

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view

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Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view ¹⁾

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe verbal irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view, especially by referring to the Argumentative Polyphony Theory (APT) as well as to the Semantic Blocks Theory (SBT), both founded by Carel (2011a). By analysing figures and expressions in this way, we will see that ironic utterances and expressions of politeness are on the same scale and that by regulating this scale, we can work out such intermediate expressions as litotes and euphemism.

Two relatively recent works on irony have been written within the two frameworks just mentioned above: Ducrot (2010) (APT) and Carel (2011b) (SBT), but their conclusions are valid only for the *typical* antiphrastic irony case and these theories' actual devices cannot adequately distinguish the four figures of speech examined in this paper.

Based on these two theories, this paper provides a global picture not only of typical irony and banter, but also of ironical litotes ('You are a bit drunk', while this person is extremely drunk) and bantering litotes ('Your idea is not stupid' for an excellent idea). As for euphemism, it can be distinguished into two subcategories: the mitigative euphemism and the condescending euphemism.

2. SBT and APT: Basic notions ²⁾

SBT and APT are both argumentativist theories, in that they are based on the idea that the meaning of an utterance is to be described, essentially, argumentatively. The meaning of an utterance is not to be calculated by judging the truthfulness of what is said (the referential meaning), but by considering its argumentative potential (the 'argumentative aspect' of an utterance, presented in 1. 1. below).

The SBT is concerned with the description of the structural meaning of an utterance, while the APT is a theory about bringing those structurally defined semantic contents into discourse. Instead of developing the theoretical discussion extensively, let us examine some basic ideas of these two theories necessary for this paper's investigation.

2.1 Semantic Blocks Theory (SBT)

The SBT is Carel's main theory about language and could be positioned on the extended line of the French argumentativist current in Anscombe and Ducrot (originally proposed by Anscombe and Ducrot 1983), but it must be considered as a critically elaborated version of the latter. First of all, among argumentative theories, the SBT has one of the most radical points of view on language and its research: its objective does not consist in elucidating the argumentative nature of language, but it considers that language itself is constructed as a system of argumentation.

For example, in SBT, the sentence 'It's a fine day today' is not considered to be a representation of an extra-linguistic weather condition; on the contrary, the meaning of this sentence cannot be clarified as such, but can only be known in a particular argumentative chain like 'It's a fine day today, so let's go on a picnic', as 'fine-weather-suitable-for-going-out'. The

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo) identical sentence ‘It’s a fine day today’ could have a fairly different meaning in ‘It’s a fine day today, so you must use sunscreen’, which should be described as something like ‘fine-weather-threatening-health-and-beauty’.

In this way, the theory’s basic idea is that an utterance gets its meaning in an ‘argumentative chain’ (*enchainement argumentatif*, which is the minimal unity of utterance) such as ‘P therefore (TF) Q’ or ‘P nevertheless (NL) NEG-Q’, in which ‘NEG’ means the negation or its semantic equivalent. This theory is called Semantic Blocks Theory because of the argumentative relations between P and Q that can be brought together in four contrastive ways: P TF Q, P NL NEG-Q, NEG-P TF NEG-Q and NEG-P NL Q. In this four-sided block, P and Q maintain the same meanings and when they are connected with TF, the argumentative chain is called ‘normative’ and when, in contrast, they are connected with NL, the argumentative chain is called ‘transgressive’.³⁾ In this sense, the sentence ‘It’s a fine day today’ in ‘It’s a fine day today, so let’s go on a picnic’ is a constituent of a different semantic block from the one used in the same sentence ‘It’s a fine day today, so you must use sunscreen’.

