe to be false*)" (Wilson 2013, 41). "This violation allows the hearer to infer the opposite of what has been said in order to restore

the assumption that the maxim has in fact been obeyed" (Sequeiros 2011, 370). Grice's analysis of irony is thus as follows:

It is perfectly obvious to A and his audience that what A has said or has made as if to say is something he does not believe, and the audience knows that A knows that this is obvious to the audience. So, unless A's utterance is entirely pointless, A must be trying to get across some other proposition than the one he purports to be putting forward. This must be some obviously related proposition; the most obviously related proposition is the contradictory of the one he purports to be putting forward (Grice 1975, 53).

In other words, if the hearer's assumption is that the speaker has in fact observed the Cooperative Principle and the first maxim of Quality, then the speaker must be understood as trying to communicate some other proposition, i.e. one that would not violate the Quality maxim and that would therefore be true. Simply put, the seemingly violated maxim of Quality gives rise to the implicature that the speaker intends to communicate a proposition that differs from the proposition contained in the statement he or she actually utters. According to Grice (1975), the proposition that the speaker is trying to get across in irony is the opposite of what the encoded meaning of their utterance is. The reason why the hearer is eventually able to discover which meaning the speaker intends to communicate is that the hearer draws inferences, which will guide him or her to it (Grice 1975).

In spite of the fact that a great number of cases of irony can be easily explained by referring to Grice's idea of flouting the Quality maxim and the subsequent emergence of an implicature, there are examples in which Grice's explanation, according to Wilson and Sperber, falls flat.

Wilson and Sperber (1992, 54–56) name several types of utterances which according to them are instances of irony but do not invariably communicate the opposite of the literal meaning.

<u>*A. Ironical understatements*</u>" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54)

Wilson and Sperber's example concerns a situation when a person comes to a shop and encounters a customer who is complaining very loudly about something. The person comments on the customer:

(4) "You can tell he's upset." (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54)

What Wilson and Sperber (1992) suggest is that, intuitively, this is ironic, even though it clearly does not want to imply the opposite, i.e. "You can't tell he's upset." (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54) or "You can tell he's not upset." (ibid.).

"*B. Ironical quotations*" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 55)

What Wilson and Sperber (1992) put forward is that a sentence

(5) "Oh to be in England, now that April's there." (Browning, 'Home thoughts from abroad', cited in Wilson and Sperber 1992, 55)

uttered on a rainy, windy, English spring day is not meant to communicate that it is not good to be in England in April, but rather that the expectations of April may not always be met. They believe that for utterances like (5) to be perceived as ironic, the interlocutors must recognize that they are actually quotations (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 55).

"*C. Ironical interjections*" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 55)

This category represents utterances which do not express a proposition, i.e. they cannot be said to be true or false and cannot be therefore analysed as violations of the first maxim of Quality – the maxim of truthfulness. Let us consider another example from Wilson and Sperber (1992),

(6) "Ah. Tuscany in May!" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 55)

uttered during a visit to rainy, cold, and windy Tuscany after a friend of yours has invited you preaching how wonderful Tuscany is in May. They argue that although it would be hard to state what the opposite of such an utterance would be, it undoubtedly features verbal irony (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 56).

"*D. Non-ironical falsehoods*" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 56)

The last group that according to Wilson and Sperber (1992) fails to be explained by Grice concerns cases in which the criterion of oppositeness of meaning is seemingly satisfied but no irony is present. The two psycholinguists suggest that this shows that the traditional definition is not complete (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 56). They use an example from Grice (1978, 124) which portrays a situation in which two people pass a car that has a broken window. One turns to the other and says:

(7) "Look, the car has all its windows intact." (Grice 1978, 124)

According to Wilson and Sperber, when the addressee asks the speaker what they mean, the speaker will explain that he or she was trying to be ironic and draw their interlocutor's attention to the car's broken window. The requirement of the traditional – and Grice's – approach of saying something which is obviously false while trying to get across the opposite is met. Yet no irony is found (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 54–56). As Grice (1978) states, given this communicative situation, the perception of (7) as ironic is implausible. Grice argues that "the absurdity of this exchange is . . . to be explained by the fact that irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation" (Grice 1978, 124) and continues by stating that speaking ironically involves reflecting "a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt" (ibid., 125). As Wilson and Sperber argue, his attempt to refine his approach to reflect more cases shows that Grice himself acknowledged that his theory suffered from certain deficiencies (Wilson and Sperber 2012).

All these objections, however, invite one to reflect more on Sperber and Wilson's approach and consider their treatment of irony, especially in relation to sarcasm. If we accept the definition of sarcasm proposed by Attardo, who claims that "[s]arcasm is an overtly aggressive type of irony, with clearer markers/cues and a clear target" (Attardo 2000, 795), it seems, in fact, that the examples they use to prove that Grice's approach is inadequate could be thought of as instances of irony just as of sarcasm. Similarly for Kreuz and Glucksberg, "sarcastic irony involves the use of counterfactual statements to express disapproval, usually with intent to hurt or wound someone or some group of people" (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989, 374). What they suggest is that we can be ironic without being sarcastic as well as sarcastic without being ironic, the difference being in whether the utterance is targeted at some identifiable victim or not (ibid.). In accordance with Kreuz and Glucksberg's account of irony, an utterance like (6), for example, would not be considered a case of irony but a case of sarcasm, for it is clear that the remark is meant to indicate the intention to hurt the person whose utterance is being referred to, or whose utterance is being echoed, as Sperber and Wilson (e.g. 1981) would put it.

Nevertheless, according to Wilson and Sperber, there is a more general problem with the traditional definition of irony, for besides understanding what irony is, we should be also able to explain why such a phenomenon exists at all and what principle it is based on (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 57). They believe that, in Grice's account, figurative utterances containing irony "convey no more than could have been

conveyed by uttering their strictly literal counterparts" (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 125). Since, according to Grice, the interpretation of such utterances requires hearers to reject the literal meaning and construct the relevant implicature (Grice 1975), Wilson and Sperber believe processing irony costs more without yielding any benefit, making it rather irrational to use it (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 125).

It thus seems that unless someone who says something and implicates the opposite does so because they know this will change the pragmatic effect of their utterance in comparison to the effect the literal utterance of the same sentence would have, this speaker is not a rational partner to a communication. In brief, if we are to be rational when communicating, as Grice promotes, and if being rational means obeying the Cooperative Principle and the maxims of conversation, a question arises as to why somebody would ever want to be ironic (and would want to say the opposite of what they mean when they can simply express themselves literally and save their own as well as their interlocutor's effort, who has to figure out what was actually meant) if there was not some kind of an added value that comes with irony.

This seeming deficiency of Grice's account regarding the motivation to be ironic is commented on in section 2.1.5.

2.1.3 Echoic Account

The abovementioned issues led to an emergence of another approach to defining irony. The so called "Echoic Account" was first presented by Sperber and Wilson, who are well known for the Relevance Theory, which they wanted to explain the communicative behaviour with. In their opinion, irony works on the basis of an echo (Sperber and Wilson 1981). They argue that "irony consists in echoing a thought (e.g. a belief, an intention, a norm-based expectation) attributed to an individual, a group, or to people in general, and expressing a mocking, sceptical or critical attitude to this thought" (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 125). They claim that "[t]he speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while dissociating herself from it with anything from mild ridicule to savage scorn" (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 60). Specifically, they propose that irony is a case of echoic mention, in which the proposition to which the speaker expresses their standpoint is mentioned (Sperber and Wilson 1981) (for further discussion see e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1981 or Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber 1984). Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber state that "besides blatant

cases of immediate echo, a variety of utterances are intended and interpreted as more or less remote echoes of past utterances, thoughts, received opinions, or accepted norms" (Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber 1984, 114). This would explain cases like:

(8) "*I'm glad we didn't bother to bring an umbrella.*" (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 302)

This could be easily addressed in rain to someone to echo their previous utterance "*Let's not bother to take an umbrella*" (ibid.) and to express a dissociating, mocking attitude towards it. Although (8) does communicate the opposite of what the speaker means, according to Sperber and Wilson it is the scornful reference to and the repetition of the advice given before that makes it ironic in the downpour (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 302).

Another example is:

(9) "See what lovely weather is. Rain, rain, rain." (Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber 1984, 115)

As argued by Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber, this could be uttered to echo a weather forecast but it could be just as easily used to echo an expectation or a hope (that the partners to the communication had shared) that the weather would be good, without this being ever overtly expressed (Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber 1984, 115).

This example illustrates that the mentioned utterance may not necessarily manifest itself in the preceding part of the exchange (ibid., 114). As mentioned by Wilson, "the thought being echoed . . . may be an unexpressed belief, hope, wish or norm-based expectation (e.g. that a certain lecture will run as it should, a certain friend will behave as she should, and so on)" (Wilson 2013, 46). According to Wilson, the failure of a situation to live up to the expectations and the subsequent criticism of it is what irony is most frequently used for, which would also account for the fact that negative irony is encountered much more often than positive irony. Wilson states that, unlike the traditional and Grice's approach, the echoic mention account provides an explanation to this and talks about the normative bias in irony. She refers to norms, which she describes as ideas that society shares about what the state of affairs should be. According to her, we recognize that we should be sincere, polite, reliable; that the weather should be good; that the goals of our actions should be reached; and so on (Wilson 2013). "So when a particular event or action fails to live up to the norm, it is always possible to say ironically *That was helpful*, *How clever*, *Well done*, *Lovely weather* and so on, and be understood as echoing a norm-based expectation that should

have been met" (Wilson 2013, 47). She further argues that, in contrast to that, it is not always possible to say "*Awful weather*" (ibid.) and intend it to be understood as ironically communicating that the sun is shining. She believes that for such an utterance to be identified as ironic, "there must have been some manifest doubt or suspicion that . . . the weather would be awful . . . Otherwise there will be no identifiable thought that the speaker can be understood as ironically echoing" (ibid.).

That negative irony is more common than positive irony is generally agreed on. There are, however, other explanations to that. Attardo (2000), for example, supports this argument by referring to Myers Roy who claims that "positive irony involves saying something negative that one does not believe; this is obviously more dangerous than saying something positive that one does not believe, since, if the intent of having one's insincere utterance be recognized fails, one is taken as having said something negative" (Myers Roy 1977, quoted from Attardo 2000, 796). In other words, if the partner to the communication does not recognize the speaker's utterance as ironic and takes it literally, the reaction to the utterance is likely to be that of approval if the encoded meaning is positive rather than negative. This is not to suggest that positive irony does not take place at all; its application is, however, limited to relatively specific contexts.

Wilson and Sperber (2012) thus argue that while the traditional and Grice's account of irony both fail to address the question of why a speaker should express themselves indirectly when they can do so directly, their approach has the answer. That is that "the point of the irony is to indicate that a proposition the speaker might otherwise be taken to endorse . . . is ludicrously inadequate" (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 123) and that by being ironic we express our (disapproving) attitude to such a proposition and thus ridicule not only whatever is echoed but also the fact that somebody might actually entertain a given thought (Wilson and Sperber 2012).

Even though the echoic mention account seems to have solved one of the biggest weaknesses the classical rhetorical and Grice's approach have, it is itself subject to critical comments. For a discussion on the viability of the echoic mention theory see e.g. Attardo (2000), according to whom "mentioning is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of the ironical status of a text" (Attardo 2000, 805). He proves this with an utterance

(10) "John said that Bob said X." (Attardo 2000, 805)

which, while being an instance of a mention, gives no rise to irony (Attardo 2000). The second point he identifies as problematic has to do with the echoic mention theory postulate that "verbal irony invariably involves the implicit expression of an attitude" (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 239). In Attardo's opinion, if implicitness is allowed, then the speaker must determine the mentioned status by means of inference. He claims, though, that in compliance with Sperber and Wilson's quote, no overt cue in the co-text suggesting the mentioned status is allowed, which gives rise to a question as to how the hearer arrives at the intended meaning. He believes it must be contextual inappropriateness that brings the hearer to the intended meaning (Attardo 2000, 806). Based on this, he therefore claims that "the ulterior step of the mentioning is unnecessary [and] that purposeful inappropriateness is a necessary and sufficient cause of irony in an utterance" (ibid.).

