A Typically Sarcastic Tone of Voice? Yeah, Right![*]

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Abstract: This paper challenges the existence of what is often referred to as the 'sarcastic tone of voice.' This claim is made chiefly on the basis of the absence of a consistent definition of sarcasm in the literature, as well as a lack of consensus on the suprasegmental parameters that accompany it. It will be argued that, by reconsidering the role of sarcasm in the communicative act and by linking it with intent, several intonational patterns may trigger the sarcastic construal of an utterance.

Keywords: sarcasm, irony, intonation, metalanguage, discourse

1. Introduction

Despite its usual and commonplace occurrence in everyday speech, the concept of sarcasm is sometimes so elusive that scientists and laymen alike are confounded when it comes to grasping the full extent of the notion. Where the scientific literature is concerned, sarcasm is either relegated to the study of acoustic correlates of emotions, or downgraded to a subpart of the study of irony. Authors are sometimes quick to assume the nature and function of sarcasm in order to secure a starting point to further their work on related areas of acoustics, psycholinguistics or semantics. As a consequence, sarcasm is rarely studied for its own merit and in most cases, it is not considered an independent speech act.

Most affected by this gross overgeneralization are the vocal cues generally attributed to sarcasm that constitute the so-called 'sarcastic' or 'ironic tone of voice' (e.g. Cutler 1974). Despite the lack of empirical evidence, the existence of such suprasegmental characteristics that are deemed 'typical' of sarcasm have mostly been presumed and not systematically questioned. In view of the fact that the semantic and conceptual boundaries of sarcasm seem blurred, the reality of 'typical' phonetic attributes is conjectural.

It is the purpose of this paper to challenge the existence of the so-called 'sarcastic tone of voice.' It will be argued that there exists not merely one, but several *sets* of suprasegmental parameters that might lead to the sarcastic

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construal of an utterance. Crucial to the argumentation will be the disambiguating of the nature of sarcasm, a task which is deemed attainable only by means of serious reconsideration of its role in the communicative act. On the basis of Haiman's work on metalanguage (1997, 1998), the claim will be made that sarcasm is linked with intent, which need not be uniquely representative of disgust and contempt, or other received ideas on sarcasm. In turn, intent will be said to drive the vocal manifestations of the attitudes that define the (meta)message communicated in sarcasm. Consequently, as sarcasm will have been redefined, so will the 'tone of voice' imputed to it.

Thus, the second section of this paper serves to discriminate sarcasm from irony, while third section will establish sarcasm as an independent speech act. Section 4 will clarify intent in relation with attitudes and metalanguage, so that Section 5 may discuss the attributes of the 'sarcastic tone of voice.' In Section 6, aspects of the psychological and social role of sarcasm will be exposed in order to further deny the existence of one single, alleged, typically sarcastic intonation. Finally, the last section will question the presumed opposition between intonational and contextual cues to sarcasm, which is thought to be the culprit of the many assumptions surrounding the allusive existence of the 'typical sarcastic tone of voice.'

2. Extricating sarcasm from irony

2.1 Sarcasm is part of the irony family

Much of the confusion surrounding the concept of sarcasm is an offshoot of its affiliation with irony (Lee & Katz 1998). Earlier literature on the subject qualifies sarcasm as some scornful or disparaging form of irony. Generally speaking however, authors do differentiate irony from sarcasm on the basis of several factors. Section 2 aims to tease out those factors so as to arrive at a better characterization of sarcasm.

2.2 Irony from infancy to postmodernism

In order to better appreciate the distinction between irony and sarcasm, a brief description of the origin and evolution of the concept of irony follows. The most

ancient notions of irony are found in the works of Aristotle and Cicero, and subsequently in those of Quintilian (Kotthoff 2002:2), for whom irony was a figure of speech or trope reflecting an opposition between the said (dictum) and the meant (implicatum).[1] A classic example of opposition would be for someone to say:

(1) "What a gorgeous day"

when it has in fact been pouring rain since morning. This definition of irony stems from a tradition of scholars who, until the 1980s, have studied irony from a literary stand point and who have portrayed it as a rhetorical figure (e.g. Booth 1975; Jankelevitch 1964; Muecke 1970).