P TF Q	NEG-P TF NEG-Q
<i>‘fine weather, so going out’</i>	<i>‘not fine weather, so staying inside’</i>
P NL NEG-Q	NEG-P NL Q
<i>‘fine weather, even so staying inside’</i>	<i>‘not fine weather, even so going out’</i>

Figure 1: Semantic block

One additional notion about the SBT must be introduced: it is called the ‘argumentative aspect (*aspect argumentatif*)’. The term ‘aspect’ here has nothing to do with the grammatical category used for a verb or a predicate’s aspect, but it is an abstract formalisation for putting together various

argumentative chains belonging to the same semantic block derivable from language itself. For example, the three argumentative chains (and more) can be said to be instantiations of the same argumentative aspect: ‘fine weather TF go out’.

- (1) a. It’s a fine day today, shall we go on a picnic? ⁴⁾
- b. With this weather, the beach will be crowded.
- c. If it’s fine tomorrow, maybe I will walk to my office.

The argumentative aspect is therefore a kind of ‘label’ or ‘name-tag’ of different argumentative chains sharing the same argumentative nature.

2.2 Argumentative Polyphony Theory

The APT is, as the name indicates, a critical development of the linguistic polyphony theory by Ducrot (1984) and it can be also considered as a theoretical update of Ducrot’s polyphony theory combined with the SBT. In other words, it is a theory supposed to describe how the semantic content⁵⁾ of the utterance (properly formulated by the SBT) is brought into the speech act level: the APT describes therefore how the semantic contents of the utterance are disposed in discourse and what is finally communicated by the utterance. It is called ‘polyphony theory’ because this theory’s main point is that we can observe more than one voice in a single utterance, while it is generally admitted that it is always and exclusively the speaker who takes responsibility for the content of the utterance. This polyphonic nature of the utterance can be presented clearly by an utterance containing negation:

- (2) Okinawa is *not* a strategic colony of the United States. ⁶⁾

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

According to the APT, there are (at least) two voices realised in this negative utterance: the first is the one with the semantic content: [Okinawa *is* a strategic colony of the United States] and the second is the negation of the first: NEG-[Okinawa is a strategic colony of the United States]. What is actually said by this utterance is a sort of objective truth and one can resort to a simple affirmative sentence to say the same thing: 'Okinawa belongs to Japan'. Utterance (2) is used precisely in order to communicate that the content [Okinawa is a strategic colony of the United States] can be considered to be debatable and the speaker presents firstly this content, which could be said by his/her interlocutor or by a third person and secondly, that he/she rejects it by the negative content.⁷⁾ According to the theory, in a negative utterance, there are always two contents: the affirmative and the negative conceived by two different voices.

To demonstrate that this kind of observation is not merely a speculative one but has some scientific validity, Ducrot (ibid.) refers to the connective 'on the contrary (*au contraire*)'. Let us see it in the following example we created to explain it:

- (3) The 'proactive contribution to peace' is not pacifistic, *on the contrary*, it is militaristic.

The 'proactive contribution to peace' is the actual Japanese prime minister's alleged pacifistic slogan, while his actual security policy is far from pacifistic, which is communicated by this utterance. Now, the connective 'on the contrary' implies a contrary (or contradictory) relation between the two contents X and Y of 'X, on the contrary, Y', which is not the case in example (3). The fact that a political slogan is not pacifistic and the fact that it is militaristic are not in contrary (or contradictory) relation: they are, rather,

in a paraphrastic relation to each other. What then could be marked in a *contrary* relation by this connective 'on the contrary'? It is the affirmative content of the first utterance: 'The "proactive contribution to peace" *is* pacifistic', which is in a contrary relation with the other ('it is militaristic') and which means we assume two contents in a negative utterance. The APT is a theory concerned with such a plurality of voices in one utterance and it tries to make clear the mechanism of the polyphonic nature in an utterance. To do so, the APT proposes two notions called *tones* and *textual functions* by Carel, and this paper proposes to rename the latter *utterance modes* with some necessary theoretical modifications. Now, let us briefly address these two notions.