2.1.4 Pretense Theory

Another approach to theorizing about irony was presented by Clark and Gerrig (1984). They define irony as pretense and express it as follows:

> Suppose S is speaking to A, the primary addressee, and to A', who may be present or absent, real or imaginary. In speaking ironically, S is pretending to be S' speaking to A'. What S' is saying is, in one way or another, patently uniformed or injudicious, worthy of a "hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt" (Grice 1978, 124). A' in ignorance, is intended to miss this pretense, to take S as speaking sincerely. But A . . . is intended to see everything—the pretense, S"s injudiciousness, A"s ignorance, and hence S's attitude toward S', A', and what S' said (Clark and Gerrig 1984, 122).

What they suggest is thus that "a speaker is pretending to be an injudicious person speaking to an uninitiated audience; the speaker intends the addressees of the irony to discover the pretense and thereby see his or her attitude toward the speaker, the audience, and the utterance" (Clark and Gerrig 1984, 121). Their theory assumes that the speaker is not performing a speech act but is pretending to perform one. The pretense account envisages that "understanding irony involves the ability to recognise that the speaker is pretending to perform a speech act and simultaneously expressing a certain type of (mocking, sceptical, contemptuous) attitude to the speech act itself,

or to anyone who would perform it or take it seriously" (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 135).

Clark and Gerrig partly base their conception of irony on Grice. The argument that Grice perceived irony as a kind of pretense seems indisputable when we refer to his own words, "[t]o be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect" (Grice 1978, 125).

They refer to the example from Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber (1984), which is provided above as (9). Clark and Gerrig (1984) argue that when someone says (9) in the middle of a downpour, he or she is pretending to be an "unseeing person" who is talking to an unknowing audience about how wonderful the weather actually is. The speaker intends that the audience sees through the pretense and understands that the speaker is ridiculing the utterance or anyone who would make it (e.g. a weather forecaster) or accept it (Clark and Gerrig 1984, 122).

From this point of view, it could be declared that the pretense theory explains irony no less than the echoic mention theory. Clark and Gerrig argue that the approach adopted by them is more powerful in that all cases of ironic mentions can be reinterpreted along the pretense theory lines (Clark and Gerrig 1984). By contrast, Wilson and Sperber state that for "irony to succeed, the object of the characteristic attitude must be a thought that the speaker is tacitly *attributing* to some actual person or type of person (or to people in general)" (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 136) and that it is the idea that irony is "tacitly attributive" that the pretense account must come to include if it is to handle counterexamples such as (7) (ibid.).

2.1.5 Neo-Gricean Approach

As the name suggests, this approach follows in Grice's footsteps when describing our communicative behaviour. With respect to irony, its supporters, such as Dynel (2013), Garmendia (2015) and Sullivan (2019), share the view that Grice was essentially right in his conception of irony and in treating it as a type of particularized conversational implicature. Importantly, however, they are not deaf to the criticism that Grice's theory of irony came under. What they do is reflect on the issues identified as problematic, improperly handled and insufficiently explained by Grice and work towards developing and perhaps correcting Grice's standpoints concerning irony to

eventually fill in the gaps and remedy the shortcomings that Grice's brief account of irony has been (by some) identified with.

For illustrative purposes, let us explore a relatively recently published paper by Arthur Sullivan (2019). In his article he attempts to defend Grice's ideas regarding irony and proposes new ways in which the criticism levelled at them could be warded off. He lists several issues for which Grice's account has been criticized:

1. "Problems of range" (Sullivan 2019, 8)

According to Sullivan (2019), there are at least three types of what he calls non-classical verbal irony which pose problems for Grice's approach. They are:

a) irony without meaning-inversion (e.g. "*So glad we didn't bring an umbrella*" (Sullivan 2019, 5) (said when it starts raining);

b) irony without flouting Quality (e.g. "*Could I possibly entice you to eat just one more small piece of pizza?* (asked of someone who has rudely devoured almost the whole pie)" (Sullivan 2019, 6), in which case the speaker is obviously not saying what he or she believes to be false, moreover, as Sullivan points out, it is only in making assertions when speakers can say what they believe to be true/false (Sullivan 2019, 6);

c) irony without derogation (e.g. "*How clumsy*" (Sullivan 2019, 6) (said to comment on a wonderful, immaculate performance of a ballerina), which contradicts Grice's view that derogation is a necessary condition without which meaning-inversion would turn out "playful, not ironical" (Grice 1978, 125).

2. "Failure of sufficiency" (Sullivan 2019, 8)

Concerning this issue, Sullivan (2019) reacts to the objection that not every instance of flouting the first maxim of Quality can be classified as irony. This has been pointed out by Sperber and Wilson (1981) who claim that Grice's account is neither necessary, because irony is not limited to assertions, in which, they say, flouting the maxim of truthfulness is only possible, nor sufficient, because of liars and the fact that not all cases of a patent falsehood can be interpreted as irony. As a result of that, they suggest that to bridge the gap we have to think of ironic utterances as instances of mention, in which "the propositions mentioned are the ones that have been, or might have been, actually entertained by someone" (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 309).

3. "Refutation by empirical studies" (Sullivan 2019, 8)

A great number of studies concerning the processing time of verbal irony were conducted in the late 1980s and 1990s. As argued by Sullivan (2019), the findings of some of them (e.g. Gibbs 1986) suggest that it does not, in fact, take longer to interpret irony as opposed to literal communication, which some considered to constitute evidence against Grice's theory, in which the literal meaning is assessed first and only its rejection guides us to the implicature, which should presumably last longer (Sullivan 2019, 9).

4. "Mechanical problems" (Sullivan 2019, 8)

This issue is related to Grice's broader theory of conversational implicature and the question of how well irony fits in it. Wilson comments on this by emphasizing that "[a] speaker's meaning typically consists of what is said, together with any implicatures. Regular implicatures are added to what was said, and their recovery either restores the assumption that the speaker has obeyed the Co-operative Principle and maxims in saying what she said (in those particular terms) or explains why a maxim has been violated (as in the case of a clash)" (Wilson 2006, 1725). She continues by claiming that "[i]n Grice's account of tropes, however, nothing is said. The speaker's meaning consists only of an implicature, and the recovery of this implicature neither restores the assumption that the Co-operative Principle and maxims have been obeyed (. . .) nor explains why a maxim has been violated" (ibid.). Sullivan admits that it might be difficult to see how "attributing a contradiction to the speaker [could] save the presumption of co-operativeness" (Sullivan 2019, 9).

5. "Motivational failure" (Sullivan 2019, 8)

The rationale for speaking ironically. According to Sullivan (2019), that is one of the Grice's theory of irony most commonly mentioned weaknesses, which echoic and pretense accounts claim to provide answers to. The criticism goes that Grice is not any better than the classical rhetorical approach at identifying the reasons why a cooperative speaker would rather say something he or she believes to be false only to communicate what they believe to be true, which could as well have been expressed directly and literally (Sullivan 2019, 9).

Sullivan (2019, 9–11) takes the stand that the criticism that is often directed at the first two issues is justified. With respect to the other three, however, he is convinced that what is perceived as deficiency is pure "misreading of Grice" (Sullivan 2019, 9). In his article from 2019, he then goes on to present the point of view from which Grice's ideas succeed in explaining irony.

Concerning the issue of the amount of time it takes to process irony as opposed to literal utterances, Sullivan (2019) believes that the empirical research does not show consistent results. The findings of a study by Schwoebel et al. (2000), to mention one of several studies that arrived at a similar conclusion, suggest that irony in fact does take longer to interpret.

The mechanical problem, according to Sullivan (2019), can be tackled by referring directly to Grice (1975), who talks about "making as if to say" something in irony. Sullivan argues that even though the fact that in irony the speaker actually does not say anything may seem an obstacle to accepting Grice's account of irony, the speaker clearly expresses a dictum (which Sullivan uses to refer to what speakers make as if to say or purport to put forward) together with an implicatum, which is distinct but still related (Sullivan 2019).

With respect to the failure of Grice's approach to explain the motivation for being ironic, Sullivan (2019) opines that Grice is quite right in not providing any rationale. Sullivan believes there is no specific reason for speaking ironically. According to him, the motivation can vary from humour through aggression to irony being just a poetic play. He also admits that this list of reasons can under no circumstances be considered exhaustive (Sullivan 2019, 10).

As far as the first two problems are concerned, Sullivan (2019) suggests that "meaning-inversion" could be broadened to the more general "meaning-replacement"; that from "making as if to say" we could move to the "full range of speech acts"; that instead of flouting the Quality maxim exclusively, we could include flouting the maxims of Quantity and Relation, since irony may take place in "significantly different ways, or at distinct levels"; and that irony may not need to involve "derogation" but the "expressive dimension", rather (Sullivan 2019, 11). Sullivan thus concludes that even though he acknowledges the first two problems of Grice's account, he believes that "a refined development of Grice's orientation is on the whole preferable to any of [the] more specific and limited post-Gricean views" (Sullivan 2019, 11).

As can be seen, each approach has its strengths as well as weaknesses. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to state with absolute certainty which approach should be perceived as reflecting the reality. It should be also emphasized that the accounts provided herein are far from constituting a complete list. Other viewpoints include e.g. "indirect negation" proposed by Giora (1995); Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown's "allusional pretence account of irony" (1995); Kreuz and Glucksberg's "echoic reminder theory" (1989); or the approach of Attardo (2000), who defines irony as "relevant inappropriateness". Analysis of all the attitudes that have been adopted to irony is, however, not the subject of this thesis. Nevertheless, despite being built around different ideas, the viewpoints can be grouped into two categories as far as irony processing is concerned.

2.2   Processing Irony

An issue which imaginarily divides the supporters of the various theories of irony is the way in which irony is processed. There are two competing viewpoints; one according to which there are two stages a person has to go through when processing irony, the other suggesting that interpretation of irony is not significantly different from that of literal utterances.

2.2.1   One-Stage Processing

According to this view, in terms of processing, non-literal communication does not really differ from literal communication. The bottom line of this approach is that when faced with an ironic utterance, the interlocutor does not go through the process consisting of several successive steps, which makes his or her recovery of the non-literal meaning no longer than that of the literal meaning.

Sperber and Wilson or Gibbs constitute the main advocates of this standpoint according to Attardo (2000). Attardo describes this view as proposing that "the processing of irony is not distinct from that of 'literal' meaning and that crucially, ironical meaning is arrived at directly, without the mediation of a first interpretation that is rejected" (Attardo 2000, 797). Himself being one of the greatest promoters of the Direct Access view, Gibbs (1994) argues that the processing time of irony and that of literal utterances is not different. He supports this claim with empirical evidence, thanks to which he concludes that it does not take longer to comprehend figurative

language than literal communication. He states "there is no need to postulate any special cognitive mechanism to handle understanding of metaphor, irony, and so for. Figurative language can be understood effortlessly, without conscious reflection" (Gibbs 1994, 118). According to him, what makes this possible is the contextual information that interlocutors are provided with and thanks to which they do not have to access the literal meaning first (Gibbs 1994).

This model therefore logically supposes that the first interpretation is the correct one since any reinterpretation would inevitably be understood as a second stage.

Attardo (2000), however, argues that Sperber and Wilson's mention theory of irony is itself a two-stage model, for to recognize that one utterance is a mention of the other "presupposes a metalinguistic distance" (Attardo 2000, 811) between the two utterances (for a more detailed and critical discussion on whether processing irony as theorized by Sperber and Wilson really involves just one stage see Attardo 2000).

2.2.2 Two-Stage Processing

The opposing attitude, which is represented primarily by Grice, is built around the idea that processing irony starts with processing the literal meaning of the utterance first. Only after what is encoded is rejected for the reasons of pragmatics (contextual inappropriateness mainly) does the hearer proceed to the other step in which they reinterpret the meaning and subsequently arrive at the non-literal meaning, which is the one the speaker intends to communicate. According to this model, the reading times of irony and/or other cases of nonliteral language should be longer.

