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再探互為主觀性：以激進構式語法分析正向反諷

Reconstructing Intersubjectivity: A Radical Construction Grammar Approach to Positive Irony

莊惠鈞

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click we've shared since day one. I must admit it's a challenge to encapsulate my deep gratitude to her in this small section without inadvertently turning it into a full-blown chapter! (Positive irony intended!)

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laughter were the perfect pick-me-up during life's challenging moments. Our casual catch-ups and breezy chats whenever we crossed paths in GIL's hallway never failed to brighten my day. Specifically in the stressful period of developing my dissertation, she even went out of her way to source a well-known herbal beverage (仙草茶), which worked wonders, despite its typical bitter taste, in alleviating my anxiety and upholding my well-being. Her spontaneous positivity made me feel not only appreciated but also reassured of the avenue I pursue. Every act of her kindness and every note of her encouragement, together with her radiant smiles, will forever be etched in my cherished memory.

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The savory dumplings, crisp tempura, umami-packed sushi, and so many other Taiwanese and Japanese dishes that she prepared are flavors of my childhood that I will always hold dear. As my most faithful intercessor, Grandma always prayed for me, looking after every aspect of my life. Though Grandpa and Grandma have since passed, the guidance of their faith-filled lives keeps illuminating my path through life's challenges. I miss them beyond measure and am filled with gratitude for their boundless love, which has shaped me into someone who can bring warmth to others. I know they would be so proud of me now, just as I am incredibly proud of them—their love, their memory, and their legacy.

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摘要

本論文旨在透過激進構式語法 (Radical Construction Grammar) 為語用中之互為主觀性 (intersubjectivity) 以及正向反諷 (positive irony) 間之關係提供一個新的研究模式。精確來說，本論文探討正向反諷之語用功能如何被構式化 (constructionalized)，進而證明此正向反諷之使用為一“互為主觀性化之結構”(intersubjectified construction)。目前的構式語法理論多元，且多著力於能夠完整描述語言之樣貌，但卻往往在需要處理語用或大腦認知層次之階段感到力猶未逮。本研究透過分析三個特定之正向反諷構式結構 (positive-ironic constructions) 探索語言之認知機制，進而在構式語法的框架下，為語用句法研究之介面提供新的解決方法。正向反諷之使用雖曾被提及具有協助建立說話者間關係之功能，但在文獻上相較於負向反諷 (negative irony) 卻極少被討論。本論文不但由認知語言學的角度探究正向反諷，更跳脫原本只侷限在雙邊關係 (dyadic interaction) 之反諷研究，進而檢視三邊之互動關係 (triadic interaction)，進一步探討互為主觀性本身如何成為正向反諷構式結構所包含之認知功能之一。每個討論反諷構式的章節都聚焦並反映一種認知機制，本論文透過三個正向反諷之構式分析，提供構式語法理論分析語用現象時之解決方法。

關鍵詞：

互為主觀性、正向反諷、激進構式語法、語用學、句法學、認知語言學

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation presents a novel exploration into the relationship between intersubjectivity and positive irony through the lens of Radical Construction Grammar (RCG)—i.e., how a linguistic construction may encode (constructionalize) the pragmatic-discursive function of positive irony that reflects intersubjectivity as an intersubjectified construction. Despite the ambition of existing construction grammars to provide comprehensive understandings of language, these frameworks have struggled to adequately incorporate the pragmatic and cognitive (metarepresentational) dimensions of language use. By examining the cognitive mechanisms underlying three positive-ironic constructions, this study seeks to bridge the existing theoretical gap, contributing a solution to the longstanding issue of connecting syntax and pragmatics within constructionist frameworks. The central theme of the research is positive irony, an aspect within linguistics that, despite its importance in facilitating the establishment of social bonds and enhancing communicative exchanges, has received relatively limited attention in scholarly discourse. Rather than adhering to the conventional dyadic interaction analyses, this investigation extends its purview to include triadic situations, thereby promoting a more comprehensive understanding of how intersubjectivity is encapsulated in positive-ironic constructions from a cognitive-functional perspective. Each distinct construction imparts a unique contribution to solving the research questions, thereby enhancing the overall comprehension of the research topic.

Keywords:

intersubjectivity, positive irony, Radical Construction Grammar, pragmatics, syntax, Cognitive Linguistics

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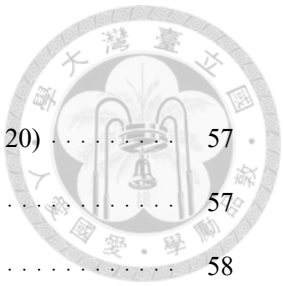

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ABBREVIATIONS & SYMBOLS

Ø	Zero form	M	Meaning
1SG	First person singular	N	Noun
2SG	Second person singular	n	Number
3SG	Third person singular	Nat (–)	Unnatural expression
2PL	Second person plural	NEG	Negative
A	Guest A; person A	NOM	Nominative case
ACC	Accusative case	NP	Noun phrase
Acc (–)	Unacceptable expression	OED	Oxford English Dictionary
ADJ	Adjective	POS	Positive
ADV	Adverb	PRF	Perfective
AI	Artificial intelligence	PTL	Particle
ASP	Aspect marker	RCG	Radical Construction Grammar
B	Guest B; person B	S	Sentence
BCC	BLCU Chinese Corpus	SPEAKING	Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model
BLCU	Beijing Language and Culture University	SSTH	Semantic-script Theory of Humor
C	Victim; person C	T	Time
CA	Conversation Analysis	TC	Topic-comment alignment
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory	UBT	Usage-Based Theory
CRS	Current relevant state	V	Verb
CST	Construction	VP	Verb phrase
CxG	Construction Grammar	VSNL	V-*sǐ*-*nǐ*-*le* construction
DA	Discourse Analysis	VSWL	V-*sǐ*-*wǒ*-*le* construction
EDC	Excessive degree construction	W	*wǒ*
EDM	Extreme Degree Modifier	ZA	Zero anaphora
EIC	Excessive impact construction	ZI	Zero inflection
EV	Emotion verb		
FTA	Face threatening act		

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GE	Grammaticalization as expansion
GEN	Genitive case
GPT	Generative Pretrained Transformer
GR	Grammaticalization as reduction
GTVH	General Theory of Verbal Humor
H	TV host
Kr	Knowledge resource
L	Lexeme
LNK	Linker, linking word

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Intersubjectivity is the basis of all sociality and of all communicability, and therefore the foundation of all culture and all history.

—Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1952, p. 83)

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that, through irony's digital footprint, we arrive at a raw fact that defies ironic sensationalism. The scholarly impetus for this ongoing research into the nexus between intersubjectivity and positive irony is illuminated by the awareness that even the most cutting-edge advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) must recognize and navigate the complexities surrounding intersubjectivity (Bruni & Fernández, 2017a; Bender & Koller, 2020) and the detection and generation of irony (see Carvalho et al., 2009; Davidov et al., 2010; Reyes et al., 2013; Ghosh et al., 2015a, 2015b; Park et al., 2018), even if the term "intersubjectivity" is not directly referenced in the aforementioned works. For instance, Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT3/3.5/4; as of April 2023), a groundbreaking language model, has been engineered to embody specific aspects of the notion of intersubjectivity (i.e., the semantic–pragmatic interface of language use), despite not having direct access to social or situational context. This accomplishment is technically realized via the neural network architecture called "Transformer" (Vaswani et al., 2017, p. 6000), which discerns the statistical regularities of natural language, taking into account discourse structures and pragmatic inference (Devlin et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Its results are specifically facilitated through essential algorithms such as self-attention, multi-head attention, layer normalization, positional encoding, and feedforward networks (Vaswani et al., 2017).

In particular, the GPT language models consider a contextual layer, allowing them to generate responses more adeptly attuned to the conversational context. This layer leverages conversational indicators such as tone, sentiment, and social roles to enhance the model's responsiveness to the interlocutor's needs and expectations. However, it is important to note that

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despite their impressive capacity, such language models lack the cognitive faculty to directly comprehend social or intersubjective context (Radford et al., 2019). This observation heightens our curiosity to investigate the nuanced relationship between intersubjectivity and positive irony using Radical Construction Grammar (Croft, 2021). This approach implies that our study lies at the intersection between syntax and pragmatics. Within the bounds of this constructionist framework, our aim is to unravel the intricacies and multiple layers inherent in the interplay between intersubjectivity and positive irony, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the two complex phenomena encoded in particular linguistic structures.

This chapter serves as a guiding scaffold to illustrate the structure of the present doctoral dissertation and is organized in the following manner. Section 1.1 delineates the background and relevance of the study. Section 1.2 introduces the research questions and objectives. Following that, Section 1.3 articulates the three positive-ironic constructions to be examined. Section 1.4 underscores the prospective contributions of this scholarly endeavor. Lastly, 1.5 furnishes an overview of the doctoral thesis.

1.1 Research Background

The notion of intersubjectivity has roots in philosophical discourse on empathy, intersubjective comprehension, and the essence of selfhood. German philosopher Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1859–1938) is often acknowledged as the trailblazer for explicitly formulating the concept of intersubjectivity within the context of his phenomenological philology. Husserl (1913/1952) posited that consciousness is invariably directed toward an object and mandates the presence of other consciousness. He saw intersubjectivity as a fundamental aspect of human experience, enabling people to share their own experiences with others. In psychology, the

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notion was first introduced by American philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead (1934), who contended that individuals develop a sense of self through social interactions and communication with others. Mead maintained that the self does not subsist in isolation but rather emerges from a dynamic interaction with others. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) represents another influential contributor to the discourse on intersubjectivity, asserting that perception is a bodily and relational process that is always situated within a particular context. He held that intersubjectivity is a necessary condition for the evolution of perception and that our experiences are constantly shaped by our engagement with others.

The seminal works that elucidate the concept of intersubjectivity have paved the way for an array of subsequent research endeavors across diverse academic disciplines. Indeed, intersubjectivity has been discussed in such fields as philosophy (Gallagher, 2001; Zahavi, 2001; Ratcliffe, 2008), psychology (Trevarthen, 1998; Reddy, 2008; Schilbach, 2010), constructivism (Gergen, 1994; Hacking, 1999), social cognition (Malle & Hodges, 2005; Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Tomasello, 2014), and linguistics (Sweetser, 1990; Clark & Brennan, 1991; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Langacker, 1999; only to mention a few). These intellectual pursuits have successively enriched our grasp of the cognitive mechanisms by which individuals construct shared meaning and align their mental states.

From the standpoint of language, communication, and cognition, intersubjectivity can be understood as an individual's capacity to recognize and respond to another's perspective, while coordinating meaning through shared reference and mutual understanding (Reddy, 1993; Clark, 1996; Enfield & Levinson, 2006; Schegloff, 2007; Streeck et al., 2011; Tomasello, 2014). This intersubjective thinking is particularly relevant and crucial for research on irony in general, because irony relies heavily on the shared understanding and mutual recognition of intended

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meanings between communicators (Gibbs, 1994; Giora, 1995; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). Successful utilization and interpretation of irony require aligning mental states and inferring the speaker's intentions, which are rooted in intersubjective thinking (Goodwin, 2000; Stivers, 2008). Several pragmatic theories, such as Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, Sperber and Wilson's (1986a) Relevance Theory, and Clark and Brennan's (1991) Common Ground Theory, have emerged as the interpretive tools to clarify intersubjectivity by shedding light on the cognitive and linguistic processes underlying intersubjectivity and other linguistic phenomena that materialize through intersubjectivity.

Intersubjective thinking is particularly relevant for positive irony, as it demands a heightened scrutiny of the risk assumed by the speaker, given that positive irony is typically viewed as a hazardous strategy (Gibbs, 1994; Giora, 1995; Attardo, 2000). In essence, positive irony is characterized as a distinct type of irony where the speaker aims to convey a positive or favorable message to the hearer, albeit by stating the opposite or using an unanticipated expression. Specifically, positive irony can be conceptualized as **[negative form + positive intention]** from a higher cognitive plane (see 1a; Tsur, 2015; Katz & Rappoport, 2016), as opposed to negative irony, which can be schematized as **[positive form + negative intention]** (see 1b; Giora, 1995; Bryant & Fox Tree, 2005). It should be noted that by form, we refer to both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication, although this research is delimited to verbal discussions of ironic language alone. Negative irony is exemplified in 1a, where Karen, who is often perceived as mean and selfish, is described as "straight-up sugar" and "the sweetest person." In contrast, positive irony is illustrated in 1b, where Pete, who never fails to impress, is described as someone who "drop[s] the ball all the time." If the hearer takes the speaker's positive-ironic expression at face value, a communication breakdown may transpire (Attardo &

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Raskin, 1991; Gibbs & Colston, 2002; Pexman, 2008).

1 a. Karen is straight-up sugar, the sweetest person you'll ever meet.
(In reality: Karen is mean and selfish.)

b. Yo, Pete be droppin' the ball all the time.
(In reality: Pete is a highly capable person at work.)

1a and 1b underscore scenarios where the effectiveness of verbal communication is largely contingent upon the establishment of intersubjectivity between conversation partners. Intersubjectivity significantly streamlines communication involving positive-ironic expressions, as the process of discerning and interpreting irony requires a more advanced cognitive effort compared to regular figurative expressions such as metaphor and hyperbole (Gibbs, 2002; Gibbs & Colston, 2012). Insufficient intersubjectivity between the interlocutors may create obstacles for the hearer in grasping the speaker's intended meaning, potentially leading to confusion or misunderstanding. Alternatively, the hearer may detect this form-meaning mismatch but struggle to comprehend the speaker's perspective or to appreciate the amusing elements in irony. In either situation, the effectiveness of positive irony is compromised.

The multifaceted relationship between intersubjectivity and positive irony can be further summarized by the following observations. First, in the context of positive irony, shared understanding is critical for the communicators (alternatively, interlocutors, interactants, or communication/conversation partners) to appreciate the intended meaning behind the positive-ironic statement at surface level (see Schutz, 1967; Gibbs, 2000). Second, both intersubjectivity and positive irony profoundly rely on contextual factors to ensure effective communication

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(Bark, 1995; Ruiz-Gurillo & Alvarado Ortega, 2013). The successful decoding of positive-ironic expressions often hinges on the understanding of situational context, background knowledge, and social dynamics (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989). This underscores the significance of contextual sensitivity in the comprehensive treatment of all instances of irony. Lastly, intersubjectivity and positive irony fulfill vital social functions. While intersubjectivity fosters shared understanding and social cohesion (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007), positive irony can promote social bonding through humor, collective experiences, and the expression of criticism in a less confrontational manner (Katz et al., 2004).

In truth, however, while we have identified several prior studies that touch upon instances of positive irony, the examination of positive-ironic language is often limited and overshadowed by their focus on negative irony (see Chapter 2). In these works, positive irony is often mentioned only in passing without in-depth analysis. Even in the field of pragmatics, whether from a traditional or cognitive standpoint, research on positive irony is relatively scarce compared to negative irony. The primary takeaways from these seminal works on positive irony can be encapsulated as follows: (a) positive irony is more challenging to process, detect, and understand due to its deviation from conventionalized language use as well as its reliance on contextual cues for meaning-making (Dews & Winner, 1997; Anolli et al., 2000; Gibbs, 2000; Colston & Lee, 2004; Pexman & Zvaigzne, 2004); and (b) positive irony is considerably less common than negative irony (Muecke, 1982; Lucariello & Nelson, 1985; Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Utsumi, 2000). These findings can indeed be seen as cause and effect.

Our perspective begs to differ. We recognize that positive irony can be more difficult to process or detect and may require various conversational cues for decoding. However, this concurrence stems primarily from the fact that these studies concentrate on context-informed

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positive irony that arises exclusively from the conversational exchange between individuals. Critically, this conclusion is relevant and applicable not only to cases of positive irony but also to a majority of pragmatic occurrences that do not convey the literal meaning of an utterance (e.g., metaphor, hyperbole, and humor). Nonetheless, scant attention has been directed toward the type of positive irony or intersubjectivity that can be encoded within a specific linguistic construction, with only a handful of exceptions. This prompted us to adopt a constructionist approach to investigate intersubjectivity and positive irony, as we have found both to be highly relevant to the process of constructionalization.

Indeed, one of the primary difficulties in understanding positive irony and other non-literal uses of language resides in the inherent ambiguity of language itself (Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 2008; Geeraerts, 2010; Croft, 2012; Tomasello, 2014). Linguistic ambiguity is characterized by the presence of multiple potential interpretations for a word, phrase, or sentence in any given language. Various factors can influence this phenomenon, including lexical ambiguity related to homonym (Klepousniotou, 2002; Beretta et al., 2005) and polysemy (Klein & Murphy, 2001; Tyler & Evans, 2003), structural ambiguity (Gibson & Pearlmutter, 1998; Ferreira & Patson, 2007), and pragmatic ambiguity (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 2000; Carston, 2002; Sperber & Noveck, 2004).

Another challenge is presented by linguistic underspecification (Bach, 1994; Cruse, 2000; Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet, 2000; Giora, 2003), a phenomenon observed in human language when a linguistic expression fails to furnish sufficient information for a comprehensive understanding of its meaning or interpretation. This issue may manifest at various tiers of linguistic processing, including semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Often, it necessitates that the hearer or reader draw upon context, background knowledge, and ancillary cues in order to

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discern the intended meaning. Instances of linguistic underspecification encompasses ellipsis (Frazier & Clifton, 2005), anaphora (Kadmon, 2001), and vagueness (Van Deemter, 2010). In short, linguistic ambiguity and linguistic underspecification represent interrelated yet discrete concepts, both entailing interpretive challenges arising from the inherent diversity and malleability of human language. Nonetheless, they diverge in the particular modalities through which these challenges materialize. Ambiguity is engendered by the presence of multiple viable meanings, whereas underspecification originates from an insufficiency of information for the definitive determination of meaning.

Both linguistic ambiguity and underspecification pose the greatest challenge for all language models in AI research due to several reasons including (a) limited context (Yeh and Harnly, 2002), (b) lack of real-world knowledge (Davis & Markus, 2015), (c) inability to infer speaker intentions (Bruni & Fernández, 2017b), (d) pragmatic ambiguity (mostly about nonliteral language uses; Chollet, 2017), and (e) lack of common-sense reasoning (Kitaev et al., 2020). Inadvertently, these factors have, to an extent, buttressed our rationale for employing Radical Construction Grammar (Croft, 2001) to examine the relationship between intersubjectivity and irony, as the approach makes attempts at dealing with these ambiguities in its core design (see RESEARCH METHODS for details). Notably, as AI technology advances, the Radical Construction Grammar framework, though not initially developed for natural language processing (NLP), may offer valuable insights into how AI language models can address their long-standing struggle with linguistic ambiguity, particularly in terms of the interplay between intersubjectivity and non-literal uses of language.

Positive irony has been insufficiently explored in prior research. Consider a hypothetical world in which positive irony reigns supreme. In this alternate reality, sarcastic remarks give way

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to genuine praise, and caustic retorts are supplanted by uplifting words. In such a scenario, the balance between positive and negative irony would be easily tilted in favor of the former, in stark contrast to the existing academic context. We find ourselves in a scholarly environment where negative irony takes center stage in most discourse, often leaving positive irony sidelined or misrepresented. Nevertheless, some linguists, ourselves included, maintain that this situation may not be set in stone as a constant.

Through the lens of Radical Construction Grammar, our investigation seeks to shed light on the underappreciated prevalence of positive irony in human language, recognizing it as a prominent mechanism for reconstructing intersubjectivity. This study utilizes a constructionist methodology which prioritizes the analysis of form-meaning pairings that reflect actual language use as outlined in Chapter 3. The scope of our research will be delimited to an examination of three distinct Chinese positive-ironic constructions: (a) the [*zéi*-POS] construction in Chapter 4, (b) the [XAYB] construction in Chapter 5, and (c) the [*búshì…ma*] construction in Chapter 6. In the following subsection, we will delineate our research questions and objectives, which serve as a navigational structure for our inquiry.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research is to examine the process of re-constructing intersubjectivity through the analysis of three Chinese positive-ironic constructions via Radical Construction Grammar. Therefore, our fundamental premise is that the pragmatic-discursive aspect of language, along with those of syntax and semantics, can be encoded in a linguistic construction per se. The research questions and objectives, arranged in ascending order of complexity as outlined below, will guide this investigation, with answers and discussions

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distributed across the relevant chapters where necessary and applicable.

1. How is positive irony operationally defined in this research, and how does this definition align with or diverge from those in previous studies?

2. How might a pragmatic function, such as positive irony, be encoded in a linguistic construction (i.e., constructionalized) from the perspective of Radical Construction Grammar?

3. How does Radical Construction Grammar, premised on a semantic-pragmatic assumption, account for the meaning-making process of a positive-ironic expression? What merits and demerits does Radical Construction Grammar present when exploring the pragmatic-discursive aspects of language?

4. How is intersubjectivity manifested and subsequently re-constructed (intersubjectification) through encoded positive irony, aided by Radical Construction Grammar? How does intersubjectification reflect the dynamics between the distinct roles played by the interactants in the context of positive irony?

In addressing the first research question, we shall formulate a working definition for the positive-ironic constructions under scrutiny. While this undertaking may appear rudimentary, it necessitates a thorough examination of preceding scholarship on the categorization of various forms of irony to ensure that the definition we endeavor to formulate is academically sound and unbiased. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed literature review to address this inquiry. The second research question aims to explore how a pragmatic-discursive meaning or function can be

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incorporated into a linguistic construction, as this research utilizes a constructionist paradigm to probe positive irony, a well-defined area within general pragmatics. In particular, the [*zéi*-POS] construction will serve as a case study to explicate this process and demonstrate the relevance and application of Radical Construction Grammar to pragmatic research. Chapter 4 will delve into this inquiry in detail.

The third research question presents a significant challenge to established analytical models used for interpreting meaning, which typically reply on theoretical-inferential reasoning. A critical study calls for an assessment of both the benefits and drawbacks of current models, circumventing the pitfalls of regarding any single theoretical framework as a universally applicable (all-encompassing) tool. Radical Construction Grammar is not exempt from this. While leveraging its strengths, we also bear the responsibility of addressing potential weaknesses or limitations of Radica Construction Grammar. Given that the essence of investigating pragmatic phenomena resides in meaning, we shall integrate supplementary explanatory frameworks to better elucidate "positive ironicity" that is generated by a construction. Chapter 5 will furnish an extensive exploration of this particular query.

Lastly, as suggested by our research title, our primary aim is to ascertain the feasibility or practicality of achieving intersubjectivity via constructionalization. After establishing that a pragmatic function can be integrated into a linguistic structure (Chapters 4 and 5), our fourth research question will argue for the manner in which encoded positive irony contributes to the reconstruction of intersubjectivity. Specifically, as intersubjectivity is a prerequisite for verbal communication, particularly in the context of ironic exchanges, the participants involved in positive irony must each assume a distinct role (participant role), which warrants deeper exploration. Chapter 6 will provide an in-depth analysis of this inquiry.

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1.3 The Three Positive-Ironic Constructions to Be Examined

Three Chinese constructional exemplars have been selected to investigate positive irony, each playing a vital role in guiding the research process through the cognitive-functional lens. Specifically, the three positive-ironic constructions represent three case studies, each with a distinct linguistic perspective. These include (a) the [*zéi*-POS] construction (2a), (b) the [XAYB] construction (2b), and (c) the [*búshì…ma?*] construction (2c).

The selection of these constructions was not randomly made from raw corpus data. As this research adopts a theoretical-inferential framework, while not considering observational approaches (i.e., CA or DA), we had to make sure these constructional exemplars not only suited our research design but had been critically peer-reviewed as constructions. Indeed, all three of constructions, viz., [*zéi*-POS] (Chuang, in print), [XAYB] (Chuang, 2020), and [*búshì…ma?*] (Chuang, 2022), have been acknowledged in published works by esteemed international publishers (Springer Nature, Peter Lang, and Brill, respectively). This approach not only economized time spent in validating the applicability of these constructions, but also ensures that our focus is maintained on addressing significant research gaps identified in aforementioned works.

In observing the highest academic integrity, our discussion and treatment of the three constructions will diverge from those in prior studies, which is of vital importance for the progress of this research. In Chuang (2020), the [XAYB] construction was addressed as the VSNL vs. VSWL alternation, primarily focusing on the interplay between syntax, pragmatics, and emotions. In Chuang (2022), the [*búshì…ma?*] construction was mainly discussed concerning its unique linguistic behaviors, with an emphasis on its patterning as a rhetorical question. Neither of these works addressed irony. Chuang (in print) is the sole study that

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discussed the [*zéi*-POS] construction in terms of positive irony; therefore, we use it in Chapter 4 to discuss the fundamental process of (grammatical) constructionalization, an aspect not addressed in Chuang (in print). Notably, Chuang did not touch upon the concept of intersubjectivity. We identified potential and valuable research lacunae in all three studies, ensuring that the investigations in the following chapters are original and free from plagiarism or any ethical concerns before proceeding with our analysis.

2 a. 你 成天 賊香 賊甜 地 睡。
Nǐ *chéngtiān* *zéixiāng* *zéitián* *de* *shuì*
2SG.NOM all.day *zéi*-EDM.savory *zéi*-EDM.sweet PTL
'You just keep snoozin' like a champ!'

b. (1) 愛 死 我 了。
Ài *sǐ* *wǒ* *le*
love die 1SG.ACC CRS
'I freakin' love ya.'

(2) 愛 死 你 了。
Ài *sǐ* *nǐ* *le*
love die 2SG.ACC CRS
'I freakin' love ya.'

c. 我 不是 說 我 不 喝 咖啡 嗎?
Wǒ *búshì* *shuō* *wǒ* *bù* *hē* *kāfēi* *ma?*
1SG.NOM not say 1SG.NOM not drink coffee PTL
'Didn't I say I don't do coffee?'

In 2a, the Chinese lexeme *zéi* 'thief' functions as an excessive degree modifier (EDM) and subcategorizes two adjectives, specifically, *xiāng* 'savory' and *tián* 'sweet.' Our attention here is on lexemes, particularly those with negative cultural connotations, which expand from one lexical category to another through conversion (i.e., zero derivation or functional shift). This idea may be applied to all EDMs that have undergone a similar grammatical transformation (see Chapter 4). Contrasting with the [*zéi*-POS] construction, the [XAYB] construction is an

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intriguing case due to its syntactic peculiarities (2b) and has been referred to as an alternative construction in previous research (see Liu et al., 2008; Liu & Hu, 2013). Chuang (2020) named this construction the VSNL vs. VSWL alternation, where V stands for verb, S for *sǐ* 'die,' N for *nǐ* 'you,' W for *wǒ* 'I,' and L symbolizes the sentence-final particle *le*, indicating a relevant current state (CRS). In this study, we reanalyze the construction and, from a higher level of schematization, label it the [XAYB] construction, with X and Y serving as variables subject to specific paradigmatic constraints while A and B as constants. The construction maintains syntactic alternativity and licenses the alternative forms (VSNL and VSWL) to share a similar interpretation, which can cause some confusion. It is worth remarking that [XAYB] is a more complex construction than [*zéi*-POS], where the syntactic pattern consists of the *zéi*-EDM modifying a positive term. Indeed, [XAYB] presents an interesting case in which the *sǐ*-EDM, under certain constructional constraints, interacts with other syntactic factors to create a positive-ironic meaning (see Chapter 5).

Lastly, the [*búshì…ma?*] construction (2c) brings the discussion of constructionalized positive irony to a different level, where no EDM is involved. In both [*zéi*-POS] and [XAYB], the positive-ironic meaning can be triggered by a lexeme that functions as a pivotal cue for pragmatic potential, while in [*búshì…ma?*], positive irony needs must be inferred from entirely different mechanisms. This is a crucial case indicating that irony indeed operates on and requires varying degrees of schematicity and abstraction (see Chapter 6). It also exemplifies the RCG premise that constructions can range from morphemes, words, and phrases to sentences.

We do not classify the three positive-ironic constructions based on an absolute taxonomy such as lexical, phrasal, sentential, or discursive, since Mandarin Chinese has a language-particular syntactic system different from other languages (e.g., Western, African, and

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Austronesian languages). Of greater significance is that when irony is involved, its scope of application is inherently discursive. For example, the [*zéi*-POS] construction may appear as a lexical or phrasal construction, but Chinese features pro-drop constructions, where "pro" stands for pronoun, and may operate on the topic-comment alignment (Li & Thompson, 1981). As a result, [*zéi*-POS] is typically not understood as it appears to be; the same situation occurs with the [XAYB] construction. Most importantly, all three positive-ironic constructions operate at the discursive level from a metapragmatic standpoint, regardless of their morpho-syntactic markings.

1.4 Expected Contributions

To the best of our knowledge, this research represents a pioneering exploration of the intricate correlation between intersubjectivity and positive irony, examined through the lens of Radical Construction Grammar. The insights garnered through this investigation offer an innovative approach for construction grammar scholars to engage in pragmatic discussions of language. Previous constructionist frameworks encountered challenges in incorporating pragmatics despite their ambitions to do so. Furthermore, while construction grammars strive to depict mental representations of language through schemata or schematized formulas, many of these depictions lack in-depth discussions at the cognitive level (metarepresentational), despite the use of the term "schema." To tackle this shortcoming, our research emphasizes the cognitive mechanisms underlying the utilization of specific constructions, scrutinizing both pragmatic and metapragmatic representations of language use. This methodology not only aligns closely with the objectives of existing constructionist accounts, but also offers a solution to the enduring challenge of bridging the gap between syntax and pragmatics.

Furthermore, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of intersubjectivity and how it is

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encoded in positive-ironic constructions, we transcend conventional discourse on participants in ironic situations by investigating their interactive potential. We broaden the scope from conventionally defined two-party settings to three-party scenarios, thereby generating invaluable insights into the realization of positive irony. Additionally, our research may illuminate the intersection between intersubjectivity and constructionalization (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), as previous grammaticalization research predominantly focused on the interplay between constructionalization and subjectification.