2.2.1 *Tones*

In the previous section, the term 'voice' was used to make it easy to understand the basic idea of polyphony theories (and also because it was the term used in Ducrot's linguistic polyphony theory; Ducrot *ibid.*). However, in the APT framework, it is the term 'tone' which is used to theorise the plurality of voices in one utterance. As this notion will not be exploited so much in this paper, we just give the prerequisite of this notion. *Tone* is an abstract label for the semantic content indicating by whose voice this content is presented. This paper presents just three principal *tones* introduced in the theory: *Speaker's tone*, *World's tone* and *Other's tone*.

Speaker's tone: the tone for presenting the semantic content as the one conceived by the speaker him/herself.

- (4) Exerting the right to collective self-defence, Japan will be more militaristic than ever.

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

The semantic content in this utterance is presented as *conceived* by the speaker him/herself, bearing the Speaker's tone. It is conceived by the speaker because the prediction about the Japanese militaristic nation is a judgement given by the speaker him/herself and not one he/she learned, for example, by hearsay. Expressions like 'I find that', 'I think that', are therefore to be explicit *Speaker's tone* markers.

World's tone: a tone the semantic content takes on when the speaker considers it as factual and presents it as such.

- (5) The Abe administration, in a Cabinet decision made on Tuesday [...] changed the government's longstanding interpretation of the Constitution so that Japan can exercise the right to collective self-defence.

(<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/07/02/editorials/abe-guts-article-9/>)

The semantic content of this utterance is not the one *conceived* by the speaker (or the writer of this article) or by his/her own judgement. On the contrary, it is considered as factual matter and presented as such by the speaker. The World's tone is often taken on in news stories, as in example (5) (even though they do not always communicate factual matters).

Other's tone: when a semantic content takes on this tone, it is not *conceived* by the speaker or considered as factual by him/her. He/she reports, so to speak, a semantic content uttered by someone else.

- (6) *I've heard that* the Indian government is eager to build new nuclear power plants, saying: 'Japanese people are living normally despite all the radiation.'

(<http://www.dianuke.org/two-years-of-fukushima-some-messages-from-japan-to-india/>)

The expression 'I've heard that' is a typical *Other's tone* marker.

By showing all these tones, it can be said that while the physical subject who pronounces an utterance is the speaker him/herself, several tones can be involved according to the nature of the semantic content expressed in the utterance.

2.2.2 Utterance modes

This paper has so far presented the SBT and the APT, trying to be substantially loyal to Carel's frameworks. In this section, however, by introducing the notion of *utterance mode* to replace the original APT notion: *textual function*, we will dare to give a revised version of APT, hoping it will give an improvement to the theory.

As we have seen, the semantic content of an utterance can take on different tones. Independently of these tones, the APT proposes that the speaker's attitude must be taken into account for an utterance. The speaker can therefore *endorse, grant or reject* the content, whatever tone it takes on. These are the three principal *utterance modes*, originally called *textual functions*, of the semantic content.

Endorsing: when the speaker foregrounds the semantic content, in the sense that he/she intends to continue his/her discourse according to the argumentative orientation of the content, the speaker is said to *endorse* this semantic content.

- (7) Okinawa is not a strategic colony of the United States; I am strongly against the in-prefecture relocation plan of the base.

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

Even though it seems to be evident, it is because the speaker *endorses* the content of the first part of (7), 'Okinawa is not a strategic colony of the United States', that he/she can continue his/her utterance in the second part: 'I am strongly against the in-prefecture relocation plan of the base'. This apparent evidence will be shaken when we will see, for example, ironical utterances (see section 3).

Rejecting: as we saw in examples (2) and (3), in negative sentences, the theory highlights two semantic contents: one affirmative and the other negative, and the discourse will be developed argumentatively following the negative content and prohibiting the affirmative content to be developed. At that moment, the theory states that the speaker *rejects* the affirmative content. In other words, negative sentences are, so to speak, marked to have rejected content, but we will see another case of rejection without explicit rejection markers (see section 3).