So far, though, the empirical studies have provided rather inconclusive evidence with respect to this issue. The findings of some experiments support this view, the findings of some other suggest the opposite. It is primarily the work done by Gibbs (e.g. Gibbs 1986 or Gibbs 1994) and his colleagues (e.g. Gibbs and O'Brien 1991) that points to the one-stage model being the one that communicators (subconsciously) follow in interpreting figurative language. This viewpoint was rejected by authors whose findings lend credibility to the contrary. McDonald (1993), Dews and Winner (1995) and Giora and her collaborators (Giora 1997; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998) all conclude that ironic utterances processing takes place in two stages. Dews and Winner (1995) argue that the literal meaning must be accessed first

as it provides speakers and hearers with information about the level of the remark's praise or criticism which irony has been shown to mute (Dews and Winner 1995). The abovementioned study conducted by Giora and her colleagues demonstrates that while the literal meaning is activated immediately after being exposed to a stimulus, the ironic meaning (i.e. the less salient meaning) becomes available relatively late, as a result of which they declare that processing ironic utterances does take longer (Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998).

Another promoter of the idea of two-stage processing is Attardo, for instance. He argues that the one-stage model suffers from a problem of computability. In his opinion, "[o]ne-stage model is logically incapable of accounting for novel input, since it will fail to differentiate between a semantically ill-formed sentence and a novel instance of metaphor, irony, or other indirect figure of speech" (Attardo 2000, 810). "The one-stage model cannot utilize a 'fail-then-recover' strategy since, obviously enough, a fail-then-recover strategy is a two-stage model" (ibid.). Attardo (2000) basically states that in compliance with the one-stage model we only have one attempt to succeed or fail in our interpretation of ironic utterances. In compliance with the one-stage model, we are not allowed to consider any other interpretation except for the first one that we find satisfying. Consequently, not managing to arrive at the intended interpretation at the first try would require reinterpreting the utterance, in which case the model would no longer consist of one stage only. He supports this viewpoint with the claim that "fail-then-recovery strategies" are known to be used by communicators, as a result of which we must admit that processing consisting of two stages is taking place, in some cases at least (Attardo 2000, 810–811).

Irrespective of how many stages processing of irony consists of and even though these two concepts are conflicting viewpoints, they have something in common. Both mention context as the phenomenon on the basis of which hearers decide whether a given utterance should be analysed as an instance of literal communication or irony. The following chapter looks at context as well as other phenomena which help us recognize irony.

2.3 Irony Detection

Given the frequency of irony in our everyday lives, the inevitable question of how we recognize irony arises. The issue boils down to how it is possible for us to interpret an utterance as ironic when its encoded meaning contains no irony on its own at all. Apparently, there must be a certain mechanism based on which we are able to arrive at the intended meaning.

2.3.1 Incongruity

When talking about interpretation of nonliteral utterances, under which irony can be subsumed, the concept of incongruity must be introduced.

In simple terms, incongruity refers to a situation when something does not fit in the circumstances. This phenomenon seems to be the most important factor that drives hearers to look for the nonliteral meaning when faced with an exchange in which the propositional meaning does not prove to be the one intended by the speaker. What a hearer has to do in such a case is notice that a certain gap exists between what the semantic meaning of the utterance suggests and what the speaker probably wants to communicate. In other words, the hearer must be able to recognize the incongruity that has emerged in the exchange as a result of the speaker's choice of words in the given situation. Unless the hearer is able to do so, the communicative intent will remain unrevealed and the whole exchange may fail.

In case of irony and its use in communication, the most obvious incongruity appears between the semantic content of the ironic utterance and the context of the utterance and/or the whole communicative situation. That is why context proves to be an absolutely crucial cue for revealing irony.

2.3.2 Context

As stated by Attardo, "irony is a completely pragmatic phenomenon, with no semantic correlates" (Attardo 2000, 814). As a result of that, it is obvious that "[i]rony comprehension is believed to rely heavily on context" (Giora and Fein 1999, 241).

Numerous studies have been conducted in order to show the strength of context with respect to irony detection. In fact, the findings of Ivanko and Pexman (2003), for instance, suggest that incongruity between context and the utterance plays its part in processing irony (Ivanko and Pexman 2003). This argument is supported by

a relatively recent study conducted by Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau (2018). In their research they tried to compare the significance of contextual cues and prosodic patterns when recognizing irony. They acknowledge the contribution of prosody but point out that "while only one subgroup of participants in [their] study used prosody as a cue to understanding irony, all the participants relied on contextual incongruity when judging the speaker utterance as ironic or not" (Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau 2018, 170). Their findings also suggest that "the greater the incongruity between context and speaker's utterance, the easier it is to perceive irony" (ibid.). Based on the data they obtained, they conclude that it is context that plays more important role when determining the status of an utterance as ironic or not (Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau 2018).

2.3.3 Prosody

Another cue that can contribute to hearers' detection of irony is prosody. Obviously, not only what we say but particularly how we say it can have an enormous effect on how our speech is perceived. Imagine criticizing somebody using a lovely and tender voice or expressing your love to somebody while yelling at them. These situations could be classified as examples of incongruity, as the intonation would not be matching the content of the message, whose correct comprehension might be in danger as a result of that. In case of irony, intonation is even more important. Adopting the Gricean approach to defining irony, the speaker has to make the hearer perceive the utterance as meaning something quite different than, strictly speaking the opposite of, what he or she has actually said literally. To make this difficult task of decoding and subsequent inferring easier for hearers, speakers in real-life situations (perhaps unknowingly) nearly always resort to using specific prosody when being ironic.

Several studies examined the relation between prosody and context and tried to evaluate the two in terms of their contribution to irony detection. In addition to the abovementioned study by Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau (2018), a study by Deliens et al. (2018) might be mentioned. In the latter, just like in the former, context was found more reliable and proved to be the factor thanks to which we are able to recognize that what is encoded is not what the speaker intends to communicate and that we have to look for another meaning – one which will make sense in the context of the communicative situation. Nevertheless, in their study they base their hypothesis

on Direct Access view. Their hypothesis was that "the presence of salient, albeit perhaps less reliable, non-contextual cues prompts interpreters to disregard costlier contextual processing" (Deliens et al. 2018, 6). The results of their study support this view. In other words, their study shows that as a result of the relative simplicity of non-contextual cues (such as prosody) processing, interpreters prefer to rely on these despite their possible inaccuracy, rather than devote their effort to contextual assessment, which is a complex and costly process (Deliens et al. 2018). "Unreliable as they are, (. . .) non-contextual cues lead to an activation of ironic meanings without the full-fledged, compositional interpretation being completed" (ibid., 44). Nonetheless, Deliens et al. (2018) point out that "assessing the utterance content relative to the background context remains the most reliable route to grasp ironic meanings. In that sense, contextual assessment of the literal meaning is, indeed, an essential part of irony processing" (ibid., 43–44).

Not all empirical evidence suggests the same, though. A study by Gregory A. Bryant and Jean E. Fox Tree (2002) suggests that "both acoustic and contextual information are used when inferring ironic intent in spontaneous speech" (Bryant and Fox Tree 2002, 99). What is crucial according to them is that their study does not work with actors like previous studies (e.g. Anolli, Ciceri and Infantino 2000 or Milosky and Ford 1997) but shows that it can be prosody which is produced naturally that can facilitate irony comprehension (Bryant and Fox Tree 2002, 110). In interpreting the findings of their study carried out in 2005, they went even further and stated that context might not be needed for interpretation at all, since the mere incongruity between the semantic content and the tone of voice might give rise to the idea that the utterance should be perceived as a case of irony (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005).

Attardo et al. (2003) argue that "there isn't a particular ironical intonation, per se, but rather, intonational patterns that contrast with the surrounding (particularly, preceding) or expected/relevant intonational pattern of utterances will signal that 'something is the matter' with the utterance and trigger the inferential process whereby irony is recognized and interpreted" (Attardo et al. 2003, 252–253). They claim that pitch is a contrastive marker for irony or sarcasm while, at the same time, admitting that "[n]o pitch pattern functions as an absolute marker of irony/sarcasm" (ibid., 252). In other words, they believe that the pitch of ironic remarks cannot be studied in isolation, for it does not provide one with any particular intonational cue concerning irony or sarcasm. Rather, it has to be assessed with respect to the pragmatics of the

given utterance. Any kind of pitch pattern may be indicative of ironic intent, yet it is always the pragmatic force of the utterance against which it must be judged (ibid., 250–252).

2.3.4 Salience

Another point of view follows the principle of salience. "According to the graded salience hypothesis (. . .), the factor determining initial activation is neither literality nor compatibility with context, but rather the salience of the verbal stimulus: Salient meanings of words and expressions should always be accessed and always first" (Giora and Fein 1999, 242). Giora and Fein argue that salience can be thought of in terms of degrees and list factors, namely "conventionality, frequency, familiarity, or prototypicality" (ibid.), which affect the degree of salience. They then explain the phenomenon of salience by referring to two meanings of a word *bank*; i.e. "financial institution" and the "river edge". What they suggest is that for a person living in urban area, for whom financial institutions are more common than rivers, the commercial meaning will be more readily available, i.e. more salient, while the meaning "river edge" will be less salient (ibid.). They further argue that "[a]lthough prior context may enhance a word's meaning, it is relatively ineffective in inhibiting activation of salient meanings" (ibid., 243). "In *Standing on the riverbank I saw some fish*, the word *river* may facilitate activation of the riverside meaning of *bank*. However, although "river" in *riverbank* may enhance the less salient riverside meaning of *bank*, it may not prevent activation of its more salient, financial institution meaning on its encounter: The salient, financial institution meaning would pop up in spite of contextual misfit." (ibid., 243).

In compliance with their hypothesis, salient meanings, regardless of the contextual background, are accessed directly and processed and examined for compatibility first. Only if they are found contextually incompatible, less salient, contextually appropriate, meanings have to be retrieved (Giora and Fein 1999, 243).

Even though Giora and Fein (1999) admit that context helps us interpret irony, they believe that it is only at a later stage when contextual information gets to the forefront and is used for correct comprehension. In their experiments they proved the hypothesis that it is the salient meaning that is always processed first irrespective of the context. As they conclude, "[a]t the early stage of comprehension, context neither

availed the meaning compatible with it, nor did it block the meaning incompatible with it. Salient information was accessed directly and automatically. When it did not reach contextual fit, it was adjusted to contextual information" (Giora and Fein 1999, 250). With these results they believe they have proven that "it is salient rather than either literal or contextually compatible meaning that is activated initially" (ibid., 252).

Regardless of at which point, context does play a role in irony comprehension and is irreplaceable in its function. Despite the lack of agreement concerning the phase of processing in which contextual (in)appropriateness is determined, it seems that whatever interpretation is arrived at must be always assessed against the context of the exchange. Only once it is found compatible with it is the interpretation accepted as the one that matches the communicative intent of the speaker.

2.4   Second Language Pragmatic Competence

There has been quite extensive research conducted in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the past decades. Given the fact that it is another example of a branch of study intending to prove what goes on in the mind of language users as they pass through various stages of their learning process, numerous attitudes to the way in which speakers acquire their second language have been adopted. This thesis adopts the Dynamic Systems Theory approach. In other words, it works with the notion of language as a dynamic system, which is complex and consists of many elements that interact. According to this approach, our knowledge is constantly changing as a result of the use of language, and new input or loss of skills is a consequence of infrequent use of certain structures and expressions. Plenty of factors come into play and have an effect on how we acquire a second language, presenting the list of which is not the aim of this section nor this thesis. This part will be mainly concerned with acquisition of pragmatic competence in a second language and the extent to which it is influenced by the proficiency level attained in the language in question.

As already noted, using a language properly in a communicative situation requires knowing other rules than the rules of grammar. The idea that it is not only the acquisition of grammatical competence that suffices language acquisition – be it of

first or any other language – goes to Hymes. According to Byram, it was Hymes who introduced the notion of "communicative competence" by which he referred to all possible abilities that a language learner must adopt in order to ensure they can use the language appropriately (Byram 1997, 7). Byram elaborates on this idea by arguing that "the exchange of information is dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted . . .; it depends on the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader" (ibid., 3). It follows that having a good command of only the vocabulary, which language users use, syntax, which governs the sentence structure, or semantics, which attempts to show what relations hold between the pieces of language and the entities they depict in the real world, simply proves insufficient. Language users cannot get along without being able to fill in the gaps between what the compositional meaning of utterances performed by speakers is and what messages these speakers actually want to communicate. Simply put, they need to acquire the pragmatic competence as well. This is no less true for mastering any additional language, i.e. a language that is not a person's mother tongue.

