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On ironic puns in Portuguese authentic oral data: How does multiple meaning make irony work?

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Abstract

In the present paper we are going to focus on two Portuguese case studies (one in European Portuguese – EP and one in Brazilian Portuguese – BP) of the ironic oral discourse that result in verbal puns. In our analysis we postulate that studying multiple meanings (polysemy and homonymy) in puns can explain how irony functions on cognitive, linguistic and cultural levels given that (i) irony is a fundamental way of thinking about human experience (Gibbs & Colston, 2007, Gibbs, 2012); (ii) it is perspectivised and culturally grounded (Tobin & Israel, 2012, Dancygier & Sweetser, 2012, 2015); and (iii) linguistically explicit in verbal irony (Bryant, 2012, cf. Batoréo, 2016).

The study is qualitative in character: the aim of the analysis is to exemplify cognitive and linguistic mechanisms culturally grounded that make irony work. In two case studies of authentic Portuguese discourse with ironic puns chosen out of larger corpora (cf. References) to be discussed in the present paper we shall argue that (i) polysemy and homonymy are cognitive and linguistic phenomena that trigger ironic puns; (ii) metonymy organised in metonymical chains or networks can be a complex cognitive mechanism that underlies

polysemy; (iii) verbal puns are perspectivised and strongly culturally and historically grounded.

Keywords: *Irony, Cognitive Linguistics, Cultural Linguistics, verbal puns, authentic oral discourse, polysemy, metonymy, homonymy. Portuguese (EP and BP), Spanish.*

1. Introduction: What do we understand by irony from a Cognitive Linguistics point of view?

Traditionally, the pun (also called paronomasia) is a form of word play that suggests more than one meaning for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect; it can be regarded as an in-joke, as its usage and meaning is specific to a particular language and its culture, and frequently language dependent. In the present study the pun is focused¹ from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics (as characterised globally by Croft & Cruse, 2004), which means that the discussion is centred on (i) conceptualisation and (ii) linguistic pun construction, showing how building multiple meaning makes puns work in (iii) specific social and cultural contexts. From the linguistic point of view the pun works by multiple meanings of words (or of similar-sounding words); prototypically, when the meanings are etymologically related we deal with polysemy, and when they are not, we deal with homonymy (or, partially, with homography or homophony only) but the criteria of distinguishing the two phenomena in non-prototypical cases are sometimes difficult to apply (cf. discussion in Croft & Cruise, 2004).

As far as irony is concerned, using the etymological *pretence of ignorance* (as both in Greek and Latin the word means *simulated ignorance*), implying and conveying an intended creative meaning, it is traditionally believed that prototypical irony is the opposite of the literal meaning verbally expressed. In fact though, as postulated by Gibbs & Colston (2001),

¹ The vast literature on puns within humour studies can be globally highlighted especially in more recent studies in the area (cf. Gan, 2015; Morreall, 2016).

for instance, it is a multi-faceted phenomenon, preferred to literal counterparts in the situation of hidden criticism, in order to soften the edge of an insult, to contain emotions, and to avoid conflict and damaging social relationships:

Speakers of irony share ironic views of people and events that are jointly extended, and celebrated upon as a conversation unfolds. This data is consistent with the claim that people use different forms of irony in various discourse situation because they conceptualize situations in ironic terms (Gibbs, 1994, Lucairello, 1994). Under this perspective, the reasons for speaking ironically are not solely located in trying to convey specific nuances of meaning, but because people view situations in this way, and their interaction reflects this figurative mode of thought. In the extent that speakers and listeners share a similar construal of events, their understanding of what speakers ironically imply by what they say will be greatly facilitated (Gibbs & Colston, p. 2001: 191). This multiplicity supports the fact that the concepts of politeness, face, maintaining social relationship as well as humour are to be seen in close connection with verbal irony (cf. Dynel, 2011).

In the recent psycholinguistic bibliography on the subject (cf. studies by Giora, 1995, Colston, 1997, Gibbs, 2000, 2001, 2012, and especially Gibbs & Colston, 2001, 2007, 2012) it has been assumed that irony is a fundamental way of thinking and speaking about the human experience (Bryant, 2012). Recently (for instance, Gibbs, 2012), it has been argued that irony is a deliberate pragmatic action. Gibbs postulates that ironic acts may not be as *deliberate* as it is often claimed they are and a dynamic view of intentional action is advanced to explain more thoroughly the psychological complexities of how ironic acts are created and understood. Speakers choose to use these ironic statements for a variety of social reasons, and it is expected that this choice be strongly anchored in a given culture dependent on its social and pragmatic specificities, as well as cognitive ones (Gibbs & Colston, 2001: pp. 191-193).