Lastly, by adopting Radical Construction Grammar, our research may have the potential to offer crucial insights for not only language research but also current AI studies. By focusing on the encoded aspect of language, which is pertinent to the core concerns of AI language models, our focus on constructionalized meaning and function may aid AI language models in better integrating intersubjective reasoning, ultimately enhancing their responses in real-world chatbot interactions. For more research implications and applications, refer to Chapter 7.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This section presents a streamlined thesis roadmap to navigate the intricacies of our scholarly exploration. The following summary functions as a useful guide to clarify the interconnections among various elements and demystifying the route we have undertaken to arrive at our conclusions. Essentially, our primary discussion will be divided into Chapters 4, 5, and 6, each concentrating on a unique theoretical aspect.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by emphasizing the research's significance, underscoring the necessity of continued investigation into intersubjectivity and irony, particularly in the context of contemporary AI language models. Chapter 2 presents an exhaustive review, pinpointing

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research gaps that our study aims to fill. We scrutinize the most germane topics, encompassing (a) the interplay between negative and positive irony, (b) prior inquiries into positive irony, (c) earlier attempts to investigate the nexus between irony and linguistic constructions, and (d) the challenges faced by previous construction grammars in addressing the pragmatic dimensions of language. This analysis is instrumental in generating an appropriate working definition tailored for the purpose of this inquiry, while concurrently explaining the rationale behind favoring positive irony over negative irony within the context of this research. Chapter 3 delineates the methodology employed, explicating the core principles of our theoretical-inferential framework, and justifying our choice of Radical Construction Grammar over alternative constructionist approaches. This chapter also specifies the delimitations of the study and addresses the validity of employing the three positive-ironic constructions in our research. By examining these aspects, we ensure the robustness of our investigation and the relevance of our chosen constructions to the study's objectives.

Chapter 4 delves into the [*zéi*-POS] construction, using it as a case study to illuminate the relationship between constructionalization and the pragmatic functions of language, with a focus on positive irony. The technical discussion integrates grammaticalization and constructionalization, which facilitates a better understanding of Radical Construction Grammar's functionality from the perspective of language change. Essentially, this discourse underscores the crucial role pragmatics plays in Radical Construction Grammar. Chapter 5 employs the [XAYB] construction to examine how constructional meaning emerges, incorporating supplementary theoretical frameworks to elucidate the meaning-making process of positive irony. These frameworks contribute to the overall explanatory power of our research.

Chapter 6 delves into the [*búshì…ma*] construction, exploring the role of intersubjectivity

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within the context of positive irony and the interactive dynamics among participants in a scenario characterized by positive irony. This exploration unearths novel insights not previously addressed. Chapter 7 then shifts to our central aim: to analyze intersubjectivity as it is manifested in positive irony, adopting a constructionist perspective. Finally, Chapter 8 consolidates our discoveries and considers their implications and applications within the wider domain of irony research, thereby laying the groundwork for subsequent scholarly endeavors.

More significantly, our research design takes into account Dell Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING model, which comprises seven components for human communication: (a) Setting and Scene, which points to the physical and social context where communication unfolds; (b) Participants, referring to the individuals involved in communication; (c) Ends, signifying the goal or purpose of communication; (d) Act Sequence, delineating the structure or organization of communication; (e) Key, highlighting the tone or mood of communication; (f) Instrumentalities, marking the channels or means of communication, such as language, gesture, or images; (g) Norms, denoting the rules or expectations governing communication within the speech community, and (h) Genre, indicating the type of speech act taking place, such as a joke, story, poem, lecture, prayer, or greeting. We have considered seven components compatible with the constructionist framework, leaving out act sequence as this research does not include interactional approach (i.e., discourse analysis and conversation analysis) to positive irony. These seven components will be discussed in different chapters where necessary and appropriate.

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CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this chapter is to identify potential research gaps by examining topics most germane to this study. In Section 2.1, a succinct overview of irony and prevalent approaches to irony will be provided to impart a fundamental understanding of the phenomenon as a lasting subject matter within scholarly discourse. Section 2.2 explicates the relationship between negative and positive irony, thereby pinpointing research lacunae, and of greater significance, formulating a working definition for positive irony. This will rationalize our selection of this particular subject for investigation, further illuminating its relation with intersubjectivity. Section 2.3 addresses the obstacles encountered by construction grammars when confronted with predominantly pragmatic subject matters, such as irony and metaphor, among others.

2.1 An Overview of Irony Research

Irony, as a unique language phenomenon—or rather, a cluster of similar linguistic behaviors—has been documented in the written civilization since Greco-Roman antiquity (800 BC–AD 600), specifically in the studies of medieval, Renaissance, and Biblical texts (Rossman, 1975; Green, 1980; Knox, 1989; Sharp, 2009; Trapp, 2017). As such, it has consistently been a subject of interest and debate throughout history. Its etymology boasts a rich trajectory, originating from the ancient Greek term *ειρωνεία* (*eirōneia*), which is derived from the Greek word *εἴρων* (*eiron*), denoting a stock character in ancient Greek comedy who feigns ignorance to highlight the flaws or absurdities of others. The word is associated with the verb *εἴρω* (*eirō*), which translates to “to speak” or “to say.” In the Greek context, *eirōneia* refers to dissimulation, feigned ignorance, or a concept subsequently known as *Socratic irony* (Vlastos, 1991).

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Through his dialogues, Socrates pioneered the use of irony as a key rhetorical component to engage his interlocutors, promote critical reflection, and reveal the limits of human knowledge (Plato, 380 BC/1997; Aristotle, 350 BC/1924; Cicero, 45 BC/2009). By affecting a posture of ignorance, Socrates employed what can be termed as feigned ignorance to accomplish these objectives. The Greek notion was later assimilated into Latin as *ironia*, where it continued to signify a comparable linguistic phenomenon. In the Latin context, *ironia* described a mode of discourse or composition that entailed articulating the opposite of the intended meaning, frequently featuring a sarcastic or mocking tone (Brickhouse & Smith, 2010; Warren, 2013). The term was borrowed from Latin into Middle English (late 11th century–late 15th century) but did not achieve widespread use until the early modern period (late 15th century–mid-to-late 17th century), retaining a definition akin to its Latin antecedent. It pertained to a rhetorical technique whereby the speaker conveyed the antithesis of the intended message. Gradually, the term's orthography and pronunciation evolved into its contemporary form (irony), signifying an occurrence characterized by an outcome deviating from expectations, often imbued with a humorous or incongruous nature (see OED). It is crucial to note that before the incorporation of irony into Middle English, analogous concepts had been referred to as satire or sarcasm. Therefore, it can be a complex endeavor to differentiate between these terms when referring to certain literary works of the period.

The exploration of irony within the realm of modern linguistics can be attributed to the eminent British literary critic and rhetorician, Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893–1979). In his seminal work, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), Richards contended that irony operates as a linguistic mechanism to communicate manifold dimensions of meaning, frequently employed to challenge or satirize established social conventions and norms. He further analyzed the interplay

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between irony and metaphor positing that both share a characteristic of "saying one thing and meaning another" (p. 132; see also pp. 131–135), thereby acting as vital instruments in investigating the nexus between language and reality. Additionally, in his treatise, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (Richards, 1961), Richards emphasized the significance of irony as a literary device in generating meaning and transmitting emotions to readers (pp. 143–170). Although Richards's preoccupation with irony stemmed from his broader interest in language and literature, his contributions continue to provide an essential foundation for those pursuing the study of language and communication. Parallel concepts can be discerned in the works of Frye (1957) and Ricks (1964). In what follows, we will scrutinize the most prevalent approaches to irony (2.1.1), explore the similarities and differences between functional and cognitive approaches to irony (2.1.2), and outline a preferred theoretical scaffolding to be employed in this research (2.1.3).

2.1.1 Approaches to Irony

A plethora of approaches, hypotheses, and theories for irony research have materialized throughout the evolution of the field of pragmatics. Arranged chronologically in the "irony as X" format, these include: irony as **situational disparity** (Muecke, 1969); irony as **violation of conversational maxims** (Grice, 1975); irony as **negation** (Muecke, 1969; Grice, 1975; Booth, 1974; Hutcheon, 1994; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995; Gibbs, 2000); irony as **opposition** (Booth 1974; Grice, 1975; Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Anolli et al., 2000; Leggitt & Gibbs, 2000; see also "script opposition" in Attardo, 1991); irony as **echoic mention** (Sperber & Wilson, 1981, 1986a, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 1993); irony as **pretense** (Grice, 1967/1989; Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995); irony as **allusional pretense** (Kumon-Nakamura et al.,

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1995); irony as **indirect negation** (Giora, 1995; Dews & Winner, 1995a; Giora & Fein, 1998; Colston & O'Brien, 2000; Langdon et al., 2006); irony as **contradiction** (Curcó, 1995; Traverso, 2009; Garmendia, 2010; Carston & Wearing, 2011); and irony as **relevant inappropriateness** (Attardo, 2000), to name only the most prominent in irony research.

The taxonomy associated with these approaches is largely self-descriptive. Upon initial inspection, however, the abundance of approaches to irony may astound many, as they each seem to encapsulate a distinct theoretical assertion. Indeed, various interrelated concepts coexist, each with its own proponents, although some may not concede that their asserted ideas could represent two facets of the same underlying premise. For example, those who conceive irony as a form of negation or indirect negation could be lumped together, given the absence of any inherent distinction between the two. In fact, supporters of the negation view have not claimed to define irony as direct negation; rather, they concur that the meaning of irony must be inferred rather than explicitly understood.

Analogously, the opposition and contradiction views delineate irony based on the juxtaposition (contrast) between the literal meaning and the intended interpretation. To a considerable degree, indeed, opposition and contradiction involve negation. While these perspectives contribute valuable insights, the differences between these theoretical stances can be understood as the synonymous entries in a thesaurus, each concentrating on a distinct facet of the same core idea. Furthermore, the view of irony as a breach of conversational maxims (i.e., Conversational Principle; see Grice, 1975, pp. 41–58), which is referenced in nearly all the aforementioned works, could also be construed as a form of negation. These perspectives can be connected to Muecke's characterization of irony as the "disparity between the opposites" (Muecke, 1969, p. 32), which furnishes an important source of irony. Nonetheless, people might

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challenge such terms as “disparity” and “opposites” due to the perception that a binary methodology appears to be often biased, and is therefore, less favorable, especially when considering human cognition.

Correspondingly, advocates of irony as pretense, which is closely connected to Grice’s (1975) *make-as-if-to-say* irony and Fowler’s (1965) concept of double audience, can be linked to those who endorse irony as allusional pretense, given that Allusional Pretense Theory is fleshed out of Pretense Theory. The former accentuates the role of pretense or role-playing in conveying ironic meaning, diverging in the specific mechanisms proposed for the processing and comprehension of irony. The latter builds upon the former by emphasizing that ironic statements often allude to a specific norm or expectation, thus, allusional pretense. Indeed, such use of pretense to actualize irony can be traced back to Socratic irony (i.e., feigned ignorance), which is pretense itself. While both theories center on the role of pretense in irony, Pretense Theory highlights the hearer’s aptitude to identify the speaker’s pretense in general, while Allusional Pretense Theory focuses on the importance of the hearer’s ability to recognize the allusion to a specific norm or expectation. In spite of these substantial insights acknowledged by Wilson (2006), she contends that the pretense accounts may be “particularly inappropriate for interpretive uses in which the speaker tacitly or overly metarepresents an abstract logical or conceptual context rather than an attributed utterance or thought” (p. 1737).

According to Wilson (2006), abstract meaning or attributed thoughts and utterances cannot be accurately characterized as mimicry, simulation, or pretense, except when a case involves elements of them (p. 1737). Consequently, pretense theories must incorporate the concept of echoic mention, serving as extensions rather than alternatives to the echoic mention approach (p. 1740). Note that this echoic use of language is a specific form of “interpretive” use

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of language (see also Blass, 1990; Sperber, 1997; Papafragou, 1998; Noh, 2000), as opposed to any regular descriptive use, which serves to foreground a speaker's "dissociative attitude" toward the opinion s/he entertains of someone. This dissociative attitude may "vary quite widely, falling anywhere on a spectrum from amused tolerance through various shades of resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn" (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 130). Interestingly, though relevance theorists such as Sperber, Wilson, Yus, and so forth, reject the irony-as-opposition mindset, this dissociative attitude is in a way "negating" the speaker's echoed thought. In other words, this dissociative attitude may function as a device for meta-negation that belongs in a broader sense of opposition or contradiction.

An inferential route for an ironic echo can be realized as follows: utterance → interpretive → attributive → echoic → irony (adapted from Garmendia, 2018, p. 45). The echoic account distances itself as a major break from Gricean opposition mainly on two points: (a) the understanding of irony is a one-stage process similar to the stance of Gibbs and O'Brien (1991), and (b) irony can be positive. Although Wilson and Sperber recognize the insights offered by the pretense accounts, they posit that core instances of irony form a natural class with interpretive, attributive, and echoic utterances, with a nuanced, continuous demarcation between central and peripheral cases of irony. Irony involves attributing thought, content, or meaning, which are abstract and immune to mimicry, simulation, or imitation (Wilson, 2006, p. 1740).

While Attardo's view on irony as relevant inappropriateness diverges from pretense theories, it is largely, if not entirely, compatible with the echoic view (see also Blackmore, 1994; Carston, 1996; Noh, 1998; Wilson, 2000). This compatibility exists because the echoic mention account operates within the Relevance-Theoretic framework (i.e., Relevance Theory; see Sperber & Wilson, 1986a). Irony as relevant inappropriateness is grounded in Attardo and Raskin's

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(1991) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH; see also Attardo, 1994), which itself evolved from Raskin's (1985) Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH).

As a cognitive theory, GTVH comprises six components, known as Knowledge Resources (KRs), which are essential for understanding humor in various forms, such as jokes, irony, and wordplay. The KRs include: (a) *Script Opposition*, which identifies the conflicting scripts in the joke; (b) *Logical Mechanism*, the process of juxtaposing two scripts to create humor; (c) *Situation*, the specific context or scenario where humor occurs; (d) *Target*, the individual or group at which humor is directed; (e) *Narrative Strategy*, the manner in which humor is conveyed through narrative techniques, rhetoric, and style; and (f) *Language*, the linguistic devices employed to express the humor, including puns, irony, and metaphor.

Fundamentally, GTVH posits that humor arises from the incongruity between two opposing scripts, or mental structures, activated concurrently by a single linguistic expression. Given the profound insights presented by this framework, the GTVH-based view of irony parallels the view of irony as negation, opposition, or contradiction. Crucially, Attardo's view of relevant inappropriateness can be easily incorporated and clarified within the broader Relevance-Theoretic framework. The so-called inappropriateness is largely rooted in the concept of relevance. Additionally, the often-inconsistent experimental results between irony as understatement (i.e., meiosis; Simpson, 1993; Colston & O'Brien, 2000) and irony as hyperbole (i.e., ironic overstatement or exaggeration; Gibbs & Colston, 2012) can also be reconciled in the broader application of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 2012). This is because a hearer's perspective-taking can influence these results, given that perspective-taking is a component of the communication process described by Relevance Theory. To a great extent, Relevance Theory can account for the aforementioned approaches to irony. For instance, Grice's four maxims of the

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Conversational Principle, along with Levinson's Q and R principles (1983), can be combined into a single, overarching maxim of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a). This then leads to a question: Assuming the validity of these lines of reasoning, what can the principal distinctions separating these theories be?

2.1.2 Functional vs. Cognitive Views of Language

Undeniably, the key differences between these views can be attributed to their foci and scope of explanation. However, a more nuanced understanding of the nature of these approaches necessitates a deeper examination. It is essential to recognize that the majority of these approaches emphasize the functional aspect of pragmatics, which underscores the importance of language use in context and the social functions it serves. This viewpoint argues that language use is driven by the speakers' goals and intentions within particular social situations, and that these communicative purposes shape language structure and use. See also Austin (1962), Goffman (1959), Searle (1969), Hymes (1974), Halliday (1978), Gumperz (1982), Tannen (1984), Brown & Levinson (1987), and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

Within this functional paradigm, contributions may include the examination of irony as a stylistic device (Leech, 1969), a rhetorical construct (Booth, 1974), a social phenomenon (Goffman, 1974), a form of addressivity (Bakhtin, 1981), a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), implicit displays of emotions (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Simpson, 1993), humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), an expression of power relations (Hutcheon, 1994), a mechanism for social control (Dews et al., 1995), tension between literal and intended meaning (Colston & Gibbs, 2002), euphemism (Linfoot-Ham, 2005), and more interestingly, as a device for achieving group identity or solidarity (Norrick, 1993; Hay, 2000; Gibbs, 2000; Kotthoff,

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2003; Eisterhold et al., 2006; Simpson, 2011; Dynel, 2018). At its core, the functional view of language investigates how such social functions influence linguistic structure. Relevant to this research, it assumes that language forms have evolved to serve specific communicative purposes. Some scholars often employ typological and cross-linguistic comparisons to understand the functional motivations for different linguistic structures. Collectively, these works accentuate the functional dimensions of irony, particularly from the vantage point of language for communication in interaction. Refer also to works by Hopper & Thompson (1980), Comrie (1981), Givón (1984, 2001), Du Bois (1987), Lambrecht (1994), Dik (1997), Payne (1997), Biber & Conrad (1999), and Van Valin (2005).

Essentially, such a functional perspective on pragmatics foregrounds intersubjectivity as a crucial concept, giving its relevance to the shared understanding between individuals during communication. Intersubjectivity plays an essential role in the process wherein language exists primarily as a tool for communication with its structure and usage being shaped by the communicative needs of its users. Intersubjectivity enables speakers to establish common ground, convey meaning, and effectively coordinate their thoughts, intentions, and actions. The most prominent approaches to irony in the aforementioned works indeed operate within the framework of "functional pragmatics," which often covers such concepts as speech acts, conversational implicature, politeness, and information structure.

However, Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory and Attardo's GTVH approach appear to somewhat diverge from this functional view, in that their position is rooted in the cognitive dimension of language use. This divergence may elucidate why some scholars may struggle to acknowledge Sperber and Wilson's echoic-mention account as more encompassing than other approaches to irony (see Wilson, 2006). More specifically, the cognitive approach to pragmatics,

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or “cognitive pragmatics,” focuses on the mental processes underlying language use, particularly the role of cognition in linguistic structure, meaning, and representation. It posits that language is shaped by general cognitive principles, such as categorization, metaphor, and mental imagery. Researchers who focus on this aspect of language use include Lakoff and Johnson (1980a), Filmore (1982), Sperber and Wilson (1986a), Taylor (1989), Langacker (1987, 1991a), Goldberg (1995), Geeraerts et al., (1994), Talmy (2000), Croft (2001), Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Noveck and Sperber (2004), Croft and Cruse (2004), Evans and Green (2006), Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2007), Bybee (2010), Bara (2010), and Bergen (2012).

2.1.3 An Inclusive Theory for Language

Undoubtedly, both functional and cognitive perspectives on language engage with the concept of mental representation (Paivio, 1990; Cummins, 1991; Clapin et al., 2004; Smortchkova et al., 2020), albeit from distinct vantage points and with divergent emphases. It should be noted that the term “mental representation” is oftentimes employed loosely even within the field of linguistics. As such, we shall clarify the specific types of mental representation relevant to our investigation. The definition and scope of mental representation may vary depending on the theoretical framework under consideration. For instance, the functional approach primarily emphasizes the social and communicative functions of language (see Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Bresnan, 1982; Givón, 1984; Lambrecht, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). While functional linguists acknowledge the significance of mental representations, their main focus is on exploring how language serves various communicative purposes, conveys meaning, and maintains social relationships. In this context, mental representations are often considered part of the broader landscape of language use, encompassing the speaker’s intentions, the hearer’s

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expectations, and the social and cultural norms that govern communication. In contrast, the cognitive approach centers on the nature of mental representations and the cognitive processes that underlie language use and understanding (see Kintsch, 1998; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Langacker, 2008; Roth, 2013). Mental representations in this framework are intimately connected to human cognition, where linguistic structures mirror the organization of knowledge, mental categorizations, and cognitive processes. Within the cognitive domain, mental representations are conceptualized as structures that underlie language use and are influenced by our cognitive abilities and experiences, thereby shaping the patterning and application of language. Cognitive mental representations emphasize the role of embodied experience, conceptual metaphor, image schema, and prototypes as well as their influence on linguistic structure.

Likewise, and more importantly, both functional and cognitive approaches to irony underscore the centrality of intersubjectivity. The functionalists view intersubjectivity as a crucial aspect of language use, where intersubjectivity plays a key role in context, speaker's intention, hearer's expectations, and social norms. This, in turn, allows speakers and hearers to coordinate their understanding, align their perspectives, and maintain coherence in communication. Contrastingly, cognitivists also acknowledge the role of intersubjectivity, particularly concerning the meaning-making and interpretation processes. Put otherwise, the cognitive perspective is concerned with the role intersubjectivity plays in the processes and representations that underlie language use and understanding. For example, the capacity to understand another person's perspective (see "theory of mind" in Apperly, 2011, 2012) and the process of establishing common ground are essential for successful communication from a cognitive standpoint.

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All in all, a theoretical examination of irony inherently necessitates a pragmatic analysis. This pragmatic exploration of irony can be undertaken through either a functional lens (functional pragmatics) or a cognitive perspective (cognitive pragmatics). As explained previously, differences between these two intimately connected approaches to language do exist; however, their dissimilarities are not inherent, but rather, lie in their aims and foci. For instance, both functional and cognitive models engage with perspective-taking (or perspectivization and viewpoint) in communication. The functional approach may exhibit interest in the manner by which perspective-taking facilitates verbal interaction (see Bühler, 1934/1990; Givón, 1989; Hanks, 1990; Slobin, 1996; Du Bois, 2007; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2012; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), whereas the cognitive approach may focus on understanding perspective-taking as a cognitive process (Langacker, 1993; Tomasello, 1999; Talmy, 2000; Keysar & Barr, 2003; Croft, 2009; Bergen & Wheeler, 2010; Matlock, 2011). Nonetheless, asserting that one of the two approaches may focus on a linguistic phenomenon that the other approach disregards would be decidedly problematic. For instance, Verhagen's (2005) approach to intersubjectivity and Croft's Radical Construction Grammar (2001) address both functional and cognitive facets of language, as do the works of Dancygier (2012) and Sweetser (2012). Irony, as noted by Giora (1995), is a "cognitive process" that recognizes the "functional role" of language in communication (Giora, 2003).

Numerous scholars have implemented irony studies across diverse experimental designs and subjects. These investigations primarily focus on the general ability to understand or detect irony in (a) children (Winner & Leekam, 1991; Loukusa et al., 2007; Filippova & Astington, 2008, 2010; Glenwright & Pexman, 2010), (b) patients with brain damage in the right or left hemisphere (McDonald & Pearce, 1996; Winner et al., 1998; Giora et al., 2000; Martin &

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McDonald, 2003; Champagne-Lavau & Joanette, 2009), and (c) patients with autism (Happé, 1993, 1995; Colich, 2012; Kalandadze et al., 2018). In these works, the authors used experimental methods to probe the mental processes involved in detecting and understanding ironic expressions. Nevertheless, a distinction exists between the definition of processes or processing of these experimental approaches and that of theoretical models, such as Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a) or Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Experimental approaches harness empirical data from designed experiments, whereas theoretical approaches concentrate on formulating abstract models and frameworks. The former may seek to test hypotheses or predictions from theoretical models (e.g., Happé, 1993; Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs et al., 2004), while theoretical approaches endeavor to develop comprehensive models to explicate linguistic phenomena. Experimental approaches address specific aspects of language (often confined by variable control), while theoretical approaches aspire to construct overarching, general models. Despite their differences, the two share commonalities, such as the pursuit to understand the underlying principles and mechanisms of language, reciprocal influence, the commitment to rigorous and systematic investigation of language, and the examination of a broad spectrum of linguistic phenomena and applications. Experimental and theoretical approaches to language differ in their methodology, goals, and scope. Nonetheless, they often complement each other in the study of language, as experimental findings can be used to inform and refine theoretical models, while theoretical models can guide experimental research.

The foregoing discussion of the various approaches to irony presents a comprehensive and concise overview of the prevailing trends in irony research. From a bona fide cognitive linguistic standpoint, it may be imprudent to assert an unequivocal distinction between the

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functional and cognitive schools of thought. Neither is it defensible to claim that any mainstream functional approach does not consider the relationship between language and human cognition, or that cognitive approaches discount the functions of language in verbal interaction. Rather, it is only judicious to regard both schools as complementary aspects of a unified force in addressing pragmatic phenomena (see Kasher, 1998; Carston, 2002; Noveck & Sperber, 2004; Gibbs, 2006; Bara, 2010). Alternatively, the meanings of "cognitive," "functional," and "cognition" may warrant reassessment when examining the interplay between functional and cognitive views on language.

Taxonomy invariably presents challenges, especially when we engage in metarepresentational discourse (Russel, 1905; Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956; Saussure, 1916/1959). It is justifiable, however, to assert that functional approaches tend to prioritize the facets of cognition related to the communicative, social, and cultural dimensions of language, whereas cognitive approaches concentrate on the aspects of cognition concerning the apprehension and elucidation of the nature and behaviors of language. The connection between these two perspectives can be conceived as one characterized by inverse proportionality, if not absolutely so. For instance, a functional model may subtly reference the mental representation of language, whereas a cognitive model may consider it as an integral element of its framework. Several cutting-age approaches within cognitive linguistics have showcased an expanded purview, encompassing both functional and cognitive dimensions of language, among which construction grammar accounts, notably Radical Construction Grammar, emerge as particularly prominent.

In essence, the theoretical perspective we are to adopt is one that leans toward integration rather than separation, regardless of our specific research foci. Keeping both functional and cognitive premises in mind, our emphasis is weighted toward the mental representation of

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language use, specifically concentrating on its metapragmatic (cognitive-pragmatic) aspects. This inclusive heuristic enables us to advance our understanding of irony and contribute more significantly to the ongoing discussion. Further elaboration on this approach will follow in Section 2.3.

2.2 A Working Definition of Positive Irony

The preponderance of irony research is centered on the negative aspect of irony, due to its pervasiveness in human language. Negative irony is variously addressed as *blame by praise* (Knox, 1961), *ironic blame* (Anolli et al., 2000), *ironic insult* (Pexman & Olineck, 2002), and *sarcastic irony* (Jorgensen, 1996), according to the extant literature we have reviewed. In fact, there exists no definitive criterion for naming the various types of ironic language. As discussed in the preceding chapter, negative irony is typically assumed to involve the use of language to convey a meaning distinct from, or often contrary to, the literal interpretation of a structurally positive expression. It is frequently employed to express dissatisfaction, critique, and so forth, or to mock or ridicule someone or something, which reflects a speaker's negative evaluation of a subject. This type of irony typically fulfills three primary functions of language: affective (Gibbs, 2000), cognitive (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a), and social (Goffman, 1967). Affective functions pertain to the articulation of emotions, such as disappointment or vexation, cognitive functions emphasize an individual's capacity to recognize incongruities or interpretive resemblance (see Wilson & Sperber, 1992), and social functions denote the establishment of group affiliation or societal boundaries.

The investigation of negative irony has been pursued extensively from a multitude of perspectives and with an array of objectives (see 2.1.1–2.1.2). Nonetheless, an overwhelming

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emphasis on negative irony may circumscribe our understanding of the broader spectrum of irony. Positive irony, also known as *praise by blame* (Knox, 1961; a term coined by Cicero), *kind irony* (Anolli et al., 2000), and *sarcastic praise* (Filik et al., 2016), or generally knowns as *ironic praise* and *ironic compliment* (see Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995; Dews & Winner, 1995b; Colston, 2000; Bruntsch & Ruch, 2017), is characterized by the utilization of language to impart a meaning often antithetical to the literal interpretation of a structurally negative expression, often intending to convey approbation or veneration. Current positive irony research has observed its infrequency in comparison to negative irony as well as the increased challenges in detecting and understanding the positive use of irony, owing to its intrinsic potential for misinterpretation (see Brown, 1980; Berrendonner, 1981; Haverkate, 1990; Giora, 1995; Glucksberg, 1995; Attardo, 2000). Furthermore, irony scholars appear to conflate positive irony with ironic praise or ironic compliment, accepting this association as a given, without critically examining the aptness of this classification. Indeed, the provenance of the term "positive irony" remains indeterminate, and it could realistically be an outcome of linguistic expediency.

Positive irony, while sharing core attributes with negative irony, is generally believed to demand a greater cognitive effort for processing than negative irony. Several functions have been identified with this positive use of irony, such as (a) fostering solidarity with the interlocutor (Leech, 1983), (b) serving as a tactful face-saving device (see "Polite Theory" in Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987), (c) operating as an evaluative instrument (Simpson, 1993; cf. "reversal evaluation" in Partington, 2007), (d) enabling the speaker to express a deeper agreement and informality compared to direct praise (Oring, 1994), and (e) mirroring the hearer's perspective-taking (Pexman & Olineck, 2002).

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The very last one is particularly captivating, as it pertains to an individual's unique way of profiling irony. Within experimental contexts, for instance, some perceive irony as amplifying the criticism conveyed by a more overt insult (Colston, 1997), while others interpret irony as softening the criticism delivered by more direct insults (see "Tinge Hypothesis" in Dews & Winner, 1995; Dews et al., 1995). Pexman and Olineck (2002), however, reconciled this intriguing debate based on their experimental outcomes, asserting that both positive and negative irony are perceived as mocking the target. More precisely, they deduced that ironic insults (negative irony) transmit a greater degree of politeness and positivity than more blatant insults, while ironic compliments (positive irony) convey diminished politeness and positivity in comparison to direct insults. In essence, while positive irony emerges as a less conventional manifestation of ironic language, it remains identifiable as sarcastic irony (p. 125). Nevertheless, we contend that this dispute may endure due to notable limitations in the methodological design of experimental approaches, such as ecological validity, oversimplification of stimuli, confined participant population, complications in isolating variables, insensitivity to individual differences, and so forth (see Noveck & Sperber, 2004; Seedhouse & Young, 2004; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). While these experiments have contributed valuable insights into perspective-taking with irony, the revelations concerning perspective-taking may be circumscribed. As noted previously, Relevance Theory offers a viable remedy to the present challenge.

Considering the multifaceted realms and objectives hitherto presented, one might pose the question: what, indeed, is irony? Intriguingly, even intellectual luminaries such as Socrates and his protégé Plato were unable to provide a comprehensive answer to quench the thirst of curious minds. As astutely noted by Anolli et al. (2000, P. 277), "irony does not represent a homogenous universe, but rather has the shape of a constellation of ironic communications, each

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with its intrinsic qualities." Therefore, it is often "more complex than syntax and semantics alone can account for" (Myers Roy, 1981, p. 407), because what we have inherited from the legacy of rhetorical literacy and human civilization is "both a device and a concept" (p. 410). As a device, irony abides by certain rules that dictate its employment; however, as a concept, irony often transcends the confines of language, which frequently proves inadequate in capturing the entirety of irony as an abstract notion.