The language whose command on the communicative level this thesis is concerned with is English, which constitutes the second language for all the participants of the study. It is obvious that "[t]o successfully master English language in international communication, as the recent views are moving towards English as an International language and lingua franca, people possessing different linguistic and cultural backgrounds truly need to have intercultural communicative competence in addition to communicative competence as a successful non-native speaker" (Farashaiyan and Tan 2012, 43). It therefore seems crucial to develop considerable pragmatic skills in one's second language in order to be able to perform adequately in the language. Yet it is the acquisition of pragmatic competence in a language other than mother tongue that poses great problems to foreign language learners.

2.4.1 Second Language Acquisition

In order to draw a line between the level of proficiency in a second language and that of pragmatic competence in it, it seems inevitable to look in detail at the process in which speakers acquire pragmatic competence in their second language in the first place. One of the most acclaimed models of SLA is the Monitor Model composed of five individual hypotheses proposed by Stephen Krashen. Overall, Krashen (1982) believes there is no significant difference between the acquisition of

L1, i.e. the mother tongue, and that of L2, i.e. the second language, since human beings always have the language acquisition device (a term coined by Chomsky, representing a concept accounting for infants' ability to acquire a language in spite of the so called poverty of stimulus) at their disposal. Krashen's ideas have been, however, challenged by various scholars, such as Gregg. In his article, Gregg (1984) points to the fact that only few adults actually do acquire a second language successfully and that "learning" may under certain conditions become "acquisition" (Gregg 1984). Krashen separates these two concepts and states that while acquisition is subconscious, learning is a product of formal teaching, as a result of which learning can never lead to real acquisition (Krashen 1982). Gregg reviews all of the five Krashen's hypotheses and, on the other hand, emphasizes that with lots of drill the rules learned may eventually be acquired by a learner (Gregg 1984).

Gregg's ideas are in line with those of S. P. Corder, a linguist known especially for his promotion of error analysis. Though himself being active at the time when nativism came to become the dominant theoretical stream in the field of SLA, he argues that several differences can be identified when describing the process of L1 and L2 learning. According to him, this is mainly to be attributed to the (in)evitability to learn the language, maturity of the learner, (non)existence of their overt language behaviour, and learner's motivation (Corder 1967). As proposed by Bialystok, L2 learners "do not begin with a childlike naivete about the social uses of language" (Bialystok 1993, 47). Kasper and Schmidt (1996) comment on this idea by stating that while children primarily need to develop "analyzed representations of symbolic knowledge", the task that adult L2 learners must accomplish in the first place is to "develop executive control over already available knowledge representations" (Kasper and Schmidt 1996, 157). In other words, "learners have to be able to direct attention selectively to the literal or intended meaning in indirect requests, sarcasm, and irony, or the markers of politeness" (ibid.). Their failure to do so – which then leads to contextual inappropriateness – may be attributed to their insufficiently developed sociopragmatic knowledge (ibid.).

Great debate has been about the effect that pragmatic competence in L1 can have on pragmatic competence in L2, i.e. whether something like transfer of pragmatic knowledge takes place. In spite of the fact that this thesis is not interested in the question of knowledge transfer, the following paragraph is, for the sake of completeness, dedicated to this issue.

2.4.2 Knowledge Transfer

"The more knowledge and skills an individual acquires, the more likely it becomes that his new learning will be shaped by his past experiences and activities" (Postman 1971, 1019). The basic question then arises as to what relation holds between the knowledge acquired in one's first language and their second language. One example of the existence of such a relation was revealed in research conducted by Kellerman. In this study (2000) he focuses on what he calls "homoiophobia" and shows that L2 learners are well aware of the constraints on the similarity between the two languages concerned, leading them to transfer the L1 structures into their L2 with caution. Their decision about whether a transfer is appropriate or not is according to him driven by "prototypicality" effects, i.e. the extent to which the meaning of a certain concept is prototypical (Kellerman 2000). As mentioned in Koike (1989), Selinker posits that transfer does take place and that as a learner makes progress, he or she adjusts their L1 system to the system of L2 in what Selinker calls "restructuring" continuum (Koike 1989, 280). Koike (1989) also acknowledges that Corder (1978), on the other hand, de-emphasizes transfer and argues that the development of interlanguage should be thought of as a "developmental" continuum, for according to him, with increasing proficiency level of L2, the system progressively becomes more complex (Corder 1978, as paraphrased in Koike 1989, 280).

If we accept the idea that language as such is a dynamic system in which lots of interaction is taking place at any time, it is plausible to posit that any new input will be in some way linked to the information already acquired and stored in that system. Therefore, the existence of the relation between language proficiency and pragmatic skills that speakers can prove to have when using the language should be undisputed.

This thesis attempts to shed light on that relation and answer the question of whether the level of second language proficiency has any effect on the pragmatic competence that speakers attain in the language. Intuitively, the relation could be that of direct proportion, i.e. the more experienced the speaker and the higher the level of their language proficiency, the better their language performance in terms of pragmatic competence. Various studies with conflicting findings have been conducted to validate this hypothesis.

2.4.3 Previous Research on the Proficiency Effect on Pragmatic Knowledge

Farashaiyan and Tan (2012) investigated the influence of language proficiency and gender on pragmatic competence by evaluating the performance of 120 Iranian students – freshmen and seniors in English translation. Their findings showed no correlation between language proficiency and pragmatic competence, but proved gender was a significant variable, as female participants outperformed the male ones in the test of pragmatic skills (Farashaiyan and Tan 2012). Rattanaprasert and Aksornjarung's study (2014) arrived at a similar conclusion. Their results indicate that there is no positive relation between the extent to which language learners master vocabulary and grammar and to which they are able to perform utterances which would be pragmatically appropriate (Rattanaprasert and Aksornjarung 2014).

On the contrary, Carrell's study (1981) revealed there was a correlation between the level of language proficiency and pragmatic proficiency. Similar conclusion was reached by Keshmiri (1999), who concludes that there is indeed a positive relation between the language proficiency level and the ability to interpret conversational implicatures by Iranian and American students (Keshmiri 1999, as paraphrased in Farashaiyan and Tan 2012, 36). Garcia (2004) examined 35 high and low level English non-native speakers to discover developmental differences in linguistic and pragmatic meaning comprehension. In her study the high level group considerably outperformed the low level one in terms of pragmatic meaning processing (Garcia 2004). These findings correspond to what Ashoorpour and Azari (2014) found out. Their study regarded Iranian learners of English on different levels of language proficiency and the effect of grammatical knowledge on pragmatic knowledge when performing the speech act of a request. The results indicate that grammatically advanced students display higher pragmatic competence than the lower-level ones (Ashoorpour and Azari 2014).

This thesis embraces the viewpoint that a positive relation exists between the level of language proficiency and pragmatic competence in the given language and that this influences the way interlocutors with different levels of proficiency interpret ironic remarks. The practical part attempts to prove this.

3   PRACTICAL PART

3.1   Introduction

With respect to the arguments presented above, the aim of this thesis is to answer the abovementioned research questions and in doing so test the corresponding hypotheses formulated in the introductory part, namely that a positive relation will be shown to hold between the level of second language proficiency and pragmatic abilities that individuals have in their second language, that it will be context that will play a greater role in interpreting ironic utterances in the second language by more advanced language users, and that it will be prosody that will play a greater role in interpreting ironic utterances in the second language by less advanced interlocutors. A small-scale experiment has been carried out in order to shed light on these issues.

3.2   Methodology

The following sections provide information about the methods of conducting the experiment, its participants, the materials used in the study as well as the environment in which the experiment was conducted.

With respect to the last-mentioned feature, given the then situation as well as the abilities of the participants, an online mode had to be resorted to, which prevented the experimenter from meeting the participants in person and controlling not only the conditions they worked under while performing the tasks but also the appropriateness of the subjects' effort and the amount of attention paid to the task. It follows that it was not in the abilities of the experimenter to make sure that all the subjects were exposed to the same conditions in terms of the physical environment in which they were located, the time of the day they chose to complete the task or the amount of time they spent completing it. The participants were asked to read the background to individual situations only once and subsequently listen to a corresponding recording only once. Nonetheless, it can be only assumed that the participants did strictly follow the instructions. All these factors might have played their parts in the participants' responses and could have influenced their decisions. The effect of them would likely be eliminated had the experiment been performed by means of an in-person meeting, in which case everybody would be working at the same time of the day, in the same

environment, with the same equipment and would be controlled in terms of how much time they spend reading the situations descriptions and listening to the recordings.

In order to prevent any misunderstandings and to ensure that everybody knew what their tasks were, all instructions were provided in Czech, which constitutes the mother tongue of all the participants. All subjects were at the same time encouraged to refer to the experimenter in case of any doubts, were those to have prevented the subjects from completing the tasks adequately. No participant accepted this offer of help. The participants were informed that the study accounted for a practical part of a diploma thesis and that it regarded perception and interpretation of real-life utterances in English. The fact that it was irony detection in particular which was investigated was not disclosed.

The relation between second language proficiency and the level of pragmatic competence was tested on a group of 8 more advanced English language users and 8 less advanced participants. It was tested by means of 6 invented situations, each of which was accompanied by a short recording containing the main utterance and immediately followed by two questions which the participants had to answer on the basis of the situation description and the content of the recording.

The whole practical part was divided into two phases.

In the first phase, personal information of all the subjects was collected by means of an online questionnaire. The basic questions regarded their age, the university they studied or had studied at, the programme they studied or had studied, the length of their university career and the amount of time for which they had studied English. Besides these questions, everybody was also asked whether they had ever sat any widely accepted exam or held a widely recognized certificate; what were some other languages they spoke apart from Czech and English, if any; how they would evaluate their level of English; whether they spent a period of more than three months in an English-speaking country and whether they had any hobbies that could possibly have an effect on the way they perform in English.

Subsequently, the participants were sent materials containing the six situations and the corresponding six recordings via email. All the subjects, i.e. the more as well as the less advanced participants, were further internally divided into two groups. Two sets that contained situations descriptions and recordings in different combinations were created and sent to the participants. The combinations were concerned with the variables of extended context and ironic prosody. One set containing certain

combinations of the cues was received by four participants in the high-level group and by four participants in the low-level group, the other four participants in the respective groups were exposed to different combinations of stimuli. Both sets contained all possible combinations of these variables. All participants were therefore faced with combinations of presence or absence of the extended context and presence or absence of ironic prosody.[1]

3.3 Participants

The participants were carefully chosen. The utmost aim was to prevent the existence of any variables which could influence the interpretation of individual situations besides the ones whose effect was being examined, i.e. the level of proficiency in English and the cues which addressees rely on in interpreting talk exchanges.

At the time of writing the thesis, all of the 16 subjects were current or former university students with age range from 20 to 28 years. Except for two, all participants (had) studied at Palacký University in Olomouc. No auditory deficiencies or hearing impairments were notified by the participants and it was assumed that all the participants belonged to the group of "normally developing persons" as long as their pragmatic competence is concerned. In other words, the author of the thesis and the experimenter at the same time had no information that any of the subjects suffered from any type of disorder that would impair their pragmatic abilities and would automatically make them predestined to not being able to recognize, and/or having troubles recognizing, the communicative intent. All subjects took part in the study voluntarily and their participation was not rewarded financially or in any other way.

3.3.1 High-Level Group

The group of more advanced subjects, i.e. the "high-level group", consisted of 5 female and 3 male participants. All of them studied a programme called English for Translation and Interpretation at Palacký University at the bachelor's level, seven of them continued in this programme on the master's level, one of them went on to study English Language and Literature at Masaryk University in Brno. All of them had

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[1] The scheme according to which the combinations of the descriptions of the situations and the recordings were distributed can be found on a CD appended to this thesis.

successfully passed a C2 level English language exam in the course of their studies and had therefore attained the English proficiency level of native speakers as standardised by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). After finishing their studies, they all embarked on careers of translators, interpreters or English language teachers, making English an inevitable part of their daily lives. Besides being exposed to English on a regular basis in their professional careers, all eight participants reported that English occupied a significant place in their free time, be it by way of them watching films or series in English, reading English books or chatting with their English-speaking friends. All of them had also reported various levels of knowledge of languages other than English. None of them had, at the time of undertaking the study, studied English for less than 15 and more than 20 years, while two of them had spent more than three months in an English-speaking country.