Granting: this utterance mode is very near to what semantics traditionally calls 'presupposition', in that the speaker approves the semantic content while it is kept in the background so that it cannot be developed in discourse. In the utterance 'He quit smoking', the speaker grants the content [He used to be a smoker], in that he/she acknowledges his smoking habit, but he/she will not develop this content in discourse. This content remains in the background despite the speaker's acknowledgement.

Before ending this theoretical presentation, the following fact must be emphasised: the tones and the utterance modes operate independently of each other; a semantic content with the Speaker's tone can be rejected (see the APT description of irony in section 3) or a semantic content in the Other's tone can be endorsed by the speaker. This latter case could be called 'unquestioning discourse' nourishing rumours or hate speeches. In this fabricated example - '*They say that* the farm products from Fukushima

are totally safe; let's eat them to support the region' - the first part has an explicit marker of the Other's tone, while the latter content 'let's eat them ...' indicates that the speaker endorses the content of the first half; we all know that discourses of this sort are very common in everyday conversation.

2.2.3 Gradualness of utterance modes: *Endorsing/rejecting continuum*

In Carel's original framework, *endorsing*, *rejecting* and *granting* are considered to be (textual) 'functions' given to the content and they are not gradual. For this paper, however, the observation about gradualness of utterance modes is essential, so that in discourse we can see cases in which *endorsing* or *rejecting* is more or less weakened. As a result, we also observe that an extremely weakened endorsing is very close to rejecting and an extremely weakened rejecting is so close to endorsing.

- (8) I will introduce you to this friend of mine;
- a. you will be good friends.
 - b. you will *surely* be good friends.
 - c. you will *probably* be good friends.
 - d. you will *possibly* be good friends.

These are examples to which more and more restrictive modality markers are added. From the point of view of utterance mode, in the four examples, the semantic content [you will be good friends] is endorsed, permitting such argumentative developments as: 'so, shall we go for dinner?' and that will be an instantiation of such an argumentative aspect as [possible friendship TF go for a dinner]. On the other hand, we can clearly see that there are differences concerning the extent of endorsing the semantic content [you will be good friends], so that, as an instantiation of the argumentative aspect

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo) [possible friendship TF go for a dinner], (8d) is quite precarious, while we feel assured with (8a) or (8b). The original APT framework does not allow such gradualness and this is why we opted to rename it *utterance mode* to take into account such kinds of gradualness.

3. Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism in the SBT/APT frameworks

In this section, we aim to give an overview to describe irony, banter, litotes and euphemism in terms of the SBT and the APT frameworks, especially in order to show that all these figures can be organised in the same argumentative configuration.

3.1 Irony and banter

3.1.1 Irony

In this paper, the term ‘irony’ is used to refer only to the typical antiphrastic irony. Actually, we can find prior research about the antiphrastic irony within the APT/SBT frameworks: Ducrot (2010) and Carel (2011b).

Ducrot (2010) analyses the antiphrastic irony from the APT standpoint, by drawing an interesting comparison between irony and negative utterance. In order to understand Ducrot’s point, let us compare the following two examples: an ordinary negative utterance and a typical ironical one.

- (9) a. I didn’t enjoy this restaurant: the steak was too tough. (negative)
b. I enjoyed this restaurant: the steak was as tender as a leather boot.
(irony)

In a negative utterance like the first part of (9a), according to the theory, there are two semantic contents: [I enjoyed this restaurant] and NEG-[I enjoyed this restaurant] and the speaker *rejects* the first one to *endorse* the

second one. This is the type of description of a negative utterance we have already seen in the preceding section.