This dual functionality, albeit not rigidly delineated, intertwines closely with the dual effect of irony: it can manifest as either negative or positive, or occasionally as an ambiguous amalgamation of both (p. 410). Aligning with numerous scholars, we maintain that positive irony constitutes a distinct type or a subtype of ironic language in general. Thus, positive irony may emerge out of the traditional understanding of negative irony. We meticulously sifted through an extensive array of previous irony studies (see 2.1–2.2) to formulate a working definition for this affirmative use of irony. For the sake of convenience, however, we shall continue to utilize the term "positive irony," fully aware that it may not be a designation that satisfies all perspectives. In fact, the absence of scholarly consensus arises from divergent perspectives and their aims of research, with some accentuating functionality, others focusing on rhetorical technique, and still others examining mental models. Essentially, scholars are frequently not engaging in discourse at the same level of abstraction. To the surprise of many, some scholars actually use the term "ironic praise" to characterize Socratic irony, which most others recognize as negative irony or ironic criticism, even when observing the same linguistic phenomenon (see Bussanich & Smith, 2013). Such disparities underscore the importance of granularity of definition, and suggests a need to scrutinize irony from a more elevated cognitive vantage point to explore the motivational impetus underpinning the use of positive irony, rather than arbitrarily fixating on a particular

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facet of irony as representative of the entire phenomenon.

In this research, we propose a definition of positive irony grounded in the schema [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$] as the metarepresentation or cognitive-level (metapragmatic) motivation that undergirds the use of positive irony. Specifically, all recognized functions of irony (functional view) that serve some positive purpose in verbal interaction, besides ironic praise and ironic compliments, will operate within this motivational schema [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$] (cognitive view). Herein, "intention" reflects the speaker's desire to cultivate rapport (bonding) with the hearer, transcending the boundaries of mere praise or compliments in fully encapsulating positive irony. While praise and compliments may logically constitute certain aspects of positivity, they do not exhaustively represent the concept. Drawing upon Prototype Theory (see Rosch 1973, 1975; Taylor, 2003; Geeraerts, 2010), the term "positive irony" suggests that it may encompass both core and peripheral elements that embody a particular positive quality. Labeling specific ironic expressions as ironic praise or compliments merely exemplify instances subsumed under a broader hypernymic category without adequately considering it. More crucially, the term "positive irony" has indeed emerged as a result of practicality rather than theoretical grounding or scholarly consensus. Despite this, the term has endured in common usage, necessitating the establishment of a cogent working definition.

Our definition aims to disentangle the complexities observed in prior studies, where several functions of positive irony have been identified, such as praise (compliment), kind reminder, euphemism (Linfoot-Ham, 2005), and most crucially, solidarity (affiliation or ingroup identity) building (Norrick, 1993; Hay, 2000; Gibbs, 2000; Kotthoff, 2003; Eisterhold et al., 2006; Evans, 2014; Curcó, 2016; Bell, 2017; Dynel, 2018). Nevertheless, many researchers

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hesitated to classify these phenomena as positive irony, given that a substantial portion of such ironic expressions appear without explicit praise of compliments, which acknowledges the absence of criteria for demarcating positive irony. By adopting this definition, we seek to bridge the gap between the different understandings of positive irony, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on its role in both communication and mental representation.

Lastly, this research refers to irony (negative or positive) as either a figure of speech or a trope, using the terms interchangeably when discussing irony as s rhetorical device for communicative purposes. In this context, “rhetoric” or “rhetorical” encompasses a plethora of techniques and devices that speakers leverage to enhance the efficacy and persuasiveness of their communication (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1991; Burke, 1969; Booth, 2004; Fahnestock, 2012). In irony research, the construct of a figure of speech is employed as an overarching term that subsumes (a) tropes (e.g., irony, metaphor, hyperbole), which signify expressive linguistic deviation from literal meanings to achieve distinct effects, and (b) schemes (e.g., alliteration, assonance, epistrophe), which encapsulate alterations in conventional word order, syntax, letters, and sounds, rather than shifts in semantic interpretation. Therefore, tropes can be considered a subset of figures of speech, both of which are subcategories within the broader conceptual framework of rhetorical strategy. For a comprehensive description of figures of speech, tropes, and rhetoric, see Corbett and Connors (1999), Quinn (2006), Baldick (2008), Cuddon (2013), and Williams and Bizup (2016).

2.3 A Constructionist Approach to Irony

This research employs a constructionist methodology to explore the relationship between intersubjectivity and positive irony, thereby requiring an review of constructionist frameworks

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(construction grammars) used for investigating the pragmatic phenomena in language so as to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In what follows, a succinct overview will be provided to facilitate the recognition of pertinent research lacunae that warrant consideration and, furthermore, to address these gaps more effectively.

2.3.1 The Theoretical Backdrop of Construction Grammars

Cognitive linguistics posits that language is deeply rooted in human cognition and that linguistic structure is motivated by general cognitive principles, out of which construction grammars emerged. Therefore, a constructionist approach to language is necessarily a usage-based model (Bybee, 1985, 2007, 2010; Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013). Usage-based theories (UBT; see Bates & MacWhinney, 1987; Tomasello, 2003; Clark, 2003; MacWhinney, 2005; Bybee, 2006) can be encapsulated by Tomasello's (2009, p. 69) dual aphorisms for language acquisition: (a) "meaning is use", and (b) "structure emerges from use." UBT serves as the explanatory basis for all construction grammars, because these syntactic models adopt an inductive (bottom-up), rather than deductive, approach, examining the ways in which language is employed, ultimately giving rise to "constructions" with varying degrees of schematicity. UBT's central premise is that a speaker's linguistic representations (forms and constructions) are created and impacted by his/her experience with the language in use, reflecting the speaker's cognitive thought processes (Langacker, 1987, 2000; Barlow& Kemmer, 2000). Consequently, grammar can be conceptualized as the cognitive organization of an individual's experience with the language (Bybee, 2006).

Embracing a domain-general cognitive process (Bybee, 2012), UBT states that (a) via *cross-modal associations* meaning is mapped onto the phonetic or manual form "experienced

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with the properties of the context", (b) that through *sequential processing* repeated sequence of words or events may be "chunked" together as units in memory to be directly accessed, (c) that *categorization*, which serves to recognize an element (or sequence) and "develop schematic slots of constructions", is a primary cognitive process that takes place at all levels of form and meaning, and (d) that *neuromotor automaton* allows units of language (constructions) to be combined in conventional ways so as for production and perception to be fluent (Bybee, 2002).

This emergentist view of grammar (a) takes language to be a dynamic process of creating grammar as if it were a constantly evolving organism (Bybee, 2012) and (b) regards grammaticalization (Bybee, 2003; Hopper & Traugott, 2003a) as the most pervasive process for creating new constructions whereby grammatical meaning and grammatical form emerge through recurrent language use (Bybee & Beckner, 2009). Frequency effects (Bybee & Thompson, 1997) are instrumental within this UBT framework. Notably, the form-meaning paring of a construction (linguistic context) shall be indexed to the social context where this construction occurs, encapsulating UBT as conceiving language as an embodied and social human behavior.

In a nutshell, construction grammars (a) see constructions as basic units of language, (b) assigns language a status of being fundamentally dynamic, (c) hold that the emergence of any form-meaning pairing must be based on the context and circumstances where it takes place, (d) assign frequency (distribution) as a key factor for grammatical constructionalization, and most importantly, (e) affirm their theoretical connection to usage-based perspectives.

2.3.2 Emergence of Construction Grammars

The traditional componential model of language, as the name suggests, is composed of

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independent linguistic components (i.e., phonology, syntax, and semantics) in a modular treatment of language whereby words (i.e., lexicons) are the only constructs bridging the three components, signifying conventional associations of phonological form, syntactic category, and meaning (Croft, 2001, p. 15). However, this model has fallen short where non-conventionalized meaning, such as idioms (e.g., *kith and kin*, *break a leg*, *hit the road*) for which compositionality alone cannot provide an adequate understanding. To analyze such idiomatic meanings, a diverse array of construction grammars has emerged, with roots in Fillmore's Case Grammar (1968) and Frame Semantics (1976a, 1976b, 1977, 1982). Case Grammar posits that verbs have a specific number of argument slots, called "cases," which correspond to the roles played by the nouns in a sentence. These cases represent various semantic relationships, such as agent, patient, instrument, goal, source, and so on. On the other hand, Frame Semantics focuses on understanding the meaning of words and phrases in relation to the broader knowledge structure, or "frames," they evoke in the human mind. A frame can be conceptualized as a mental schema or a cognitive structure that organizes our knowledge and understanding of a particular concept, situation, or event.

The notion of such a methodology for investigating language does not refer to a monolithic framework operating under a single set of theoretical principles. Indeed, it was not until Adele E. Goldberg (1995) introduced the term "construction grammar" in her groundbreaking work, *Construction: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*, that a common label for these similar methods emerge. Consequently, the Goldbergian version of the approach is often known as Construction Grammar (capitalized C and G), and is commonly abbreviated CxG. In a broader sense, many similar theories have either contributed to or developed from the CxG model for language research, hence, the term "construction grammars"

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in the plural (see Östman & Fried, 2005). These may include works by Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987, 1991b, 2008; see Cognitive Grammar), Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1988), Fillmore and Kay (1993), Lambrecht (1994); Goldberg (1995, 2006), Michaelis and Lambrecht (1996), Kay (1997), Kay and Fillmore (1999), Bergen and Chang (2005; see "Embodied Construction Grammar"), Arnon and Snider (2010), Steels (2011; see "Fluid Construction Grammar"), Boas and Sag (2012; see "Sign-based Construction Grammar"), and Gries & Ellis (2015). In short, all construction grammars are cognitive frameworks for investigating language with a focus on meaning, if not exclusively semantics.

As a UBT approach to language, construction grammars are not only usage-driven but also non-transformational and without underlying syntactic or semantic forms. This renders them a "monostratal" (Goldberg, 1995, p. 7) or "non-derivational" (Langacker, 2005, p. 102) theory. For instance, in CxG, a construction should encompass more than just a form-meaning pairing. It must also reflect (a) some degree of schematicity, which highly correlates with a construction's productivity, along with specific constraints, (b) an expanded interest from irregular constructions (idiomatic expressions) to regular constructions (e.g., transitive and ditransitive constructions), and more importantly, (c) the interrelationship between syntax (construction), semantics, and pragmatics.

To summarize, a CxG approach aims at finding the optimal means of representing the relationship between "structure, meaning, and use" (Fried & Östman, 2004, p. 12). Keeping schematicity and productivity in mind, constructions in this framework must not include nonce expression, as CxG is a linguistic model relying on "constructional grammaticality" for analyzing and representing a given syntactic pattern. CxG is particularly interested in exploring the formalization of the relationships, rather than structural forms alone, that hold between

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different linguistic elements, such as, “break,” “a,” and “leg” in the idiom *break a leg*. The theoretical architecture of CxG can be captured in the description below.

> …(i) speakers rely on relatively complex meaning-form patterns – constructions – for building linguistic expressions; (ii) linguistic expressions reflect the effects of interaction between constructions and the linguistic material, such as words, which occur in them; and (iii) constructions are organized into networks of overlapping patterns related through shared properties. (Fried & Östman, p. 12)

In Goldberg’s (1995) model, relationships between constructions are characterized in terms of *motivation* and *inheritance* (Evans & Green, 2006). Motivation (see “Principle of Maximized Motivation” in Goldberg, 1995, p. 67-69) refers to inter-constructional predictability and arbitrariness between form and meaning. That is, if two grammatical constructions are meaningful and share grammatical properties, then they should to a certain degree be functionally or semantically predictable, associable or understandable, despite arbitrariness. For example, though *scissors*, *pants*, *glasses*, and *binoculars* arbitrarily denote different entities, they may all share the common feature of being bipartite objects (Langacker, 1987, p. 47, cited by Goldberg, 1995, p. 70). To further illustrate how language observes the motivation principle, Goldberg introduces the four inheritance links: (a) polysemy (e.g., “transfer” in the ditransitive construction), (b) subpart (e.g., the transitive and intransitive constructions of the same verb), (c) instance (e.g., the idiomatic expressions that do not permit all paradigmatic entities), and (d) metaphorical extension links (e.g., the resultative construction as a metaphorical extension of the cause-motion construction) in a network where the four links may interact with each other for

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maximized motivation.

In brief, while CxG, like other syntactic theories, examines the syntactic relations between constituents of a construction for meaning (including both semantics and pragmatics), it has been criticized for its relatively restricted view of pragmatics. Although CxG rejects a strict division between semantics and pragmatics (Goldberg, 1995, p. 7), comprehensive discussions of pragmatics have been scarce in the Goldbergian framework. Fried & Östman (2004, p. 13) argue that CxG has a "fairly narrow view of pragmatics," because "pragmatic force and effect in CxG have been recognized primarily as conveyed through conventions of language, not in terms of conversational reasoning or socio-cultural constraints and possibilities."

Even before CxG matured, Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor (1988) had contended that, in the case of *let alone*, pragmatic information could be connected to a construction in multiple ways. They suggested that an entailment relation needs to be construed between the two propositions joined by *let alone*, and that discourse-level aspects, such as the function of "let alone" as a response to a specific context or proposition, should be taken into account. Finkbeiner (2019) aptly observed that, despite CxG's recognition of the crucial role pragmatics plays in shaping constructions, the framework lacks a precise notion of pragmatics. Critically speaking, this raises the question of whether a constructionist approach to language, particularly CxG, remains consistent with a usage-based model, when it claims to employ an inductive method for generalizing linguistic patterns grounded in pragmatic behaviors of language (i.e., actual language uses).

This question underscores the necessity of presenting an in-depth comparison between functional and cognitive approaches to language at the beginning of this chapter. We acknowledge that constructionist approaches endeavor to elucidate a range of language behaviors from a cognitive standpoint, specifically concentrating on the schematization of particular mental representations to account for the driving force behind language use. Nonetheless, without a

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satisfactory treatment of pragmatics, it would be futile to develop explanations for such mental representations, which form the basis for cognitive discussions of language. We have observed that while CxG is well-suited for analyzing regularities and patterns in grammatical structures, it might not be as effective in addressing more dynamic and context-dependent aspects of pragmatics, such as common ground, social roles, and cultural norms, among others.

Although linguistic frameworks like CxG have encountered challenges in incorporating pragmatics, the difficulty in grappling with pragmatics is not unique to constructionist approaches. Pragmatics presents a challenging task as it is elusive and dynamic, which often defies regularity, making it difficult for formalist approaches to language, such as structuralism (Greimas, 1966/1984; Greimas & Courtês, 1982), generative semantics (Heim & Kratzer, 1998), and formal semantics (Portner & Partee, 2002), to account for pragmatic factors. Even some cognitive models, such as Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008) and Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995), have struggled to fully explain the role of pragmatics. Despite these challenges, we nonetheless argue that construction grammars are effective analytical tools for investigating the interface between syntax and pragmatics, and may prove valuable for investigating pragmatic uses of language such as irony, despite any limitations.

To address the limitations of the constructionist model for language, it is imperative to adopt, as we argued previously, an inclusive approach embracing both functional and cognitive perspectives to better elucidate the usage-based aspect of language. This requires a refreshing line of argument that incorporates new explanatory tools to investigate pragmatics, as it is only through a proper understanding of pragmatics, notably cognitive pragmatics or metapragmatics (see Silverstein, 1976, 1993; Verschueren, 2004), that we can expound on mental representations. To this end, we aim to integrate other cognitive-functional models with the constructionist approach to examine the complex relationship between intersubjectivity and the pragmatic phenomenon of positive irony.

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In this endeavor, we have chosen to employ Radical Construction Grammar (Croft, 2001) as our framework, which we believe will better enable us to address the limitations of traditional construction grammars, such as Construction Grammar (CxG) and other similar approaches. The rationale behind our decision to use Radical Construction Grammar will be expounded upon in the upcoming chapter.

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CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter provides an outline of the theoretical underpinnings and clarifies the thought process that informed our decision to utilize the methodology employed in this research. It also offers a critical appraisal of the strengths and limitations of the methodology to facilitate a deeper understanding of the research process. In Section 3.1, we elaborate on the rationale behind our inclination toward a theoretical-analytical approach mainly from the perspective of cognitive reasoning. Following this in Section 3.2, we introduce the Radical Construction Grammar framework within a broader context, providing an encompassing overview. Finally, in Section 3.3, we articulate the delimitations that define and demarcate our research endeavor.

3.1 Rationale for Adopting Theoretical-Inferential Reasoning

As noted by Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 2), all theories of communication from Aristotle to modern semiotics were based on a single model—the *code model*, whereby communication is achieved by encoding and decoding messages. However, several philosophers and modern linguists, notably Paul Grice (1957, 1968, 1969, 1975, 1981, 1989) and David Lewis (1969, 1975), have proposed a quite different model, which Sperber and Wilson call the *inferential model*, whereby communication is achieved by producing and interpreting evidence (i.e., instances of linguistic manifestations). Sperber and Wilson further incorporate elements of both the code and inferential models, with an emphasis on the latter, by proposing Relevance Theory (1986a), where relevance plays the crucial role in bridging the gap between the models. Specifically, a relevant-theoretic approach per se operates on two principles (pp. 261–279): (a) the First (or Cognitive) Principle of Relevance and (b) the Second (or Communicative) Principle

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of Relevance. The former states that human cognition is geared toward maximizing relevance, whereas the latter states that communication creates an expectation of relevance.

Moreover, the Cognitive Principle is considered both descriptive and normative, in that it describes the natural cognitive tendencies of human beings to seek and process relevant information. However, it also has a normative aspect as it suggests that individuals should aim to maximize relevance in their cognitive processes to make the best use of their cognitive resources. On the other hand, the Communicative Principle is considered a descriptive, rather than normative, claim, because it does not prescribe the way people should communicate; rather it aims to capture the general tendencies in human communication behavior. The distinction between the two principles highlights the fact that Relevance Theory is focused on understanding the actual behavior and cognitive processes of humans in communication rather than prescribing how they should communicate. It should be noted that it is not either speaker or hearer alone, but both of them (therefore, as "communicators"; p. 272), that must engage in an inferential process to convey and understand information that is relevant to the context of their interaction.

All in all, while acknowledging communication as a process of encoding and decoding, the authors posit that to grasp the cognitive processes underlying communication, communicators need to use inference, based on relevance, to derive meaning from utterances that convey context-dependent meaning.

3.1.1 Inferential Reasoning for Meaning

The exploration of the interplay between intersubjectivity and irony inherently situates itself within the field of pragmatics, as both concepts are deeply entrenched in the study of language use in context as well as the underlying processes that facilitate communication (see Levinson,

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1983). Context, which plays a crucial role in functional pragmatics, may refer to several crucial factors, both external and internal, that contribute to the meaning-making process in a conversation. The factors that are most relevant to this research include (a) **physical** context (Kendon, 1990; Gumperz, 1992), involving objects, locations, participants, and the like; (b) **linguistic** context (Clark & Carlson, 1982; Levinson, 1983), primarily pertaining to the language employed in conversation; (c) **psychological** context (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Carston, 2002), often referring to the mental states, emotions, and intentions of the interlocutors; (d) **social-cultural** context (Goffman, 1981; Scollon et al., 2012), which encompasses social-cultural assumptions and norms (e.g., face, politeness, identity) and interactional dynamics (e.g., roles, relationships) between conversation participants; and (e) **common ground** (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a; Giora, 1997), typically referring to shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions between the interlocutors. Refer also to definitions of context by Austin (1962), Goffman (1967), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Tannen (1984), Ochs & Schieffelin (1984), Clark (1991), Kasher (1998), and Mey (2001).

Of all five contextual factors, common ground is particularly emphasized in cognitive pragmatics, as it underpins all interactional behaviors. Notably, these context types are rather closely interdependent than mutually exclusive. More essentially, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which contextual variables facilitate the emergence of intersubjectivity and positive irony, one must resort to his/her skills in cognitive reasoning so as to navigate the nuances of inferential interpretation (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a). However, since each context type comprises different elements, with some even spanning across multiple types, we will only focus on the most relevant ones to maximize the explanatory adequacy of this research.

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As argued by Levinson (2003, p. 38) citing Gumperz in an interview, the gap between the said and the unsaid "is still very much [out] there," because "we have today at best only the feeblest understanding of inferential processes in conversation" (see also Gumperz, 1971, 1992). This aligns with our theoretical stance. We further propose that the relationship between sentence meaning (literal) and utterance meaning (implied; see Sperber & Wilson, 1986a) can be best elucidated by the interplay between intersubjectivity and (positive) irony. The exploration of such inferential processes necessarily takes into account an individual's capacity for cognitive reasoning (Fodor, 1983, Sperber & Wilson, 1986a; Dennett, 1987; Evans & Stanovich, 2013), such as (a) deductive reasoning (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Johnson-Laird & Byrne, 1991), (b) inductive reasoning (Croft, 2001; Croft & Cruse, 2014), (c) analogical reasoning (Holyoak & Thagard,1995; Hofstadter & Sander, 2013), (d) abductive reasoning (Peirce, 1955; Josephson & Josephson, 1996), (e) spatial reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b; Gärdenfors, 2000), (f) causal reasoning (Woodward, 2003; Pearl, 2009), (g) probabilistic reasoning (Tenenbaum & Griffiths, 2001; Nickerson, 2004), and (h) counterfactual reasoning (Roese & Olson, 1997; Mandel et al., 2005), to name only the most germane to this study. These types of reasoning, like the aforementioned context types, are not mutually exclusive, nor competing, methods for understanding intersubjectivity and positive irony. Rather, they serve as analytical instruments utilized throughout this research where necessary and appropriate, with varying degrees of contribution, to shed light on the employment and interpretation of these linguistic phenomena. Concurring with a cognitive-linguistic point of view, this assertion emphasizes that it is improbable for individuals to reply on one single type of reasoning to interpret all aspects of language. These distinct reasoning skills work together to enhance our communication and comprehension of specific uses of language, such as the positive-ironic constructions.

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Our stance with the necessity of utilizing such inferential approaches can also be illustrated by Peirce's (1955) "triadic relation" from the semiotic (semeiotic) perspective. The triadic relation is composed of (a) *sign*, which is the representation or symbol that stands for a given object, (b) *object*, which refers to the entity or concept that the sign represents, and (c) *interpretant*, which is the meaning derived from or the mental representation formed in response to the sign, which enables further understanding and interpretation. For notional equivalence, a sign (also known as *sign-vehicle* and *representamen*) can be understood as the onomasiological manifestation or strategy (linguistic forms) speakers adopt to describe concepts and ideas, an object as the semasiological content corresponding to the sign or what Sperber and Wilson (1986a) call *explicature*, and an interpretant as a speaker's actual experience with the sign and its corresponding object. In this light, an interpretant can be seen as the "effect produced by the sign or the sense made of it" (Chandler, 2017, p. 29) or the result of an interpretive process that involves the sign, the object, and the interpreter's cognitive and cultural background (Nöth, 1990). Alternatively, sign and object may roughly, if not absolutely, be taken to operate within linguistic knowledge (i.e., a broader sense of grammar), while interpretant, within both conceptual and world knowledge. See also Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Croft & Cruse, 2004 for distinctions of the three types of knowledge.

The interaction between the sign, the object, and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as "semeiosis" or "semiosis," referring to the process of sense-making (Chandler, 2017, p. 31), accounting for our predilection for the RCG framework, which looks beyond linguistic constructions as mere form-meaning pairings by delving into the pragmatic-discursive potential that contributes to an emergent construction (see 3.2.1). When applied to language models, the sign determines an interpretant by using certain features of the way the sign signifies its object to

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generate and shape our understanding (Atkin, 2006). We concur with Peirce particularly on the three interpretant types he has distinguished besides some others, viz., (a) *immediate interpretant* (the representation within the sign), (b) *dynamical interpretant* (the actual reaction produced), and (c) *final interpretant* (the significance), which we consider most relevant to the investigation of language in use (see Chandler, 2017, pp. 32–33). The immediate interpretant represents the most basic understanding of the sign's meaning, which corresponds to an interpreter's initial grasp or recognition of what the sign represents. The dynamical interpretant is the actual reaction, response, or effect that the sign produces in the mind of an interpreter. Lastly, the final interpretant refers to the ultimate significance, purpose, or general effect that the sign is intended to convey or produce, which is concerned with the broader meaning or implications of the sign beyond the specific context of an interpreter. Moreover, this final interpretant is the ideal or most complete understanding of the sign that would be reached if the interpretive process were carried out to its fullest extent. Refer also to Short (2007) and Bergman (2009) for an in-depth description of Peirce's interpretant types.

3.1.2 Theoretical-Inferential Reasoning

In the RCG framework, a linguistic form is viewed as a symbol (sign) but would not itself constitute a sign per se if without a referent, which is an entity (object) explainable by grammatical rules (syntax, semantics, phonology, etc.). RCG targets more than form-semantics pairings, as meaning is inherently dynamic in the context of pragmatics (actual language use). Rather, RCG seeks to probe the process of meaning construal and takes an ultimate interest in mental representations (i.e., schemata) of language, which interact with and pivot on conceptual and world knowledge. Moreover, the constructionist models, notably RCG, are concerned with

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different types of inferential meaning, such as (a) conceptual meaning (Fodor, 1975; Rosch, 1978; Jackendoff, 1983; Murphy, 2002), (b) procedural meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a; Blakemore, 2002; Croft & Cruse, 2004), and (c) processual meaning (Peirce, 1955), although the very last does not seem to be distinctly addressed.

Conceptual meaning deals with the mental representations of objects, events, and abstract concepts that the words and phrases convey. It is often associated with content words of a language, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, which carry specific semantic information. We take such conceptual meaning to approximate to the combination of both an object and an immediate interpretant in the Peircean model. Procedural meaning (see also "procedural pragmatics" by De Saussure, 2007) refers to the meaning derived from the way words, phrases, or sentences are used to perform specific actions or convey particular intentions in communication; it is therefore fair to claim that pragmatic meaning is procedural meaning but not vice versa, as the latter does not necessarily depend on a required set of pragmatic factors for signification. Lastly, processual meaning signifies the dynamic and ongoing process of meaning-making in communication. Essentially, RCG exhibits a heightened focus on how processual meaning is constructionalized as procedural meaning when it comes to any meaning that is emergent. This underscores the fact that discussions of pragmatic phenomena may largely rely on inferential models for a solid explanatory basis. More importantly, since we claim to adopt a theoretical-inferential framework, we must also define the connection between the two closely related concepts (theoretical and inferential), as we must not use the terms merely as convenient shorthand terms.

Theoretical reasoning refers to the process of thinking about, developing, or evaluating theories, concepts, and principles within a specific field of study (see Kuhn, 1962; Newell &

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Simon, 1972; Bourdieu, 1977; Dubin, 1978; Paul & Elder, 2006). This type of reasoning involves considering abstract ideas, making connections between concepts, identifying underlying patterns or structures, and generating explanations or predictions. The focus of theoretical reasoning is on constructing and refining theoretical models rather than gathering empirical data, given the importance of the latter. On the contrary, inferential reasoning (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Shadish et al., 2002; Pearl, 2009; Borenstein et al., 2009; Miles et al., 2013) involves drawing conclusion or making inferences based on available evidence or data. This type of reasoning is used to make educated guesses, form hypotheses, or generate from specific instances to broader populations or phenomena. Inferential reasoning is common in empirical research, where researchers use statistical techniques or qualitative methods (existing theories) to analyze data and derive conclusions.

The analytical framework of this research is defined as theoretical-inferential in that theoretical reasoning serves to guide the inferential process of investigating the three positive-ironic constructions with an aim to reconstruct intersubjectivity. For instance, RCG, as a "grounded theory" (see the entire volume by Charmaz, 2014), operates as the primary theoretical approach to understanding language use and structure, during which some level of inferential reasoning is required. In many cases of language research, including ours, the application of a theoretical framework to analyze and interpret data necessarily involves some form of inferential reasoning (Maxwell, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018).

Theoretical-inferential reasoning therefore plays a pivotal role in our understanding the intricacies of the meaning-making process, notably for complex linguistic phenomena like irony, metaphor, and hyperbole. In view of the foregoing discussion, the chief argument we propose here is that, to gain insight into the interpretation and constructionalization of (positive) irony,

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the critical ability required is a researcher's theoretical-inferential skills, hence, our adoption of the analytical framework of RCG. Lastly, given that our research inevitably incorporates inferential processes within theoretical reasoning, it warrants mentioning henceforth that the term "theoretical" encompasses both the theoretical and inferential aspects.

3.2 Radical Construction Grammar

In this section, we turn our attention to the foundational principles of Radical Construction Grammar (RCG; Croft, 2001), a theoretical approach dedicated to unravelling the intricate relationships between form, meaning, and function in human languages. RCG asserts that linguistic knowledge is essentially structured around "constructions"—conventionalized pairings of form and meaning—which serves as the building blocks of linguistic competence. Note that such building blocks are defined differently from those in other syntactic theories, especially in traditional distributional methods that consider building blocks to be atomic primitive syntactic elements, such as morphemes, words, and phrases (p. 4). In RCG, "the whole construction is the primitive unit of representation and the parts are derivative" (p. 183). By examining the core tenets of this framework, our aim is to provide a general understanding of RCG's contributions to language studies and its implications for our investigation into the nuances of positive irony as it materializes within constructionalized linguistic expressions. It should be remarked that, since RCG serves as the primary framework for the research, the actual application of RCG for analyzing constructions will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2.1 Why RCG instead of CxG?

The first aspect that captures attention in William Croft's (2001) Radical Construction Grammar

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framework is the striking term “radical.” Indeed, RCG is radical, because it signifies a dramatic departure from preceding syntactic theories, with the exception of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008). It revisits the foundations of syntax to initiate a fresh start by eliminating all (formal) syntactic apparatus found in other syntactic theories (p. 4). This extensive elimination encompasses not only formal syntactic theories, such as Transformational (Chomsky, 1957) and Generative (Chomsky, 1965) or Montague Grammar (Montague, 1974), Tree Adjunct Grammar (Joshi et al., 1975), Government and Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1981), and Relational Grammar (Perlmutter, 1983), but also functional syntactic theories, such as Construction Grammar (CxG; Goldberg, 1995), Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997), Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan, 2001), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), and Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008). To maintain terminological and operational consistency in this “radical” light, RCG employs the following labels to reference different facets of linguistic classification: (a) elements: parts of the syntactic structure, (b) components: parts of the semantic structure, (c) symbolic unit: a symbolic part comprising an element and a component, (d) symbolic relations: the correspondence relations between the form (element) and meaning (component) of a construction, and (e) semantic relations: the ways words or phrases (i.e., between components) are connected based on their meaning within a particular construction.

In fact, RCG does not posit any syntactic relations within a construction; rather, it acknowledges only the “meronomic” or “part-whole” relations as the sole internal syntactic structure. For example, in *Heather sings* (based on Croft’s example, p. 24), the term “syntax” should refer to the role the element (Heather) plays in the intransitive construction as a “part-whole relation” (element to construction) rather than a “syntactic relation” (part to part) between

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one element (Heather as the subject) and another (sings as the verb) in the traditional sense (p. 23-24). However, this does not imply that Croft denies any relationship between two elements, but rather that such relations, if any, should be profiled by other meronomic relations. For instance, tense/verb agreement and word order operate as parts of a whole construction (schema) and are therefore also meronomic relations (intra-constructional). Below is a comparison of the syntactic representations of *Heather sings* between Generative Grammar (see Figure 1), Construction Grammar (CxG; see Figure 2), and Radical Construction Grammar (RCG; see Figure 3).