3.3.2 Low-Level Group

The group of less advanced subjects, i.e. the "low-level group", consisted of 8 female participants. All of them were asked to fill in the questionnaire concerning their personal as well as language background, just like the subjects in the high-level group. Except for one, who had already finished their studies at Palacký University, all of the participants in the low-level group were active students at universities in Olomouc or Brno at the time of the study and none of them studied English nor any other study programme in which English would play a role and which could therefore potentially influence the level of their linguistic competence in English. With the exception of two cases, in which the level was not determined by the participants themselves, all of the subjects in this group reported only low proficiency levels of other foreign languages they had ever studied besides English and evaluated their English as corresponding to what could be classified as low or intermediate level. In case of two participants, English represented the only foreign language they had in their repository. Unlike the high-level group, in which all the subjects were known to have passed a C2 level exam in English, the most widely recognized exam in English that 6 out of the 8 subjects had passed was the secondary school leaving exam. At the moment of doing the study, the smallest amount of time spent by studying English in this group was 7 years, the most time spent by studying this language was 16 years. One participant had spent more than three months in an English-speaking country.

Regarding their free time, most of them mentioned watching English films with Czech subtitles or videos on the Internet in English.

The level of language proficiency of subjects in this group had to be tested before they could be included in the study. All participants in the low-level group thus had to sit a language assessment test, the results of which revealed their skills, in order to verify they qualify as suitable participants. In order to determine the level of their English with reference to the established CEFRL, freely available online Cambridge Assessment Test was used[2]. The subjects were instructed not to search for any vocabulary items nor any grammatical rules as a result of which they could potentially score higher in the test than they would have without it. Only those subjects that had not scored higher than B2 level on this test were allowed to continue in the study[3]. Higher levels of proficiency were undesirable in this group. As a consequence, one participant was eliminated and could not take part in the other section. Once the participants had sat this test and once it had been proved that their level of English was not higher than B2, they were sent the other part which regarded the study itself.

As mentioned before, the level of pragmatic competence as influenced by context and/or prosody was tested by means of six situations and six corresponding recordings.

3.4 Communicative Situations

The six situations were invented by the experimenter. Their content was chosen arbitrarily, the only condition that had to be fulfilled was that no situation placed either group at an advantage with respect to its interpretation. In other words, it would make little sense to include a situation in which two linguists are discussing different politeness theories and refer to Brown and Levinson's Face Saving Model, making an ironic remark about the notion of "face", for example, as this would in all likelihood put the subjects in the low-level group (who had no expert knowledge of linguistics, let alone pragmatics) at a considerable disadvantage. That is why all the situations concern very common issues and constitute moments which all the subjects could have

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[2] https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/general-english/

[3] The levels of language proficiency as determined by the test can be found in an Excel document in a folder containing the results of the low-level group participants. They are presented in brackets, following the numbers these participants were assigned.

experienced in their lives. Moreover, given the fact that all the subjects had a university education or still were university students at that time, a certain level of general knowledge was presupposed, which cleared the way for providing just the necessary amount of information.

Each situation was produced in two versions; namely in a version containing the full, extended context, and in the other in which the crucial information – thanks to which the ironic interpretation of the target utterance was hypothesized to be facilitated – was left out. Each participant obtained a Word document which included descriptions of the six situations, some of them with the extended context, some of them without it. Irrespective of that, each situation description was followed by two questions, both of which the participants were asked to answer. The first question, hereinafter also as the "a) question", which came directly after the situation description, was concerned with the content of the situation and its aim was to verify that the subjects had in fact read the description carefully and had made sense of it. Besides that, it also played the role of a distractor whose usage was intended to deflect participants' attention. The other question, hereinafter also as the "b) question", was the question that asked about the interpretation of the situation. These b) questions were formulated in such a way as to make sure that the answers to these questions would contain the crucial information based on which the experimenter would be able to state whether the subject has or has not revealed irony.

For the sake of example, one situation and a corresponding set of questions are presented below. The content in parenthesis constitutes the information that either was or was not provided and which is referred to herein as the "extended context". The target utterance, which is underlined in the following example, was not provided in the written form in any of the cases. In order to avoid mixed input and to make sure that the participants would indeed listen to the recordings, the target utterances were always provided in the recordings only.[4]

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[4] All the situations descriptions, recordings as well as the questions and the participants' answers to them can be found on the CD appended to this thesis.

Joke

A group of colleagues are having lunch during their lunch break at a canteen. Andrew, the well-known entertainer, tells a joke the target of which are blonde women. The group falls about laughing. Melissa (being a blonde, considering herself an intelligent woman and being tired of listening to jokes about how blonde women are stupid,) reacts: "<u>I love your sense of humour</u>."

a) What is the subject of Andrew's joke?
b) What is Melissa's opinion on Andrew's sense of humour?

3.5   Recordings

As stated above, recordings played a crucial role in this study. Not only did they contain the target utterances, based on which the subjects were requested to answer the questions, but given the nature of the spoken word, they also came with certain prosody.

The whole set consisted of twelve recordings altogether; two recordings for each of the six situations, out of which in one case, the speaker was reading a situation description with neutral prosody, in the other, ironic prosody accompanied the utterance. The recordings were labelled in such a way that situation 1 with neutral prosody was presented to the subjects as recording 1.1, the same situation recorded with ironic prosody was labelled 1.2, thereby preventing the participants from deducing from the labels of the recordings what they contained. With the aim of maximizing authenticity, the speaker was not informed about the subject of the study, nor was she instructed to utter the target sentence with specific prosody. Nevertheless, during the process of recording, it became clear to the speaker that in cases in which the extended context, which supported ironic interpretation, was present, ironic prosody was sought, while in cases in which this context was absent, neutral prosody was desired. Therefore, each target utterance for each of the communicative situations was recorded with what was to represent neutral as well as ironic prosody. The recordings were made in the speaker's office using a voice recorder built into the IPhone 6s cell phone. The quality of the recordings was rated as high by a disinterested listener.

3.5.1 Speaker

Given the fact that the aim of the thesis was to investigate how certain aspects of real-life language would be interpreted by non-native speakers of the language, it had to be a native speaker's speech which would then be evaluated by the subjects. The person asked to participate in this study in the role of the native speaker was Dr Elizabeth Allyn Woock, a lecturer at Palacký University.

As revealed by Dr Woock (2022), she was born in Champaign, Illinois and besides Illinois, which is traditionally classified as belonging to the American Midwest, she has also lived in New Jersey, Colorado, Massachusetts and Maryland, and spent a considerable amount of time in Ireland. She comes from a family which she claims speaks a combination of rural southern and Midwestern accent, which tends to be stigmatized. That is why she says she has learned a more East-coast accent during her studies in the United States. Fourteen years ago, she moved to the Czech Republic, where she has lived since then, which she claims influenced the way she speaks a lot. She has reported that she does not spend much time with many native English speakers and spends basically no time with people who would speak the same accent that she does. Moreover, she has also stated that due to the fact that a strong American accent might be difficult to comprehend in the Czech settings, she has simplified her English, and because of the fact that she has to speak Czech a lot, her English accent has been also affected by Moravian Czech. In her opinion, she currently speaks with a Czech-influenced flat accent she has developed while living abroad. She also claims she tries to suppress the so called southern drawl, which she says comes up when she talks to her family[5], and a speech impediment, which she states she works hard to cover up while speaking (Elizabeth Woock, e-mail to author, June 20, 2022). With reference to the fact that no features of the southern drawl were identified in the recordings, nor did the recordings show signs of any speech impediment which could influence comprehensibility and interpretability in any way, they were regarded as suitable.

Unlike some other experiments focusing on a similar subject in which the stimuli were recorded by professional actors or actresses (e.g. Matsui et al. 2016; Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau 2018; Deliens et al. 2018), in this study, the speaker is a university lecturer, which is thought of as having both, advantages as well

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[5] Features of the southern drawl could be potentially problematic and pose a greater challenge and cause comprehension difficulties especially in the low-level group.

as disadvantages. On the one hand, the speaker does not possess the professional acting skills and might be less capable of modifying her speech and produce utterances with certain prosody as requested by the circumstances. On the other hand, the fact that the speaker is a non-actress is regarded more suitable considering the aim of the study, which is to investigate how language users evaluate stimuli representative of real-life language use. Given the fact that the speaker was not an actress, she must have counted on her naturally acquired speech experience and was assumed to have been speaking with the same prosody that she naturally would in non-experimental conditions in order to communicate the intentions in question. Her speech can be altogether regarded as authentic.

3.6 Results

Even though each participant was faced with twelve questions in total, i.e. two questions for six situations, they were only the six answers to the six b) questions the content of which was the focus of the study. Having said that, it does not mean that the other six answers were not paid any attention to at all. These a) questions had their role to play and the absence of answers to these questions would disqualify the subjects' answers to the b) questions.

All of the participants, however, answered the first question in a set, suggesting that they had indeed made themselves familiar with the situations sufficiently. In three cases, the first question in a set was answered incorrectly, though. All of these cases, however, regarded situation number three, which might have been perceived differently with respect to the piece of information which was the subject of the question. In one case, the participant replied that the text did not provide the answer to the question. This was attributed to the low level of the participant's skills in English and her lack of knowledge of the expression "to be concerned with", which arguably prevented her from understanding the question. In other three cases, the answers to the a) questions were somewhat inaccurate but not incorrect. In spite of the inadequate answers in those few cases, it was clear that the participants had read the descriptions of the situations, which qualified their responses to the second question in every set as suitable to be included in the study.

The second question always regarded the interpretation of the target utterance in the light of the overall communicative situation. The aim of these b) questions was

to find out whether the subjects had recognized the ironic intent of the speaker. Importantly, these questions never asked explicitly about whether irony was present in the discourse or not, nor was the expression "irony" mentioned anywhere throughout the study in order not to bias the participants in any way.

What has to be mentioned at this stage is that except for Hypothesis 1 they were only each participant's 4 responses which were taken into account out of the 6 b) questions each subject was asked to answer. Therefore, they were 48 responses in each group used to confirm or disprove Hypothesis 1 and 32 responses used to validate Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3.

As has been mentioned above, in each of the 6 cases each participant was presented with a certain combination of cues, i.e. extended context and prosody. Importantly, every participant was faced with all 4 combinations, which could be represented as + context / + prosody, + context / − prosody, − context / + prosody, − context / − prosody. It follows that, inter alia, every participant had to interpret a communicative situation while having context as well as prosody at their disposal. As a result of the fact that in such a case it is not possible to state with certainty which cue they relied on in processing the utterance, responses to the questions in these cases were not included in the results as far as Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were concerned. By the same token, each subject was also in 1 out of the 6 combinations faced with a situation in which they had neither of these cues, which disqualified the responses to the questions in these cases from being included in the results for the two hypotheses for the same reason.

The + context / + prosody and − context / − prosody combinations were taken into account in validating Hypothesis 1 only, with reference to which their relevance was clearly demonstrated as is discussed below. Besides that, these combinations were also included in order to verify that the participants had read the descriptions of the situations, listened to the recordings and understood the task. In other words, if a subject had been provided with both, extended context as well as prosody, but had not revealed irony, it would have been clear that the participant had not known what they had been asked to do or, possibly, that their ability to distinguish between the encoded (literal) meaning and the intended meaning is limited, in which case the usableness of their responses when exposed to the other combinations would have been called into question.

The other 2 combinations, i.e. + context / − prosody and – context / + prosody, were those which the subjects were exposed to repeatedly. The first four participants in both groups had context at their disposal without prosody in 2 cases and were encouraged to rely exclusively on prosody in the other 2 cases. The other four participants in each group had context at their disposal without prosody in 3 cases and prosody without context in 1 case. Out of the 32 cases and corresponding 32 responses in each group, which were taken into account in order to examine Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, in 20 cases the participants were encouraged to rely on context as ironic prosody was not available, in 12 cases it was the other way around. As can be seen below, the combinations of the cues available for the interpretation of individual situations were different in the two sets in both groups of language proficiency so as to ensure that every situation is judged on the basis of different input.