By the 1990s, very few authors, regardless of their scholarly background, relied solely on the primitive notion of opposition or counterfactuality in their definition of irony. Although the bipolar gap between the dictum and the implicatum itself is not contested, it was agreed that that one must also adopt other types of speech acts as part of the definition. Because of the related notion of nonveridicality, the idea of counterfactuality was transferred to another type of conceptual scale, the abstract scale of quantity which opposes understatement and hyperbole. Given the appropriate verbal and vocal cues, the sort of utterances which one would find at the extremes of this scale could be considered as ironic. To demonstrate how hyperbole can become ironic, Kreuz & Roberts (1995: 25) have drafted a "Random Irony Generator," a devise from which an ironist can draw any number of utterances (with a minimum of originality). The formula is simple and the utterance is constructed thusly: "That was…+ adverb + extreme positive adjective." For instance, in any number of situations, the following sentences could be uttered:

(2) a. That was simply perfect!
b. That was certainly brilliant!

[1] For an excellent account of irony in history and the history of irony, see Muecke 1970.

Conversely, understatement can be interpreted as irony, such as this woman's reply in the following dialogue between her and a guard:

(3) "'Three five one,' the guard repeated slowly. 'Third floor. Think you can make it on your own?"
'Just about, I should think, thank you very much'"
(Didbin 1988: 249 in Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995: 3)

The woman's profuse expression of gratitude towards the rude guard is regarded by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995) as an instance of over-politeness, which also has great ironic potential given certain situations. On its own, over-politeness could almost be regarded as a subpart of hyperbole. But paired with an indirect request, the irony takes another form altogether. Consider this mother talking to her daughter:

(4) "Would you very much mind if I asked you, please, to perhaps consider cleaning up your room sometime this month?"
(Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989: 383)

Opposition, understatement, hyperbole, over-politeness and indirect requests constitute the generally acknowledged forms of irony in the literature, though opinions still diverge greatly on what should and what should not be considered irony. For instance, one author has taken the definition of irony to the extreme limit; in his 1993 chronicle *The Irony Board II*, Douglas Coupland has elaborated a list of words that, in his opinion, no longer refer to their original meanings, but that have retained a new, ironic denotation. The list includes such words as 'smorgasbord,' 'natural,' 'contemporary,' 'snazzy,' 'melting pot,' all of which correspond to one of five specific criterion of choice (among which stands the presence of the word in an in-flight magazine publicity or a Steak Hut menu).

2.3 Coming to terms with irony

Upon computing the elements common to all those approaches to irony, one arrives at the overall (if somewhat basic) conclusion that irony is a means of expressing oneself indirectly in order to communicate two distinct messages. The first message is the actual verbal message, typically delivered in a distorted manner or, in Anolli et al.'s (2001) words: "an alteration of a reference aiming at stressing the reality of a fact by means of apparent dissimulation of its true nature." That one would proclaim "What a gorgeous day!" when it is pouring rain does, after all, inform a listener who has recognized the irony that the weather is in fact not so gorgeous. More relevant to this paper however is the second message conveyed through this ironic utterance, that is, the one that reveals the speaker's attitude towards the state of the weather; in this society's set of cultural beliefs, such an exclamation would probably broadcast the speaker's discontent. It is precisely this expression of discontent that comes into play with sarcasm and eventually, with the 'sarcastic tone of voice.'

2.4 Sarcastic irony

The crudest definition of sarcasm in association with irony encountered in the literature is that of de Groot et al. (1995), for whom sarcasm is merely a type of ironic insult. Granted, the use that one makes of certain sarcastic remarks and how they are delivered can effectively result in insulting vocal behaviour. This definition of sarcasm is nevertheless fundamentally deficient given the fact that it would not account for all instances of irony that were considered above. One would be at a loss to find a direct insult in the comment about the weather in (1), unless very special conditions applied (such as the speaker mockingly repeating a comment uttered earlier by the listener or by a third party, in the presence of this individual).