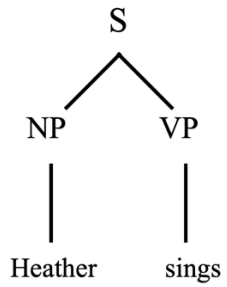

Figure 1. *Heather sings* in Generative Grammar (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 20)

[[Heather]$_{NP}$ [sings]$_{VP}$]$_{S}$

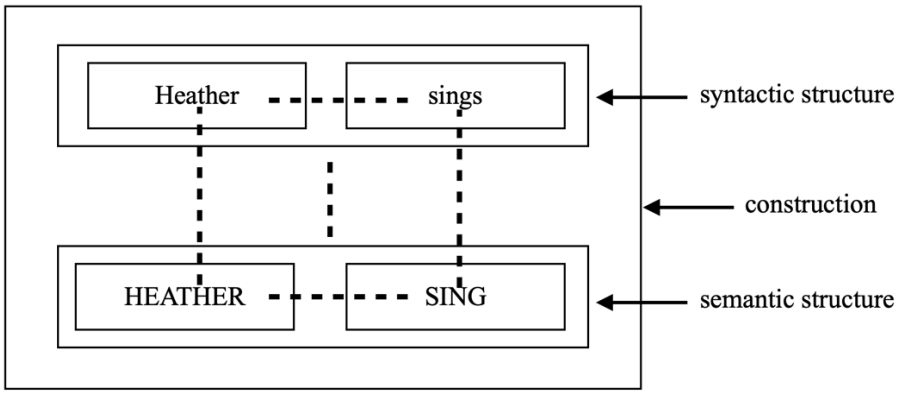

Figure 2. *Heather sings* in CxG (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 20)

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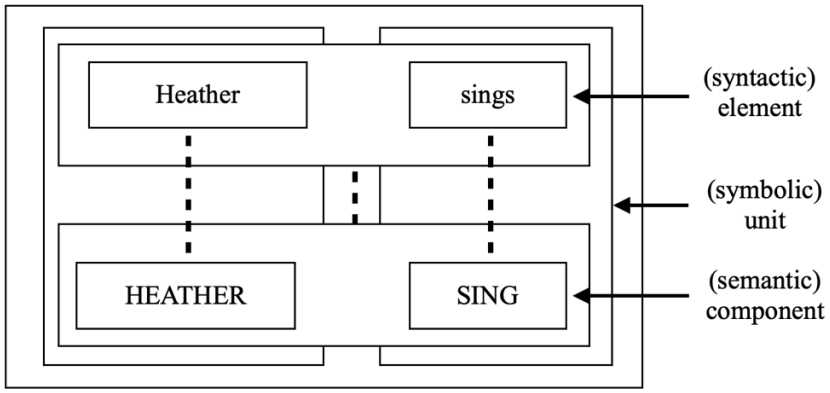

Figure 3. *Heather sings* in RCG (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

In RCG, grammatical constructions possess only meronomic structure, where the construction is the more inclusive unit containing its elements, which in turn are constructions—units encompassing other units until reaching the level of words and morphemes (p. 366). The sole type of links between constructions and elements of constructions are taxonomic links (inter-constructional) to "capture generalizations across categories in different constructions" (p. 59). In this regard, Croft argues that RCG is a simpler model of syntactic representation (grammatical knowledge) than reductionist construction grammar (p. 56); more radically, RCG is disarmingly simple as a "genuinely minimalist model of syntactic representation" (p. 362). It is worth noting, however, that Croft uses the term "minimalist" in a more figurative sense than how the term is employed in Chomsky's Minimalist Program (1993, 1995). The Minimalist Program strives to understand the essential principles underlying human language by minimizing the theoretical apparatus required to describe and explain language structure, based on a set of universal principles and innate mechanisms, emphasizing economy and efficiency in language processing. Yet, through the "minimalist," which means actually "simplest," syntactic

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representation, RCG aims to provide a comprehensive and unified account of language based on cognitive and functional perspectives on language use.

Croft's model presents a central thesis based on two key aspects: (a) the primitive status of constructions and (b) the nonexistence of primitive syntactic categories (Croft, 2001, p. 5). It is important to note that the theoretical foundations upon which RCG builds are those of "typological universals" (Comrie, 1989; Croft, 1999). In other words, RCG encourages linguists to "think like a typologist" (Croft, 1999) when analyzing the grammar of a specific language, as a variety of structural patterns have been found to be language-specific, thus necessitating a different, non-prescriptive approach. To be "radical," Croft (2001, p. 58) asserts that constructions themselves are also language-specific. Indeed, without a certain degree of typological understanding, RCG may appear as a highly perplexing system of linguistic categorization, especially concerning the aforementioned meronomic structure and taxonomic links. In fact, RCG is a theory of syntactic representation that is consistent with the findings of field linguists and typological theory (Comrie, 1989; Croft 1990), as RCG characterizes the grammatical structures that are assumed to be represented in the speaker's mind (Croft, 2001, p. 3).

Furthermore, RCG distinguishes itself from CxG through two pivotal differences, which rationalize our decision to favor of the former. First, RCG considers everything as a construction, ranging from a morpheme to a sentence (Evans & Green, 2015/2006, p. 693), while CxG primarily focuses on sentence-level discussions. Second, RCG argues for an inductive inquiry into language (a bottom-up perspective, as that of a functional typologist), while CxG posits that a bottom-up model of grammar may fail to paint the whole picture and advocates a near-exclusively top-down approach, despite CxG being a UBT approach (see Croft, 2001, pp. 58–

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59). Crucially, Croft's model places a heightened emphasis on language "diversity" and "variation" rather than on mere generalizations as those found in most formalist reasoning. He argues that language is "fundamentally dynamic" and features "variation, arbitrariness, change" in a cross-linguistic manner (Croft, 2001, p. 8). This can be observed at both the micro-level (language use) and the macro-level (a large number of grammatical changes that drive generalizations to work themselves out).

More importantly, RCG offers a promising avenue for integrating "synchronic language-internal variation" into typological thinking where diachronic variation is the primary concern (Croft, 2001, p. 7). For instance, "irony" is a product of dynamic verbal communication based on "intersubjectivity," and RCG can serve as an intermediary to bridge the gap between synchronic variation (constructions and constructionalization) and diachronic change (language change), allowing for a mutually benefitted theorization. Indeed, RCG not only treats everything from a morpheme to a sentence as a construction, it takes an interest in exploring the properties of a construction that are "unique, idiosyncratic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic, or discourse-functional" and treats these each as an "independent node" in the constructional network so as to understand and profile a speaker's knowledge of his/her language (p. 25). Note that "any quirk of a construction is sufficient to represent that construction as an independent node" (p. 25), which means that if a specific construction encodes two functions, either function being mapped onto the construction is viewed as an independent construction (independent node). Essentially, in the case of irony, a construction's function must include not only (a) the properties described by an utterance (ironic expression) but also (b) those of the discourse where this utterance takes place and (c) those of "the pragmatic situation of the interlocutors" (Croft, 2001, p. 19).

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In summary, what truly occurs in natural discourse are constructions as "complex syntactic units," rather than individual words with category labels attached to them (Croft, 2001, p. 52). This perspective aligns with a typological outlook that suggests discourse and grammar should mutually influence each other in realizing the constructionalization of linguistic forms (Givón, 1979b; Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Thompson & Mulac, 1991; Du Bois, 2003, 2014a, 2014b). In other words, grammar should be interpreted through the lens of discourse and vice versa, which offers insight into the true understanding of the constructionalization of verbal expressions such as irony. This "discourse-grammar approach" (Du Bois, 2017) to language (e.g., ironic constructions) is fundamentally grounded in a "usage-based" way of thinking. As such, we opt for Radical Construction Grammar (RCG) as our theoretical framework instead of Construction Grammar (CxG), since the former places a heightened focus on the "interaction between grammar and discourse," an aspect the latter considers minimally. However, a question may be raised about this RCG approach regarding its theoretical soundness: Is there a methodological clash between RCG and UBT given that the former appears to dismiss a distributional approach (Croft, 2001, p.29), which happens to be a primary method in the latter.

To clarify, RCG certainly embraces a usage-based orientation. Croft's objection to the distributional method stems from the fact that distributional results are often employed to support a reductionist syntactic theory, which differs from what he terms "a minimalist" theory of RCG (2001, p. 362). In RCG, there is no need to label an "exceptional case" as such since it must represent another "construction" for which RCG seeks to provide an explanation. As Croft suggests (p. 73), distributional analysis should consider distributional facts that are "relative to the meaning of the words and constructions being analyzed"; otherwise, crucial linguistic generalizations might be overlooked. For instance, frequencies should not be solely regarded as

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paradigmatic possibilities in a construction like *drive X to Y* (e.g., *drive me crazy*, *drive me up the wall*). In fact, RCG also examines those cases that fail to fit the drive X to Y construction in order to provide explanations for constraints encompassing syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and even discourse-functional considerations.

3.2.2 An RCG Approach to Irony

With a general overview of RCG provided in the preceding section, questions remain about its suitability, as a constructionist framework, for examining pragmatic phenomena like irony. In the ensuing discussion, we will address these questions to ascertain the validity of RCG as a robust theoretical framework for delving into irony and present a critical perspective on the framework regarding its limitations.

3.2.2.1 A Concern Regarding Pragmatics

The second most frequently raised question concerns the application of the RCG framework, or any constructionist account, for investigating linguistic phenomena that are fundamentally grounded in pragmatics. To address this question, one must first recognize that verbal manifestations of language, whether pragmatic or not, are realized through linguistic constructions. In other words, without such constructions, no verbal irony can be produced. Thus, investigating pragmatics in verbal communication inevitably involves studying the interface between syntax and pragmatics (actual language use), with the former referring to linguistic forms and the latter to linguistic meanings and functions.

Crucially, Radical Construction Grammar allows for (a) the polysemy (radial category structure) of some construction types, (b) metaphorical extensions of constructions, and (c) the

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acceptance of the usage-based model of the representation of grammatical information in the taxonomic network of constructions (Croft, 2001, p. 59). All of these guidelines align with our research design. Based on RCG, a speaker cannot divide the domain of linguistic phenomena into "grammar" and "semantics/pragmatics," assuming that grammatical agreement will be found in the former and semantic/pragmatic agreement in the latter (p. 230). Technically, and operationally, the decisive motivation for our preference of RCG over CxG stems from the fact that RCG provides a simpler and more streamlined syntactic framework. It eliminates the need for intricate, man-made rules—often represented as a dense network of syntactic relations—that, while reflecting certain language properties, frequently fall short in capturing the nuanced dimensions of language in practice.

More importantly, RCG is a theoretical-analytical model that serves as the principal guidance for investigating language, taking into account various aspects of language (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic-discursive), and assuming that if there is no functional description of language (pragmatics), there is no schematic representation (metapragmatics or cognitive pragmatics). In essence, the principal advantage of RCG over CxG lies in its greater emphasis on functional descriptions of language, given RCG's classification as a "cognitive-functional" model (refer to 3.1 and Chapter 2). This aspect also elucidates how RCG, framed as a "theory of syntax" (Croft, 2001, p. 3), proves applicable to pragmatic research.

3.2.2.2 A Concern Regarding RCG as a Syntactic Theory

Carrying forward from the previous question, this very last concern may be the most critical one calling into question the nature of RCG as a theory of syntax for investigating pragmatic phenomena (e.g., all sorts of figures of speech). The RCG framework has its major emphasis on

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mental representation taking into account the dynamic factors of communication; however, like any other syntactic theory, RCG is "just a syntactic theory" (Croft, 2001, p. 364). Croft concedes that this has been a central concern of linguistics for the past century (p. 364). Despite RCG's overarching aim to investigate language in general, as a theory of syntax, RCG is not a theory of language. A theory of syntax without a theory of language is merely a notational system or, at best, a model of a speaker's mental processes. "Radical Construction Grammar is no exception to this fact" (p. 364). This, however, does not detract from the validity of employing RCG as the constructionist model, as opposed to other constructionist accounts, to examine a pragmatics-focused phenomenon.

Distinct from most other construction grammars, Croft acknowledges RCG's limitations, opening the door for integrating RCG with other theoretical frameworks sharing fundamental similarities, such as grammaticalization (constructionalization; Traugott & Trousdale), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a), and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008). Croft's recognition of his framework's limitations should be commended, not perceived as a flaw, as it demonstrates the scientific and systematic nature of the approach, given that no perfect theoretical language model exists. RCG serves as a critical, albeit simplistic, syntax model for investigating form-meaning pairings in human language. This broad-minded perspective enables the integration of additional theoretical models to advance our scholarly exploration.

3.3 Delimitations

The aim of this section is to delineate the extent and confines of the present investigation by clarifying the precise standards and parameters that will be accorded due focus. All pertinent

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facets of the research endeavor under scrutiny will be considered. For potential constraints or limitations pertaining to this research, refer to Chapter 7.

Foremost, it is crucial to underscore that this research is devoted to the examination of verbal irony, thereby deliberately excluding situational and dramatic irony. Verbal irony encompasses instances wherein a speaker deliberately employs language to convey a meaning that is incongruous with the literal interpretation of their words. For example, remarking "What a beautiful day!" during a torrential downpour exemplifies verbal irony, as the speaker's intent opposes the literal meaning. Situational irony, on the other hand, arises when an event or circumstance contradicts the expected outcome, often to highlight the incongruity between expectations and reality. An instance of situational irony might include a fire station engulfed in flames, as the expectation would be for such an establishment to combat fires, rather than succumb to them. Lastly, dramatic irony refers to situations in which the audience possesses knowledge that is unknown to the characters within a narrative, thereby creating tension or humor. For example, in Shakespeare's play *Othello*, the audience is aware of Iago's nefarious machinations, while the eponymous character remains oblivious to the ongoing situations. By concentrating our intellectual efforts on verbal irony, we aim to dissect its multifaceted nature and communicative implications as it pertains to not only our topic but also the wider domain of human communication and discourse.

Second, it is imperative to clarify that our investigation of verbal irony is solely predicated on the linguistic aspects of this rhetorical device, effectively disregarding non-verbal or paralinguistic elements of communication. Non-verbal communication encompasses a wide array of cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and gestures, which can significantly influence the interpretation of a message. Paralinguistic features, on the other hand, include vocal

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elements like pitch, tone, and intonation, which contribute the overall conveyance of meaning. However, this our research does not delve into the multimodal aspects of language. Although the study of multimodal communication is undeniably important, our decision to focus exclusively on the verbal aspects of irony is grounded in the pursuit of a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the linguistic intricacies inherent in the rhetorical device. By doing so, we maintain a rigorous focus on the construction-based dimensions of language, which allows for a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms underlying this particular form of expression.

Next, as mentioned in previous chapters, our research endeavors are specifically directed toward the examination of positive irony, as opposed to negative irony. This conscious decision stems from the recognition that negative irony, despite its ubiquity and prominence in linguistic scholarship, has been extensively researched, thereby leaving less room for novel insights and discoveries. By concentrating our efforts on positive irony, we are able to contribute to an underexplored dimension of irony research, thereby expanding the boundaries of knowledge within this domain by looking into the various ways language can be manipulated to convey subtle, yet impactful, meanings, as well as the potential communicative benefits of employing such a rhetorical device.

Lastly and importantly, this research does not attempt at incorporating psychological approaches, given our recognition of the insights they may offer, due to inherent limitations in experimentation (see 2.2) and the variance in our respective fields. Our predilection for a theoretical framework over an experimental model is based on its particular advantages in pragmatics research, as it allows researchers to delve into the underlying mechanisms and principles that govern language use in context. While empirical methods have proven valuable in certain instances, a theoretical approach may offer several advantages, such as (a) systematic and

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structured analysis (Langacker, 1987; Goldberg, 1995; Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008), (b) generalizability (Lakoff, 1987; Halle & Marantz, 1993; Tomasello, 2003), (c) predictive power (Fillmore et al., 1988; Bergen & Chang, 2005; Bybee, 2010), and significantly, (d) integration with other linguistic theories (Croft, 2001; Barsalou, 2008).

Therefore, we have excluded some functional approaches to language, such as Discourse Analysis (DA; Schiffrin et al, 2005; Gee, 2014) and Conversation Analysis (CA; Schegloff et al., 1977, 1987, 2007; Sacks, 1995), both subsumed under the broader term of interactional linguistics. This is because DA and CA often have a limited focus on the cognitive processes of verbal interaction. Rather, the two approaches often concentrate on the structure and organization of language in context, prioritizing the examination of language as it unfolds in real-time interactions and the broader social contexts in which these interactions occur. For example, their conception of context may not target the same set of contextual factors that intrigue us. To understand the inherent pragmatic complexity of irony, it is often essential to integrate such interactional approaches with insights from cognitive pragmatics or psycholinguistics. This necessarily underscores our decision to focus explicitly on the cognitive-pragmatics basis of language use for positive irony. Although the exploration of organized structure of discourse or conversational patterns may shed light on certain conversational behaviors, it remains difficult to identify the ironic intent conveyed by the speaker through investigating mere patterns of communication (see Bryant & Tree, 2002).

Interactional approaches to language can be viewed as both a theoretical and observational framework, which involves both the development of theoretical concepts to explain patterns and structures within discourses and the use of empirical observation to identify and analyze these patterns in actual communication. However, their foci and aims are more

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socially and culturally grounded. Essentially, a functional approach to language is encompassed within a broader cognitive framework, but not vice versa. By foregrounding the analysis of constructionalized expressions of positive irony, we are able to hone in on its grammatical and pragmatic-discursive complexities, thereby uncovering the systematic patterns that reflect the cognitive-functional motivation underlying them. Recognizing these delimitations facilitates a better understanding of our research design. This, however, does not imply that one analytical tool is superior to the other. The choice is contingent not only on a researcher's focus and objectives, but also on his/her interests and expertise. All in all, our stance on intersubjectivity and positive irony is cognitive-functional and is weighted toward the cognitive aspect of language (see 2.2).

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The *zéi* construction (see 3a–b), which consists of the patterns of [*zéi* + positive terms] and [*zéi* + negative terms], is the very first positive-ironic exemplar to be explored in this research. The Chinese lexeme 賊 *zéi*, whose "purport" (Cruse, 2011, p. 119) covers an unappealing cluster of cultural images, such as *thief*, *rubber*, and *bandit*, contributes crucially to the ironic interpretation of the *zéi* construction. Syntactically, *zéi* functions as an excessive degree modifier (EDM) for the argument it subcategorizes, while semantically, the *zéi*-EDM enriches the interpretation of the construction with a salient negative semantic prosody, prompting a contrast in meaning between the *zéi*-EDM and the word it selects (see Chuang, in press).

3 a. 這　床　　看起來　賊舒服。　　[*zéi* + positive terms]
Zhè chuáng kànqǐlái zéishūfú
This bed look *zéi*-EDM.comfortable
'The bed (or mattress) looks friggin' comfy.'

b. 今天　天氣　賊熱。　　[*zéi* + negative terms]
Jīntiān tiānqì zéirè
Today weather *zéi*-EDM.hot
'It's freakin' hot today.'

In modern Mandarin Chinese, both [*zéi* + positive terms] and [*zéi* + negative terms] have seen widespread use and acknowledged in several studies (Wang & Li, 2005; Tao, 2011; Liu, 2014; Sheng, 2015; Zhang, 2016); however, they have not been discussed in depth from either formal or functional persuasions. In fact, current studies, except Chuang (in press), have averaged out to a rather short and simplistic characterization of the *zéi* expressions, with a major focus on the formal representation and a restricted discussion of their pragmatic functions. While

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the authors recognize the phenomenon as a "construction," whether defined in accordance with Goldberg (1995, 2006) or Croft (2001), none attempted to argue through all three most fundamental aspects of language (i.e., syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) posited in construction grammars, so as for a given linguistic construction to be properly addressed as such.

At first blush, one may readily extrapolate a tripartite division of the *zéi* construction, viz., [*zéi* + negative terms], [*zéi* + positive terms], and [*zéi* + neutral terms]. However, this pyramidal conceptualization could be as mistaken as assuming the existence of semantic neutrality in real-world language use based on formal logic (notably, deductive reasoning). It is true that certain descriptions of the human world can be rated as more objective than others. For instance, when someone is asked to describe an item of clothing in the living room, s/he may utter *There's a red jacket on the couch* or *On the couch is a red jacket*. Taken at face value, the two expressions may denote the same propositional content based on a truth value attributed to them. That said, the sentences are constructed in different syntactic patterns that symbolize the speaker's attentional focus or perspective on said item, which results in his/her word choice (*red*, *jacket*, *couch*), syntactic preference (normal sentence order vs. inverted sentence order), and/or even manner of speaking, namely paralinguistic cues (e.g., tone and pitch) and non-verbal language (e.g., gestures and facial expressions).

Most distinct from people's depictions of commonplace things and matters, ironic expressions are inevitably far removed from being objective, because irony has been believed to intimate a speaker's attitude, whether it be "hostile" or "derogatory" (Grice, 1967/1989, pp. 53–54), "dissociative" (Wilson, 2006, p. 1724), "critical" (Garmendia, 2010, p. 403), or "negatively evaluative" based on "untruthfulness" (Dynel, 2013, p. 403), to name only the most widely known. These evaluative attitudes are negative in that irony necessarily involves the "normative

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bias" (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 127) or "norm violations" (Köder & Falkum, 2021) of some sort. More importantly, the *zéi* construction has incorporated the *zéi*-EDM, which plays a significant role in generating its constructional meaning by virtue of the term's strong negative semantic prosody (Chuang, in press). In addition, an affective attitude is often found to accompany an ironic expression that conveys the feelings and emotions of an ironist (Yus, 2016), manifesting his/her sentimental attachment (one's *likes* or *dislikes*) to the world.

Like "negatively evaluative irony" (negative irony or ironic criticism), "positively evaluative irony [i.e., positive irony or ironic praise] needs a focal negatively evaluative element to be present in the utterance expressed" (Dynel, 2013, p. 425). Therefore, we have excluded [*zéi* + neutral terms] from our discussion because there exists no such thing as a neutral expression apropos of irony. For ease of reference, [*zéi* + positive terms] and [*zéi* + negative terms] will be schematized as [*zéi*-POS] and [*zéi*-NEG], respectively, throughout the chapter. Lastly, this chapter is delimited to linguistic constructions of positive irony, for which reason, its main focus is set on the [*zéi*-POS] expressions. For certain, the [*zéi*-NEG] expressions may be used for positive irony as much as it may negative irony, if and only if context appreciably permits, which, however, falls outside the purview of this research due to a different methodology required for explaining the cognitive mechanisms of [*zéi*-NEG] for positive irony.

Finally, it should be noted that in our effort to explicate how RCG operates as a cognitive-functional grammar (refer to Chapters 1–2) to investigate linguistic constructions as form-meaning/function pairings, we will draw on the core principles and most relevant concepts within the frameworks of grammaticalization and constructionalization (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013). This will aid us in exploring how meaning changes and emerges. This is primarily

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because the fundamental premises of Traugott's theory of grammaticalization bear significant similarities with the RCG framework, as will be evident in the ensuing discussions.

This chapter will be structured as follows. 4.1 reviews the most relevant and updated research on the Chinese *zéi* construction. 4.2 gives a general account of the grammaticalization of *zéi* by (a) making a distinction between several easily confused concepts (*grammaticalization* vs. *language change* and *grammaticalization* vs. *constructionalization*) to justify the *zéi* construction as a theoretically sound subject matter, (b) foregrounding constructionalization (i.e., an RCG-plus-grammaticalization approach) as a sine qua non model for exploring positive-ironic constructions, and (c) briefly introducing the key processes and mechanisms involved in our constructional examination. 4.3 delves into the development of positive irony as a constructionalized function, investigating the semantic and morphosyntactic progression of *zéi* up to the point of the [*zéi*-POS] construction in its entirety. Finally, 4.4 sums up the chapter, and crucially underscores the significance of intersubjectivity as it pertains to the constructionalization of positive irony.

4.1 Previous Studies

As previously noted, the general characterization of the *zéi* construction ([*zéi*-POS] and [*zéi*-NEG]), can be found in the works of Wang & Li (2005), Tao (2011), Liu (2014), Sheng (2015), Zhang (2016), and Chuang (in press). Most of these investigations have provided only a brief account of the subject matter without much in-depth analysis. Despite this, the studies have collectively affirmed several facts as follows. First, the *zéi* expressions are widely assumed to have originated in the regional dialects of Northeast China. Second, the *zéi* expressions have been a well-acknowledged construction in today's colloquial Chinese, although Mandarin

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speakers outside the Chinese Mainland (i.e., Mandarin speakers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, etc.) may not be familiar with the *zéi* expressions, much less use or appreciate them (as of the time of the research). Lastly, the lexeme *zéi* serves the purpose of excessive degree modification often associated with another Chinese EDM 很 *hěn* 'very' as illustrated in 很好吃 *hěn-hǎochī* 'very delicious' and 很有趣 *hěn-yǒuqù* 'very interesting.' Our review will start out with Wang and Li (2005) and Sheng (2015), based on which we propose a revised syntactic model of the *zéi* construction. We then will look briefly at Tao (2011), Liu (2014), and Zhang (2016) before settling on Chuang (in press), who, using historical evidence to illuminate the cultural significance of the *zéi*-EDM, argued for the emergent function of positive irony ([*zéi*-POS]) embedded in the *zéi* construction from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective.

Premised on their historical findings, Wang and Li (2005) noted that the *zéi* expressions can not only trace roots back to Northeastern Mandarin, but also be found in the Wu languages (i.e., 吳語; see also Tao, 2011, p. 114) spoken primarily in the areas within and surrounding Shanghai (notably, *Shanghainese*). They also observed that *zéi* may subcategorize the following syntactic patterns, with some constraints, in order to form the *zéi* construction: (a) [*zéi* + *yǒu*/*méi*-nouns], where *yǒu* (有) and *méi* (沒) translate as *with* (having) and *without* (not having), respectively; (b) [*zéi* + *néng*/*yuàn* + verbs], where *néng* (能) and *yuàn* (願) translate as *capable* and *willing*, respectively; (c) [*zéi* + adjectives]; (d) [*zéi* + psych verbs]; (e) [*zéi* + non-action verbs]; (f) [*zéi* + short verb-object phrases]; and (g) [*zéi* + short predicate-complement phrases] (pp. 747–748). However, some of the key claims made by Wang and Li (2005) may strike many as ambiguous (without working definitions) and contradictory (without solid explanations). For instance, they argued on the one hand that *zéi* is an "absolute degree adverb" (Wang & Li, 2005, p. 747), which corresponds to EDM, that deals only with "one's subjective understanding [of

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something whose nature] is conceptual and empirical" (p. 747), and that *zéi* evokes strong emotions when combined with the word it modifies. These compare favorably with our view on the *zéi*-EDM. On the other hand, however, they argued in opposition that as an adverbial modifier, *zéi* is "generally unmarked" and can "objectively and simplistically express the matter of degree" (p. 747). Such claims may confuse many of their readers, because most of the *zéi* examples the authors provided for this "unmarked" adverbial function do feature *zéi* as a modifier that is saliently "tinged" (see "Tinge Hypothesis" by Dews et al., 1995) with the negative imagery conveyed by *zéi*. After all, in their research, *zéi* is treated as a modifier that is significantly different from *hěn*. Even when considering *hěn*, it would be quite challenging to make such a claim, as degree modifiers inherently exhibit some degree of scalarity (see Paradis, 2001; Neeleman et al., 2004; Morzycki, 2015).

Sheng's (2015) account of the *zéi* construction did not really distinguish itself from that of Wang and Li (2005), although she managed to work out a syntactic model for the *zéi* expressions, viz., [*zéi* + V/N/ADJ/ADV] (in our summarization). In her model, *zéi* acts as a degree adverbial that subcategorizes a limited set of word classes such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Chuang (in press), however, took exception to this model, and, instead, proposed a revised version that rules out the [*zéi* + N] alignment—specifically, from [*zéi* + V/N/ADJ/ADV] to [*zéi* + V/ADJ/ADV]. In Chuang's qualitative survey (n = 100), the respondents were asked to judge three [*zéi* + N] expressions in which *zéi* was defaulted to *very* (ADV) in preference to *thief-like* (ADJ): namely, 賊紳士 *zéi-shēnshì* '*zéi*-gentleman,' 賊淑女 *zéi-shúnǚ* '*zéi*-lady,' and 賊城管 *zéi-chéngguǎn* '*zéi*-city inspector.' The results (see Figure 4: Nat (+) = natural expression; Nat (–) = unnatural expression; Acc (–) = unacceptable expression) confirmed Chuang's claim that [*zéi* + N] is an ungrammatical representation in Mandarin

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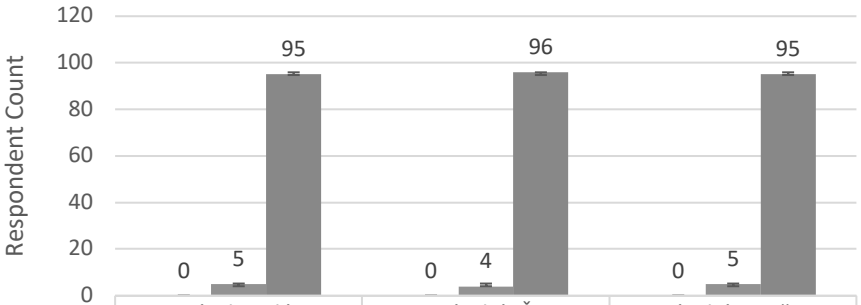
Chinese. Indeed, Sheng's own examples (i.e., 賊紳士 *zéi-shēnshì* '*zéi*-gentleman' and 賊淑女 *zéi-shúnǚ* '*zéi*-lady') would be considered valid only if both 紳士 *shēnshì* 'gentleman' and 淑女 *shúnǚ* 'lady' functioned as adjectives (i.e., *gentleman-like* and *lady-like*, respectively) in lieu of their counterpart nominals (gentleman and lady). Sheng could have mistakenly treated *shēnshì* and *shúnǚ* as nouns in these examples, because Chinese morphology figures largely on *zero-derivation* (also known as *conversion* or *functional shift*), where grammatical cases (conjugations and declensions) are principally marked by zero form.



	zéi-shēnshì	zéi-shúnǚ	zéi-chéngguǎn
Nat (+)	0	0	0
Nat (–)	5	4	5
ACC (–)	95	96	95

Figure 4. Respondents' judgment of *zéi-shēnshì*, *zéi-shúnǚ*, and *zéi-chéngguǎn* (Chuang, in press)

Tao (2011) initiated a discussion of the *zéi* construction from the perspective of grammaticalization; however, she did not justify any raw data she derived from the Chinese classics, let alone provide any interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, to establish the validity of her historical model. In fact, we found some of her examples problematic. For instance, in 賊人將來 *zéirén jiānglái* 'The robbers (literally, the *zéi*-like people) will come (or invade),' *zéi* is mistakenly classed as a noun, while in reality, it functions as an adjective (p.