Participant 1		
Situation	Context	Prosody
1	+	+
2	-	-
3	+	-
4	-	+
5	+	-
6	-	+

Table 1: Cues combination for participants 1–4 in each group

Participant 5		
Situation	Context	Prosody
1	+	-
2	+	+
3	-	-
4	+	-
5	-	+
6	+	-

Table 2: Cues combination for participants 5–8 in each group

3.6.1 Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis is the most all-encompassing of the three. It refers to the first research question, which it attempts to answer. It applies to both groups of participants

and looks at the overall success rate in terms of irony detection, irrespective of which cues were or were not present in the talk exchange. Hypothesis 1 predicted that high-level subjects would be more successful in irony recognition than the low-level ones. In order to examine this hypothesis, regardless of whether the target utterance was accompanied by extended context, prosody typical of irony, both of these cues, or neither of them, subjects were judged according to the number of cases in which they recognized that the intent of the speaker was different from the one contained within the words uttered explicitly.

High-level group irony detection		
combination	number of ironic intents recognized	success rate
+ context / + prosody	8 out of 8	100.00%
+ context / – prosody	19 out of 20	95.00%
– context / + prosody	8 out of 12	66.67%
– context / – prosody	7 out of 8	87.50%
irrespective of the cues	42 out of 48	87.50%

Table 3: Number and percentage of cases of irony detection in the high-level group

Low-level group irony detection		
combination	number of ironic intents recognized	success rate
+ context / + prosody	8 out of 8	100.00%
+ context / – prosody	17 out of 20	85.00%
– context / + prosody	5 out of 12	41.67%
– context / – prosody	0 out of 8	0.00%
irrespective of the cues	30 out of 48	62.50%

Table 4: Number and percentage of cases of irony detection in the low-level group

Overall, the participants belonging to the high-level group revealed the ironic communicative intent of the speaker in 42 out of 48 cases, which means that they were successful in 87.50% of cases. The success rate of low-level participants was at 62.50%. In absolute numbers that means that the low-level participants correctly interpreted the talk exchanges in 30 out of 48 cases. The more experienced English users were thus 1.4 times more successful in utterance interpretation and outperformed the subjects whose English was not on such a high level by 25.00% of cases. This hypothesis may be regarded as confirmed by the data obtained.

On the whole, differences in the way the two groups of proficiency managed to detect irony, i.e. the absolute numbers of cases in which the participants recognized irony while being exposed to the 4 combinations of cues as well as the success rates of irony detection in individual cases are displayed in Chart 1 below.
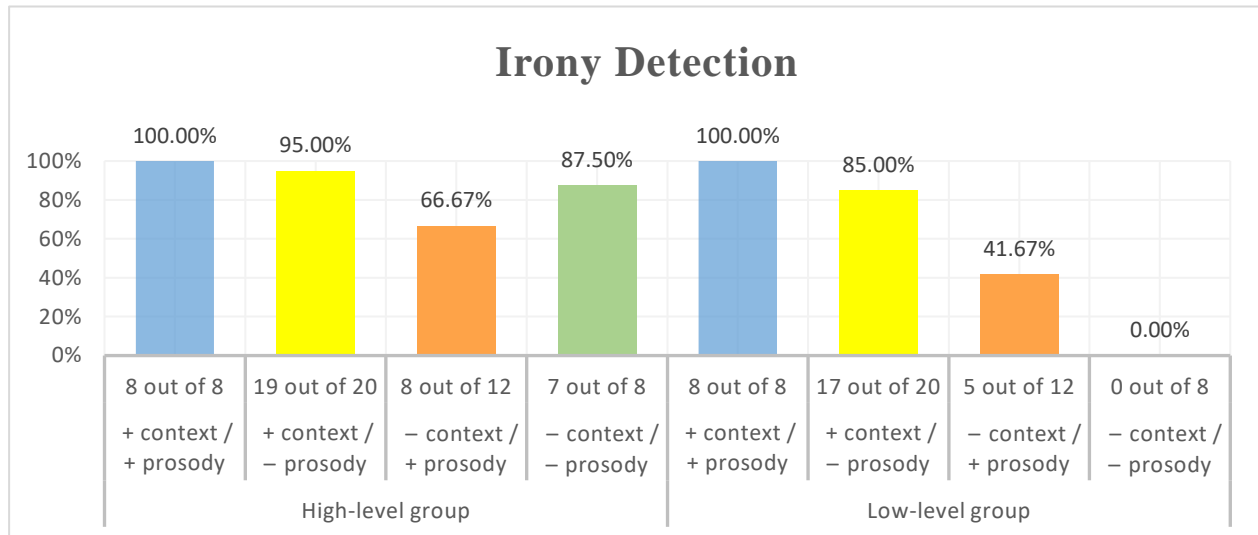

Chart 1: Number and percentage of cases of irony detection in all combinations in both groups of proficiency

As already mentioned, concerning Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, they were only the 4 cases regarding the 2 combinations, in which one of the cues was provided while the other was not, which were relevant to the aim of validating the hypotheses. They were the answers to the questions in these cases which could shed light on these hypotheses and answer the corresponding research question. The following sections present evidence on the basis of which the two hypotheses were confirmed or rejected.

3.6.2 Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was concerned with the high-level participants only. It predicted that the more experienced language users would count on context rather than prosody in interpreting the communicative situations. This hypothesis was formulated as a result of studies suggesting that context is a very reliable cue in irony processing (e.g. Ivanko and Pexman 2003; Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau 2018). It is specifically the latter study whose results indicate that addressees prefer context to prosody when interpreting utterances (Rivière, Klein and Champagne-Lavau 2018).

In compliance with this hypothesis, high-level participants were expected to always reveal the ironic intent of the speaker in case they were provided with the extended context. The other part of this hypothesis predicted that the more proficient English language users would be less certain about the intent of the speaker should this context not be provided. In that case, they would be left without a lexical cue as to how to interpret the communicative situation and would have to rely wholly on prosody.

Hypothesis 2		
combination	absolute numbers	percentage
+ context / – prosody	19 out of 20	95.00%
– context / + prosody	4 out of 12	33.33%
irrespective of the cues	23 out of 32	71.88%

Table 5: Number and percentage of cases in which participants from the high-level group interpreted utterances according to what was hypothesized

The results of the study as regards this hypothesis suggest that it might not be exclusively context that the more experienced communicators rely on. In 19 out of the 20 cases, i.e. in 95.00% of cases, in which they were provided with the extended context but neutral prosody they revealed the ironic intent of the speaker, suggesting that the lack of prosody typical of irony did not pose any obstacles to them. Nevertheless, out the 12 cases in which they were provided with prosody typical of irony but in which the extended context was not made available they were able to recognize that the intended reading of the utterance was ironic in 8 cases. It follows that in the – context / + prosody combination they interpreted the utterances according to the expectation in 33.33% of cases only.

Irrespective of the combination, the high-level group participants interpreted the communicative situations according to the expectation in 71.88% of cases in total. It seems that, as far as this group is concerned, it did not matter which cue they were provided with, since they were able to identify the ironic intent even in the combination in which they did not have the extended context at their disposal, as is demonstrated by the fact that in that combination their interpretation was contrary to what was hypothesized in 66.67% of cases. To conclude, the presence or absence of extended context does not appear to have a significant effect on highly proficient language users' abilities to detect irony. Hypothesis 2 could not have been confirmed.

3.6.3 Hypothesis 3

The last hypothesis can be thought of as the opposite of the second hypothesis. It only took the low-level participants into consideration and predicted that the cue they would find more beneficial to interpreting the utterances will be prosody. This hypothesis was put forward with reference to experiments conducted by Bryant and Fox Tree (2005) or Deliens et al. (2018), both of which demonstrated the role of prosody in interpreting communicative situations. They were especially the findings of the study by Deliens et al. (2018) which laid the foundations of the last hypothesis of this small-scale study. As mentioned above, the study by Deliens et al. (2018) proved that while context is a more reliable cue as to the revelation of the communicative intent, as a result of the fact that prosody is more readily available to addressees, it is considered first (Deliens et al., 2018).

Hence, the prediction was that the lower level of linguistic (and expectedly also pragmatic) competence of the less experienced subjects would make them avoid processing the extended context. It was predicted that, unlike the proficient language users for whom the analysis of the information in the context would not increase the amount of mental energy required for processing without rewarding them with greater input contributory to revealing the intent of the speaker, context analysis would impose excessive burden on the addressees in the less advanced group and that it would be found too costly by them. Because processing the extended context would increase the processing capacity demands, they would decide to ignore this context and would interpret the talk exchanges on the basis of prosody only even in situations in which the extended context would be provided.

Hypothesis 3		
combination	absolute numbers	percentage
+ context / – prosody	3 out of 20	15.00%
– context / + prosody	5 out of 12	41.67%
irrespective of the cues	8 out of 32	25.00%

Table 6: Number and percentage of cases in which participants from the low-level group interpreted utterances according to what was hypothesized

With respect to this hypothesis, the results show a clear tendency. In 5 out of the 12 cases in which the extended context was not provided and it could thus be only

prosody that the subjects used for the interpretation they revealed the ironic intent, meaning that they interpreted the utterances as expected in 41.67% of cases. In the other combination, i.e. + context / − prosody, in which, according to what was hypothesized, they should not be capable of recognizing that the speaker was being ironic, they did recognize the ironic intent of the speaker in 17 out of the 20 cases. In other words, in this combination, their interpretation did not correspond to the expectation in 85.00% of cases, while it was in line with it in 15.00% of cases only.

In total, the subjects in this group interpreted the communicative situations according to what was hypothesized in 25.00% of cases. The data gathered thus do not support Hypothesis 3, as a consequence of which it was rejected.

3.7 Discussion

One unexpected finding which emerged from the study is worth pointing out. The − context / − prosody combination produced curious results in the high-level group. Logically speaking, in the absence of contextual as well as prosodic cues, it should be impossible for the subjects to reveal that the speaker was being ironic. Yet 7 out of the 8 more experienced participants, when faced with this combination, interpreted the target utterance as conveying irony. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that their proficiency in English allowed them to see that in all the other cases the proposition that the speaker actually wanted to communicate with their utterance was the opposite of what they have said explicitly. Arguably, this might have led these 7 high-level participants to conclude that the speaker must have intended to be ironic in this case too. The other factor which could also play its part is the fact that all of these participants had studied English at Palacký University. All of them had thus acquired knowledge of linguistics in English; moreover, many of them had over the period of their studies attended the semestral course of pragmatics, the content of which is concerned with how, on many occasions, what is communicated cannot be determined by the meaning of the expressions used. Given the fact that irony is also discussed in the course, the participants who had completed the course had known how irony works and might have searched for irony even in cases in which there was no cue suggesting the ironic intent is present.

Another agent that might have influenced the outcome of the experiment was the speaker. As has been already mentioned, the speaker was not a professional actress,

as a result of which her speech and intonation might have been considered more authentic. On the other hand, when listening to the recordings and comparing the pairs of recordings which were to represent neutral and ironic prosody, in some cases the differences were not easy to spot and what was supposed to stand for ironic prosody was not perceived by the author of this thesis as prosody highly typical of irony. In other words, the ironic intent was not noticeable in the prosody to such an extent that the presence of ironic prosody would be automatically indicative of irony. This offers a plausible explanation for why the subjects in the low-level group in the end gave preference to context in interpreting the utterances, even though they were provided with ironic prosody, and therefore did not produce results which would be in line with those generated by the estimates and expectations. Another way to account for the unexpected findings would be to refer to what was revealed by Peters et al. (2016). The subject of their study was sarcasm understanding, which was explored by investigating the differences between native and non-native English speakers with respect to their ability to use context and prosody in interpreting communication. They showed that while native English speakers always considered context, which they perceived as more beneficial, but took into account prosody once that was available in order to confirm the hypotheses they had formulated about the interpretation, non-native speakers of English, who in their case were Arabic, ignored prosody as a cue to sarcasm recognition and relied on context only. The authors argue that this can be explained by referring to insufficient language resources of the non-native speakers, which prevent them from revising the understanding they have arrived at thanks to context (Peter et al. 2016).

While on the subject of sarcasm, another objection which could be raised is that some of the target utterances might be thought of as containing sarcasm rather than irony and as such are inappropriate as regards the aim of the study. Nonetheless, having embraced the idea of Attardo (2000), according to whom sarcasm is a type of irony, which unlike irony has a clear target (Attardo 2000), the distinction between these two phenomena was not considered necessary. What was regarded as essential was that although in some cases the utterances might be perceived as instances of sarcasm, they would always be considered instances of irony on the whole.