From the point of view of Cognitive Linguistics, Croft & Cruse (2004) propose that irony be treated metonymically as it is only in a particular context that an ironic statement can evoke – metonymically (!) – a particular nonadopted viewpoint. The idea of viewpoint and perspectivisation in irony is proposed in Tobin & Israel (2012: p. 28):

Acts of ironic understanding in general, including verbal, dramatic, and situational ironies, involve a type of dynamic reconstrual in which attention “zooms out” from the focused content of a mental space to a higher viewpoint from which the original Viewpoint Space is reassessed. In this interpretative process, a meaning is accessed from one viewpoint (the ironized) and then, simultaneously or a little later, re-accessed from a higher viewpoint (the ironic). (Tobin & Israel, 2012: p. 28)

The idea of a viewpoint is also developed in Dancygier & Sweetser (2012, 2015), who postulate that interpretation of irony relies on the concept of mental space and viewpoint:

Both in order to perceive the contrast between the alternatives, one needs a viewpoint space higher in the network, where the contrasts between the alternatives and the reason for using irony can be resolved. (...) [I]n other words, irony does not reside in the fact that a person is saying something blatantly not true, but the perception of the nature of the contrast between the actual utterance and the intended meaning. (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2015: p. 186)

In the present paper we are going to discuss two case studies of the ironic pragmatic actions observed in Portuguese oral narrative discourse used in verbal interactions, with one of the examples in European Portuguese (EP) and the other in Brazilian Portuguese (BP).

It is a well-known fact (cf. Morais & Batoréo, 2013) that in our daily verbal interaction we are prolific story producers and consumers, in a process which results in everyday narrative production that serves as a social stage for developing frameworks for understanding and reflecting upon events within our personal biography. The very process of storytelling enhances shared world knowledge, triggers a sense of closeness and contributes to creating a common ground of beliefs and values, which also triggers evaluating and criticizing others. Focusing on puns with a narrative discourse as background, in the present study we propose therefore (i) to study cognitive and linguistic resources such as multiple meaning (polysemy and homonymy) that we employ in a given language – in our case, Portuguese (both EP and BP) – to create ironic puns and make irony work, and (ii) to analyse the role of cultural norms in authentic spoken discourse that anchor and legitimate these uses.

From the methodological point of view, our analysis is based on two case studies, chosen out of authentic Portuguese corpora of language-in-use: Furtado (2016) for European Portuguese, and Marinho (2016) (cf. Marinho & Ferrari, 2016), as well as different sites on “piada de português” (*jokes on the Portuguese*) available on the internet (see: References), for Brazilian Portuguese. The sampling was carefully executed, in order to choose two illustrative examples (one of polysemy and one of homonymy) that can be considered representative of the phenomena in focus.

The study is divided into four sections. Section 1 is introductory in character, trying to answer the fundamental question: *What do we understand by irony from a Cognitive Linguistic point of view?* In section 2, we present the first case study: *Polysemy of ‘Mercedes’ in The Mercedes joke*. Here we analyse an EP polysemous ironic pun (with internal quoting of Spanish), showing how its meaning is constructed in a metonymical network of cognitive and cultural representations and metarepresentations. As the joke presented is a complex one, allowing at least two representation levels of irony, as well as a complex metonymical analysis of polysemy, section 2 will be divided into three subsections: (2.1.) *Formal representation, scripts, and a sarcastic trigger*, (2.2.) *Polysemy and a metonymical network as a grounding cognitive mechanism* (2.3.) *Representations and metarepresentations of irony*. In section 3, we present the second case study: *Homonymy of ‘cremado’ in the “cremado” joke*. Here we analyse a homonymous Brazilian pun, which deals ironically with Brazilian perspectivisation of the Portuguese identity, constructing sarcastic stereotypes of the Portuguese in the “piada de português” style. The linguistic construction of this pun is much simpler than the previous one, therefore, more precise division in subsections will not be provided. In the final section (4), we are going to discuss the previous analysis of the two case studies of polysemous and homonymous puns within a cognitive linguistics and cultural representation and metarepresentation framework.