Regarding an ironical utterance like (9b), on the other hand, Ducrot makes the following remarks. For this utterance to be ironical, the speaker cannot endorse the content of the first sentence: [I enjoyed this restaurant], even though this content is brought into discourse with the Speaker's tone. This first sentence, however, contrary to the negative sentence in (9a), bears no explicit marker of *rejecting*, but we know that the content is rejected thanks to the context - in this particular case, by the second utterance 'the steak was as tender as a leather boot'. What distinguishes irony from a normal negative utterance is that in irony, while the presented semantic content is rejected by the speaker, there is no endorsed content for all that. Irony can therefore be characterised, according to the APT, as an utterance the content of which is rejected without explicit marker of rejection and which contains no (substitutive) endorsed content.

From the SBT standpoint, Carel (2011b) gives a more convincing explanation on the contextual factor for irony. According to this paper, the ironical effect is engendered by an absurd instantiation of an argumentative aspect. Let us compare the two following examples in (10).

- (10) a. I loved this restaurant: the steak was so tender.
(normal utterance)
- b. I loved this restaurant: the steak was as tender as a leather boot.
(irony) (=9b))

We can say that both statements are instantiations of the same argumentative aspect that can be described as [good food TF like the restaurant]. The utterance (10a) is, so to speak, a normal instantiation of this argumentative

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo) aspect in that good food is instantiated as a tender steak, while we can see immediately that (10b) is an absurd instantiation because of the phrase 'leather boot'. Carel (ibid.) argues that this absurdity of instantiation is what characterises the ironical effect of an utterance and by mediating the two papers - Ducrot's (APT) and Carel's (SBT) - we can say that this absurdity is precisely what makes us notice the rejective utterance mode of an ironical utterance, providing a suitable context for irony.

3.1.2 *Banter*

According to Leech (1983), who characterises it felicitously, banter can be paired with irony from the verbal behavioural point of view:

While irony is an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock politeness), the type of verbal behaviour known as 'banter' is an offensive way of being friendly. (mock impoliteness; Leech 1983: 144)

While Ducrot's and Carel's papers are concerned only with the typical irony case, we can see that bantering utterances can be described in the same way as irony in terms of the APT/SBT frameworks; that is, banter is also an absurd instantiation of an argumentative aspect by an utterance with its rejected semantic content in the Speaker's tone. In this way, some of Leech's examples (presented as (11) and (12)) can be described as follows ((13) and (14)):

- (11) What a mean, cowardly trick!
- (12) a. Here comes trouble!
b. Look what the cat's brought in!

- (13) argumentative chain: What a mean, cowardly trick! (I appreciate his cleverness)
 ↑ instantiation (absurd)
 argumentative aspect: [good ability TF appreciate]
- (14) argumentative chain: Here comes trouble! / Look what the cat's brought in! (I welcome him)
 ↑ instantiation (absurd)
 argumentative aspect: [cool person TF welcome]

The blatant absurdity of instantiations observed here induces us to recognise the rejective utterance mode of the content [What a mean cowardly trick!], [Here comes trouble!] or [Look what the cat's brought in!] in each of these examples.

If this description is correct, it means that in the APT/SBT frameworks, banter is described precisely in the same way as irony, that is, while the parallelism between irony and banter is supported, our frameworks do not allow us to distinguish between the two figures. Therefore, in order to complete the description, it will be effective to introduce the notions of 'applausive' and 'accusative' in our description of the phenomenon; these two notions are not to be technically defined, but to be interpreted intuitively. A discourse is applausive when it is developed to praise someone or the situation in question and it is accusative when it is developed to blame someone or the situation in question. To sum it up:

- (15) Irony and banter
 a. Irony and banter are both speech effects observed when a semantic content in the Speaker's tone is uttered in rejective utterance mode. This rejective utterance mode, ordinarily given to the affirmative

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

content in a negative utterance, can be taken on by an ironical or a bantering utterance, thanks to the fact that they are both absurd instantiations of an argumentative aspect attached to the utterance in question.

b. When the utterance in question is brought into an *accusative* discourse (with mock politeness), the utterance is considered to be ironical. On the other hand, when it is brought into an *applausive* discourse (with mock impoliteness), the utterance is considered to be bantering.