Another deficiency of the study is the lack of test concerning pragmatic skills. To put it another way, none of the subjects in either group had sat any test assessing their ability to engage in processing utterances and recognizing communicative intents

of interlocutors in general. This test would have been conducted in their mother tongue, i.e. Czech, and would have imparted information about the participants' abilities to use language in order to communicate in social settings. Given the fact that the abilities of the subjects to participate in effective communication had not been assessed, it cannot be excluded that some of them might not have developed the pragmatic skills in their L1 to a sufficiently high level for them to be able to build on those in their L2. As stated above, though, the author of this thesis and the experimenter at the same time was not aware of any pragmatic deficiencies which would impair the subjects' abilities to interpret the communicative situations they were exposed to and which would thus disqualify them from taking part in the experiment.

Finally, it is abundantly obvious that a lot more data would be needed to state with certainty that the hypotheses were confirmed or disproved. As far as the first hypothesis is concerned, the 96 interpretations, 48 in each group, can be considered a sufficiently large sample based on which the conclusion could be drawn. The other two hypotheses would call for analysis of a greater number of responses. After all, they were only 32 interpretations in each group which were analysed with the aim of validating Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 and answering the second research question. Having said that, the study constituting the practical part of this thesis did not have pretensions to gather incontrovertible evidence. The aim of the study was to suggest ways in which the relation between language proficiency and cues regarding irony detection could be explored. Considering the fact that this study can be classified as an experiment design, it can be claimed that the findings are satisfying. The answers obtained from the participants in both groups constitute evidence which points to the validity of the first hypothesis, while tentatively suggesting that the second hypothesis should be rejected and indicating that the third hypothesis does not, in fact, hold true. Statistical hypothesis testing should be carried out in order to state with certainty whether the data provide enough evidence to accept or reject the hypotheses presented.

Future experimenters should aim to undertake a large-scale study, which would involve more participants and more situations that these participants would have to interpret. More conspicuously ironic prosody should be procured and used in case future research on this topic is carried out. Overall, the effect of phenomena such as context and prosody remains an extensively researched subject which, however, still deserves more empirical investigation.

4   CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on pragmatic skills in a foreign language. In particular, it attempted to discover whether a positive correlation exists between one's language proficiency and their pragmatic competence in their second language. Furthermore, the practical part of this thesis also aimed to cast light on the question of whether any difference exists between subjects with different levels of proficiency in their L2 in terms of the way they process talk exchanges containing irony in their L2.

16 subjects participated in the study, 8 per each group of proficiency. All of the participants were current or former university students at the time of conducting the experiment. All of them were native speakers of Czech for whom English represented their second language. While the participants in the high-level group had all passed a C2 level exam in English, qualifying them as fully professional in English, none of the low-level subjects acquired a level in English higher than B2.

Three hypotheses were put forward, the validity of which was examined by way of a small-scale empirical study, which comprised the practical part. The study took the form of 6 fabricated communicative situations which were accompanied by different combinations of cues, namely extended context and prosody typical of irony, the necessity of which in respect of irony detection was investigated. All the subjects were instructed to read the descriptions of the situations, which is some cases contained the extended context, which was expected to serve as a facilitator in terms of irony revelation, in other cases they were left without this cue but had ironic prosody at their disposal. Each participant also experienced one situation in which they were exposed to both stimuli and one in which no cue was available. The participants' task subsequently was to listen to recordings which corresponded to the situations and contained the target utterances, the interpretation of which by the subjects was the main focus of the study. A female native speaker of American English was asked to record the utterances. Each target utterance was recorded in two versions, i.e. with neutral prosody and with prosody typical of irony. After having made themselves familiar with the communicative situation and having listened to the recording, the subjects were instructed to answer two questions. The first question asked about information which the participants, after having read the description of the situation, should be able to provide, regardless of their proficiency level. The point of this question was essentially to verify that the subjects had indeed read the description of the situation. The other

question was concerned with their own interpretation of the target utterance relative to the rest of the communicative situation and the way they perceived what the speaker had said.

The first hypothesis regarded the success rate at which participants belonging to the two groups of proficiency detect irony. It predicted that the greater linguistic competence in English that can be attributed to the more experienced interlocutors would endow them with greater pragmatic skills and would guarantee that they would be more successful in recognizing irony; in other words that they would reveal the ironic intent in more cases than the participants from the low-level group. Irrespective of which cues were or were not provided, the subjects belonging to the high-level group recognized that the speaker was being ironic in 42 out of 48 cases, i.e. in 87.50% of cases; the less experienced language users revealed irony in 30 out of 48 cases, i.e. in 62.50% of cases. The findings thus support this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis predicted that the high-level participants would find extended context an essential cue in interpreting the utterances. Given the fact that in 19 out of 20 cases in which they must have relied on context as ironic prosody was not available and in 8 out of 12 cases in which they had ironic prosody at their disposal but lacked the extended context they did reveal the ironic intent, it can be concluded that they interpreted the utterances according to what was hypothesized in 95.00% of cases and 33.33% of cases, respectively. In total, it was in 23 out of 32 cases, i.e. in 71.88% of cases, in which their interpretation was in line with the expectation. The findings display a tendency which does not support this hypothesis.

The third hypothesis predicted that the participants who had not developed professional linguistic competence would give preference to prosody, which would represent a more available cue, the processing of which would not lead to cognitive overload. In 17 out of the 20 cases, i.e. in 85.00% of cases, though, in which the low-level subjects were not provided with ironic prosody and had to count on context only they were able to reveal irony, which means that it was only in 15.00% of cases in which they interpreted the utterances according to what was hypothesized. On the other hand, in cases in which they could have only based their interpretation on prosody they recognized irony in 41.67% of cases, i.e. in 5 out of the 12 cases. The fact that their interpretation lived up to the expectation only in 8 out of the 32 cases, i.e. in 25.00% of cases, led to rejection of this hypothesis.

To conclude, based on the small-scale empirical study conducted, it could be argued that the greater the language proficiency of native Czech speakers in English, the greater their pragmatic competence in English. The evidence obtained also points to the fact that context is a more useful cue for interpreting talk exchanges in English for both, more experienced as well as the less proficient language users. Although the lack of the extended context did not seem to pose problems for the high-level group, they were more successful in recognizing irony when this cue was available, as they correctly detected irony in 27 out of 28 cases, i.e. in 96.43% of cases, in which context was provided, while they recognized the ironic intent in 15 out of 20 cases, i.e. in 75.00% of cases, in which it was not. The fact that the low-level group participants recognized irony in 25 out of the 28 cases, i.e. in 89.29% of cases, in which they had context at their disposal, while in cases in which this cue was missing they only detected irony in 5 out of the 20 cases, i.e. in 25.00% of cases, clearly demonstrates that context is the cue that language users rely on irrespective of the level of their language proficiency.

To put it another way, the answer to the first research question is that more experienced language users are more successful in detecting irony than less advanced interlocutors. Concerning the other research question, the results of the experiment indicate that it is context which communicators, regardless of their linguistic competence, rely on in interpreting ironic utterances. Whereas in both groups of proficiency the success rates of irony detection were higher when the extended context was provided than when it was absent, the difference between the success rates in those two situations was significantly greater in the low-level group. What makes the two groups distinct is that while the more experienced interlocutors are able to compensate for the lack of context, most likely thanks to their expertise in English, subjects with lower levels of linguistic competence in English suffer from its absence.

Further research should be undertaken on this topic. This thesis could then be approached as a starting point from which the issues dealt with herein could be elaborated. What I personally perceive as a contribution of this work are the shortcomings it suffers from. Should they be remedied, by way of gathering larger sample, namely a greater amount of participants who would be asked to interpret a greater number of communicative situations, and perhaps making sure that more noticeable ironic prosody is provided, this study could possibly answer the questions many people interested in intercultural pragmatics have in mind with greater certainty.

5   RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá pragmatickými dovednostmi v cizím jazyce, konkrétně v angličtině. Předměty zkoumání v rámci praktické části jsou rodilí mluvčí českého jazyka s různými úrovněmi anglického jazyka. Práce se zaměřuje na vnímání ironie, specificky pak na to, do jaké míry ovlivňuje pokročilost anglického jazyka českých rodilých mluvčí schopnost odhalit a správně interpretovat ironické promluvy v angličtině.

Teoretickým východiskem této práce jsou myšlenky jednoho ze zakladatelů pragmatiky Herberta Paula Grice, dle kterého je ironie případ přeneseného významu slov, jimiž autor zamýšlí komunikovat opak sdělení, které je obsaženo ve výrazech, jichž užil (Grice 1975).

Je totiž jasné, že v mnoha případech, ač pracujeme s předpokladem, že se při komunikaci chováme racionálně, myslíme něco jiného než to, co doslovně říkáme. Lidská komunikace tudíž spočívá zejména v odhalení zamýšleného významu, který může být značně odlišný od toho, který mluvčí takzvaně zakódoval. Jinými slovy, komunikační intence, tj. to, co autor svou výpovědí skutečně zamýšlí, v naprosté většině případů nelze určit ze samotné sémantické reprezentace jazykového signálu pomocí dekódování. Jsou to inferenční schopnosti adresátů, díky kterým je možno překlenout mezeru mezi sémanticky zakódovaným obsahem výpovědi a významem, jenž autor výpovědi zamýšlí komunikovat.

Lze tedy dojít k závěru, že lidská komunikace funguje díky tomu, že v průběhu komunikace si receptor na základě autorem sdělovaného obsahu vytváří hypotézy o jeho komunikačním záměru, z nichž následně vybere tu, pro kterou autorova promluva poskytuje největší množství nejsilnějších důkazů. Toto platí rovněž pro komunikační situace, ve kterých je autorovým záměrem komunikovat více nebo něco jiného než to, co lze vyčíst z explicitní jazykové formy, příkladem čehož je i ironie.

V teoretické části jsou představeny různé přístupy k definici ironie. Představen je tradiční přístup, který H. P. Grice (1975) rozšiřuje. Značná pozornost je věnována také přístupu Dana Sperbera a Deirdre Wilsonové, kteří pohlíží na ironii jako na případ echa, při kterém autor promluvy odkazuje na promluvu či myšlenku vyjádřenou dříve někým jiným nebo na něco, co lze považovat za všeobecný předpoklad, aniž by ho kdokoli v předchozí interakci vyslovil, a vyjadřuje k tomu svůj negativní a disociativní postoj (např. Wilsonová a Sperber 1992). Následuje rozbor přístupu Clarka a Gerriga

(1984), podle kterých je ironie založena na předstírání či přetvářce, kdy autor ironické výpovědi předstírá, že je někdo jiný a že hovoří k nezasvěcenému publiku, přičemž záměrem mluvčího mluvícího ironicky je, aby publikum odhalilo přetvářku a tudíž i skutečný postoj mluvčího ke sdělované skutečnosti, publiku nebo sobě samotnému (Clark a Gerrig 1984). Přehled teorií ironie je zakončen přístupem skupiny lingvistů, kteří jsou jakýmisi následníky Grice. Práce v této části odkazuje zejména na myšlenky Sullivana (2019), který obhajuje přístup jednoho z otců pragmatiky, poskytuje (do)vysvětlení Griceových myšlenek a v několika ohledech rozšiřuje původní Griceův přístup, aby obsáhl všechny případy ironie a odrazil kritiku, která byla vůči pohledu Grice na ironii vznesena.

V další části se práce věnuje rozdílným názorům na způsob, jakým lidský mozek ironii procesuje. V této otázce proti sobě stojí dva přístupy, a sice jednostupňové zpracování a dvoustupňové zpracování. Mezi příznivce názoru, že co se týče zpracování promluv, komunikace spočívající v přenesení smyslu není nikterak odlišná od doslovné komunikace, se dle Attarda (2000) řadí zejména Sperber a Wilsonová nebo Gibbs. Gibbs (1994) tvrdí, že naše kognitivní schopnosti nám s přihlédnutím ke kontextu komunikační situace umožňují pracovat s hypotézou, že záměrem mluvčího je, aby byla jeho promluva interpretována v přeneseném významu, aniž by bylo zapotřebí v první řadě posoudit doslovný význam. To dokládá výsledky empirického výzkumu, ze kterých vyplývá, že interpretace přeneseného významu není pro receptory nikterak časově náročnější (Gibbs 1994). Na druhou stranu však závěry jiných studií naznačují pravý opak. Dewsová a Winnerová (1995), stejně jako Giorová (1997) nebo Attardo (2000) zastávají názor, že zpracování ironických sdělení probíhá ve dvou fázích, a sice tak, že v první fázi adresát určí doslovný význam komunikátu, jenž posoudí s ohledem na kontext situace, v druhé fázi potom, pakliže doslovný význam promluvy v daném kontextu není vhodným adeptem na hypotézu ohledně autorova komunikačního záměru, pátrá po přeneseném významu autorových slov, který by odpovídal situačnímu kontextu komunikace.