2. The first case study: Polysemy of ‘Mercedes’ in *The Mercedes joke*

2.1. Formal representation, scripts, and a sarcastic trigger

The first case study chosen for the present paper focuses on an irony-within-discourse pun and is illustrated by *The Mercedes joke* (In: *corpus* Furtado 2016: XXXI-XXXII), constructed within narrative original oral discourse in European Portuguese (cf. Batoréo, 2016), as demonstrated in Table 1.

Case study (example) 1: <i>The Mercedes joke</i>			
European Portuguese (Spanish original highlighted in bold)		English translation	
12	uma igreja / estão pessoas cá fora no átio da igreja / a conversar//	12	there is a church / in the courtyard there are people talking to one another //
13	e a certa altura chega um carro/ um Mercedes //	13	suddenly a car arrives / it is a Mercedes //
14	sai de lá / o bispo / que entra na igreja //	14	a bishop comes out of it and goes into the church //
15	dai a pouco / outro carro / outro Mercedes //	15	then / another car approaches / again a Mercedes //
16	sai um padre / que entra na igreja //	16	a priest comes out and goes into the church //
17	depois outro Mercedes / e mais Mercedes //	17	then another Mercedes / and another Mercedes approach //
18	pessoas que vão para a //	18	people who go //
19	que se dirigem à igreja //	19	who go to the church //
20	então/ cá fora/ um: / um +	20	then / in the courtyard / there is a +
21	há uma pessoa / que se vira pra outra / e que pergunta//	21	there is a person who turns to another and says //
22	é que esta anedota é em espanhol / portanto//	22	but this joke is in Spanish / so //
23	mas que +	23	but
24	só eu que não sei espanhol //	24	but I do not know Spanish
25	qué / qué hacen? qué hacen? lá dentro? qué que están haciendo?	25	what are they doing there? what are they doing?
26	están a orar //	26	they are praying //
27	orar? que es orar?	27	praying? what is praying?
28	implorar mercedes a dios //	28	asking God for mercy (<i>Mercedes</i>)
29	<hhh>/	29	<hhh>/
30	<hhh>/	30	<hhh>/
31	< XXX implorar Mercedes XXX / hhh>/	31	<XXX asking God for mercy (<i>Mercedes</i>)
32	<hhhh/ tá boa> //	32	<hhhh/ that’s a good one> //

Table 1. Example of *The Mercedes joke* (In: *corpus* Furtado 2016: XXXI-XXXII)

The transcription of the narrative that frames verbal interaction with *The Mercedes joke* occupies 32 lines, within which the proper joke is inserted within lines 12 to 32, as presented in Table 1. The first eleven lines are external to the joke itself (and thus not presented here) frame the verbal interaction of a group of speakers that choose one of the participants to tell the proper joke that starts in line 12.

The Mercedes joke presents two *scripts* (in the sense of Raskin, 1984). The first script (lines 12 to 19) constitutes the background of the story: (i) there are many people talking to one another in the courtyard of a church; (ii) suddenly some cars arrive, all Mercedes; (iii) bishops and priests come out of the cars and go into the church. The second script (lines 20 to 28) constitutes the foreground of the story with the “echoing strategy” of quoting someone’s discourse, which – for linguistic reasons only – is presented in Spanish: (i) there are two people talking to one another in the churchyard; (ii) the conversation is supposed to be in Spanish (shown in bold in the text of Table 1). In the Spanish text (lines 25 to 28), (i) the first speaker asks what those coming out of the cars are doing in the church, and the second speaker answers that they must be asking God for mercy/ *Mercedes*. The Spanish pun (in line 28) within the Portuguese narrative triggers the joke, resulting linguistically only if in Spanish (but not in Portuguese); nevertheless the understanding of the Spanish pun works for the Portuguese audience, because intercomprehension is assured, as shown in lines 29 to 32 with the final reaction to the joke by the group of participants in the narrative frame: “That’s a good one!” and laughter. The final feedback of the joke receivers show how humour, irony and/or sarcasm reveal the intense joy that speakers of irony often share, and how it marks intimacy between speakers and listeners, and brings them closer together. The joke presented in example 1 works in the narrative context of a group interaction because (i) it is short and schematic; (ii) it echoes somebody else’s dialogue produced presumably in Spanish, imitating a foreign accent, which is an extra factor of mocking strategy; (iii) its sarcastic humour is based on social criticism of clergy as a privileged class. The typical ironic contrast of an explicit and an implicit statement is created here: explicitly the priests pray for God’s mercy (as they are supposed to according to the religious and church rules) but implicitly (where an