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113). Besides, she seemed to have failed to carefully organize her corpus data (with repetitions and obscure arrangements). Zhang's (2016) work served more as a commentary on the *zéi* expressions (with points reflecting the findings in earlier research) than as an academic study proper. Despite this, he remarked in particular that although the adverbial *zéi* is annotated in various dictionaries with negative connotations, it is indeed not restricted to off-putting situations in real-life language use. He continued, "*Zéi* is phonetically more powerful, humorous, vibrant, friendlier-sounding, descriptive, and expressive [than other EDMs in Mandarin (*Putonghua*)]" (our translation; p. 175). Liu (2014) conducted a sociolinguistic study (n = 110) on the comparison between two Chinese lexical markers—*zéi* and *chāo* (超: super), and noted several interesting facts about *zéi*: (a) that *zéi* as a degree modifier can actually be found in the Beijing dialect (also known as *Pekingese* or *Beijingese*) as early as 1920s and 1930s, albeit not so widely used as it is today, (b) that *zéi* predates *chāo* in terms of excessive degree modification, (c) that *zéi* conveys a higher level of "language intensity" (see Bradac et al., 1982, 1980 for the term) than *chāo*, (d) that *zéi* collocates more often with other conversational words than *chāo* in colloquial speech, (e) that *zéi* has permeated all social domains [in Chinese Mainland], although its frequency of use remains higher in North and Northeast China (especially, the latter), and (f) that *zéi* appears to be more popular with the general public than with the Chinese social elites (largely due to the vulgar associations of the term).

Chuang (in press) provided historical evidence with morpheme-by-morpheme glossing—based on selected dictionaries and Chinese classics whose textual interpretations were professionally verified—to illustrate the morphosyntactic and semantic development of the Chinese pictograph *zéi*. To account for the *zéi* construction, he argued in particular that such historical evidence is instrumental in understanding the cultural aspect of *zéi*, viz., how the term

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is imbued with the different cultural frames accumulated through time (see Figure 5) has led to the constructionalization of [*zéi*-POS]. These frames, each representing a set of subframes (e.g., *kill* and *destroy* in Frame 1), are not a series of disjunct historical coincidences but are events or concepts that connect with each other through metaphorical or metonymic extension. I also noted that Frame 4 may not be directly associated with Frame 1 (therefore, no intersection between them), because modern Chinese speakers are barely informed of *zéi* being employed as a verb (see Figure 6). Indeed, the nominal use of *zéi* is the most salient and accepted in the availability of the term's parts of speech (see Figure 7). The nominal frame has not only greatly contributed to the negative cultural imagery of *zéi* in Chinese society, but engendered various norm-biased qualities (negative social values) concomitant with the term. For instance, the subframe of *thief* may evoke impressions of *sneaky*, *furtive*, *ineligible*, etc., while the subframe of *traitor* calls to mind those of *treacherous*, *perfidious*, *double-crossing*, and so on. Such invoked qualities are tied up with one's experience of using the term, which necessarily results in some negatively valenced opinion or attitude.

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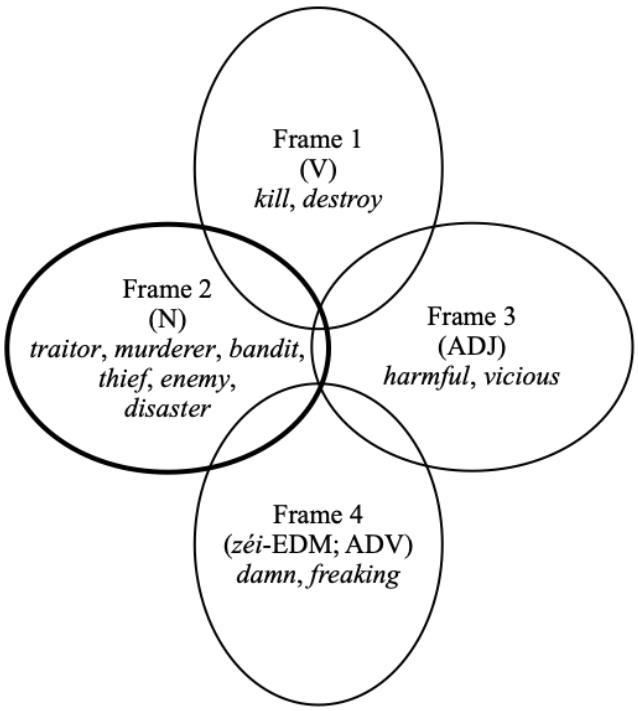

Figure 5. Intersection of cultural frames involving *zéi* (Chuang, in press)

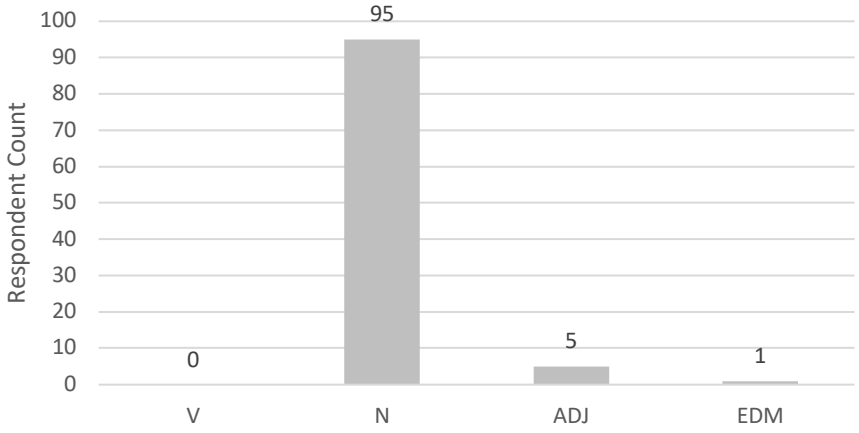

Figure 6. *Zéi* as N (n = 100) (Chuang, in press)

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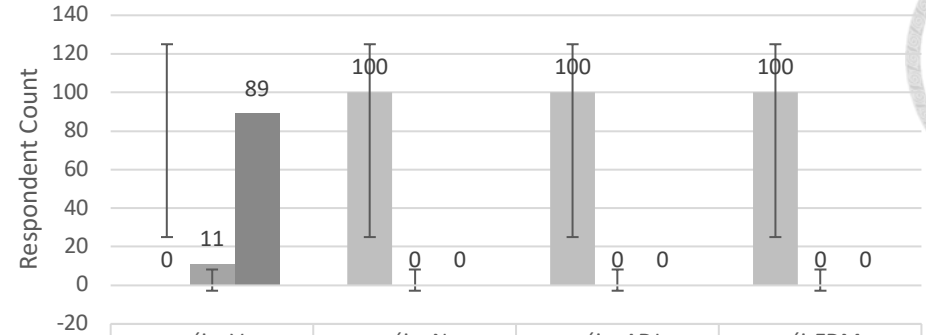

	zéi + V	zéi + N	zéi + ADJ	zéi-EDM
Nat (+)	0	100	100	100
Nat (–)	11	0	0	0
ACC (–)	89	0	0	0

Figure 7. Respondents' acceptability: Parts of speech of *zéi* (n = 100) (Chuang, in press)

Chuang (in press) argued that it is through one's familiarity with the interconnected cultural frames and subframes of *zéi* that one gets to perceive the near-oxymoronic (based on discourse prosody) alignment of [*zéi*-POS] that leads to emergent positive irony. The cultural richness embedded in *zéi*, which lends a distinctive flavor and vibrancy to the *zéi* expressions, sets the term apart from most other EDMs, such as *super*, *very*, *so*, *extra* in English, or 爆 *bào* 'explosively' or 'violently,' 超 *chāo* 'super' or 'exceedingly', 激 *jī* 'dramatically' or 'excitedly,' and 巨 *jù* 'gigantically' or 'enormously' in Mandarin Chinese. Chuang's study considered not only the syntactic and semantic aspects but also the cultural-pragmatic dimensions of the *zéi* construction. Following Chuang (in press), we will in this chapter inquire into how the grammaticalization (notably, constructionalization) of *zéi* should account for the emergence of positive irony, which constitutes an essential part of the constructional meaning of [*zéi*-POS].

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4.2 Grammaticalization of *Zéi*

The process of how *zéi* has developed from verb to adverb (*zéi*-EDM) can be illustrated in the selected examples in 4a–d (for more examples, see Chuang, in press). As noted by Chuang, the Chinese word *zéi* has emerged over the course of language change—first as verb (*kill* and *destroy*), then noun (*traitor*, *murderer*, *bandit*, *thief*, *enemy*, and *disaster*), adjective (*harmful* and *vicious*), and finally, adverb (i.e., the *zéi*-EDM, conveniently translated as *very* and *extremely*), in chronological order based on surviving historical texts. Indeed, the process of grammaticalization of the *zéi*-EDM is instantly evident in the variation of meaning and word property (i.e., semantically and morphosyntactically) of the term. For this reason, we have chosen the *zéi* construction with which to explore the crucial role grammaticalization plays in the "(grammatical) constructionalization" (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, pp. 94–148) of [*zéi*-POS] (see 4.2.2). Specifically, we employ the grammaticalization framework by Traugott to elucidate the RCG approach (i.e., constructionalization of language) to language change.

4 a. 至德者　　火　弗能　　熱，水　　弗能　　溺，
Zhìdézhě　　*huǒ*　*fúnéng*　*rè*　*shuǐ*　*fúnéng*　*nì*
Highest.moral.people fire cannot boil water cannot drown
寒暑　　弗能　　害，禽獸　　弗能　　賊。
Hánshǔ　　*fúnéng*　*hài,*　*qínshòu*　*fúnéng*　*zéi*
winter.summer cannot harm beast cannot destroy
'The spirit of those who practice the moral high ground cannot be destroyed by fire or water, nor by the alternating seasons of winter and summer, nor by any beasts.'
(from *Zhuangzi*[1], circa 476–221 BC)

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b. 諂諛　我　者，　吾　賊　也。
Chǎnyú　*wǒ*　*zhě,*　*wú*　*zéi*　*yě*
Flatter　1SG.ACC　person　1SG.GEN　enemy　PTL
'He who fawns on me is taken to be my enemy.'
(from *Xunzi*[2]; circa, 300 BC)

c. 寒暑　不　合　賊　氣　相　姦
Hánshǔ　*bù*　*hé,*　*zéi*　*qì*　*xiān*　*gjiān*
Winter.summer　not　match　harmful　weather　interactively　violate
'The transition between different (cold and hot) seasons is always an unpleasant one.'
(from *Shiji*[3]; circa 91 BC)

d. 我　知道　錯　了，　賊愛　你們　拉。
Wǒ　*zhīdào*　*cuò*　*le,*　*zéiài*　*nǐmen*　*lā*
1SG.NOM　know　mistake　CRS　*zéi*-EDM.love　2PL.ACC　PTL
'I know it's my bad. I freakin' love you guys.'
(adapted from BCC)

Our theoretical stance on grammaticalization concurs in principle with those of Traugott (2002, 2003a, 2008, 2012a), Traugott and colleagues (Traugott & König, 1988/1991; Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003; Traugott & Trousdale, 2010), and Croft (2001, 2010), and it falls in with the usage-based framework of human languages as postulated by Bybee (2003a, 2003b, 2012) and Langacker (2010, 2011). As much as we agree in theory to Givón's model of syntactic change (i.e., the path of [discourse > syntax > morphology > morphophonemics > zero]; Givón, 1979a, p. 209) and Lehmann's six parameters of grammaticalization (Lehmann, 1995/2015), which consider both paradigmatic and syntagmatic constraints (i.e., integrity, paradigmaticity, paradigmatic variability, structural scope, bondedness, syntagmatic *variability*), such models

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may be considered "most easily operationalized in languages with extensive inflectional morphology" (Traugott, 2013, p. 271). This suggests that different modifications may necessarily be made to suit studies on otherwise different types of language such as "Chinese and indeed Present-Day English" (p. 271). Prior to delimiting the grammaticalization processes for investigating [*zéi*-POS], we must first distinguish between the relationships (a) between grammaticalization and language change, and (b) between grammaticalization and constructionalization.

4.2.1 Grammaticalization vs. Constructionalization

This research has shared Traugott's view that grammaticalization is a "basic" (Traugott, 2002, p. 220) and "uniquely distinct" (Traugott, 2012a) type of language change, although not all instances of language change (generally assumed to be *sound change*, *lexical change*, *semantic change*, and *syntactic change*) can count as grammaticalization. For instance, semantic change is known to be achievable without necessarily causing syntactic recategorization (e.g., through metaphorical or metonymic extension, although both may serve as "crucial factors in the onset of grammaticalization"; Traugott, 2013, p. 272), and so are sound change and lexical change. Although grammaticalization is traditionally taken to be "a process whereby lexemes or lexical items become grammatical" (i.e., from content words to function words or from segmentally fuller material to segmentally more bonded and restricted material), the process of constructionalization—which encompasses units ranging from bare lexemes and morphosyntactic strings to properly defined constructions—can provide "equally standard example[s]" to the same end (e.g., body part terms for adpositions: *by (X's) side*; Traugott, 2003a, p. 624). A typical such case is Traugott's grammaticalization work on the development of English

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degree modifiers/quantifiers (i.e., [NP1 [of NP2]] > [[NP1 of] NP2] for *a sort/lot/shred of*; Traugott, 2008). "The most crucial point about grammaticalization is that it is a process whereby units are recruited 'into grammar'" (Traugott, 2003a, p. 626) or whereby "grammar is created" (Croft, 2006, p. 366), which paraphrases concisely the two-pronged definition of the term by Hopper and Traugott in 1993:

> (i) [Grammaticalization is] a research framework for studying the relationships between lexical, constructional, and grammatical material in language, whether diachronically or synchronically, whether in particular languages or cross-linguistically, and (ii) a term referring to the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions [in Traugott's aforementioned case and in ours, *modification*]. (Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003, p. 231)

The term "grammatical" in Traugott's definition may involve both a lexical (grammatical category) and a (morpho-)syntactic (grammatical function) perspective. Therefore, the grammatical behaviors of the *zéi*-EDM as well as the linguistic environment(s) where it operates can be embraced as promising topics into a grammaticalization theory despite the fact that *zéi* has not developed into any major grammatical category (e.g., prepositions, conjunctions, and case).

The next clarification to be made concerns the relationship between grammaticalization and constructionalization (see Traugott & Trousdale, 2013; Traugott, 2015). Both being *-ization* words, the concepts profile a gradual, gradient, and variable process of language change (Traugott, 2003a, p. 626) whose developmental tendencies or routes have come to be

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metaphorically known as “clines” (e.g., the [content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix] cline; Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003, p. 7). Similar terms have been found with different grammaticalization theorists (see Konvička, 2019): ***grammaticalization scales*** (Lehmann, 1985), *grammaticalization chains* (Heine, 1992), ***cline of grammaticality*** or ***cline of grammaticalization*** (Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003; Norde, 2002), *grammaticalization pathways* (Bybee et al, 1994; Pagliuca, 1994; Bisang, 1996), and *grammaticalization channels* (Diewald et al., 2009). While the other terms are rather focused on lexical change from a diachronic perspective, those in boldface are largely synonymous with each other. The latter are diachronically understood as the “schema that models the development of forms [e.g., from free morphemes to bound morphemes],” and is synchronically “thought of as a continuum” that is “an arrangement of forms along an imaginary line at one end of which is a fuller form of some kind, perhaps ‘lexical,’ and at the opposite end a compacted and reduced form, perhaps [if not invariably] ‘grammatical’” (Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003, p. 6).

Conceived in both diachrony and synchrony in investigating language change with keen interests in linguistic iconicity, markedness, economy, and so on, grammaticalization has entailed “typological implications” (i.e., language universals) that are supported by cross-linguistic evidence (see Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003), which dovetails with the RCG framework (Croft, 2001). As noted by Traugott (2008, p. 231), grammaticalization underlies Croft’s theory of Radical Construction Grammar, making the theory “especially well-suited for developing an articulate approach to the correlations between grammaticalization and constructions” (p. 224). Several advantages have been identified with such a constructional approach (notably, RCG) to language change (Traugott, 2015, pp. 59–60). That is, RCG (a) considers both meaning and form equally, (b) places its attention on the outcome (as opposed to the source) of a change whether

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the resulting construction appears to be primarily contentful (lexical) or procedural (grammatical), and (c) focuses not only on simple and complex outputs but also on different levels of schematicity (from item-specific micro-constructions to abstract schematic constructions).

In other words, constructionalization is grammaticalization—only the former takes in more language changes than does the traditional architecture of grammaticalization (Traugott, 2015, p. 60)—because it "encompasses much of what has been discussed in the grammaticalization literature, while also going beyond it to include morphosyntactic changes that are more far-reaching than have been considered in most work on grammaticalization to date" (Traugott, 2015, p. 52). More importantly, the RCG framework, as a tool for constructionalization, provides a way to "integrate synchronic language-internal variation" into language research (Croft, 2001, p. 7). This is notwithstanding the fact that both constructionalization and grammaticalization carry implications of diachronic significance in language change. By constructionalization, Traugott speaks of a new approach that builds RCG into grammaticalization research under which many processes are subsumed, such as intersubjectification, morphologization, and syntacticization of word order. Henceforth, grammaticalization and constructionalization will be treated as interchangeable terms in this research given some differences in their foci. This also sums up the rationale behind the title of this research and for choosing the [*zéi*-POS] construction to foreground the crucial role of grammaticalization for constructionalized positive irony.

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4.2.2 Key Mechanisms in Grammaticalization/Constructionalization

Grammaticalization (constructionalization) is a complex and multifactorial type of language change that involves a variety of interacting processes [i.e., the different mechanisms] (Diewald, 2011, p. 366), which leads to the emergence of grammar, that is, into "paradigmatic, obligatory structures, which as a common core display some type of relational meaning" (p. 384). The mechanisms as well as their motivations that are cognitive in nature and key to grammaticalization are crucially instrumental in the inquiry of linguistic constructionalization. As mentioned previously, this chapter chiefly piggybacks on Croft's and Traugott's theoretical frameworks; therefore, only the processes that are central to their theoretical persuasions and that are most relevant to the *zéi* construction will be considered in our analysis. For instance, we will look into the multilayered complexity of [*zéi*-POS] (namely, the dimensions of (morpho-)syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), but will not dwell on the morphologization of the lexeme *zéi* in that Mandarin Chinse is an isolating and zero-derived language, and that sound change does not seem to constitute a predominant, if not inconsequential, factor in the constructionalization of *zéi*. In addition, sound reconstruction together with the kind of methodological rigor often required for researching Chinese historical phonology may in its own right merit another doctoral research project, hence, not considered herein. The mechanisms to be discussed include reanalysis, analogy, actualization, activation, and so forth. Definitions of these mechanisms will be provided where necessary and appropriate.

4.3 Constructionalization of *Zéi*

The progressive cline of the Chinese word *zéi* is summarized in Table 1 and visualized in Figure 8 as shown below, based on Wang and Li (2005), Tao (2011), Liu (2014), Sheng (2015), Zhang

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(2016), and Chuang (in press). Table 1 sketches out the four stages of change of *zéi*, where meanings correspond to their respective morphosyntactic roles (parts of speech). These have served as the historical evidence to rationalize the basic aspect of grammaticalization of the term. However, the cline does not suggest a specific connection between the adjective form of *zéi* and its most salient adjective sense(s) in the modern context. For instance, although *harmful* and *vicious* emerged as the very early semantic types of Stage III (adjectives), the sense of *thief-like* and its semantic extensions (e.g., *sneaky*, *wily*, and *calculating*) may prevail over *harmful* and *vicious* in present-day Mandarin. Table 1 and Figure 8 have reflected but facts about language change based on the historical texts available to both earlier research and ours. As noted by Wang and Li (2005) and Sheng (2015), the sequence of the four stages of *zéi* may instantiate the regular grammaticalization route of many Chinese verbs (V > N > ADJ > ADV); however, several things remain noteworthy. First, conversion is highly characteristic of the Chinese language (especially, classical Chinese), for which reason, functional shift between different parts of speech of the same lexeme is relatively easy and common. In addition, it is difficult to theorize a clear-cut distinction between Chinese verbs and adjectives even when the word order of a sentence is well established; hence, the long-standing debate over the status of *adjectival verbs* in the language ensues.

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Table 1. Semantic and morphosyntactic change of *zéi*

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV
Part of speech	verb	noun	adjective	adverb
Meaning	*destroy*, *murder*	*Murderer*, *robber*, *bandit*, *traitor*, *thief*	*harmful*, *vicious*	(*zéi*-EDM) *very*, *extremely*

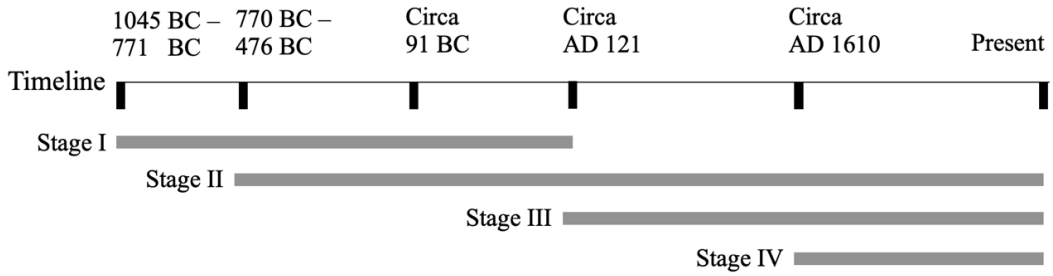

Figure 8. History of the semantic-morphosyntactic change of *zéi* (see also 2a–d)

Second, due to such operative conversion in Chinese, the recorded history of language provided herein may not be taken as precisely showing the onset of a specific shift between any two parts of speech that have been identified with *zéi* since Stage I (verb). Third, there is currently no such claim whatsoever as specifying the time of the very last use of Stage I in documented history. We shall, based on earlier studies (Wang & Li, 2005; Tao, 2011; Liu, 2014; Sheng, 2015; Zhang, 2016; Chuang, in press), assume the significant decrease, if not the exact end time, of Stage I to be nearing the time of publication of *Shuowen Jiezi*[4] (AD 100–121), as no later mention of Stage I has been reported. Lastly and importantly, overlaps between the different stages have been observed (see Figure 8), which is widely taken as a key and typical feature of grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003), and which causally suggests that

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grammaticalization routes “cannot be described appropriately in terms of discrete categorization” (Heine, 2003, p. 590).

Schematically, each stage of the semantic-morphosyntactic change of *zéi* (see Table 1) can be illustrated, as shown below (Figures 9–12), to profile the correlation between a semantic component and a syntactic element, thereby forming a symbolic unit. Specifically, these figures present the RCG schemata for each phase of *zéi*’s grammatical development, while Figure 13 provides an example of the *zéi*-EDM—贼美 *zéi měi* ‘freakin’ beautiful.’ It warrants mentioning that the semantic components in the schematized representations correspond to the conventionalized interpretations of a word, phrase, or sentence. However, in the RCG framework, these conventionalized interpretations encompass both semantic (semanticized) senses and pragmatic (pragmaticalized) senses and functions, which are encapsulated in a syntactic element. The association between an element and a component is depicted by a dotted line as a symbolic relation, and an element-component pairing is seen a symbolic unit. In essence, RCG treats a form-meaning/function pairing as a symbolic unit. It is this symbolic unit that serves as the launchpad for any constructional exploration within the RCG framework. The figures (schematized representations) below also confirm the observation that reanalysis is covert but analogy is by contrast overt (Hopper & Traugott, 1993, pp. 63–64) in the process of language change.

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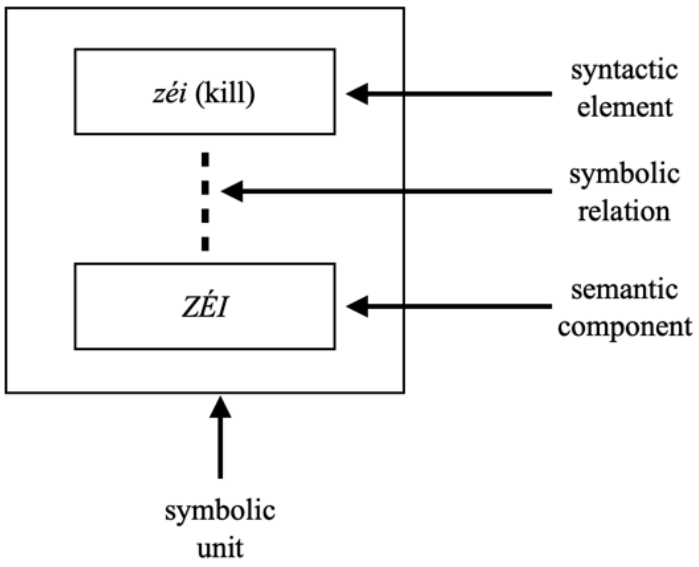

Figure 9. *Zéi* as V (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

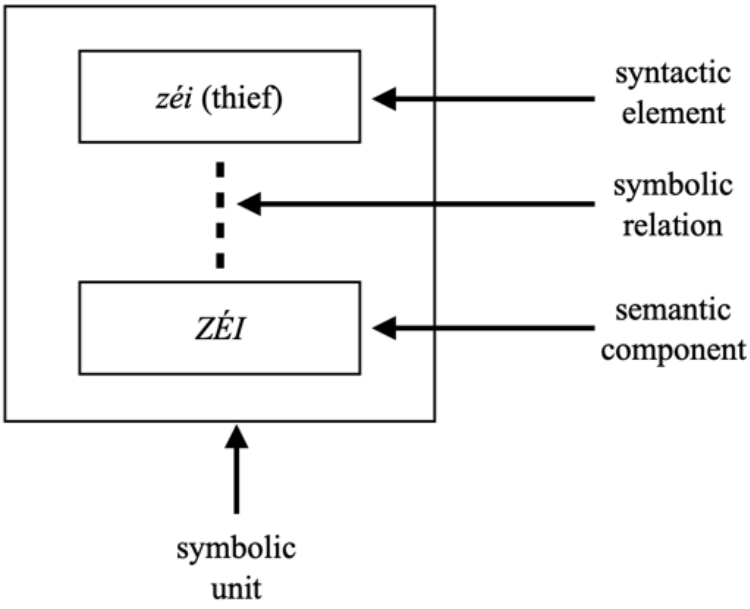

Figure 10. *Zéi* as N (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

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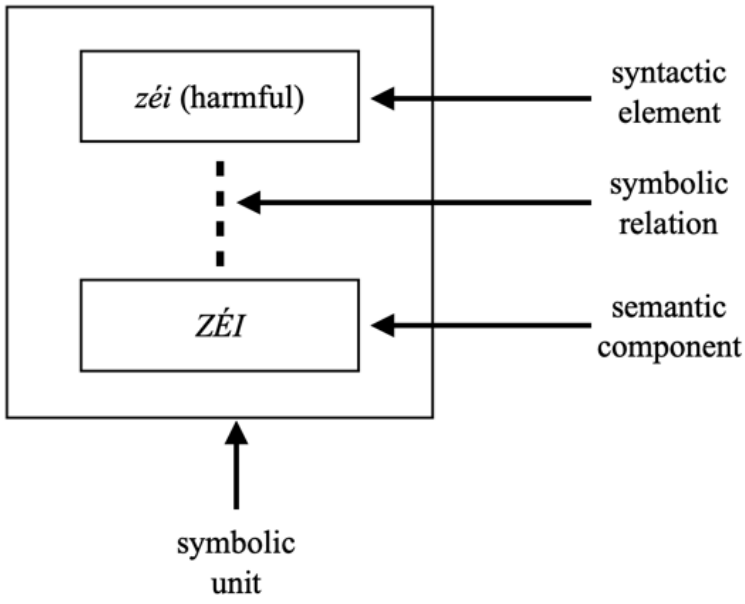

Figure 11. *Zéi* as an adjective (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

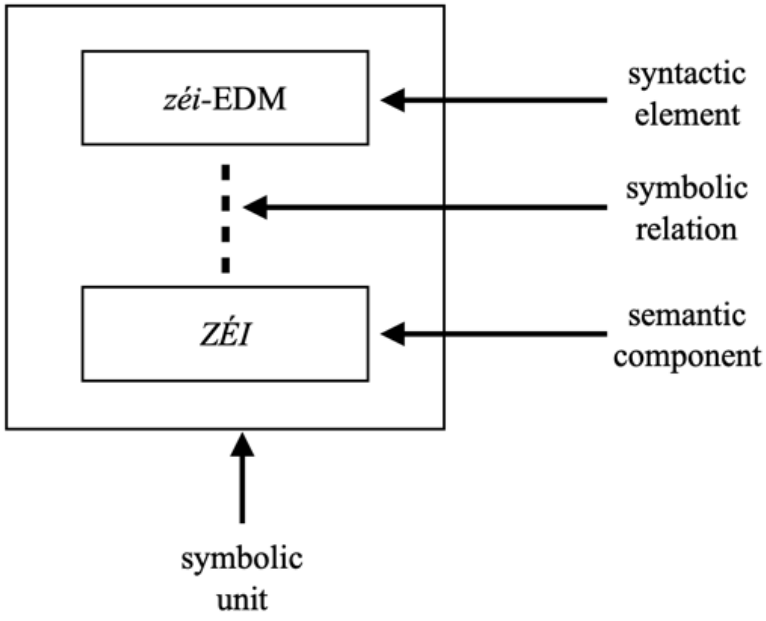

Figure 12. *Zéi* as an EDM (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

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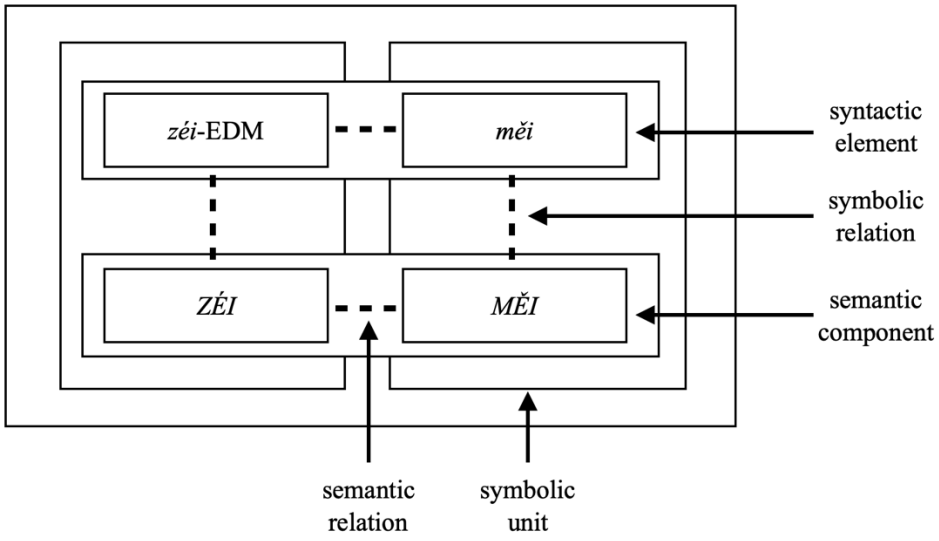

Figure 13. *Zéi*-EDM in 贼美 *zéi měi* 'freakin' beautiful' (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 21)

To deepen our understanding of Stage IV, as illustrated in Figures 12–13, the *zéi*-EDM can indeed be viewed as a subset of the EDM modification construction, which in turn is nested within the broader adverbial modification construction (see Figure 14). From the perspective of RCG, the sole link between the modifier and the modified is a semantic one. In essence, RCG prefers to interpret this relationship through the lens of selection (based on meaning) rather than subcategorization (grounded in *a priori* syntax). *ZÉI* and *MĚI* 'beautiful' each play a role that directly participates in the EDM modification construction, thereby establishing a part-whole relationship at the syntactic level. The combination of *ZÉI* and *MĚI* in the EDM modification construction (*zéi*-EDM *měi* 'freakin' beautiful') is not dictated by syntactic relations but arises from the interplay of semantic components (notably, *zéi* and its corresponding headword) within a construct. This interplay is guided by principles of semantic preference (Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 2001; Hoey, 2005) and/or semantic prosody (Louw, 1993; Partington, 2004; Whitsitt, 2005). However, although RCG disregards any predefined syntactic relations or innate principles, such

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as Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 1965; 1995), it does recognize the syntactic roles played by the elements in a phrase or sentence. In this particular case, *zéi* assumes the modifier role and *měi* the headword role. These roles do not inherently embody a syntactic relationship; rather, they are semantically drawn together, if not coerced. The interaction of these roles within a construction leads to the emergence of new meanings. Echoing Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008), RCG adopts a semantic/function-based approach to syntax. Only when the [*zéi*-EDM + V/N/ADJ/ADV] patterning crystalizes into an emergent construction (i.e., schematized) does it yield an anticipated constructional meaning or function.