It would seem that a speaker's discontent with a particular situation might explain why the utterances in examples (1) to (4) are construed as sarcastic: Kreuz & Glucksberg (1989) do consider their example of over-politeness and indirect request in (4) as sarcastic irony. In fact, their research has shown that participants do distinguish between sarcasm and irony (see also Lee & Katz

1998), chiefly because ridicule is perceived as the main purpose of sarcasm, but not of irony. Other authors agree and consider sarcasm an aggressive, derogative, disparaging form of irony (amongst others: Attardo 2000, 2001; Gibbs & O'Brien 1991; Jorgensen et al. 1984; Kreuz & Roberts 1993). These allegations seem to suggest that much more could be involved in sarcastic irony than simple counterfactuality or other stylistic behaviour, since in addition to the message (both said and intended), there now seems to be an affective component in the communicative act of sarcasm. Notwithstanding this conclusion, the psycholinguists that have studied sarcastic irony in the past twenty years have managed to conveniently sweep the intrinsic affective issues 'under the carpet' as it were, claiming that emotional intent made little difference where the processing of irony was concerned (Attardo 2000; Gibbs & O'Brien 1991; Jorgensen et al. 1984; Kreuz & Roberts 1993). Since most of the research on sarcasm in the last twenty years or so has been published by psycholinguists, linguists and other scientists at large have widely accepted this notion of sarcasm as "the most salient cultural form of irony" (Nakassis & Snedecker 2002).

3. Sarcasm as an independent speech act

3.1 Sarcasm hurts

Fowler's (1965) canonical characterization of sarcasm as an ironic remark meant to be derogatory towards people survives in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000), whose first entry refers to "an ironic remark intended to wound." While de Groot et al. (1995) spoke of insults, *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1996) depicts sarcasm with expressions such as reproach, scorn, contempt and taunting. Muecke (1970) goes so far as to use the word "weapon." The second entry in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000) is perhaps one that accurately summarizes most of the definitions of sarcasm in the literature: the dictionary elevates sarcastic language to the status of "wit," which is "intended to makes its victim the butt of contempt or ridicule." The operative word here seems to be *victim*. For all practical

purposes, sarcasm as seen by scholars of the literary tradition seems to refute the old adage and personify sarcasm as the quintessence of verbal "sticks and stones."

It cannot be denied that sarcasm has a biting intent. However, making a it matter of intentional torment towards a victim is too restrictive a definition. For instance, this interpretation does not, once again, account for the utterance in (1), in which the comment about the weather is undeniably sarcastic, but not directed at an intended victim (unless of course one were mock-imitating someone in their presence). As a matter of fact, this sort of utterance may well be spoken without the presence of listeners.

3.2 Sarcasm and Metalanguage

Haiman's (1997, 1998) views on sarcasm and metalanguage significantly add to this debate by bringing innovative insight into the question. According to his theory, language is composed at its core of a message, which surrounded with a shell of metalanguage, arranged in concentric circles. The message core is associated with the thought and the linguistic message itself, whereas the metalanguage surrounding it would convey the image of what the speaker wants the listener to hear, much like a performance. Accordingly, sarcasm is a construct that allows the speaker to use a certain type of metalanguage which not only is non-universal, which actually barely qualifies as cultural, as it may also vary from person to person (Haiman 1998: 16).

The idea that sarcasm would be a question of personhood in addition to a genre of speech has been suggested by Capelli et al. (1990) and Nakassis & Snedecker (2002). Although they did not elaborate on this claim, it is obvious in the writing of certain authors or the verbal behaviour of certain people that it is a form of expression privileged by some and not all. As for sarcasm as a cultural phenomenon, opinions obviously vary as a function of how one describes sarcasm. If, as Haiman (1998:19) suggests, the essence of sarcasm is found in metalanguage, then it would stand to reason that there are any number of ways one could express sarcasm.