unstated meaning is created) the priests ask God for more luxury, instantiated here by a Mercedes car. The joke seems to be sarcastic in gibbsian terms (cf. Gibbs, 2000: p. 17), as the author of the joke speaks positively to convey a more negative intent to vent frustration, understanding the situation as offensive and/ or violating a group's normative standards. This sarcastic pun trigger is also self-directed, affirming the speaker's deference and even allegiance to the group and the prescribed behavioural cultural norms in traditionally Catholic countries, as Portugal and Spain.

2.2. *Polysemy and a metonymical network as a grounding cognitive mechanism*

From a linguistic point of view, the joke trigger in example 1 is based on a linguistic pun founded on polysemy (see Table 2) of the Spanish word for *mercy*: '*merced*' in its plural form '*mercedes*'. The Portuguese equivalent of the word is '*mercê*' (plural: '*mercês*'), which – due to morphophonemic divergences between the two languages – does not allow the pun, and is the linguistic reason for the “echoing strategy” of language switching (Portuguese to Spanish) used in the joke.

The polysemy found in the joke is legitimated by a chain – or even a net of (at least) seven metonymies – that form a grounding cognitive mechanism network extended between religious and automobile meanings of the name *Mercedes*, proposed in detail in Table 2, showing its epistemological and psychological status and an interesting historical and cultural background. Some of this grounding seems warranted here as it will be further analysed.

The cultural background in which the polysemy is anchored can be observed on two levels: *abstract* and *concrete* (cf. Table 2). The first one, of an *abstract* nature, starts with the initial meaning of '*mercy*', understood as a special quality in the Catholic religion, oriented towards kindness, forgiveness and help given to people who are in a very bad or desperate situation, being this quality symbolised by the figure of Our Lady of Mercy (*mercy* is here one among many other qualities Our Lady can symbolize). In order to be blessed with this specific quality, Catholic girls in Spain or Portugal, for instance, are christened after Our Lady, as

María de las Mercedes (in Spanish) or *Maria das Mercês* (in Portuguese). In other countries with Catholic roots the religious (*Maria de las*) *Mercedes* connection may be present at the level of a collective Catholic cultural tradition, even if particular families themselves are not of Catholic faith.

The second level of the cultural background, which is of a more *concrete* nature, can be seen in the names given to *goods* are after somebody named *Mercedes* (see the Mercedes-Benz sources in References). The car we know today as *Mercedes* was named after Mercedes Jellinek (christened Mercedes Adrienne Ramona Manuela Jellinek), born in 1889, the daughter of Emil Jellinek, a wealthy Austrian businessman, a self-made man, and a car racer, passionate for the newly invented motorcars at the turn of the 20th century (cf. Krebs 2001). When the automobile was invented by Gottlieb Daimler and Carl Benz in 1886, Emil Jellinek was immediately enthusiastic for this new means of transport. He loved to race, and – when his daughter was born and christened – he was known in car races as *Herr/ Monsieur Mercedes*, after her first name. Later in life, Emil Jellinek had his family name legally changed to Emil Jellinek-Mercedes. The sources on Mercedes' history (cf. References) stress that details on how the *Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft* – *DMG Phoenix* became a *Mercedes* are hazy, but it is recognized that Emil Jellinek was known for the inclination to name various objects after his daughter: his yacht, his homes and eventually the cars he sold, raced and drove were given her name.²

Having these two cultural backgrounds – the *abstract* and the *concrete* one – as the starting point in the polysemy construction, we can observe how the religious concept of mercy, i. e., of forgiveness, benevolence, and kindness, give origin to the name of Our Lady of Mercy – *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes* – as the one who is the personification of all these qualities (giving rise to the 1st metonymy). An instantiation of the name of the saint is a common

² “In 1896, Jellinek saw an advertisement in a German magazine for an automobile by Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft. (...). Jellinek agreed to order 36 cars if they bore the name of his daughter – and the factory gave him an exclusive sales agency for America and parts of Europe. Daimler agreed. (...). In 1901, when she [Mercedes] was just 11 years old, her demanding father insisted that her name be given to the cars he intended to buy. (...) Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft used the Mercedes name for most of its cars and registered it as a trademark in 1902 (...). The companies established by two automotive pioneers, Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler (...) merged in 1926. Mercedes-Benz went on to become one of the world's best-known brand names.” (Krebs 2001).