Následující kapitoly se zabývají vodítky, na základě kterých adresát výpovědi rozpozná ironický záměr mluvčího. Pozornost je věnována třem hlavním ukazatelům, a to kontextu, prozódii a salienci neboli prominenci.

Teoretická část je zakončena kapitolou o akvizici druhého, tj. cizího, jazyka a přehledem studií, které byly v této oblasti zrealizovány. Jsou představeny poznatky Farashiyanové a Tanové (2012) a Rattanaprasertové a Aksornjarungové (2014), které

tvrdí, že nelze pozorovat jasnou souvztažnost mezi jazykovou a pragmatickou kompetencí, rovněž jako závěry studií Carrellové (1981) nebo Garciové (2004), které naopak naznačují, že existuje pozitivní korelace mezi těmito veličinami.

V praktické části své práce jsem se snažila ověřit celkem tři hypotézy.

První z nich se týkala celkové míry úspěšnosti odhalení ironie s ohledem na úroveň anglického jazyka. Tato hypotéza hovořila o tom, že subjekty, jejichž anglický jazyk je na vysoké úrovni, budou celkově úspěšnější při interpretaci promluv a odhalování ironického záměru jejich autorů. Jinými slovy, v rámci první hypotézy bylo cílem prokázat, že existuje korelace mezi jazykovou neboli gramatickou a pragmatickou kompetencí.

Mou druhou hypotézou bylo, že jazykově pokročilejší účastníci výzkumu se budou při interpretaci jednotlivých klíčových výpovědí spoléhat zejména na kontext. Tato hypotéza byla stanovena po vzoru studie Rivièrové, Kleinové a Champagne-Lavauové (2018) naznačující, že v porovnání kontextu a prozódie je důležitějším faktorem pro interpretaci ironických promluv kontext (Rivièrová, Kleinová a Champagne-Lavauová 2018). Předpokladem tedy bylo, že pro subjekty, jejichž jazyková kompetence v anglickém jazyce je vyšší, bude rozhodujícím vodítkem to, že kontext situace a klíčové promluvy si nebudou odpovídat, na základě čehož usoudí, že autorův komunikační záměr musel být jiný než ten, který je obsažen v explicitně vysloveném jazykovém signálu.

Poslední hypotéza hovořila naopak o tom, že pro jazykově méně pokročilé subjekty bude vodítkem, na které budou více spoléhat, prozódie. Zdrojem této hypotézy byl zejména výzkum provedený Deliensovou a kolektivem (2018), jehož závěrem bylo, že ačkoli jsou vodítka, která nijak neodkazují na kontext a mezi která se řadí mimo jiné i prozódie, méně spolehlivá, co se týká zpracování ironických výpovědí, účastníci komunikace se jimi díky jejich dostupnosti řídí (Deliensová a kolektiv 2018). Předpokladem tedy bylo, že účastníci studie s nižší úrovní anglického jazyka vědomě či podvědomě upřednostní právě prozódii. Ta pro ně bude představovat dostupnější vodítko, díky kterému ušetří mentální kapacitu; nároky na ni by byly vyšší, pokud by brali v potaz kontext komunikační situace.

Cílem této práce bylo prokázat nebo vyvrátit výše zmíněné hypotézy, a to pomocí experimentu v malém měřítku, jehož se účastnilo celkem 16 rodilých mluvčích češtiny ve věku 20–28 let. Dle úrovně anglického jazyka účastníci dohromady tvořili dvě skupiny, které byly porovnávány. První skupina sestávala z 8 bývalých studentů

oboru Angličtina se zaměřením na tlumočení a překlad na Univerzitě Palackého v Olomouci, kteří v rámci studia úspěšně složili zkoušku z anglického jazyka na úrovni C2, tj. na úrovni rodilého mluvčího. Druhou skupinu tvořilo dalších 8 účastníků, z nichž všichni byli v době výzkumu současní nebo bývalí studenti na Univerzitě Palackého v Olomouci nebo na Masarykově Univerzitě v Brně. Společným rysem této skupiny byla znatelně nižší úroveň jazykové kompetence v anglickém jazyce, která v žádném z případů nepřekročila úroveň B2, což bylo u této skupiny ověřeno jazykovým testem volně dostupným na stránkách Cambridge English.

Podstatou experimentu byla interpretace klíčových výpovědí zakončujících celkem 6 komunikačních situací. Každá situace byla vyhotovena ve dvou podobách, a sice s širokým kontextem, jehož přítomnost měla napovědět, že promluva má být vnímána ironicky, a bez něj. Účastníci si měli přečíst popis situace a následně poslechnout onu klíčovou promluvu namluvenou rodilou mluvčí anglického jazyka. Ta byla poskytnuta pouze ve formě zvukového záznamu, a to jednak aby se předešlo tomu, že budou mít subjekty smíšená vstupní data, jednak aby se zaručilo, že subjekty si nahrávky opravdu poslechnou. Ke každé situaci byly promluvy nahrány ve dvou podobách, a to s neutrální prozódií a s ironickou prozódií. Každý subjekt pak prostřednictvím e-mailu obdržel nahrávky a soubor s popisem situací v různých kombinacích vodítek, tedy s rozšiřujícím kontextem i bez něj a s ironickou prozódií i bez ní. Úkolem účastníků bylo na základě jednotlivých situací a klíčových promluv zodpovědět dvě otázky, které se ke každé komunikační situaci vztahovaly. První z nich se týkala obsahu situace a jejím záměrem bylo zejména ověřit, že se subjekty se situacemi patřičně obeznámily. Zároveň měla tato otázka rozptýlit pozornost účastníků. Druhá otázka se pak ptala na interpretaci klíčové promluvy. Je tedy jasné, že předmětem zájmu byla vždy odpověď na druhou otázku u každé situace.

Každý účastník interpretoval klíčovou promluvu u 6 komunikačních situací. Vyjma první hypotézy, u které se analyzovalo všech 6 odpovědí každého účastníka, tj. 48 odpovědí u každé skupiny, byly u každého subjektu posuzovány pouze 4 odpovědi, a to ty, jež se vztahovaly k situacím, u kterých měly subjekty k dispozici jen jedno ze dvou zmíněných vodítek. Jinými slovy, kombinace, v rámci které mohl účastník přihlížet jak k rozšiřujícímu kontextu, tak k ironické prozódii nebo naopak neměl k dispozici ani jedno z těchto vodítek, byly pro potřeby ověření druhých dvou hypotéz z výsledků vyloučeny. Jejich úkolem bylo mimo jiné poskytnout ujištění, že účastníci porozuměli svému úkolu. Za předpokladu, že subjekt měl k dispozici obě

vodítka svědčící o ironii, ale nebyl schopen odhalit, že autor promluvy zamýšlel, aby byl obsah jeho sdělení vnímán jako ironie, by totiž bylo patrné, že daný subjekt neporozuměl svému úkolu nebo nebyl schopen vnímat rozdíl mezi doslovným a zamýšleným významem řečníkových slov. V každé skupině pokročilosti anglického jazyka tedy bylo za účelem ověření druhých dvou hypotéz analyzováno celkem 32 odpovědí.

Na základě odpovědí obdržených od účastníků výzkumu lze říci, že první hypotéza byla prokázána. Účastníci spadající do jazykově pokročilé skupiny odhalili ironii ve 42 případech z celkem 48 případů, méně pokročilí účastníci pak ve 30 případech ze 48 případů. Míra úspěšnosti tedy byla 87,50 % a 62,50 %, v tomto pořadí.

Druhou hypotézu se nepodařilo prokázat. Konkrétně v kombinaci, v rámci které měly subjekty k dispozici kontext, avšak postrádaly ironickou prozódii, subjekty interpretovaly komunikační situace dle očekávání v 19 případech z 20 případů, tj. v 95,00 % případů. V případě, kdy se museli spoléhat pouze na prozódii, rozpoznali účastníci z pokročilejší skupiny ironický záměr řečníka v 8 případech z 12 případů, tj. v 66,67 % případů, což bylo zjištění v rozporu s hypotézou. V souhrnu pokročilejší účastníci interpretovali promluvy v souladu s očekáváním v 71,88 % případů. Data naznačují, že ačkoli je u této skupiny větší pravděpodobnost odhalení ironie, pokud je k dispozici rozšiřující kontext, jeho nedostatek nepředstavuje nepřekonatelnou překážku, neboť ho jsou tyto subjekty díky vysoké úrovni své jazykové kompetence schopny kompenzovat.

Třetí hypotéza byla získanými daty vyvrácena. Celkově účastníci z méně pokročilé skupiny interpretovali promluvy v souladu s očekáváním pouze ve 25,00 % případů. V případě, kdy měly subjekty s nižší úrovní jazykové kompetence k dispozici pouze ironickou prozódii, odhalily ironii v 5 případech z 12 případů, tj. v 41,67 % případů. V opačném případě však, navzdory očekáváním, tito účastníci ironii odhalili v 17 případech z 20 případů, což představuje 85,00 % případů, ve kterých jejich interpretace neodpovídala hypotéze. Možným vysvětlením by mohl být fakt, že při pořizování nahrávek nebyla řečnicí užita nápadně ironická prozódie, jejíž přítomnost by jasně poukazovala na fakt, že záměrem je, aby byla promluva vnímána jako případ ironie.

Závěrem lze tedy říct, že existuje korelace mezi jazykovou a pragmatickou kompetencí v druhém jazyce. Je patrné, že účastníci z jazykově pokročilejší skupiny byli celkově úspěšnější v odhalování ironie než subjekty s nižší úrovní jazykové

kompetence v angličtině. Data také naznačují, že bez ohledu na jazykovou pokročilost je vodítkem, na které se adresáti při komunikaci více spoléhají pro potřeby odhalení komunikačního záměru mluvčího, kontext. Účastníci s vyšší úrovní jazykové kompetence v angličtině ironii odhalili celkem ve 27 případech z 28 případů, tj. v 96,43 % případů, kdy měli k dispozici kontext, a v 15 případech z 20 případů, tj. v 75,00 % případů, kdy toto vodítko poskytnuto nebylo. Účastníci z jazykově méně pokročilé skupiny odhalili ironii celkem ve 25 případech z 28 případů, tj. v 89,29 % případů, ve kterých byl kontext k dispozici, zatímco pouze v 5 případech z 20 případů, tj. ve 25,00 % případů, kdy jim bylo toto vodítko odepřeno. Je tedy patrné, že v kombinacích, ve kterých byl poskytnut rozšiřující kontext, byla míra úspěšnosti odhalení ironie v obou skupinách vyšší než v případě, kdy kontext poskytnut nebyl, přičemž v méně pokročilé skupině byl rozdíl výrazně znatelnější. To lze přisoudit tomu, že zatímco pokročilejší subjekty byly díky své jazykové kompetenci schopny ironii odhalit i bez kontextu, subjekty, jejichž jazyková kompetence nedosahovala tak vysoké úrovně, toto vodítko postrádaly natolik, že ve většině případů, kdy rozšiřující kontext nebyl k dispozici, nebyly schopny promluvy správně interpretovat.

Rozsáhlejší empirický výzkum by mohl poskytnout prokazatelnější výsledky. Budoucí výzkum v této oblasti by měl zahrnovat znatelně vyšší počet účastníků a několikanásobně vyšší počet komunikačních situací, jejichž interpretace je hlavním předmětem zájmu. Zároveň by mohl těžit z nápadněji ironické prozódie. S přihlédnutím k výše zmíněnému lze tento experiment provedený v malém měřítku vnímat jako možný odrazový můstek poskytující základ pro další badatelskou činnost.

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