As such, the question boils down to one of whether vocal cues that lead to the decoding of attitudes are universal ones. Whether affective content is preserved

over linguistic barriers has been much debated and no consensus has been reached as of yet. Studies by Beier & Zautra (1972), McCluskey et al. (1975) and McRoberts et al. (1995) have suggested that cross-cultural recognition of emotions or intended affect might be indicative of universal corresponding vocal behaviour, whereas those by Austin (1972) and Key (1975) claim differences in the emission and perception of the affective message across cultures. Some have made more subtle distinctions of emotions by distinguishing an activity dimension from an evaluative dimension (see Davitz 1964 for the hypothesis) that some vocal expressions may be unlearned from cultural patterns (see Van Bezooijen et al. 1983 for the empirical study). Finally, some have made a distinction between what types of emotions have a more cross-linguistic recognition potential (Abelin & Allwood 2000).

The debate as to whether vocal expressions of emotions and attitudes may cross linguistic barriers or if it is a question of personality may be a little beside the point, but it serves to illustrate that sarcasm may be culturally bound or even idiosyncratic in view of the nature of the metalanguage with which it is associated. This in itself seems to indicate that the tone of voice with which one chooses to express sarcasm is not as universal as the literature suggests. However, the crucial concern here is that the essence of the sarcastic message is found in the metalanguage, where it clearly indicates "I do not mean what I am saying (I mean something else)," as opposed to being found in the message itself, as suggested by semanticists and psycholinguists. Let us consider example (1) once more:

(1) "What a gorgeous day!"

uttered when it has been pouring rain since morning. According to the traditional definition of irony, the message would have been that of "it is not in fact a gorgeous day." Some might even add a second message: "and I am not happy about it." As explained above, this does not qualify the statement as a sarcastic one according to the definitions of sarcasm, since it lacks the very precise goal of directly wounding or ridiculing and it does not necessarily take a victim.

Haiman's theory of metalanguage adds to this is the paraphrase "I do not mean what I said that this is a gorgeous day," that is, "it is not a gorgeous day (the message), even though I chose to say it as though it were (metamessage)." It is the very fact that the speaker chose to utter (1) as though it were a gorgeous day that informs the listener that the intent was sarcastic, that is, that the speaker chose to "perform" or to project a different image of the message than that of the message itself.

4. The incongruousness of the 'sarcastic tone of voice'

Haiman's theory of metalanguage is far-reaching. What is of importance to this discussion however is that sarcasm seems to be triggered by a meta-utterance, "I don't mean what I'm saying" or "This isn't for real," which may be encoded in any number of ways. Speaking of mood markers conveyed by the metalanguage, Haiman chose not to speculate as to what those may be, since he had already intimated that they might be particular to a group or subgroup of people, even individuals. This argument in itself suggests that there is much more to sarcasm than what is considered a typical instance, and much less to the archetype 'sarcastic tone of voice' than has been alluded to.

In fact, one could say that Haiman's views completely disprove the existence of a particular 'sarcastic tone of voice' since sarcasm is now defined in terms of metalanguage, as opposed to intent. Intent, of course, is still present and part of the message, but it no longer defines sarcasm Rather, it defines what kind of sarcasm is used, or the function of it.

5. The 'sarcastic tone of voice'

It has become clear in the last few paragraphs that the notion of sarcasm is defined by means of metalanguage, and that metalanguage is linked with intent. It has also been demonstrated that sarcastic intent is unexpectedly unrestricted if compared with traditional rhetoric beliefs. As a consequence, such a concept as a typically 'sarcastic tone of voice' has become incongruous. Intuitively however, the notion of rejecting the sarcastic intonation seems repulsive.