Spanish name – (*María de las Mercedes*) – which can be given to any female, believing that Our Lady of Mercy's qualities will be guaranteed symbolically to the newly baptized child by the name of the saint (2nd metonymy). In the case of the second metonymy we have an extra case of one more metonymical usage (2a in Table 2) of part of the whole name instead of the whole one, i. e., the short form of the name – *Mercedes* – is generally used instead of *María de las Mercedes* but traditionally rather in familiar contexts and not in formal ones, at least in Spain or Portugal. Nevertheless, this tradition may not be followed, especially if the cultural context is only generally Catholic, as for instance in Austria. The short version of the name – *Mercedes* – was actually given to Mercedes Jellinek, the daughter of Emil Jellinek (3rd metonymy). In the polysemous network construction this is the starting point of the *concrete* level of the analysis. Emil Jellinek himself was known as *Herr/Monsieur Mercedes*, and then added the name *Mercedes* to his own family name, becoming Emil Jellinek-*Mercedes* (metonymy 3a and 3b). He was keen on giving his daughter's name to different goods he owned, such as houses, a yacht and cars (4th metonymy). Thus, the cars named after his daughter's name gave origin to an international brand (5th metonymy), which instantiated names of all the cars of the same brand in the world (6th metonymy), and then gave the name to the car factories (7th metonymy). All the seven metonymies presented in Table 2 constitute a complex cognitive net that help us to visualise the mechanisms that rule the polysemy of *Mercedes*. In fact, the real metonymical network does not stop here, as we can have proper names of animals or places (like restaurants, for instance) or other goods named by the brand or by a woman named Mercedes, creating a (theoretically everlasting) metonymical chain of semantic extensions (indicated in the Table 2 by the final '*etc.*').

[Spanish]

ABSTRACT LEVEL



0. **Quality:** ‘merced’ → pl. ‘mercedes’ (mercy)

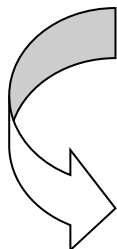


1. **Personification:** ‘*Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*’ (Our Lady of Mercy)

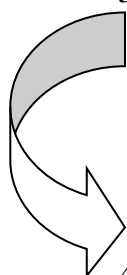
2. **Specification:** ‘*María de las Mercedes*’ – a female proper (Spanish) name



2a. short familiar form of the name: ‘*Mercedes*’



CONCRETE LEVEL



3. **Instantiation:** proper name of *Mercedes* Jellinek,
Emil Jellinek’s daughter



3a. Emil Jellinek is known as *Herr Mercedes*

3b. Emil adopts a new family name: *Jellinek-Mercedes*

4. **Goods** created by *Mercedes*’ father and named after her:
cars, houses, a yacht, etc.



5. **Type:** the car brand



6. **Token:** Individual car of the brand



7. **Location:** Place where cars are produced/ factory

etc.

Table 2. Representation of the basic network of the seven fundamental metonymies interwoven in the case of polysemy of ‘*Mercedes*’ (in Spanish).

2.3. *Representations and metarepresentations of irony*

The joke in the first case study can also be the subject of a different analysis from the one presented in subsections (2.1.) and (2.2.). If the irony in the first interpretation is an intentional one as the “echoing” strategy and language switching show it is, the second ironic reading of the joke that we propose now is not intentional and emerges out of the failed act of telling the joke in contemporary and correct Spanish, which the proper speaker recognizes (s)he does not speak properly. The truth is that the expression “Implorar mercedes a Dios” (line 28) will not be used in current Spanish, as the word ‘*mercedes*’ is restricted to specific crystallised usages (cf. Batoréo, 2016), and nowadays is rather substituted by its synonym ‘*misericordia*’. Nevertheless, the joke works only with the expression as it is used in line 28 (even if we know it is not modern Spanish), which makes the Portuguese think this is what the Spanish say (but they do not). The second reading of the joke is thus the second level of representation, constructed upon the first, intentional one. It emerges out of self-evaluation of the speaker’s linguistic capacities – “I cannot speak Spanish properly” (line 24) – and a further non-intentional evaluation of those who not knowing the language well, and recognising this as a fact, still think they are able to tell a joke and can make the story funny. Though they protect their face by saying they are not Spanish-fluent, they believe it is proper Spanish, as the joke works, not being conscious that what they produce is rather *Portuñol* (*Portuguese + Español*) resulting from the contact of two linguistically close tongues, and geographically, historically, and culturally neighbouring languages. In both scripts of the joke, the speakers do not have this metarepresentation because it is not a shared knowledge of Portuguese speakers; on the contrary, what is commonly believed in Portugal is that all the Portuguese can understand and speak Spanish easily (and correctly) but the contrary is not true. Thus social non-intentional criticism arises: if you try to speak a language you do not know you are subject to a social criticism because of your ignorance: you do not have qualities (negative axiological value) of what you intend to have (positive axiological value). This is why the second representation of the joke makes the contrast not only between the