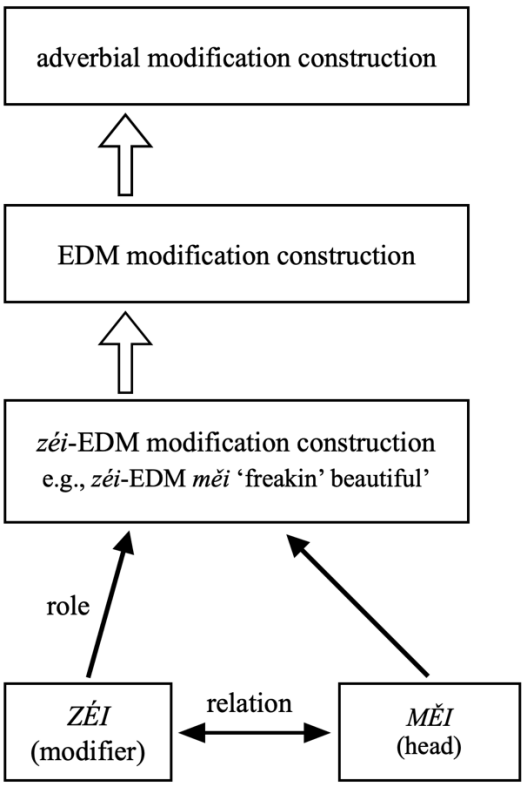

Figure 14. Form-meaning/function pairing of 賊美 *zéi měi* 'freakin' beautiful' in RCG (adapted from Croft, 2001, p. 23)

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4.3.1 From Semantic Change to Syntactic Change: Metonymization and Metaphorization

When it comes to grammaticalization, meaning (semantic-pragmatic components) is of foremost importance, because semantic change often motivates subsequent (morpho-)syntactic change (recategorization). In fact, many would take for granted that *zéi* has undergone obvious lexical change. This assumption is correct if such lexical change considers only a lexeme's change in meaning. Lexical change indeed refers not only to a word's change in semantic structure that is immanent to grammaticalization but also to the removal of a previously existing word from or the incorporation of new vocabulary into the lexicon of a given language (Dworkin, 2010). What the *zéi*-EDM appears to have gone through belongs with the former as *zéi* remains in use in modern Mandarin Chinese. We will therefore not speak of lexical change but semantic change in the case of *zéi*.

The change is rather *semasiological* (a constant form featuring new and/or different meanings) than *onomasiological* (a constant meaning expressed by new and/or different forms), in which case, the morphosyntactic construction of *zéi* is treated in light of polysemy (see polysemy in Tyler, 2006; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2007/2010; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) as illustrated by the schematized representation in Figure 15, where *L* stands for lexeme and *M* for meaning. This semantic change is primarily driven by two major mechanisms—metaphor and metonymy, or in Traugott and Dasher's terms, for capturing the dynamic nature of the mechanisms, *metaphorization* and *metonymization* (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004). Although both terms signify a process, metonymization has been thought of as a more basic mechanism and conceptual phenomenon than metaphorization regarding the relationship between language and cognition (Barcelona, 2000; Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004). More importantly,

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metaphorization is considered a principle of analogy while metonymization is identified with reanalysis, neither excluding the other (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004, pp. 28–29).

$$L \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{Form} \\ M_1 \end{bmatrix} > L \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{Form} \\ M_1 + M_2 \end{bmatrix}$$

Figure 15. Schematized representation of polysemy (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004, p. 25)

On the one hand, *zéi* has been reanalyzed and construed into different senses (see Table 1). For example, *zéi* first appeared in the Chinese bronze inscriptions[5] as a verb (Stage I) meaning *kill* or *destroy* during the Western Zhou Dynasty (1045 BC–771 BC; see also Chuang, in press for the discussion of the graphemes of *zéi*). As mentioned earlier, each semantic structure is best realized as a cultural-pragmatic frame (*kill*, *destroy*) that encompasses yet more subframes (*wound*, *harm*, *maltreat*, *molest*, etc.) via semantic extension (or *context expansion*; see Heine, 2003, p. 580; Himmelmann, 2004, p. 31). Such semantic extension is fundamentally metonymy-driven as the main frame (superordinate terms) may impart certain qualities to its subframes (subordinate terms) through "the extension of pragmatic meaning" (Childs, 2021, p. 425; see also Heine, 2003), viz., "invited inferences in the associative, continuous stream of speech/writing" that are semanticized over the course of time (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004, p. 29). This has not only modified the underlying representations of *zéi* but also reflected the dynamic part-whole (i.e., metonymy, including *part-for-whole*, *whole-for-part*, and *part-for-part*) nature of language evolution as postulated in Radical Construction Grammar. More essentially, such metonymy-prompted change in meaning may bring about syntactic change—specifically, conversion or functional shift in the case. As argued in many earlier studies (Brinton, 1988; Kövecses &

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Radden, 1998; Ziegeler, 2003; Brinton & Traugott, 2005; Kövecses, 2010), functional shift operates on the metonymic part-for-part relation, which well accounts for the constructionalization of *zéi*. Meaning-wise, for instance, Stage II (N: doer) is viewed as part of the greater whole of Stage I (V: action) and so is Stages III (ADJ: quality or state), although Stage IV (ADV: *zéi*-EDM) may rather be part of either Stage II or Stage III than Stage I. In brief, the semantic reanalysis of *zéi* has effected not only the semantic change but also the recategorization of *zéi* (see Table 1 and Figure 8).

On the other hand, metaphorization confirms the principle of analogy in grammaticalization. Analogy pivots on one's conceptualization of the comparison between two "domains" or, in Traugott and Dasher's terms, "conceptual structures" (2004, p. 28). Note, however, that such conceptual structures in a theory of grammar refer indeed to the different "large-scale domains of linguistic organization" such as syntax, semantics, and phonology (p. 28)—for example, how Stage I (V: *kill*, *destroy*) maps onto Stage II (N: *murderer*, *robber*, *bandit*, *traitor*, *enemy*, *thief*). To achieve this, one needs to be able to conceptualize the development of *zéi* from the action of *killing* or *destroying* to the performer of the action *murderer* or *bandit*. In short, Stage I is as much of a conceptual structure as Stage II. Metonymization and metaphorization are not mutually exclusive phenomena; rather, they "both exploit pragmatic meaning" and "both enrich meaning" (p. 29; see also Traugott, 2000/2014). Principally, the domains of a metaphor (target and source) "must be understood or perspectivized metonymically for the metaphor to be possible" (Barcelona, 2000, p. 31, as cited in Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004).

Although not necessarily creating morphology, "grammaticalization often goes together with the sematic development of bleaching" (Booij, 2007, p. 266), also called *desemanticization*,

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weakening of meaning, *semantic depletion* (Weinreich, 1963), *attrition of semantic integrity* (Lehmann, 1982/2015), and *loss of semantic complexity (or substance)* (Heine & Reh, 1984), or, to an extent, *sematic narrowing* (*specialization* or *restriction*). However, *zéi* seems to have run counter to this most invoked notion of semantic change often found in the traditional treatment of early grammaticalization, because it shows no obvious sign of semantic reduction. Instead, many would speculate that *zéi* has primarily, if not exclusively, undergone *semantic generalization* (or, *semantic broadening*, *expansion*, and *extension*). These two mechanisms are widely held to be opposite ideas.

In the case of *zéi*, however, we argue that although generalization seems to take precedence over semantic bleaching, they indeed "feed on each other" not only at the outset of grammaticalization but also at various phases throughout the entire process, if considered in diachrony. Such a relation is not exactly a balanced or complementary one but one that enables the two to exploit each other as a result of meaning competition (frequency-based) during the "pragmatic strengthening [of informativeness]" of some sort (Traugott, 1988, p. 411), again based on metaphor and, in particular, metonymy (Traugott & König, 1988/1991; see also "inferencing" in Levinson, 1983), where context has pride of place. Despite the inclination to challenge Hopper and Traugott's proposition that initial phrases of generalization do not demonstrate the semantic bleaching characteristic of more advanced stages, it is judicious to exercise restraint. This contention seems to stands in opposition to Givón's (1984, 1995, 2009) view on generalization. The former regards grammaticalization as beginning with generalization instead of semantic reduction, while the latter sees generalization as the process where a word becomes more general and is therefore more context-dependent, which continues until the point where a word's meaning is derivable largely, if only exclusively, via context. We do not see the

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two as much of opposing views on generalization as a part of the grammaticalization process. First, Hopper and Traugott stress the importance of taking into account language-specific potential (see also Croft, 2001) in investigation of grammaticalization. Second and more importantly, the two views indeed focus on different aspects of the grammaticalization cline. Hopper and Traugott's focus is primarily on how meaning is lost as a signpost for grammaticalization, while Givón highlights the generalization process that, too, leads to semantic bleaching. Both underscore the importance of pragmatic factors that give rise to language change. To remedy this, it is crucial to acknowledge the balance between older and newer meanings (Traugott, 1988; Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003), for example, preservation of polysemy, layering, and semantic change.

Mandarin Chinese is not an inflectional language, hence, lacking morphological evidence to show change. As emphasized in the RCG framework (see also 4.2), language-specific factors must be taken into consideration to account for change. Although Traugott (1988) argues that "beaching and grammaticalization must be uncoupled" (p. 407) so as to understand how pragmatics interacts with semantics in the initial phases of grammaticalization, we propose instead that both generalization and bleaching be taken as essential mechanisms for bringing about grammaticalization. Bleaching is as important for investigating meaning variation in early stages of grammaticalization as is generalization. For instance, the transition from Stage I (V: *kill*, *destroy*) to Stage II (N: *murderer*, *robber*, *bandit*, *traitor*, *enemy*, *thief*) has indeed seen a reciprocal action between both mechanisms. Pragmatically and semantically, Stage I gradually gains more polysemous potential regardless of whichever meaning (*kill* or *destroy*) *zéi* first turns up to be in history. As *zéi* is conceptualized as a frame, it is rather easy for either *kill* or *destroy* to develop into other relevant, if not perfectly synonymous, interpretations due to the many

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metalinguistic (e.g., emotion, intention, and intensity) and socio-pragmatic (e.g., bonding, joking, and warning) motivations underpinning human language use. The core sense of *zéi*, whether it be *kill* or *destroy*, can generalize into new senses (e.g., *harm* and *abuse*), meanwhile, drifting off into less prototypical ones—in a way, losing its semantic integrity, hence, bleaching. In fact, even the senses of *kill* and *destroy* are themselves products of (re)interpretation by readers and scholars from a much later era since the bronze inscriptions (circa 1045 BC). The evidence can also be found in the next phase of change (Stage II), where *zéi* emerges as a nominal, namely, the various kinds of doers "supposedly" performing the action encoded in Stage I. Compared with Stage I, Stage II sees a remarkable increase in polysemous interpretation, viz., *murderer*, *robber*, *bandit*, *traitor*, *enemy*, and *thief*, among others, while only senses like *murderer* (or *killer*) and *destroyer* can map back to *kill* and *destroy*, respectively.

Given the abovementioned increase occurring in Stage II, *zéi* undergoes again another round of negotiation between generalization and bleaching. Although there is no morphology to mark change from Stage I to Stage II, the different nominal senses of *zéi* may indeed serve to indicate the reworking of the lexeme's semantic boundaries (as opposed to morphosyntactic boundaries) going fuzzy and blurry, while the members in each stage show family resemblance (see "prototypes" in Taylor, 1990, 1995, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, specialization can happen in such a game of semantic give-and-take. A good example is that the nominal use of *zéi* is oftentimes restricted to *thief* in modern Chinese. In fact, evidence to show bleaching during generalization can also be found with a speaker's perspective shift within one single stage or across the stages. *Kill* and *destroy* (Stage I) as well as *murderer*, *destroyer*, *robber*, *thief*, and so on (Stage II), are by their very nature good examples to characterize this shift in that the speaker must start to profile a different, often metaphorically or metonymically relevant, entity to allow

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for sematic change.

We therefore argue that in a highly conversion-based and/or zero-derived language like Chinese, generalization and bleaching may feed into each other to manifest the dynamic nature of innovative language use not only in the early stages of grammaticalization but also at different phases of the process. Toward the one end of the cline (early stages), generalization rather inevitably outbalances bleaching than excluding it, while toward the other end (later stages), generalization gradually gives way to necessary, obvious loss of semantic substance or complexity even if the bleaching of a lexeme or construction has yet to develop into any grammatical category.

4.3.2 Constructionalization and Constructional Change

To gain crucial insights into the *zéi* construction, it is important to differentiate and understand the relationship between constructionalization and constructional change as the two are often confused or taken as similar concepts in other constructional work on language change (cf. Traugott & Trousdale, 2013; Hilpert, 2013). As outlined in the beginning of the chapter, the RCG framework is most instrumental not only in "summarizing what one has found [regarding grammaticalization]" but also in "helping make the distinction between constructionalization and constructional change" (Traugott, 2022, p. 40). Constructionalization is an RCG approach to grammaticalization, which is also characterized as "the establishment [i.e., conventionalization] of a new symbolic association of syntactic element and semantic component which has been replicated across a network of language users" (p. 39), or further elaborated as below.

Constructionalization is the creation of $form_{new}$-$meaning_{new}$ (combinations of) signs. It

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> forms new type nodes, which have new syntax or morphology and new coded meaning, in the linguistic network of a population of speakers. It is accompanied by changes in degree of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality. The constructionalization of schemas always results from a succession of micro-steps and is therefore gradual. New micro-constructions may likewise be created gradually, but they may also be instantaneous. Gradually created micro-constructions tend to be procedural, and instantaneously created micro-constructions tend to be contentful. (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 22)

Constructionalization can be further characterized as *lexical* or *grammatical*. Within the same conceptual structure (e.g., Stage II), the core senses of *zéi* (*murderer*, *destroyer*) have developed into less prototypical but related lexical senses (*robber*, *thief*, etc.), while retaining their nominal status through reanalysis (semantic change) without losing much, if any, semantic substance. This constructionalization is lexical (e.g., *cupboard* "board for storing cups" > *cupboard* "closed storage area in a home"; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 22). Constructionalization can be grammatical if it takes place between two conceptual structures (e.g., from Stage I to Stage II) when it involves category change (decategorization or recategorization). Indeed, the transition from Stage I to Stage IV profiles quite a few "relative" changes that characterize grammaticalization: (a) from contentful to procedural (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004), (b) from referential to non-referential (Dasher, 1995), and, as the best-known instance, (c) from lexical to grammatical (Kuryłowicz, 1965)—because the *zéi*-EDM is encoded as a grammatical (degree) quantifier despite its adverbial status. The case of *zéi* therefore is treated as an exemplification of constructionalization.

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Constructional change, on the other hand, is found to precede or follow "a succession of conventionalized incremental steps" or can be otherwise defined as "a change affecting one internal dimension of a construction [pragmatically]," which "does not involve the creation of a new node" (p. 26). For instance, for a new meaning of *zéi* to emerge and be established (e.g., from Stage I to Stage II), there has to be pragmatic (usage-based) changes that start out from a small group of individuals. Suppose that someone starts to use the verb form of *zéi* from "kill" to "destroy" at some point of time in history. At this very moment, the new meaning of *zéi* can at most be considered an innovative use of an existing construction. Following this line of reasoning, there has to be an increasing number of individuals who adopt this new use of *zéi* before this emergent meaning ("destroy," based on "kill") is widely recognized in a given speech community, further giving rise to a conventionalized next-stage sense. Constructional change necessarily begins from a smaller scale (between two or more interlocutors) before it spreads to a larger scale (a community). Note, however, that as the conceptualization of *zéi*'s original sense ("kill") can vary from individual to individual, it is possible that such constructional changes can be realized as a process of negotiation of meaning differentials between individuals before generalization takes place. In brief, constructional change can refer to any modification of an existing construction that does not involve the creation of a new form-meaning pairing. This could include changes in the frequency, productivity, or constraints of a construction, or changes in its relations with other constructions.

Constructional change occurs at different phases of change and is not a phenomenon opposing constructionalization. Constructional change can be understood as the "invited inferences" (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004, p. 29) in a phase where pragmatics takes place before new meaning becomes conventionalized (semanticized). This subtle change is only

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noticeable when an earlier usage of a term (e.g., *a lot of* "a group of") starts to feel like a "mismatch" between its form and meaning (e.g., *a lot of* "many, much"; see Traugott & König, 1988/1991). More essentially, constructional change should precede reanalysis. Adapted from Traugott (2003a, p. 635), Figure 16 is a model of meaning change in grammaticalization to show how constructional change where T stands for time, M for meaning, and CST for construction.

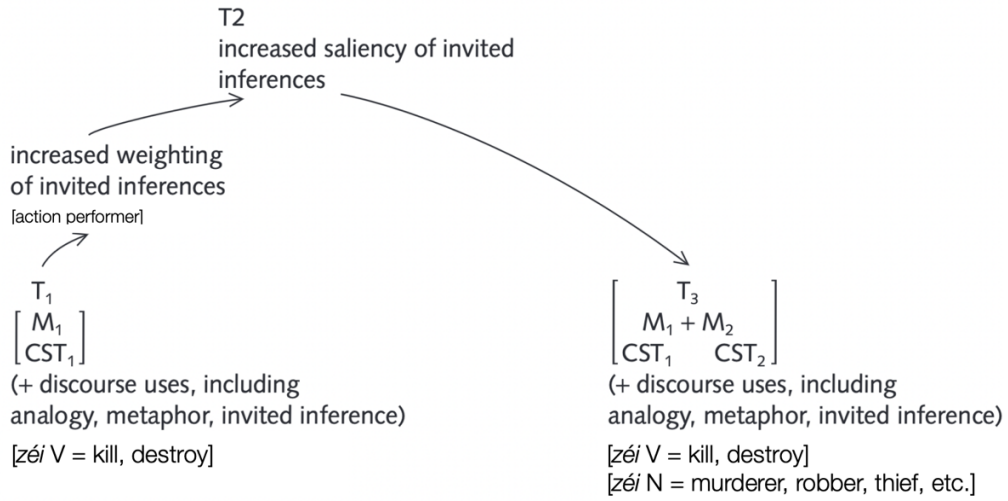

Figure 16. Model of constructionalization and constructional change of *zéi* (adapted from Traugott, 2003a, p. 635)

Like generalization and bleaching, constructional change and constructionalization feed off of each other (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 27), although in a sense, constructional change is subsumed under constructionalization. Indeed, the four stages of *zéi* have very well exemplified this relationship. Prior to the gradual "actualization" (Andersen, 2001, p. 225; see also Timberlake, 1977) and the final "actuation" (Bergs & Stein, 2001, p. 79) of any language change is the semantic change triggered by invited pragmatic inferencing of some sort despite the absence of morphological markedness throughout the stages. It is constructional change at work that takes place within a speech community where a restricted number of users pre-

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reanalyze an established form-meaning relationship. From this point onward, the change begins to actualize step-by-step at different rates. When a given subsequent stage (I–IV) reaches actuation, a local constructionalization (e.g., from Stage I–Stage II) then completes. In turn, Stage II can lead off with another constructional change that leads eventually (or not) to another constructionalization (e.g., Stage III). Collectively, the process is packed with different constructional changes and constructionalizations at both local (from Stage I to Stage II) and global (from Stage I to Stage IV) levels. Up to the present, the case of *zéi* has well supported Traugott's view that usage-based constructionalization adopts grammaticalization both as reduction (**GR**; see Givón, 1979a; Lehmann, 1982/2015, 2004; Hein et al., 1991; Bybee et al., 1991; Haspelmath, 2004) and as expansion (**GE**; see Himmelmann, 2004; cf. Bybee et al., 1994), and that both need to be explained in a model of constructional change (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 96).

4.3.3 Unidirectionality

The GR approach to language change leads to the hypothesis of unidirectionality in grammaticalization, proposed as early as Kuryłowicz (1965). Some of the most influential research on this predictable cline can be found in Givón (1979a, p. 209; discourse > syntax > morphology > morphophonemics > zero) and Dahl (2004, p. 106; free > periphrastic > affixal > fusional). As noted by Traugott and Trousdale (2013, p. 101), the GR approach (as reduced semantic complexity and increased internal dependency) is largely "modular" and "relatively narrow," except the work of Givón or Bybee and colleagues. In this line of reasoning, *zéi* at Stage IV may be eventually regarded as grammaticalizing based on a lexical[6] source that "consists in ANCILLIRIZATION [alone], a CHANGE IN EXISTING DISCOURSE-

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PROMINENCE CONVENTIONS (Boye & Harder, 2012, p. 22; capitals original; cited in Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 104). This, however, is not a stance advocated by this research, nor by Traugott and colleagues or Croft, as its main GR focus is nonetheless restricted to the development of grammatical expressions as a word/morpheme (i.e., *zéi*) rather than a construction, viz., *zéi* and its part-whole relationship with other linguistic elements based on discursive-pragmatic considerations (e.g., [*zéi*-POS]).

To investigate grammaticalization from a "complementary" perspective (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 109), pragmatics must be carefully taken into account as it is the driving force of constructional change; hence, a loss-and-gain model (Sweetser, 1988; Brems, 2011), as opposed to a loss-only model, seems to be a better-thought-out idea. As mentioned in 4.3.1, metaphorization and metonymization are two key mechanisms in semantic change leading to grammaticalization, therefore, the GE approach being brought forth afterward. Indeed, Bybee et al. (1994) later propose a view of grammaticalization embracing both pragmatics and semantics (including metaphor and metonymy). Specifically, GE refers to generalization as "loss of lexical specificity [i.e., bleaching]" (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 106), meanwhile gaining new meanings and functions. It allows for "reduction and increase in dependency but sees them as a function of the kind of grammatical category that is being developed" (p. 108). To a great extent, the GE perspective generally appears to better characterize constructionalization than GR. Although both tackle issues in language change, GR and GE indeed answer different questions. GR primarily investigates "development of morphosyntactic form" (e.g., coalescence, fusion, and increased dependency) while GE aims at not only "changes in an item" but also "how grammaticalization occurs in context" and even how changes may further develop "after grammaticalization has set in" (p. 109). GR is therefore thought of as a strong hypothesis

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associated with unidirectionality, while GE a weaker version (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 100). This may be indicative that when beginning to shift her focus to constructionalization (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), Traugott has started to embrace a grammaticalization theory in which a word may undergo different degrees of both semantic expansion (generalization) and reduction (bleaching) at the early phrases of language change, which is supported by RCG.

A most compelling GE model can be found with Himmelmann's "three expansions": *host-class expansion*, *syntactic expansion*, and *semantic-pragmatic expansion*, the last being the "core defining feature" (Himmelmann, 2004, pp. 32–33). The second and third types of expansion have been elaborated in earlier sections regarding the different stages of *zéi*, while the very first can be illustrated in the sentences below where *zéi* functions an EDM. The host-class expansion of *zéi*-EDM (Stage IV) in modern Mandarin is largely a synchronic and syntagmatic one that subcategorizes verbs (5a), adjectives (5b), and adverbs (5c) (i.e., [*zéi* + V/ADJ/ADV]), which manifests the "dynamic coevolution of form and meaning" (Bybee et al., 1994, p. 20). Due to its negative semantic prosody, the *zéi*-EDM is first observed to modify negatively valenced words (i.e., [*zéi*-NEG]; 5a–c), which is an unsurprising result as can be found with

5	a. 今兒	賊恨	我	哥	的。	[*zéi* + V]
	Jīner	*zéihèn*	*wǒ*	*gē*	*de*	
	Today	*zéi*-EDM.hate	1SG.GEN	older.brother	PTL	
	'I freakin' hate my (older) brother today.'					
	(adapted from BCC)					

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b. 這　　新來的　　看起來　　賊傻。　　[*zéi* + ADJ]

Zhè　　*xīnláide*　　*kànqǐlái*　　*zéishǎ*

This　　newbie　　look　　*zéi*-EDM.silly

'The newbie looks darn silly (or awkward).'

(adapted from BCC)

c. 她　　車子　　開　　得　　賊慢。　　[*zéi* + ADV]

Tā　　*chēzi*　　*kāi*　　*de*　　*zéimàn*

3SG.NOM　　car　　drive　　PTL　　*zéi*-EDM.slowly

'She drives so friggin' slowly.'

(adapted from BCC)

other EDMs across languages. Interestingly, the *zéi*-EDM undergoes another host-class expansion, this time being a paradigmatic one extending its selection to positively valenced words (i.e., [*zéi*-POS]; see 6a-c). It is in this stage that positive-ironic implicature is encoded. Such an expansion model (generalization-oriented) fits not only into Meillet's reanalysis-based theory of grammaticalization, but also into the very first formulation of unidirectionality hypothesis in history (Meillet, 1912/1958).

6　a. 我　　賊想　　你。　　[*zéi* + V]

Wǒ　　*zéixiǎng*　　*nǐ*

ISG.NOM　　*zéi*-EDM.miss　　2SG.ACC

'I freakin' miss you.'

(adapted from BCC)

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b. 誰　像　你　一樣　賊可愛?　[*zéi* + ADJ]

Shuí *xiàng* *nǐ* *yīyàng* *zéikěài*

Who similar 2SG.ACC same *zéi*-EDM.cute

'Who's so friggin' cute (or gorgeous) like you?'

(adapted from BCC)

c. 你　腦子　動　得　真　賊快。　[*zéi* + ADV]

Nǐ *nǎozi* *dòng* *dé* *zhēn* *zéikuài*

2SG.GEN brain move PTL really *zéi*-EDM.fast

'You think so darn fast.'

(adapted from BCC)

Both GR and GE approaches hypothesize unidirectionality. Although Hopper and Traugott argue that unidirectionality "cannot be regarded as an absolute principle" (1993/2003, p. 126) and that the unidirectional concept should be seen but as "a robust tendency" (Traugott, 2001, p. 1; see *degrammaticalization* in Ramat, 1992; Norde, 2009), grammatical changes are in great measure one-directional, a view also shared by both Traugott and Croft. Despite seeking answers to different questions about grammaticalization, GR and GE often point to the same developmental trend—unidirectionality. Constructionalization then embraces both GR and GE as complementary approaches to language change, because "many aspects of GE follow from GR factors" (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 109).

4.4 Concluding Remarks

The case of *zéi* is one analyzed as progressing from one end that is more "atomic" and "substantive" (Stage I) to the other end that is more "complex" and "schematic" (Stage IV; Croft, 2001, p. 58). The "primitive grammatical units" being investigated are the constructions (p. 362),

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as opposed to primitive atomic categories or syntactic relations, represented by the four stages of *zéi*. Our focus is language output, namely, linguistic performance instead of linguistic competence. Adopting historical data and modern usage-based examples, we find *zéi* to have developed a grammaticalization cline of at least four stages based on its morphosyntactic changes over the course of time. On the one hand, the investigation is a diachronic one (from 1045–771 BC to present), while on the other hand, it is conceived from a synchronic perspective due to the coexisting forms of *zéi*. We adopted constructionalization—an RCG approach to language change (notably, grammaticalization)—to investigate the Chinese lexeme from both GR and GE models. That is, expansion (generalization) and narrowing (bleaching) both have occurred during language change (see 4.3.1). We should note that we used the [*zéi*-POS] construction to

investigate how a pragmatic function (namely, positive irony) can be encoded in a linguistic construction through constructionalization. This construction presents a typical cline of grammaticalization, a feature commonly assumed in diachronic research. However, from the perspective of RCG, a construction can be approached both diachronically and synchronically. More specifically, construction grammars offer a resolution to the challenges of language change research, which have traditionally been approached from a diachronic perspective.

Our analysis not only confirms the regular mechanisms (i.e., *layering*, *divergence*, *specialization*, and *persistence*; see Hopper, 1991, p. 22) often identified in grammaticalization[7], but also foregrounds the importance of the three key mechanisms of the process, viz., reanalysis (metonymization), analogy (metaphorization), and repetition (frequency). These mechanisms have aided in further realizing productivity, schematicity, and compositionality in a theory of constructionalization (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013; Traugott, 2015; Croft, 2001). Such an

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understanding is crucial in our research in that all three positive-ironic constructions being investigated must first and foremost undergo grammatical grammaticalization to be able to be adopted in a later stage (as an available item of one's linguistic inventory) for implying positive irony.