Scientifically speaking, the 'sarcastic tone of voice' is factored by a set of supralinguistic cues which are not limited to intonation and which are not always consistent with one another, perhaps due to the fact that sarcasm has been defined too loosely to allow for good comparison. Results of studies involving sarcastic irony have suggested that when a sarcastic remark is uttered, the overall pitch rises, but the variations are kept at a minimum (Anolli et al. 2000; Séguin 2006). Milosky & Ford (1997) and Séguin (2004) however have uncovered evidence of increased F_0 variability. Fónagy (1971) has observed a sudden rise in pitch after the beginning of the utterance resulting in a shrill voice, which drops down to a low and steady creak towards the end of the utterance. The rate of articulation and tempo are significantly lengthened, the syllables are prolonged and the pauses are shortened (Anolli et al. 2000; Cutler 1974; Milosky & Ford 1997; Rockwell 2000). The stress on syllables or words is intensified or exaggerated to produce an effect that Anolli et al. (2000) have qualified as "premeditated." Finally, part of the sentence or the whole utterance might become nasalized (Anolli et al. 2000, Cutler 1974, Haverkate 1990).

These supralinguistic characteristics seem to roughly correspond to those of expressions of sarcasm as defined by the scholars of the literary tradition, in the sense that they might concord with some physical paralinguistic characteristics of speech uttered in anger, disgust and contempt (Buck 1984). According to Bugental (1974), the facial expressions accompanying speech may have an effect on the speech characteristics of the speaker; for instance, a negative attitude may provoke a "downward pull on the muscles and a tightening of the jaw and vocal mechanisms" (Rockwell 2000). The consequences of this could be set forth vocally as flattened tone (low F_0 variability), a lower F_0 and increased amplitude.

Fónagy (1971, 1983) has anthropomorphized sarcasm and laced its vocal correlates heavily with psychoanalytic symbolisms. For instance, the nasality would result from the desire of an individual to expel something revolting from his or her mouth, where it could be tasted, but also smelled, hence the lowered velum. The low creak is explained by a constriction of the pharynx consequential

to the refusal of food, symbolizing the refusal to acknowledge an individual or an event which by extension are a prelude to homicide (Fónagy 1983: 136).

Some researchers have investigated the vocal correlates of emotions without making any association with sarcasm (among many others: Abelin & Allwood 2000; Banse & Scherer 1996; Koike et al. 1998; Murray & Arnott 1993; Scherer 1986, Williams & Stevens 1972). The results of these studies show summarily that while some of the affective behaviour attributed to sarcasm may be found in vocal manifestations of anger, disgust and contempt, other emotions are also characterized by similar parameters. For instance, if a rise in F_0 has been observed for anger and contempt, it has also been observed for happiness, shyness and fear, as has pitch variability, which is not said to be a characteristic of the 'sarcastic tone of voice.' Surprise and dominance are also said to share the high intensity of the 'sarcastic tone of voice.' Finally, Streeter et al. (1977: 348) contend that F_0 tends to rise when a speaker is insincere, which might be linked with sarcastic irony- though it could be argued whether irony is really an act of insincerity.

In sum, it could be said that there indeed exists a tone of voice which is usually associated with sarcasm. If it does however, it is very limited in scope and applies only to the use of sarcasm in its most severe definition.

6. Many sarcasms, many sarcastic 'tones of voice'[2]

In Section 4, different intents driving the use of sarcasm were introduced as a way to give new life to its definition. In this section, a variety of uses, or functions of sarcasm will be presented in order to make the point that sarcasm need not be associated with a tone of voice which represents anger, contempt or disgust. This will be a very brief and superficial survey and the reader must be aware that only a surface amount of the uses of sarcasm will be scratched. Since Section 3 has already touched on the subject of the traditional purpose of mocking and ridiculing, no further mention will be made of it below.

[2] Note that many of the quoted authors did work on irony, not sarcasm, but the examples they have provided were deemed sarcastic according to the criteria elaborated in the earlier sections.

Out of the myriad of purposes sarcasm may serve, certainly one of the most common is that of criticism "off the record" as Brown and Levinson (1978) put it, which amounts to criticism through false praise in the words of Lapp (1992). For instance, in a professional context, an employer may choose to use sarcasm in order to smooth office relations or to show what kind of a boss they are:

(5) Said to an employee who is always late: "There you are, on time, as usual!"