explicit evaluation vs. *unstated* evaluation of the situation, as it is supposed to in the case of irony, but it also contrasts the reality people live in with the expectations people have about this reality.

3. The second case study (Brazilian Portuguese): Homonymy of ‘cremado’ in *The ‘cremado’ joke*.

The second case study analysed in the present paper focuses on the ironical Brazilian joke chosen from the Marinho corpus (Marinho, 2016: p. 28), which is considered a typical example of a common type of joke known as “piada de português” (*jokes on the Portuguese*) (see: References), as presented in Table 3. In these sarcastic jokes the social Brazilian-Portuguese stereotypes are anchored historically in colonial and migration bilateral tradition (cf. Fino, 2016), with the Portuguese perspectivised by the Brazilians as ignorant, narrow-minded (if not stupid), crooked, dirty or rascal.

Case study (example) 2. <i>The ‘cremado’ joke</i>	
Brazilian Portuguese original	English translation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Um brasileiro, de passagem por Lisboa, é surpreendido com a notícia da morte de seu amigo português. 2. Triste com a perda, ele procura saber onde será o velório do querido amigo e se dirige para lá. 3. Ao chegar, olha para o caixão e vê o morto inteiramente nu. 4. Ao lado dele, nota um grande pote de creme, no qual cada um dos presentes coloca a mão e, após pegar um pouco, passa no corpo do defunto. 5. Espantado com a estranha cena, ele se aproxima da esposa e pergunta: 6. - Desculpe-me a ignorância, mas o que estão fazendo é tradição por aqui? 7. A esposa respondeu: - Não! É inédito! Nunca fizemos. É que ele pediu para ser <i>cremado</i>. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Brazilian travelling in Lisbon is surprised with the news of his Portuguese friend’s death. 2. Sad with the loss, he tries to discover where the vigil of the beloved friend will take place and he heads there. 3. At the arrival, he looks at the coffin and he sees the deceased entirely naked. 4. At the side of the dead, he notices a great pot of cream; he notices that everybody puts his hand into the pot, takes a little of the cream and, then, spreads it on the deceased’s body. 5. Astonished with such a strange scene, he moves closer to the deceased’s wife and asks: 6. – I apologise for my ignorance, but is what you are doing a tradition here? 7. The wife answered: - No! It is completely unknown! We have never done it. The problem is he asked to be <i>cremated</i>.

Table 3. “The ‘cremado’ joke” (Brazilian original in: *corpus* Marinho 2016: 28)

The joke is told in the form of a narrative, starting with the first scenario: the death of the Portuguese friend of a Brazilian traveller in Lisbon, which constitutes the background of the story (lines 1 to 2). Starting with line 3, the second scenario is created, forming the foreground of the story (lines 3 to 7): the set-up of the vigil of the Portuguese friend. Having arrived at the vigil, the Brazilian first spots the naked body of the deceased (line 3) and, then, by his side, a huge pot of cream that everybody uses to rub on the dead man's body (line 4). Astonished with this unknown practice, the Brazilian questions the deceased man's wife about this unknown practice (lines 5 to 6), which he learns is also unknown to the widow (line 7) in spite of practicing it herself. She confesses that the practice is a new one among the Portuguese who decided to use it only in honour of the very deceased who had asked to be *cremated*/ "*creamed*" (i. e., have the cream put on), line 7.