3.2 Litotes

To make a long story short and instead of setting off on a long definitional discussion, this paper distinguishes litotes from euphemism in a few words: litotes and euphemism both consist in saying something less than what should be said, but the point of litotes is to do so by emphasising the gap between what is said and what should be said, while the attenuation in euphemism is, on the contrary, to make the situation more unremarkable and it is motivated mainly by politeness considerations.

Now, let us examine litotes in more detail. As litotes consists in emphasising the gap between the words and the situation, this figure inclines, evidently, to get closer to irony and banter, and litotes is sometimes rephrased by 'ironical understatement' (Wilson 2006). As mentioned in the beginning, it was this paper's decision to keep the word 'irony' only for the typical antiphrastic irony, but if not, we could consider at least some litotes cases as a subtype of irony (or of banter if it is applausive). Anyway, as Ducrot's and Carel's analyses of irony were limited to the typical instances, now, we must apply the APT/SBT frameworks to litotes, with necessary modifications of these theories.

In terms of the APT, what is characteristic in litotes compared to irony is that in litotical utterances, the rejective utterance mode is not complete and this is precisely why we need the gradualness of utterance mode, by departing from the notion of 'textual function' in the original APT framework, which does not allow it. As was the case for the irony/banter distinction, we can find 'ironical litotes' and 'bantering litotes', which can be paraphrased respectively as 'attenuated irony' and 'attenuated banter'.

3.2.1 *Bantering litotes (attenuated banter)*

Let us examine bantering litotes first, because, in our definition of the term, litotes is more easily formed as bantering than as irony, as far as those realised in negative utterance are concerned.

Let us imagine a situation in which you were invited to your friend's home and she welcomed you with a feast as excellent as what you would find in a luxurious restaurant, which was cooked by her husband. And then if you say something like (16) below, which is blatantly out of place for the situation, your utterance can be understood as a case of bantering litotes.

(16) Your husband is *not a bad* cook.

In a similar situation in which you are really very close to your friend and her husband, it is possible to banter more explicitly, like in (17):

(17) Your husband is a terribly bad cook!

In terms of the SBT, (16) and (17) can both be described as more or less absurd instantiation of an argumentative aspect.

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

(18) argumentative chain: Your husband is not a bad cook. (I appreciate his talent)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [excellent talent TF appreciate]

(19) argumentative chain: Your husband is a terribly bad cook. (I appreciate his talent)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [excellent talent TF appreciate]

We can see that in both cases, there is an absurd instantiation of the argumentative aspect: [excellent talent TF appreciate], but we can see also that, compared to the typical ‘antiphrastic’ banter in (17) (see (19)), the absurdity in the bantering litotes case is attenuated. An excellent gastronomic talent is blatantly contradictory to ‘a terribly bad cook’, but ‘not a bad cook’ is not a contradictory description of the situation, but simply seriously insufficient. Therefore, it can be said that the rejecting utterance mode in litotes is attenuated, while it is complete in bare irony.

3.2.2 *Ironical litotes*

Ironical litotes can be described exactly in the same way as bantering litotes. So let us compare just one example of ironical litotes to a plain irony that could be possible in the same situation. The context in which examples (20) and (21) could be ironical would be that you talk about an extremely drunk person in a bar, who is talking incoherently and even raving. And if you say, with a wry smile something like (20), you would make an ironical litotes about this person, while if you say something like (21), it would be an antiphrastic bare irony. This last case would be all the more effective if this person had told you beforehand that he is perfectly sober, which would be a

case where the echoic interpretation of irony (Wilson 2006) can be typically effective.

(20) He is a bit drunk, this guy.

(21) Yes, he is perfectly sober.