Another purpose of sarcasm is humour, including banter, playfulness, jocularity and teasing (Attardo 2000; Clift 1999; Dews et al. 1995; Dews & Winner 1995, 1997; Drew 1987; Jorgensen 1996; Kotthoff 2002a, b; Kreuz 2000; Kreuz et al. 1991; Haiman 1997, 1998; Leetch 1983; Long & Graesser 1988; Roberts & Kreuz 1994; Seckman & Couch 1989; Séguin 2004, 2006; Slugoski & Turnbull 1988). In her study of dinner conversations, Kotthoff (2002b) has discovered that more than half of the ironic and sarcastic comments generated playful discourse or laughter. Clift (1999) came to similar conclusions after analyzing her corpus. Gibbs (2000) notes that sarcasm and irony can be used by friends to bond or mock teasingly (see also Drew 1987 on teasing).

Amongst other functions, sarcasm is used to emphasize and to clarify (Robert & Kreuz 1994). It is used as a facilitator, that is, as a means to talk about subjects that make speakers uncomfortable, i.e. "mentioning the unmentionable" (Clift 1999). Along the same lines, irony can show the speaker to be detached vis-à-vis the conversation in showing emotional control (Dews & Winner 1995, 1997; Dews et al. 1995) or to protect interpersonal relationships (Anolli et al. 2001, Gibbs & Colston 2001). It is a way to handle social differences by adding a touch of humour (Kotthoff 2002b). While some have found a way to work irony into a politeness theory/face-saving strategy (Barbe, 1995; Brown 1995; Brown & Levinson 1978; Glucksberg 1995; Slugoski & Turnbull 1988), Colston 1997 is of the opinion that sarcasm is powerful in expressing surprise. Finally, some instances of sarcasm are compelling expressions of cynicism. Of course, the

sarcast may have more than one aim in mind, as pointed out by Kreuz et al. (1991) and Glucksberg et al. (1995), such as to be humorous and polite, but to get a point across, or to reflect an attitude without hurting someone's feelings.

With so many intentions behind a sarcastic comment, regardless of the message, one wonders how some of the authors have come to identify what has been described in Section 5 as the typical 'sarcastic tone of voice.' Indeed, inasmuch as sarcasm may serve to convey countless attitudes in psychological, social or professional contexts for any number or purposes, there are simply too many variables to control in order to define, let alone study, a typically 'sarcastic tone of voice.'

7. On the necessity intonational cues to sarcasm

Perhaps one reason why so many researchers hang on so desperately to the notion of one single 'ironic' or 'sarcastic tone of voice' is that they need such thing in order to oppose intonational cues to contextual cues when it comes to processing sarcasm.

Some have proposed, for various reasons, that intonational cues might play a bigger role in the processing of irony and sarcasm than contextual cues. Rockwell (2000) considers that this is the case in view of the "anthetical nature" of irony, though it is unclear how antithesis affects intonation. Narkassis & Snedecker (2002) establish a strong relationship between intonation and "the actual use of irony." Fernald (1989) and Scherer (1986) for their part have established on empirical basis that it is entirely possible to decipher emotions (hence, some components of certain types of sarcasm) on the basis of intonation alone, without the benefit of the propositional content. Finally, Capelli et al. (1990), after reviewing the literature on the importance babies give to intonational and prosodic features of the voices in their environment (Fernald 1984, Fernald & Kuhl 1987, Walker-Andrews & Grolnick 1983), conclude that they are well suited to the recognition of various intentions and emotions.