Zéi like other "dispreferred entities" has first gone through narrowing due to cultural-pragmatic factors associated with "taboo, social prejudice, or unpleasantness" (Hopper & Traugott, 2003, p. 102), and in a later stage evolved as a grammatical quantifier (*zéi*-EDM). We further argue that *zéi*-EDM can select positive terms (i.e., [*zéi*-POS]) to encode the discourse function of positive irony. This stance not only sees "grammar as a processing strategy" (Givón, 1980, p. 81) and "as the result of the continual negotiation of meaning that speakers and hearers engage in" (Hopper & Traugott, 2003, p. 98), but seeks to explore how speaker attitude can be grammaticalized (Fujii, 2000). These are the core issues highlighted in both RCG and grammaticalization approaches to language change that await answers.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the operational and technical discussions of language change from the RCG perspective. The [*zéi*-POS] construction needs to be learned as a "non-compositional unit" (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 20) despite retaining a certain "degree of analyzability" (p. 27). However, to fully comprehend how positive irony can be encoded in an existing construction such as [*zéi*-POS], it is necessary to integrate a working theoretical-inferential model that accounts for the emergence of meaning or function. In the following chapter, we will move on to examine how such meaning or function emerges based on our second positive-ironic construction ([VSNL vs. VSWL]) from the perspectives of hyperbole, conceptual metaphor, and most importantly, conceptual blending, to provide explanations for encoded positive irony.

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CHAPTER 5. BLENDING AS AN EXPLANATORY MDOEL:

THE [XAYB] CONSTRUCTION

This chapter centers its focus on the second positive ironic exemplar to be investigated in the research, viz., the [XAYB] construction (alternatively, [XAYB]). In the construction, X and Y each represent a variable element, while A and B each stand for a constant element. The constructional constraints state that (a) variable X selects a small cluster of emotive verbs (EVs; i.e., *love*, *hate*, *miss*, *worry*, and *envy*), (b) that constant A needs be the lexical marker (EDM) of 死 *sǐ* 'die' or 'death,' (c) that variable Y admits only two pronominal cases 你 *nǐ* 'you' and 我 *wǒ* 'I,' and (d) that constant B is restricted to the Chinese sentence-final particle 了 *le*, which signifies a current relevant state (CRS). Examples are shown below in 7a–b where the sentences appear to be interchangeable with each other as synonymous expressions (see free translation).

7 a. 愛 死 你 了。
Ài *sǐ* *nǐ* *le*
love *sǐ*-EDM 2SG.ACC CRS
'I freakin' love you!'

b. 愛 死 我 了。
Ài *sǐ* *wǒ* *le*
love *sǐ*-EDM 1SG.NOM CRS
'I freakin' love you!'

Syntactically, the switch between *nǐ* 'you' and *wǒ* 'I' may come off as a stark incongruity in terms of syntax and semantics, given the Chinese zero form (zero derivation)

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system that would otherwise be expected to mark the symbolic, if not morphosyntactic, relationships between (a) *nǐ* 'you' and *wǒ* 'I' and (b) the other elements in either sentence. This constructional variation has aroused interest in some theorists whose focus lies in the construction's alternating potential (see 5.1 below). However, the thesis advanced here is that such [XAYB] expressions could represent an example of positive irony, rather than striving to justify whether the subtypes of [XAYB]—7a (Y = *nǐ* 'you') and 7b (Y = *wǒ* 'I')—may supplant each other as alternative constructions. Nor is it to ascertain the frequency or degree of potential variation within specific contexts.

Chapter 4 investigates the constructionalization (grammaticalization) of the [*zéi*-POS] construction in keeping with the core tenets of Radical Construction Grammar. It reviews key processes (i.e., metaphorization, metonymization, analogy, reanalysis, generalization, and narrowing) and discusses how a (positive) ironic function might be encoded in a linguistic form. It deals with (positive) irony strictly in a constructionist approach, specifically, in the ways form–meaning/function pairings emerge over the course of time from semantic change (pragmaticization and semanticization) to syntactic change (recategorization). In essence, Chapter 4 sets out to tackle the most fundamental aspects (syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) of a construction's encoded potential in itself. Building upon this foundation, Chapter 5 ventures to explore what is often considered the greatest vulnerability in all construction grammars (see Chapter 2), namely what RCG terms as the pragmatic and discursive aspects of a construction (Croft, 2001, p. 25).

It should be noted that any prior mention of a construction's pragmatic aspect in Chapter 4 fulfills, at the very least, the basic requirement for describing language typical of a constructionist theory. In alignment with the constructionist framework outlined in Chapter 4, a

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positive-ironic construction can be understood as the end result of pragmaticalization (Diewald, 2011). This is defined as the constructionalization of discursive functionality, therefore making it "pragmatic-discursive." Although "it is possible for linguistic form[s] to encode either conceptual information or procedural information" (Blakemore, 2002, p. 78), there is a noticeable gap in providing a comprehensive explanation for the emergence of positive-ironic meanings in these constructions. Our pursuit thus expands to further scrutinize these pragmatic–discursive functions (i.e., positive irony), not only because irony constitutes "a particular topic for pragmatic analysis" (Garmendia, 2008, p. 3), but also because it aligns with one of RCG's primary aims of examining and understanding language—how a pragmatic-discursive function can be encoded through the mapping between an element and a component.

Arguably, one of the substantial limitations of human language manifests in its relatively confined inventory of linguistic symbols—be they sound, written, or gestural. These symbols often strive to communicate meanings that cannot be thoroughly delineated (Kecskes, 2008). This very challenge has been encountered by all syntactic theories of language. Kecskes contends that human communication replies on two crucial systems of the cognitive network: (a) the meaning construction system and (b) the meaning prompting system (p. 386). Both systems share a commonality in their utilization of speakers' previous experience and knowledge to generate and interpret meaning within language use; however, they exhibit distinct functionalities (pp. 386–387). The meaning construction system is charged with the task of creating meaning by employing our world knowledge and experiences to interpret and make sense of new information encountered in communicative scenarios. It collaborates with other cognitive processes, including attention, memory, and perception, to forge meaning.

On the other hand, the meaning prompting system carries the responsibility of offering

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cues that facilitate our understanding of language. It achieves this by encoding contexts of prior usage of linguistic expressions into lexical units (words), which can subsequently act as triggers for meanings upon their reencounter. This system works synergistically with a language's grammar to enable a limited assortment of linguistically combinable forms to encompass a broad spectrum of meaningful scenarios. To encode, while the meaning construction system engenders meaning, the meaning prompting system supplies cues that aid our comprehension of language. Indeed, the RCG framework functions within the purview of the meaning prompting system, given that its central focus lies in the investigation of form-meaning/function pairings in language. Yet, RCG also strives to describe a construction's pragmatic-discursive meaning, which inevitably engages with the more metarepresentational aspects of language (pertaining to the meaning construction system), specifically the cognitive motivations beyond the emergence or creation of meaning.

To explore positive irony, any inquiry must first engage with a specific linguistic expression (form), which serves as a springboard for any meaningful discourse. Accordingly, this research adopts the RCG approach. Indeed, RCG presents itself as a notably integration-accommodating framework (see Chapters 2–3). Beyond its "radical views" concerning the correspondences between diverse elements and components in a construction, it is relatively straightforward and simplistic to integrate RCG with other cognitive-functional approaches to language.

Capitalizing on the [XAYB] construction, Chapter 5 introduces the explanatory model of Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002), also known as conceptual integration, to explore positive irony against the backdrop of cognitive metarepresentation that is "empirically [or metapsychologically] plausible" (Wilson, 2012, p. 230). Prior to demonstrating how

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conceptual integration may augment our understanding of construction-induced positive irony, it is vital to familiarize ourselves with the thinking model of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), thereby setting the cognitive stage for such conceptual integration analysis. It is essential to clarify that this research does not seek to account for the cause behind the variation or alternation of the [XAYB] construction, but rather to cast cognitive–pragmatic light on the emergence of positive irony from the construction.

This chapter will be structured as follows. Section 5.1 reviews previous studies pertaining to the [XAYB] construction. Section 5.2 delves into the relationship between hyperbole and metaphor—two most prominent figures of speech in ironic expressions—within the conceptual metaphor framework, which underpins the [XAYB] construction. Lastly, Section 5.3 utilizes conceptual blending to elucidate how positive irony arises from the [XAYB] construction, serving as an instantiation of encoded positive irony.

5.1 Previous Studies

Discussions paralleling the [XAYB] construction can be found in Liu et al. (2008), Liu and Hu (2013), and Chuang (2020). This section reviews how the first two groups of authors approach the topic from different semantic perspectives (5.1.1) and how Chuang probes the construction from a cognitive-pragmatic viewpoint (5.1.2).

5.1.1 Excessive Degree Construction vs. Excessive Impact Construction

The first two works (Liu et al., 2008; Liu & Hu, 2013) bifurcate the construction into two subconstructions: (a) Excessive Degree Construction (EDC; see 8a) and (b) Excessive Impact Construction (EIC; see 8b), primarily grounded on a semantic analysis. The authors observe that

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while 2a–b appear to “demonstrate a positional switch of the arguments without switching their semantic roles,” these two sentences must not be treated as “a ‘free’ alternation without semantic consequences” (Liu & Hu, 2013, p. 52). As shown in Figure 17, the two distinct syntactic forms (2a-b) have indeed undergone a shift of semantic roles in the course of their syntactic alternation. The alternating constructions are hence argued to “represent two different form-meaning associations in line with their [Verb-Resultative] combinations” given their structural resemblance (p. 54). 8a (EDC) and 8b (EIC) can be further illustrated through the schematized alignments in Figure 18.

8 a. 我 羨慕死 他 的 好運 了。
Wo *xianmu-si* *ta* *de* *haoyun* *le*
1SG envy-die 3SG GEN good.luck PRF
‘I envy his good luck to death.’
(Liu & Hu, 2013, p. 51; glossing original)

b. 他 的 好運 羨慕死 我 了。
Ta *de* *haoyun* *xianmu-si* *wo* *le*
3SG GEN good.luck envy-die 1SG PRF
‘His good luck made me envious of him to death.’
(Liu & Hu, 2013, p. 52; glossing original)

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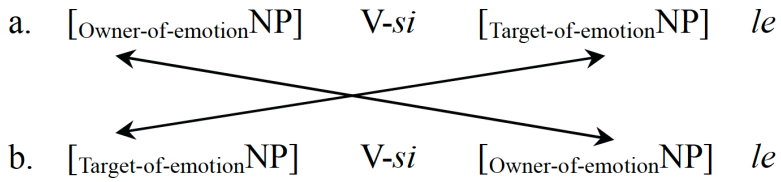

Figure 17. Positional shift between Owner-of-emotion and Target-of-emotion (Liu & Hu, 2013, p. 52, capitals original)

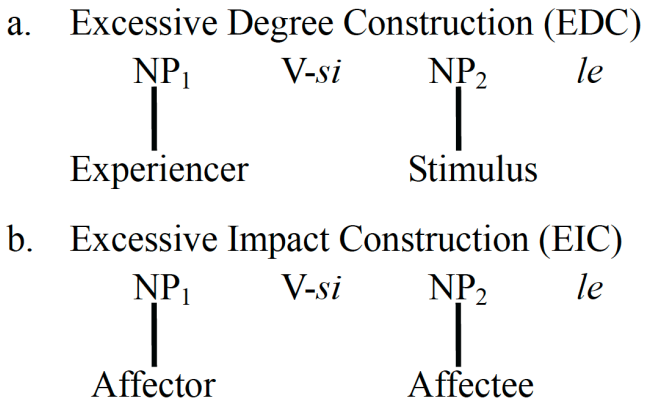

Figure 18. EDC vs. EIC constructions (Liu & Hu, 2013, p. 57)

Specifically, EDC encodes an Experiencer-to-Stimulus relation wherein the *sǐ*-EDM modifies the experiential state, whereas EIC emphasizes "the impact of an Affector onto the Affectee" (p. 58). The former is a degree-attributing construction that profiles the "stative relation of an Experience towards a Stimulus target," while the latter is an impact-depicting construction that "takes the bearer of emotion as an Affectee in a causative relation" (p. 84, capitals original). However, it should be acknowledged that both Liu et al. (2008) and Liu and Hu (2013) have scrutinized a broader phenomenon that may encompass the [XAYB] construction, but the EIC/EDC alternation inherently differs from the positive-ironic construction of [XAYB]. In fact, the authors did not include any [XAYB] instance in their studies. In a sense,

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[XAYB] presents a higher level of analytical complexity in several ways. Frist, the subjects or "topics" of the sentences are syntactically removed. Second, the Owner-of-emotion vs. Target-of-emotion relation (Fig. 1; capitalization original) or the Experiencer–Stimulus and Affector–Affectee relations (Fig. 2; capitalization original) are confined to two Chinese pronominal cases (see 1a–b). Third, the [XAYB] expressions are found to only admit a limited number of emotion verbs. While the authors took into account the "participating verbs" (p. 59) and "associated verbs" (p. 81) that enter the alternation constructions based on their Google searches (dated May 12, 2010; p. 61), they did not explore the relationship between such verbs to provide a pragmatic–discursive explanation despite their functionalist claim. All in all, the authors have formulated a rather cogent account of the EDC/EIC alternation, largely contingent upon the syntactic and semantic dynamics of Mandarin grammar.

5.1.2 V-*sǐ-nǐ-le* vs. V-*sǐ-wǒ-le*

Chuang (2020) stands out as the pioneer in scrutinizing the [XAYB] construction, proposing its analysis as a syntactic alternation between two distinct subconstructions (see Table 2), labeled as V-*sǐ-nǐ-le* (VSNL) and V-*sǐ-wǒ-le* (VSWL). This investigation embarks with a novel understanding of the Chinese taboo word 死 *sǐ* 'die,' which carries a cultural taboo, showcasing its evolution into an extreme degree modifier (the *sǐ*-EDM) as a result of hyperbole and metaphor. Even though the *sǐ*-EDM is recognized widely when used to modify adjectives and adverbs in Mandarin, the word *sǐ* 'die' is generally avoided in verbal communication due to the negative imagery (*fear*, *misfortune*, etc.) associated with the term.

Chuang explores the VSNL/VSWL alternation using a constructionist approach but extends beyond simple structural and semantic descriptions to uncover the cognitive-pragmatic

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potential of the alternation (see 9a–b, Chuang 2020, p. 200; glossing original). The VSNL/VSWL alternation features several syntactic peculiarities regarding word order that renders it "illusional" (p. 200) or "puzzling" (p. 202), viz., zero inflection (ZI), zero anaphora (ZA), and topic-comment alignment (TC) in Mandarin Chinese. Of note is the very last one (TC) that straddles the boundary between syntax and pragmatics (see Tables 2–3). The three sectors of Chinese grammar play a crucial role in one's making correct or commonsensical inferences of Mandarin sentences (Li & Thompson, 1979; Chen, 1986; Shi, 1989), in large part because Chinese uses inferences exclusively (LaPolla, 1990) and is considered a "pragmatic ordering language" (Huang, 2013). In other words, one must inevitably take into consideration the pragmatic motivations underpinning the use of a Chinese sentence for any such inference-making (see LaPolla, 1990, 1995; Li & Thompson, 1979, 1981).

9 a. 愛死　　你　　了。 (VSNL)
Ài-sǐ　　*nǐ*　　*le*
love-die　2SG.ACC　CRS
'I love you to death!'

b. 愛死　　我　　了。 (VSWL)
Ài -sǐ　　*wǒ*　　*le*
love-die　1SG.NOM　CRS
'I love you to death!'

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Table 2. VSNL ([[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N] *le*]; Chuang, 2020, p. 209; glossing original)

	Example	Type
a	我 羨慕死 你 了。 *wǒ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *nǐ* *le* I envy-die you CRS I envy you to death.	VSNL-1 *wǒ*: subject (agent) *nǐ*: object (patient) SVO: syntax-level
b	我(,) 羨慕死 你 了。 *wǒ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *nǐ* *le* I envy-die you CRS I envy you to death.	VSNL-2 *wǒ*: topic (agent) *nǐ*: objet (patient) TC: discourse-level
c	我(,) 羨慕死 你 了。 *wǒ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *nǐ* *le* me envy-die you CRS You envy me to death.	VSNL-3 *wǒ*: topic (patient) *nǐ*: subject (agent) TC: discourse-level

Table 3. VSWL ([[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ W] *le*]; Chuang, 2020, p. 210; glossing original)

	Example	Type
a	你 羨慕死 我 了。 *nǐ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *wǒ* *le* you envy-die me CRS You envy me to death.	VSWL-1 *nǐ*: subject (agent) *wǒ*: object (patient) SVO: syntax-level
b	你(,) 羨慕死 我 了。 *nǐ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *wǒ* *le* you envy-die me CRS You envy me to death.	VSWL-2 *nǐ*: topic (agent) *wǒ*: objet (patient) TC: discourse-level
c	你(,) 羨慕死 我 了。 *nǐ* *xiànmù-sǐ* *wǒ* *le* you envy-die I CRS I envy you to death.	VSWL-3 *nǐ*: topic (patient) *wǒ*: subject (agent) TC: discourse-level

Chuang further analyzes the VSNL/VSWL alternation into three cognitive stages in terms of transitivity (see Table 4) that operates with certain types of emotion verbs (EV) entering the construction. The alternation can be schematized as [[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W] le], where the EVs ([EV$_{trans}$]; Stage I) together with the *sǐ* EDM form the Chinese transitive verb-resultative (VR)

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construction ([[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$) that subcategorizes as its object only the Chinese pronouns *nǐ* 'you' and *wǒ* 'I' (i.e., [[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W]; Stage II). Lastly, Stage II takes the sentence-final particle *le* to complete the construction ([[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W] *le*]; Stage III). It should be noted that both 9a and 9b must be interpreted based on the construction ([[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W] *le*]) as a whole rather than from any syntactically sound segmentation of the patterning (e.g., [[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W]). Stages I and II do not yield the constructional meaning vested in Stage III that licenses the VSNL/VSWL alternation. As a CRS marker, *le* figures prominently in engaging the roles of ZI, ZA, and TC (p. 209; see also Tables 2 and 3 for how the three factors interact in sense making based on different levels of pragmatic inferencing).

Table 4. Stages of the VSNL/VSWL alternation (adapted from Chuang, 2020, p. 208; glossing original)

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
	EV$_{trans}$	[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W]	[[[[EV$_{trans}$] *sǐ*]$_{trans}$ N/W] *le*]
VSNL	*ài nǐ* love you	*ài-sǐ nǐ* love-die you love you to death	*ài-sǐ nǐ le* love-die you CRS love you to death
VSWL	*ài wǒ* love me	*ài-sǐ wǒ* love-die me love me to death	*ài-sǐ wǒ le* love-die I CRS love you to death

To highlight the role of pragmatics that is encoded in the construction, Chuang investigates the emotions that interact with the *sǐ*-EDM during the alternation, noting that only five Chinese EVs are found to participate, viz., *love*, *hate*, *miss* (as in *I miss you*), *worry*, and *envy* based on his BCC data (p. 210). Three out of the five EVs (i.e., *love*, *hate*, and *worry*) can be categorized into various sets of "primary emotions" (see Arnold, 1960; Plutchik, 1980; Ekman

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et al., 1972; Tomkins, 1984; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987), although *envy* and *miss* do not seem to fit into any category (Chuang, 2020, p. 211). As Chuang further argues, however, *miss* is an "implied" or "presupposed" form of affection, while the kind of *envy* that participates in the alternation is a "non-malicious envy" (Parrot & Smith, 1991, p. 23), which is considered a "socially or culturally mediated term" (p. 211) used for expressing someone's admiration for the positive qualities in another person. This also applies to *hate* in that the speaker who adopts *hate* in the alternation does not intend to communicate his or her revulsion toward the hearer but some sort of affection disguised in a seeming complaint (p. 212). In a word, these EVs all serve to enhance the bonding between the interlocutors who make use of the VSNL/VSWL alternation. However, Chuang did not proceed to address yet another important pragmatic–discursive aspect of the VSNL/VSWL alternation, namely the positive ironic function encoded in the construction, although he mentioned in passing a connection between positive irony and the hyperbolic use of the *sǐ*-EDM.

5.2 Hyperbole and Metaphor

The aforementioned authors have indeed recognized, albeit without conducting a detailed investigation, the critical roles of metaphor and hyperbole in the conversion between literal and figurative meanings of *sǐ* 'die,' which functions as an extreme degree modifier. The *sǐ*-EDM contributes crucially to the constructional meaning of the alternation as a booster for affection and emotion that makes possible the alternation between the subconstructions of VSNL and VSWL (see Tables 2–3), or in our terminology, the [XAYB] construction. It merits mentioning that we have reclassified the VSNL/VSWL alternation as [XAYB] as this designation more aptly characterizes the alternation from a higher metarepresentational level.

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This section centers on the stylistics of irony (otherwise known as the *stylistic approach*; Boutonnet, 2006, p. 29)—notably, *metaphorical irony*, *hyperbolic irony*, and even *something in between* from a cognitive–functional perspective as opposed to the traditional treatment of the two as tropes in the literary practice. Hyperbole and metaphor are the primary cognitive tools to provide for the effects of positive irony (see Giora, 1997; Colston & Gibbs, 2002; Pexman & Olineck, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 2012; Carston & Wearing, 2015). For terminological consistency, we will address hyperbole and metaphor as rhetorical devices (or, alternatively figures of speech), rather than tropes in the literary tradition, here and in the subsequent discussion. In what follows, we will delve into the cognitive mechanisms of hyperbole and metaphor—two prominent rhetorical devices frequently associated with the production of irony in general—in terms of how they are relevant to the creation of positive irony.

5.2.1 Hyperbole and Metaphor for Irony

Ironists are generally assumed to flout the first Gricean maxim (Quality) in the Cooperative Principle for communication (Grice, 1975), because they do not mean what they appear to be saying at the surface structure of language—namely, a disparity between sentence meanings and utterance meanings, also known as *nonverdicality* (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Colston, 2000), *counterfactuality* (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Katz & Lee, 1993; Pexman et al., 2007) or *untruthfulness* (Dynel, 2016). This may involve all kinds of implicature in relevance to the immediate context of and the mutual knowledge between the interlocutors required for encoding (speaker) or decoding (hearer) an ironic function within a given expression. Indeed, human language involving figures of speech often engage in counterfactual thinking (Byrne, 2002, 2016). This implies that speakers furnish alternative outcomes for events that have already

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happened or currently exist, as these rhetorical devices deviate from reality or direct representation of the world. Counterfactual thinking allows human beings to think flexibly and abstractly, and to understand alternative scenarios (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 2012; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). However, such counterfactual expressions are not normally perceived as lies (McCarthy & Carter, 2004), owing to several reasons: (a) the speaker's intention, (b) common knowledge and convention, (c) the context of communication, and (d) cognitive processing.

When speakers employ rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, metaphor, and irony, they typically do not intend to mislead or deceive their hearers (Chisholm & Feehan, 1977; Sorensen, 2007; Meibauer, 2014), barring situations when that is indeed their intent. This can be attributed to the shared knowledge and conventions between the interlocutors (Gibbs, 1994; Sperber & Wilson, 1986a; Wilson & Carston, 2007). The understanding of the distinctions between lies and rhetorical devices can be enhanced by the (immediate) communication context involving the conversational participants (Hymes, 1974; Clark, 1996; Verschueren, 1999). Additionally, although both lies and figures of speech are grounded in counterfactual thinking, they necessitate different cognitive processes (Barsalou, 1999; Giora, 2003; Gibbs, 2014). In essence, although these rhetorical devices rely on implicature, which inevitably engages counterfactual thinking, they cannot be equated with varieties of lies.

As noted by Dynel (2016c), an ironic implicature may be piggybacked on the *as-if-to-say* implicature (Grice, 1975; see also Garmendia, 2007) resulting from the use of metaphor that flouts the maxim of Quality, and is hence, an "irony-after-metaphor order of interpretation" (Dynel, 2016, p. 265). Dynel's claim is well supported by Colston and Gibbs (2002) in their experiments in which the participants take longer time to process irony than metaphor, and in

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which metaphorical irony requires more time for listeners to comprehend than simple ironic expressions (p. 74). Although Grice did not look deeper into the interactions between metaphor, hyperbole, and irony (or other figures of speech), such cross/inter-figure piggybacking or compounding (see Popa-Wyatt, 2020 for *figure compounds*) is ubiquitous in human languages.

Hyperbole (or *overstatement*), known as "the neglected sister of metaphor and irony" (Popa-Wyatt, 2020, p. 91), has not received "serious analytical attention" in comparison with other dominant figures of speech such as metaphor and irony (Carston and Wearing, 2015, p. 79). The experimental literature (notably, in psychology and psycholinguistics) has recently treated hyperbole as a type of irony. For example, Gibbs (2000; see also Colston & Keller, 1998; Colston & O'Brien, 2000) concludes that hyperbole together with jocularity, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, and understatement comprises the "five main forms of irony" (Gibbs, 2000, p. 339). Whether hyperbole should be classed as irony remains open to debate. However, what is crucially derived from the various lines of debate (theoretically or experimentally) is that hyperbole, metaphor, and irony are closely intertwined with each other at the metarepresentational level from a usage-based standpoint. Essentially, these figures may combine to form a "more encompassing rhetorical device" (Popa-Wyatt, 2020, p. 92).

In fact, the two "paradigmatic cases of hyperbole" that mesh with other figures of speech are *hyperbolic metaphor* and *hyperbolic irony* (p. 95). In the former case, hyperbole functions as the input for metaphor to build on (metaphor as the dominant/driving figure), while in the latter, hyperbole is meant for facilitating the production of irony (irony as the dominant/driving figure). The prominent status of metaphor and irony, if compounded with hyperbole, can be realized from the syntactic alignments of the terms (i.e., metaphor and irony as headwords). Otherwise

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stated, hyperbole serves as the facilitator in these figure compounds.

5.2.2 Metarepresentational Schemes of Irony

A question then presses: *If the three figures (hyperbole, metaphor, irony) are permuted, what would be the result?* We propose three combination possibilities, or rather, three metarepresentational schemes of irony: (a) *hyperbolic irony* [hyperbole ➞ irony], (b) *metaphoric irony* [metaphor ➞ irony], and (c) *hybrid irony* [hyperbolic metaphor ➞ irony], in which the arrow symbol (➞) denotes a *leading-to* relation. In fact, the hybrid irony can be understood as using hyperbolic metaphor to construct irony, with both hyperbole and metaphor being the input. It is pertinent to note that when the three figures come into the mix, irony is always the dominant and driving force of a figure compound, because it is the need for expressing an ironic thought that the speaker presses into service hyperbole and metaphor. This suggests that there may exist some hierarchy of the rhetorical devices, which is hardly touched upon in even the most-updated irony literature (see Carston & Wearing, 2015; Popa-Wyatt, 2020).

Hyperbole (*quantitative shift*) relies on the shift of quantity or magnitude along a scale, while metaphor (*qualitative shift*) involves a multi-dimensional shift of quality (Carson & Wearing, 2015, p. 88). Essentially, hyperbole is used as an "interpretive effect" (Popa-Wyatt, 2020, p. 95) or as "a [scale-based] cue to the speaker's mocking, scornful or contemptuous attitude" (Wilson, 2017, p. 211), while metaphor is employed for "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). By metaphor, we speak of *conceptual metaphor* in compliance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a. 1980b). CMT comprises three primary conceptual metaphor types: *structural metaphor* (*Life is a journey*), *orientational metaphor*

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(*Happy is up*), and *ontological metaphor* (*Personification*) (see also Reddy, 1979; Grady, 1997; Kövecses, 2003, 2005, 2010). It is interesting to observe that Lakoff and Johnson as well as many CMT scholars have not provided an in-depth account of hyperbole (or other rhetorical devices except metaphor) despite these other devices' figurative nature. Following Lakoff and Johnson, we treat hyperbole and metaphor, both *loose* uses of language (Sperber & Wilson, 1986b), as operating within the greater conceptual metaphor system. We shall argue similarly for the *sǐ*-EDM in the [XAYB] construction below.

The [XAYB] construction involves an excessive degree modifier (*sǐ*). As an element of a construction (RCG-based), the *sǐ*-EDM plays a crucial role that contributes exclusively to the constructional meaning as a whole. At first glance, *sǐ* seems to naturally assume a metaphorical role. In fact, 10a–b could be paraphrased as *I worry about you so much* ***as if*** *I were dying* or *I worry about you so much* ***like*** *I'm dying*. Such a hybrid irony (hyperbolic–metaphoric) as the XAYB construction behaves in a way similar to a *broad-scope simile* (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014) or *open mapping* (Croft & Cruse, 2004) that has come to be conventionalized as a *narrow-scope simile* (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014) or *narrow mapping* (Croft & Cruse, 2004). It surely takes one's cognitive capacity for metaphorical reasoning (notably, analogy and association) to make sense of a seemingly unsuitable use of the *sǐ* EDM in the sentences. It is evident that the EDM is hyperbolically and figuratively charged. High-affectivity words like *sǐ* display a typical bipolarity feature (i.e., negative semantic prosody) packaged in the lexical form. The mixture of hyperbole and irony is a rather natural pattern in human languages as they both sever to evaluate and are meant for "the business of expressing how the speaker feels about how things turn out compared to how they were expected" (Popa-Wyatt, 2020, p. 100).

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10 a. 擔心　死　你　了。

Dānxīn　*sǐ*　*nǐ*　*le*

worry　*sǐ*-EDM　2SG.ACC　CRS

'I freakin' worry about you!'

b. 擔心　死　我　了。

Dānxīn　*sǐ*　*wǒ*　*le*

worry　*sǐ*-EDM　1SG.NOM　CRS

'I freakin' worry about you!'

To conclude, we argue not only for the *sǐ*-EMD to encode both hyperbole and metaphor, but also for hyperbole to be subsumed under the conceptual metaphor system. For a specific linguistic phenomenon to be dubbed as such, several conditions need be met. The role of conceptual metaphor must not be naturally assumed, merely because the understanding of given concept requires conceptual processing. Although many linguistic phenomena call for metaphorical inferencing (figurative reasoning), they may not be classed as conceptual metaphor. Essentially, the schema of said linguistic phenomenon must be applicable to a subset of other expressions—namely, the many "metaphorical expressions." For instance, the metaphorical expressions based on *Life is a journey* may include *The lovers ran into some problems on the way*, *The couple plan to go down the road together*, and *How do you deal with a bumpy relationship?* More importantly, this same linguistic phenomenon must not only be recognized by speakers of a given speech community (or culture), but also be working at a more basic (higher-up) level of human cognition (Su, 2002; Littlemore, 2003; Kövecses, 2003, 2005).