The joke works because it is short in form and culturally anchored in a shared scenario of both Portuguese and Brazilian communities: it focuses the vigil tradition of a deceased body, usually a night-long practice before the funeral, where relatives and friends can say farewell to the dead person lying in an often wide-open coffin. In the joke the humorous effect is gradually created with (i) an image of the naked body lying in the coffin, which is the first sign of something unusual going on, as the deceased bodies are usually dressed up for this occasion, with (ii) an image of a big pot of ointment, (iii) and a totally unexpected rubbing-on scene. The real joke trigger comes in the last line of the narrative by the use of the homonymous word '*cremado*', which in the first and culturally expected reading means *cremated*. The second reading though, in consonance with the image of a huge pot of cream (ointment) by the dead man's side suggests an unexpected action of rubbing the substance onto the dead man's body, which gives origin to a Portuguese neologism: '*cremado*' (literary: *creamed*) from '*cream*' (ointment) → '*cremar*' (rub the ointment on somebody) → '*cremado*' (somebody rubbing cream on someone else).

The explicit evaluation of the scene from the Brazilian point of view is that secular traditions, such as deathwatching (wake or vigil), are still in practice in Portugal, which makes cremation not only unusual but also culturally unfit. The unexpected understatement though,

contrasting with the first explicit evaluation is much stronger than that: if cremation is explicitly asked for by a dying person it may not only be denied out of ignorance of the family and community but it can give origin to new and even more ignorant practices, culturally unexpected and socially unacceptable, because of violating local taboos, such as exposing the dead man's body totally naked and touching it by rubbing ointment on it.

From the linguistic point of view, the homonymy of the trigger pun occurs between the existing word '*cremado*' (*cremated*) and a neologism easy to understand relating to somebody who has ointment rubbed on them. The two lexical items – the existing one and the pseudo-word as a neologism – are the results of a historical coincidence, as the etymology of the two is totally different. The word '*cremado*'/*cremated* comes from Latin and means burnt by fire implying a process of the combustion, vaporization and oxidation of dead bodies to basic chemical compounds (gases, ashes and mineral fragments). On the other hand, '*cremado*'/*creamed upon* (originated in '*creme*'/*cream* → '*cremar*'/*rub cream on somebody* → '*cremado*'/*somebody rubbed with the cream*) comes from Old French '*crème*' (that originates from Greek and Late Latin), meaning ointment. Contrary to the polysemous situation of *mercy* that, in the first case studied in section 2, extended semantically its original meaning by a net of metonymies, in the second case study, we face two different lexical items with two different historical and non-related meanings, originating in *burning* vs. *ointment*. These two forms met by chance in a historical coincidence, giving origin to a linguistic ironic pun of example 2. Here sarcastic description of the vigil scenario (with the dead man's body and a pot of cream by its side) and sarcastic utterances in the final joke trigger are stated positively to convey negative messages from the Brazilian perspectivisation: the Portuguese are ignorant and out-dated, and even when confronted with the modern reality are stuck in the old habits and unable to reflect upon the modern reality or interpret it correctly. The sarcasm increases with the gradual narrative construction and reinforcement of the critical attitude; the final trigger is just the highest point of the gradated sarcasm.

4. Final discussion

In the present paper we focused on two case studies of the ironic pragmatic actions that result in puns observed in Portuguese oral discourse (both EP and BP), used in verbal interactions and in common jokes. Our special interest was focused on multiple meaning – both polysemy and homonymy – and the way this phenomenon makes irony work in discourse. The study was qualitative in character, and its aim is to exemplify cognitive and linguistic mechanisms that are culturally and historically shared and grounded and make irony work. The sampling was done on the basis of discourse corpora presented in Furtado (2016) for European Portuguese, on the one hand, and Marinho (2016) as well as other sites on “piada de português” (see: References) for Brazilian Portuguese, on the other. The choice of the two case studies presented in the paper was deliberate in order to provide illustrative and representative examples of the phenomena in focus.

Our theoretical starting point was that irony is neither a rhetoric figure nor a mere linguistic device but (i) it is a fundamental way of thinking about the human experience (Gibbs & Colston, 2007, Gibbs, 2012); (ii) it is perspectivised and culturally grounded (Tobin & Israel, 2012, Dancygier & Sweetser, 2012, 2015), and (iii) it is linguistically explicit and discursively highlighted in verbal irony (Bryant, 2012). Our analysis was based on two case studies of verbal irony triggered by multiple meaning, and our aim was to show that (i) polysemy and homonymy are cognitive and linguistic phenomena that we consider common in ironic puns; (ii) metonymy, metonymical chains and even complex metonymical networks are cognitive mechanisms that make polysemy work in an ironic pun; and (iii) jokes with verbal puns having a (narrative) discourse as a background to the pun are perspectivised and anchored by cultural norms socially shared in discourse that legitimate these uses. The very process of storytelling, telling the jokes, and provoking laughter enhances shared world knowledge, triggers a sense of closeness, and contributes to creating a common ground of beliefs and values, which also triggers evaluating and criticizing attitudes towards others (and also towards oneself), perspectivised from a given society or community point of view.