Conversely, on the basis of semantic or psycholinguistic testing and argumentation, some linguists have stated that contextual cues are the only cues

that are needed in order to recognize sarcasm and irony. This point of view seems to be mostly the offspring of philosophy, pragmatics and theoretical semantics, which holds the traditional view that irony (sarcasm is assumed to belong to the realm of irony in this case) is a speech act involving a paradox between the dictum and the implicatum. The earlier theories relied on Grice's (1975, 1978) introduction of the concept of conversational implicatures, a system whereby in order to insure effective communication, speakers and listeners abide by what is termed the Cooperative Principle. An implicit collaboration between speakers and listeners, the Cooperative Principle is upheld by way of four maxims which, when flaunted, breach the cooperative nature of the speech act. When a hearer encounters an utterance which he or she knows to be counterfactual or otherwise false or insincere, a maxim is violated and he or she must reassess the utterance in order to determine the intended meaning. Grice introduced irony as a speech act that violated the maxim of Quality, since the information given in the statement does not match the quality of the context. Since the recent redefinition of the ironic utterance to include a broader type of utterances, such as understatement, the maxims of Relevance or that of Quantity have been added to the list of Gricean maxims that may be flaunted by irony (see among others Attardo 2000 and Colston 1997).

It is perhaps unfortunate that this ongoing debate it at the crux of the literature on the 'sarcastic tone of voice.' After hastily defining irony and sarcasm to fit certain purposes, it is often taken for granted that there exists an opposition between suprasegmental manifestations of sarcasm and contextual cues in the processing of sarcasm and irony. Even though there is little doubt that varying occurrences of sarcasm will be decoded by listeners with the help of relatively unequal measures of intonational and contextual cues, there is, as Nakassis & Snedecker (2002: 9) pointed out, "danger to regard intonation a priori as a non-relational cue, independent of its context use", as there is much more to basic speech than purely syntactic and semantic attributes (among others: Ladd 1978; Soskin & Kauffman 1961; Starkweather 1961).

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to challenge the existence of a typically 'sarcastic tone of voice' by disambiguating the nature and function of sarcasm. This was achieved firstly by distinguishing the notion from what Haiman (1998:18) calls its "conceptual neighbour" irony, in examining its evolution from trope expressing counterfactuality to a much more complex form of nonliteral utterance. After accepting the notion of sarcastic irony (sarcasm, which happens to be ironic), sarcasm as an independent speech act was then actualized by way of Haiman's theory of metalanguage, whereby it was established that it is not the intent that determines sarcasm, but its meta-message of "I don't mean what I'm saying." In Section 4, a further distinction was made between intent and metalanguage; it was established that although metalanguage allowed sarcastic construal, intent ruled intonation, which, in turn, may be considered as vocal correlates of attitudes and emotions. Based on this new knowledge, the existence of the typically 'sarcastic tone of voice' was reconsidered. Section 5 circumstantiated what is meant in the literature by 'sarcastic tone of voice' on the basis of the scant literature on the subject, then proceeded to show that what was considered a 'typical sarcastic tone of voice' was in fact suprasegmental correlates roughly corresponding with anger, contempt and disgust. It had already been established that sarcasm could express much more than those three emotions or attitudes, and further evidence was provided in Section 6, where some of the psychological and social aspects of the use of sarcasm were laid out. Finally, Section 7 explored in more detail the debate that might have been the stepping stone for misrepresentation of intonational cues to sarcasm: the eagerness of some to establish a pattern of processing of sarcasm by weighing contextual cues against intonational cues.

There is a strong possibility that the essence of the debate regarding sarcastic tones of voice resides in the fundamental lack of research involving spontaneous expressions of sarcasm (Bryant & Fox Tree 2002; Kotthoff 2002b; Scherer 1986). Real-life conversations are assuredly preferable to the meticulously made-up vignettes and stories used in experimental settings, not only for their spontaneity and candor, but also because such natural conversations allow the analysis of

responses of the listeners. Verbal and other reactions provided by listeners, mostly ignored in the field of irony and sarcasm before Kotthoff (2002b), could be a powerful tool in establishing not only if and how the listener has deciphered the sarcasm, but more to the point, what intent the speaker has managed to convey by way of a very complex speech act. In addition, a corpus of candid tokens of sarcasm could help determine the extent of the idiosyncrasy of the phenomenon and perhaps eventually allow for a certain patterning of other "intonational misfits" (Cruttenden 1984) spawned by bouts of sarcasm, such as those cited in Haiman (1998:32): exaggeration, flattening, singsong melody, falsetto, undue emphasis and the like.

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