As both examples are more or less ironical, in our theoretical framework, the semantic content included in both of them must be uttered in the rejecting utterance mode and for that, they have to be absurd instantiations of an argumentative aspect, as the following descriptions indicate:

(22) argumentative chain: He is a bit drunk. (He must calm down)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [drunk TF need to calm down]

(23) argumentative chain: He is perfectly sober. (He must calm down)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [drunk TF need to calm down]

Here again, in the case of ironical litotes (22), the absurdity of the instantiation of the argumentative aspect is attenuated, that is, being a bit drunk is not as contradictory to being dead drunk as being perfectly sober is. As a result, the rejective utterance mode is also attenuated to output an attenuated irony.

3.3 Euphemism

In the previous section (3.2), we made a distinction between litotes and euphemism, but it may be that the border is not clear for some readers. Therefore, an utterance like (20), 'He is a bit drunk' could be understood as

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

a case of euphemism, by modifying the context. For example, let us say, you were the concierge of a luxury hotel and the dead drunk man in question is one of your most important customers. You are obliged to be as polite as possible to him. Then, if you say to him 'You are a bit drunk, sir', your utterance is no longer a litotes, but a case of euphemism because you have no intention of emphasising the gap between your words and the actual situation, but, on the contrary, you try to minimise verbally the terribleness of the situation.

How can all this be described within the APT/SBT frameworks? While litotes consists in, though attenuated, the rejective utterance mode of the expressed semantic content, the speaker of euphemism must *endorse* the semantic content of the utterance. Euphemism is motivated principally by politeness and in order to be really polite (not mock polite), the speaker has to be more or less sincere in his/her words; that is to say, he/she must more or less endorse his/her semantic content. With this point in mind, let us delve into the issue by beginning with what we call 'mitigative euphemism', followed by 'condescending euphemism'.

3.3.1 Mitigative euphemism

The example 'You are a bit drunk, sir' of the concierge confronted with his dead drunk customer is typically a case of mitigative euphemism. At the current moment of this paper's research, this type of euphemism is described in the same way as the ironical litotes at the level of the SBT, which is shown in (24) below and the difference between them can be described at the level of the APT framework, as a question of utterance mode.

(24) argumentative chain: You are a bit drunk. (You must calm down)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [drunk THEREFORE need to calm down]

The SBT level description is identical for the ironical litotes and for the mitigative euphemism: an absurd instantiation of an argumentative aspect. It is at the APT level that we can observe the difference: in the ironical litotes, as we have seen, the absurd instantiation gives rise to the rejective utterance mode to the content, even though the rejection is attenuated. In the mitigative euphemism, on the contrary, the speaker endorses the content despite the SBT level absurdity and this endorsing is motivated by politeness. It can be said that politeness is something that can be ostensibly shown by presenting one's polite linguistic attitude and in this particular case, it is this 'challenging' endorsing of the absurd instantiation that substantiates the polite attitude of the speaker. But of course, this type of utterance is liable to be ironical if the absurdity of the instantiation is too strong to be concealed by politeness, which is precisely why the distinction between mitigative euphemism and ironical litotes is obscured, and we can practically exploit this ambiguity by ironising while pretending to be polite.

3.3.2 Condescending euphemism

Euphemism is a linguistic strategy to attenuate the content of the utterance to avoid a shock that one could give because of its directness. While this strategy is used for mitigating the aggressiveness of the content, as in the mitigative euphemism we have just mentioned, it is also used for condescending, that is, to attenuate self-praise. In this paper, this type of euphemism is called 'condescending euphemism'.

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo)

(25) My son speaks French tolerably well.

Someone can say (25) even though his/her son speaks French perfectly and its argumentative mechanism can be described similarly to the mitigative euphemism.

(26) argumentative chain: My son speaks French tolerably well. (So he won the speech contest)

↑ instantiation

argumentative aspect: [excellent TF win]

If the word 'absurd' is too strong, this instantiation is at least too weak regarding the conclusion to be drawn. And the politeness effect is derived from the fact that the speaker is endorsing the content despite this gap between the argumentative aspect in question and the actual argumentative chain.