It is our understanding that what we observed in two Portuguese puns sampled as illustrative and representative of the phenomenon focused upon and analysed in our study corroborates what Gibbs (2000: p. 28) postulated on asymmetry in different types of irony: in the cases of jocular utterances, speakers more frequently present a negative statement to convey a positive message, whereas sarcastic utterances are stated positively to convey negative messages.

In the first study, two types of irony were defined. The first irony, a sarcastic one with strong social criticism, focusing the clergy who pray (positive message) but do it to get luxury, not mercy (negative message). The second irony is a jocular constructed situation: when you try to speak a language you do not know well, even if you recognise it as such in an auto-ironical attitude (positive value) you prove to be ignorant (negative value). The scope of each irony is different as they are constructed one on the other in metarepresentation: the first one is intentional and is triggered by a metonymical net of polysemous meanings extended from the cultural Catholic ground – starting with a Spanish word ‘*mercedes*’ (*mercy*) – towards the automobile reality at the beginning of the 20th century and further on, whereas the second one is non-intended and results from the humorous effect of using a foreign language in a non-correct way and even from the combination of the lack of this knowledge and the self-evaluation recognising some sort of ignorance. While the second irony is more auto-oriented in perspectivisation of a specific society and community we live in, the first one, on the contrary, seems to be in consonance with general beliefs, bluntly criticised, for instance, in Janis Joplin’s *Mercedes-Benz* song focused on those who while praying orient their intentions towards earthly goods, especially luxurious ones:

Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes-Benz?

My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends

Worked hard all my lifetime, No help from my friends

Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes-Benz?

(...) I’m counting on you, Lord, please don’t let me down (...)

In the second case study, we also face a sarcastic pun with strong social criticism: the sarcastic description of the almost surrealistic vigil scenario with the dead man's body in the coffin being rubbed with cream by his relatives and friends is topped by the final joke trigger perspectivising the Portuguese from the Brazilian point of view as ignorant, out-dated, narrow-minded and unfit to face modern reality. This joke is a typical “*piada de português*” (*jokes on the Portuguese*), an extremely common Brazilian joke (as exemplified by numerous sites on the internet available on the subject, see: References) that hands down the stereotype of the Portuguese, strongly culturally and historically grounded in the common colonial and migration past and present reality (cf. Feio, 2016).

From the specifically linguistic point of view, the two examples are unbalanced: in the second joke, there is just a confrontation of two words (one Portuguese word and one pseudo-word, a neologism) that coincide in form by chance with no linguistic relationship whatsoever. On the contrary, the first example is linguistically very complex and demanding as it deals with polysemous meanings etymologically related in one language (Spanish) but allowing its understanding in another (Portuguese) as both languages are typologically and historically closely related. The polysemy in this case is legitimated by a series of cognitive mechanisms of different types of metonymies that form a net of extended meanings, which are non-finite in nature, as they can be extended and create plausible formations of new semantic extensions founded by further metonymies.

Both the case studies analysed in the present paper illustrate how the complex multiple meaning process in ironic puns can be either cognitively, linguistically or culturally constructed, especially in the case of polysemy with a cognitive metonymical network that underlines it. They are produced in authentic discourse and reflect authentic societal relationships, culturally and historically shared and determined, and perspectivised in order to highlight the aspects the pun producer wants to bring into focus both globally in generally shared social beliefs and, specifically, in social and national stereotypes.

Our analysis shows how multiple meaning in Portuguese puns makes irony work as a fundamental way of thinking about human experience, both global and contextually specific,

and how irony is perspectivised and culturally anchored. It is our belief it is a good contribution to the study of irony within the Cognitive Linguistics framework, and especially, in Cultural Linguistics, where the interaction Cognition – Language – Culture is explicitly highlighted.

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Extra information related to the corpus:

1. Information on Mercedes Jellinek and the Mercedes-Benz brand

Janis Joplin's *Mercedes-Benz* lyrics

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWFkEuJ1sqI>