4. Conclusion

To sum up all these observations, the following remarks can be made:

1. In irony, banter, litotes and euphemism, one can observe a more or less absurd instantiation of an evoked argumentative aspect.
2. In irony, banter and litotes, the main semantic content is brought into discourse with the *rejective* utterance mode, without (substitutive) *endorsed* content.
3. Irony and banter can be described similarly in the APT/SBT frameworks, while an utterance in question becomes ironical if it is oriented toward an accusative discourse and becomes bantering if it is oriented toward an

applausive discourse.

4. Litotes can be ironical or bantering according to the same standard as stated in 3, but the absurdity of the instantiation of an argumentative aspect is less strong than the bare irony and banter. As a result, the utterance takes on the attenuated rejective utterance mode to be realised as attenuated irony or banter.
5. Euphemism is also a case of an absurd instantiation of an argumentative aspect, but in euphemism, the semantic content of the utterance in question must be *endorsed*, even modestly, by the speaker.

To conclude, all the figures of speech discussed in this paper can be described in the configurative schema below (Figure 2) and they are located on the scale of the utterance mode, the two poles of which are *endorsing* and *rejecting*.

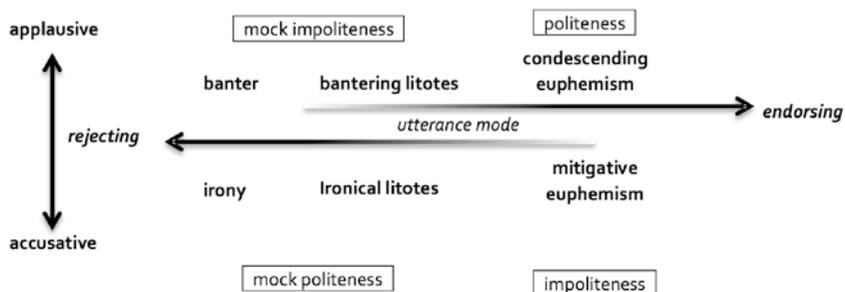


Figure 2: Figures of speech on the utterance mode scale

One could instantly point out a possible serious problem in this configurative schema: on one sole scale, two opposing utterance modes are contrastively disposed, but in doing so, the vanishing points of these two utterance modes could be supposed: is zero endorsing equal to full rejecting,

Irony, banter, litotes and euphemism from an argumentative point of view (Okubo) and vice versa, or is there a neutral point where the semantic content is neither endorsed nor rejected? And furthermore, how is the granting utterance mode to be located on the scale? All these questions must be put off until our forthcoming research. We hope, nevertheless, to have outlined the semantic interrelations among the figures of speech examined in this paper.

Note

- 1) This research was financially supported by the Kansai University Secondary Fund for Research, 2017.
- 2) The basic notions of the SBT and the APT presented in this section are principally based on Carel (2011a) and Carel (2012), but as noted below, this paper proposes some theoretical modifications (including a terminological one) necessary to our analysis.
- 3) The term 'transgressive' is to be understood as infringement and not as transcendental.
- 4) This paper is not a corpus-based study, which means that most of the examples are made up for explanation, unless otherwise noted. Needless to say, the findings in this paper will have to be verified more empirically henceforth.
- 5) 'Semantic content' here could be comparable to 'propositional meaning' in semantics, but these two notions are fundamentally different in that the former does not suppose the truth condition for calculating the meaning of the utterance, while the latter supposes it by definition.
- 6) Okinawa is an island prefecture situated in the southwest of the mainland and 74% of the American military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa, covering 18% of the prefecture's area.
- 7) The order ('firstly' and 'secondly') given to the interpretative process of the negative utterance is nevertheless not to indicate its temporal nature, but to show readily the discreteness of the two contents.

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