From the usage-based stance per se, the hyperbolic use of EDMs is a well attested fact in modern Mandarin Chinese. Hyperbole as a rhetorical device has figured cross-linguistically and

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cross-culturally in the human world. Fundamentally, the use of hyperbole is motivated by a speaker's need to amplify the volume or magnitude of something being evaluated with its scalar value going up, therefore, the orientational metaphor—Hyperbole is **MORE** (*hyper-* as going beyond, *OED*) or Hyperbole is **UP** (*hyper-* as going above, *OED*). In brief, our postulation states that CMT, as a complementary model to our RCG approach, can facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the XAYB expressions. Lastly, however, a key question has yet to be dealt with, that is, *What then is a cognitively sound explanation for the XAYB construction to be positive ironic*? As noted by Wilson from the perspective of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986b; Wilson & Sperber, 2002/2012), the rhetorical devices (i.e., hyperbole and metaphor, amongst others) are "not inherently ironical" (Wilson, 2017, p. 201). To elucidate this matter, we will bring in *conceptual blending theory* to address this central concern.

5.3 Conceptual Blending Theory

The major objective of (conceptual) Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998, 2000, 2002), also known as conceptual integration, is to create scenes that fit the "human scale" (Oakley & Pascual, 2017, p. 426) at which people divide the world into entities so as to manipulate them in human life. This division of the world is an "imaginative achievement" (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 8). By establishing the mental spaces for blending, we are entitled not only to "human-scale understanding", but to "global insight" (i.e., more than what linguistic forms communicate) and "new meaning."

One of the most important aspects of such efficiency (human scale), insight, and creativity is the "compression of vital relations" achieved through blending (p. 92; see also Holyoak & Thagard, 1995). Such vital relations (see details in Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, pp.

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92–102) include *Change* (e.g., age, translation), *Identity* (most basic vital relation), *Time* (related to memory, change, continuity, simultaneity, non-simultaneity, causation), *Space* (blends frequently compress over space), *Cause–Effect* (related to Time, Space, Change), *Part–Whole* (e.g., metonymy), *Representation* (related to Identity and Part-Whole), *Role* (e.g., President [input space I: role] Obama [input space II: value]), *Analogy* (depends on Role-Value compression), *Disanalogy* (grounded on Analogy; i.e., Analogy for Disanalogy), *Property* (features of an entity), *Similarity* (for elements sharing properties), *Category* (through Analogy [outer-space vital relation] and Similarity [inner-space-vital relation]), *Intentionality* (regarding hope, desire, fear, belief, memory, dispositions, and attitudes), and *Uniqueness* (obtained automatically in the blend). It should be noted that some of these vital relations of compression are meant for inner-space compression (e.g., Property, Similarity, Category, Intentionality) while others typically, if not invariably, work toward outer-space compression (e.g., Identity, Cause–effect, Analogy, Disanalogy). This explains a seeming functional overlap between Analogy and Similarity. Indeed, the former operates on an outer-space link between elements in different input spaces and the latter on an inner-space link. As noted by Fauconnier and Turner (pp. 92–93), links between the input mental spaces (i.e., outer–space links) can be compressed into relations situated within the blend (i.e., inner-space links). For example, Cause-Effect and Time can be scaled down to tighter Cause-Effect and briefer Time in the blend (p. 92), namely, a process from outer-space to inner-space relations (see pp. 65–67 for "the Bypass" example).

To successfully arrive at the blended space, the vital relations of compression need to undergo an "imaginative" array of mappings (i.e., linear connections or correspondences based on similar topologies) between different input spaces otherwise known as *mental spaces* or *frames* (p. 105). Such frames are obtained via one's "premium attention to vital relations, scales,

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force dynamics, and image schemas" based on their "internal" (not inner-space) vital relations (p. 106). Technically, the basic diagram of conceptual blending is composed of four mental spaces (see Figure 19 below): a generic space, two input spaces, and a blended space.

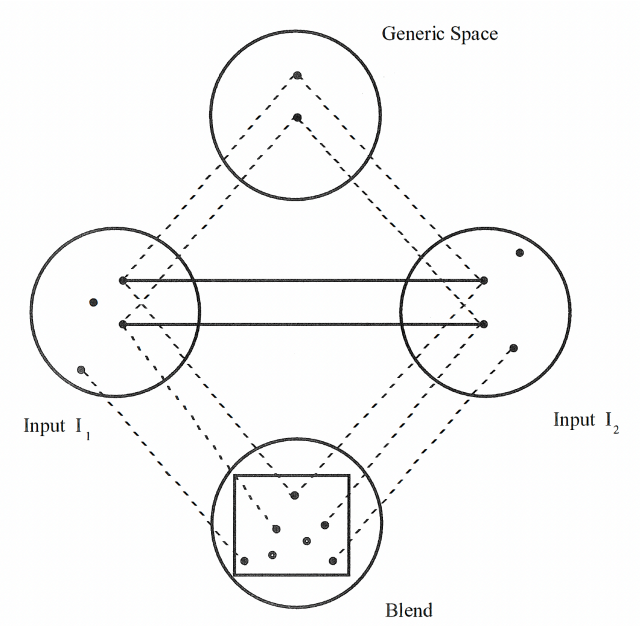

Figure 19. The basic diagram of blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 46)

The generic space (topmost level) maps onto the two input spaces or inputs (middle level) what they have in common. The blended space or the blend (bottom-level) develops an emergent structure (emergent meaning through blending) not found in the inputs. Fauconnier and Turner further propose four types of integration networks: *simplex*, *mirror*, *single-scope*, and *double-scope*. The simplex network prototypically applies to human beings (p. 120). For instance, the blended space of *Paul is the father of Sally* or *Paul is Sally's father* (Figure 20) can be decomposed into (a) an organizing family framework of father and daughter (input to the left) where father and daughter are elements recognized as roles and (b) a counterpart frame (to the

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right) with two elements *Paul* and *Sally* as values, based on the Role-Value vital relation. The mirror integration network can be realized in Arthur Koestler's famous riddle of the Buddhist monk (see p. 39; Figure 21), where the blend involves the inputs that are nearly identical. This mirror network reflects human capacity for logical and counterfactual reasoning that operates on various vital relations such as Identify, Space, Time, Change, Analogy, and Disanalogy.

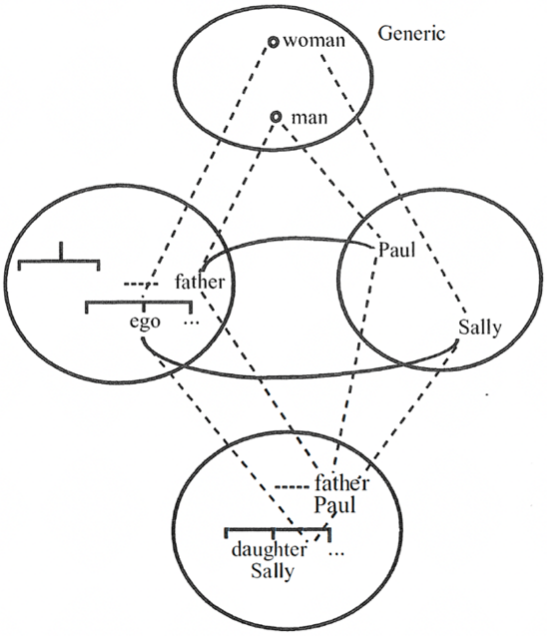

Figure 20. A simplex network
(Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 121)

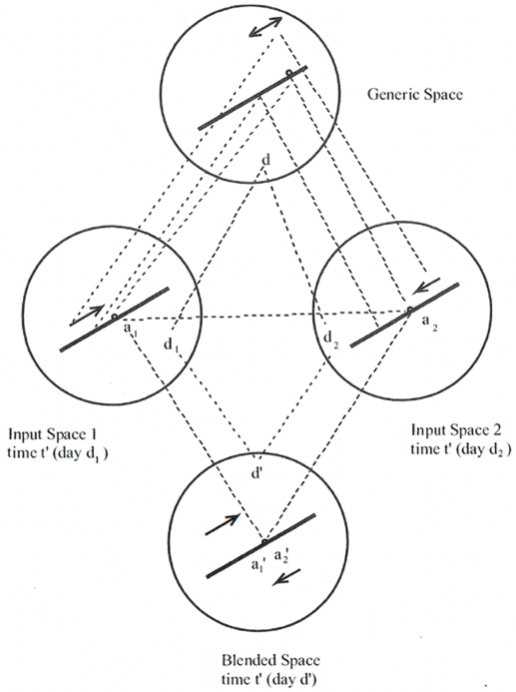

Figure 21. A mirror network
(Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 45)

The single-scope network requires two input spaces with different organizing frames, with either frame projected to "organize the blend" (p. 126) but not the other and is hence "highly asymmetrical" (p. 127). Found in the description of "…one CEO landed a blow but the other one recovered, one of them tripped and the other took advantage, one of them knocked the

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other out cold" (p. 126) are two organizing frames *boxing* and *business*, respectively (Figure 22). However, the description (total of the sentences as the blend) is organized by the boxing frame as can be realized in the various predicates such as *blow*, *trip*, *take advantage*, and *blow* that are indicative of typical activities in boxing. Finally, a double-scope network (p. 131), as the name implies, calls for two inputs with different (often clashing) organizing frames, while the blend features a third organizing frame partaking of the two mentioned frames from the inputs. A defining example is *same-sex marriage* (p. 269; Figure 23) whose input spaces represent two different and clashing organizing frames.

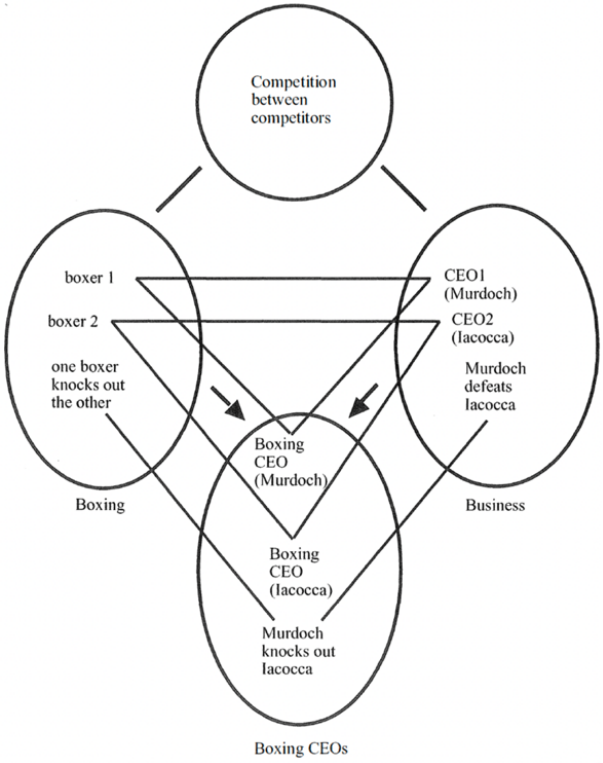

Figure 22. A single-scope network
(Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 121)

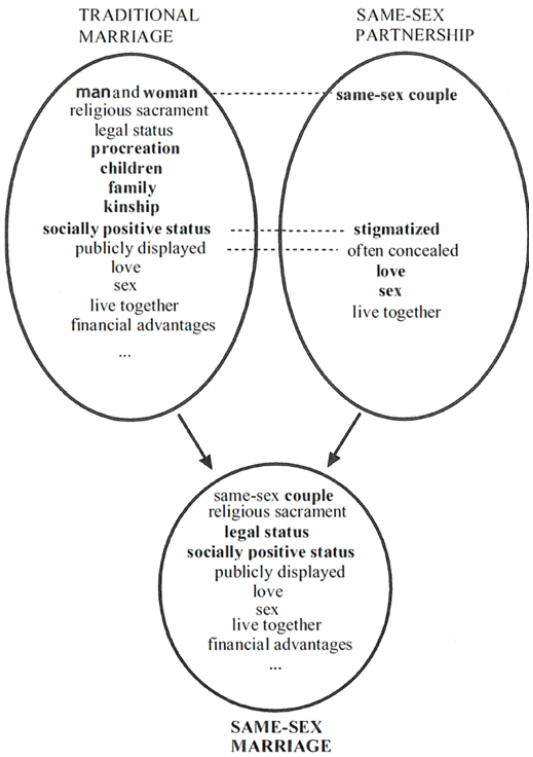

Figure 23. A double-scope network
(Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 271)

Conceptual blending theory features the four integration networks as its central focus. To better realize conceptual integration in terms of "the role of implicit and explicit assumptions in

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meaning construction" (Coulson & Oakley, 2005, p. 1517), Coulson and Oakley propose to include the *grounding box* as the "*post hoc* analytic device" in their blending diagrams for specifying three basic elements of all discourse—namely, presentation space (input space I), reference space (input space II), and blended space. Inside the grounding box are two distinct variants of ground: *deictic* and *displaced* (p. 1517). The former refers to "the specific regulative conditions of real usage events" (i.e., time, place and relative status of the participants) and the latter a set of deictic coordinates that associate with the former (i.e., *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, *this*, *that*, *here*, *there*, *these*, *those*, *now*, *then*, *yesterday*). The displaced ground not only assumes a crucial role in establishing the mental spaces, but also facilities the reference to "objects and states-of-affairs" that are available only from memory or fantasy.

Any emergent (blended) meaning therefore develops both from the contextual meaning described in the grounding box and from the input spaces. In their "French Clinton" example (alluding to Clinton's sexual scandal with the then-underling Lewinsky during his presidency), whether one input space serves as the presentation or reference space may greatly affect the result of conceptual integration. In Figure 24, American politics serves as the organizing frame to present the event that references French politics. In Figure 25, French politics is used as the presentation space to reference American politics. Although both strategies may lead to the same blended space, they tell very different perspectives. The former focuses on presenting American politics (higher morality) against French politics (lower morality) to highlight the Clinton scandal as immoral. The latter, on the contrary, calls attention to French politics as the presentation space in order to downplay the political ethics (Clinton's unethical personal conduct) American politics maintains over the "more important global issues" such as fighting terrorism or global warming. The interpretative nuances promoted by the presentation–reference

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switch are not immediately graspable except through the grounding box that outlines different factors that determine the contextual richness, including readership, news agencies, ideological stances, etc. (see details in Coulson & Oakley, 2005, pp. 1519–1519). Though a *post hoc* analytic device other than an *a priori* predicative tool, the grounding box helps recover how a text can be differently interpreted depending on one's capacity for background and contextual elaboration. To better illustrate how positive irony can be cognitively processed and appreciated, we shall adopt Coulson and Oakley's model (the blend diagram with a grounding box) as a modified framework for conceptual integration.

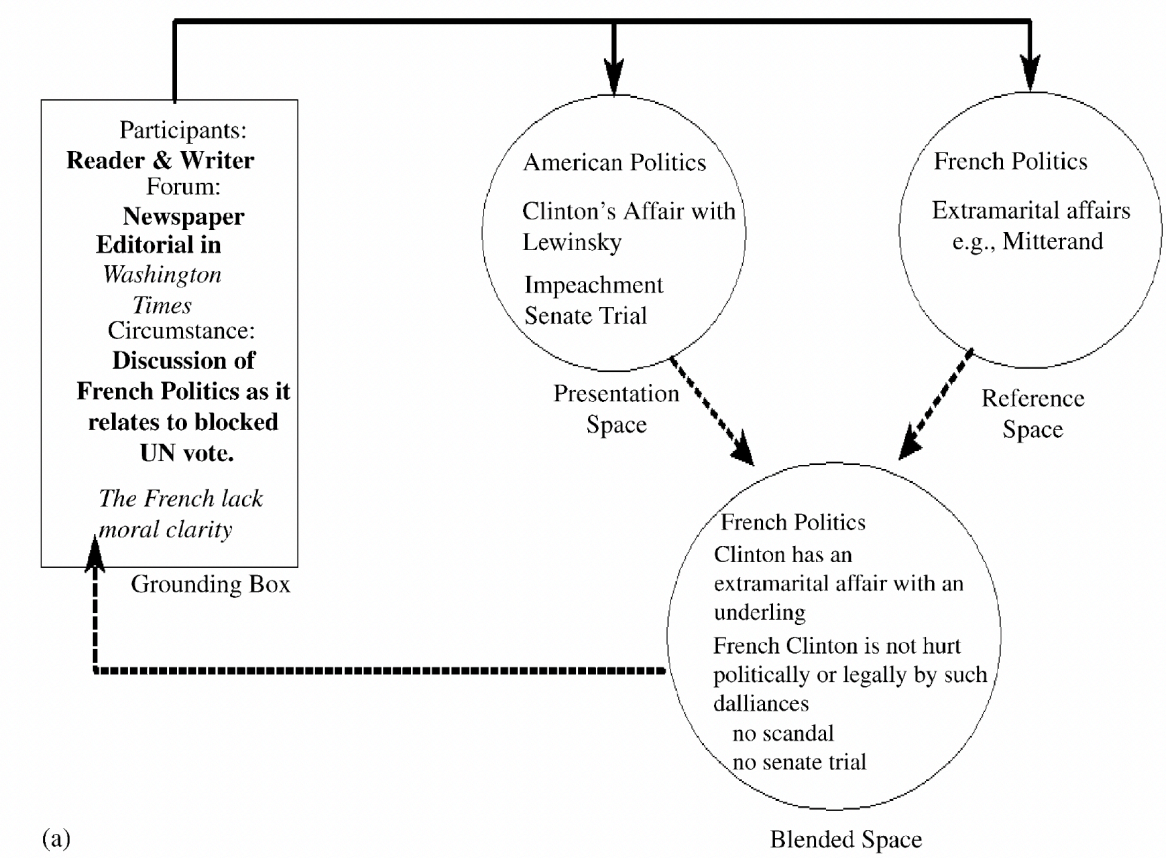

Figure 24. French Clinton and moral clarity (Coulson & Oakley, 2005, p. 1519)

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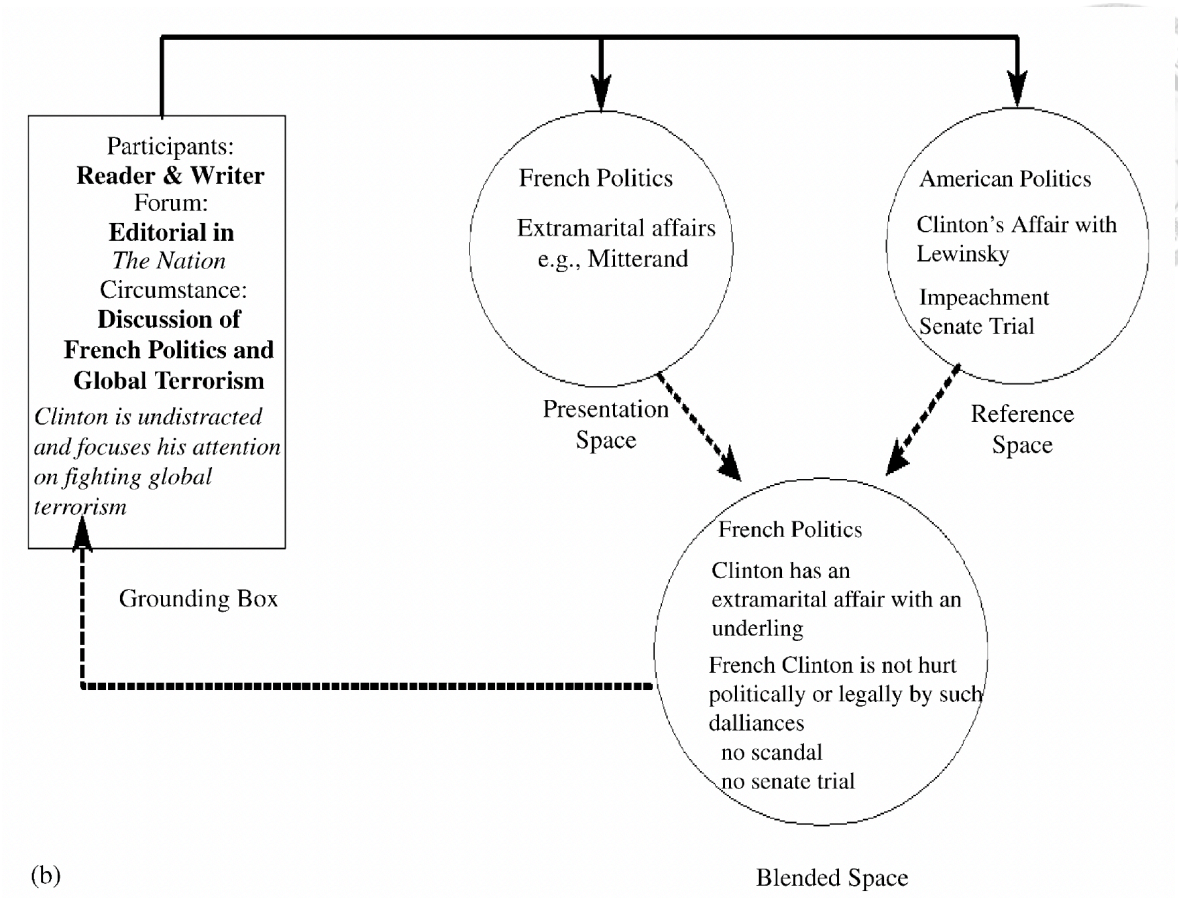

Figure 25. French Clinton and global terrorism (Coulson & Oakley, 2005, p. 1519)

5.3.1 Conceptual Blending for the [XAYB] Construction

To put into practice how the positive ironic construction can be approached from a conceptual integration perspective, we have worked out the blending diagrams (based on 5a–b, see below) first for the [XAYB] construction in this section to show how it could be unpacked (decompressed) into the integration network (see Figures 26–28). Suppose a couple goes on a date in a café after a long separation due to their work in different cities. When they finally meet, the boy (A) says to the girl (B) "*I miss you so much*" using the Chinese [XAYB] construction (see 5a–5b). Figure 26 diagrams the conceptual integration between the presentation space (i.e., "a literal source-domain meaning"; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 127) and the reference space

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(i.e., a metaphoric target-domain meaning, p. 127). The former (input I) presents an existing [XAYB] construction where *sǐ* is used as a regular EDM (see Chapter 4 for the constructionalization of *zéi*), while the latter (input II) references a specific pragmatic–discursive function arguably encoded in the former based on *sǐ* as a taboo word. The generic space for the two input spaces states that both are identical in syntactic structure and are both used to express one's emotion toward the other in a dialogue. Given the grounding box that sketches out the fundamentals, however, the diagram does not seem convincing enough for the input spaces to compress directly into the blended space that ultimately engenders a positive ironic reading.

11 a. 想 死 你 了。
Xiǎng *sǐ* *nǐ* *le*
miss *sǐ*-EDM 2SG.ACC CRS
'I freakin' miss you!'

b. 想 死 我 了。
Xiǎng *sǐ* *wǒ* *le*
miss *sǐ*-EDM 1SG.NOM CRS
'I freakin' miss you!'

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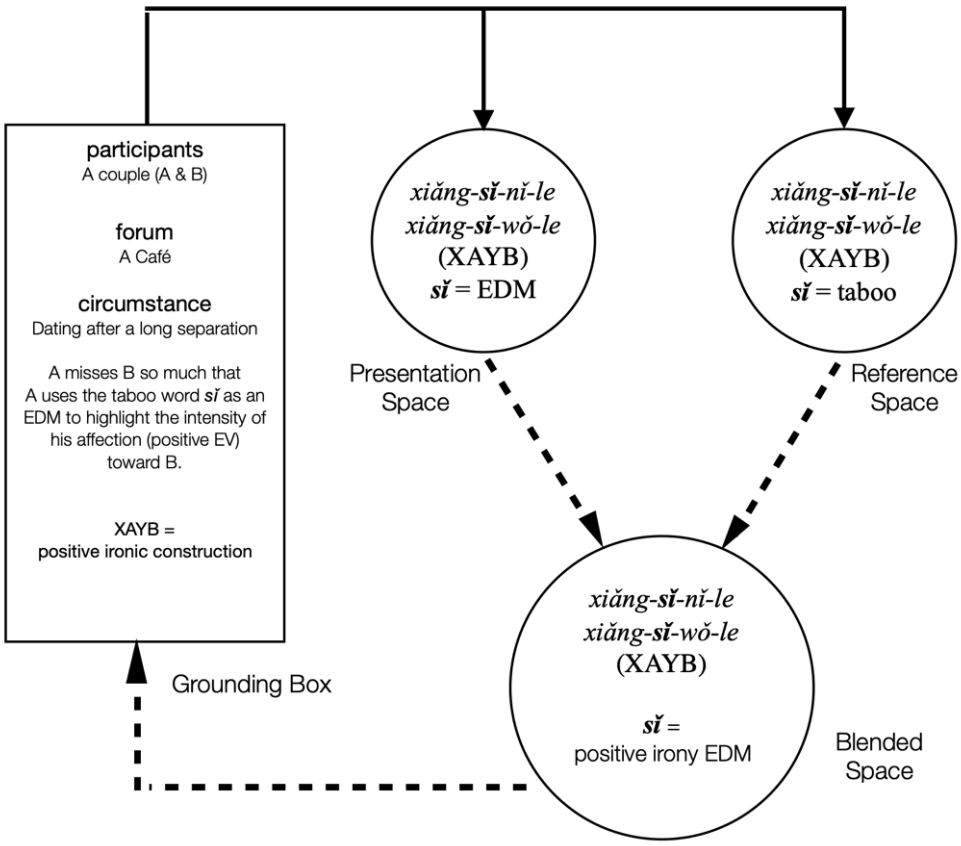

Figure 26. The [XAYB] Diagram

We therefore propose to add an intermediate blend to Figure 26 to better realize the vital relations being compressed for positive irony during the integration (see Figure 27). In this intermediate blend, we take the participating EVs (*love*, *hate*, *miss*, *worry*, and *envy*) into serious consideration, because like the *sǐ*-EDM, the EVs assume a crucial part of the construction that contributes to a positive ironic interpretation. Without said EVs, the [XAYB] construction would at best be viewed as the alternation between the EDC and EIC constructions (see Liu et al., 2008; Liu & Hu, 2013) without inducing any ironic meaning, positive or negative. With the participation of the EVs, however, interesting vital relations may come to be better visualized. In fact, the presentation space contributes a more conventionalized interpretation of the [XAYB]

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that most speakers would not easily associate with irony. Indeed, it is a commonplace strategy to use a highly negatively valenced word to perform degree modification; any EDMs as such may frequently select negatively evaluated words or phrases whose intensity is in turn enhanced by said EDMs (Chuang, 2020). However, the positive EVs come into play, a totally different construal emerges not only because the EVs connect to *positive affect* in our working memory (Miller, 2011) but because they prompt a remarkable mismatch between the *sǐ*-EDM and the EVs.

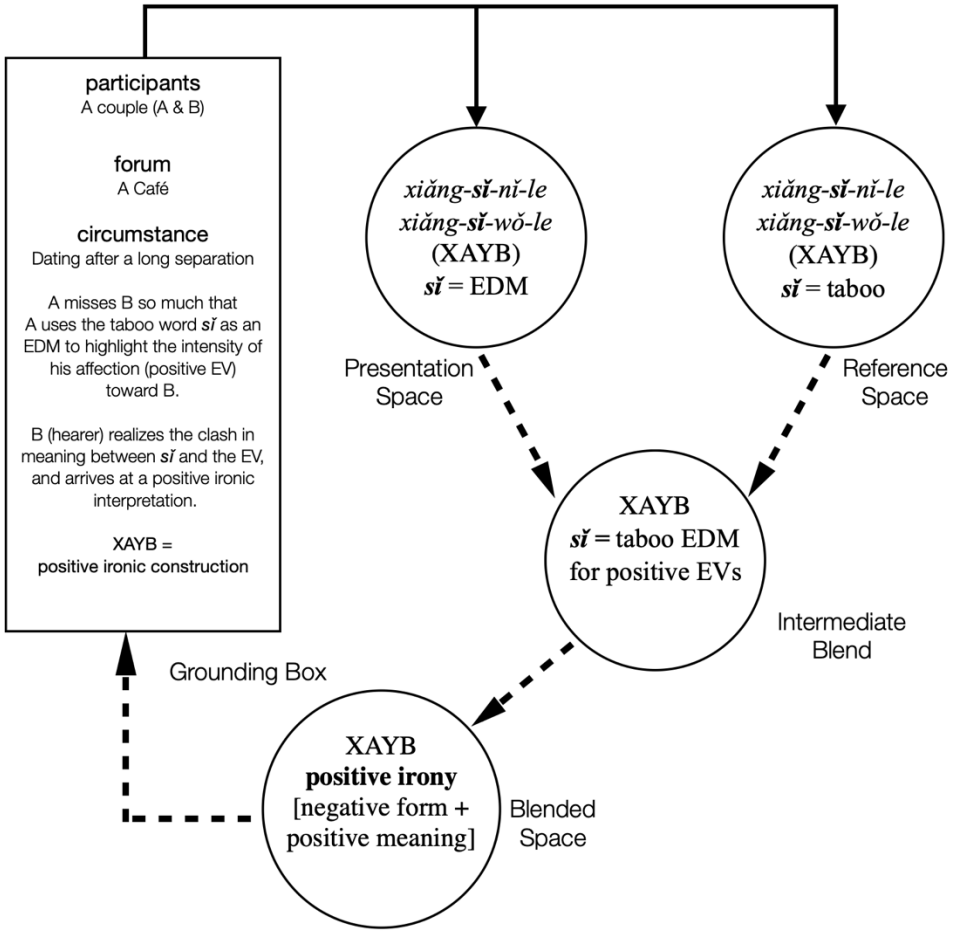

Figure 27. The [XAYB] Diagram with an Intermediate Blend

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In other words, the intermediate blend profiles a transitional structure where *sǐ* assumes a two-fold role, viz., both an EDM (literal interpretation) and a cultural taboo word (pragmatic-discursive interpretation). The new meaning (function) that develops from an existing word is common during language change, because "conceptualization of the experience encoded by the lexical items (content words) occurring in the construction reasserts itself, so to speak, in the new function" (Croft, 2021, p. 127). Moreover, the positive EVs have come into the constructional mix, making the linguistic mix even more pragmatically complex. This midway space provides the "structure of experience" (Croft, 2001, p. 108) and "conceptualization of experience" (Croft, 2001, p. 110). In the intermediate blend, the *sǐ*-EDM does not select only words or phrase of negative affect; instead, it starts to modify positive terms.

Indeed, *xiǎng* 'miss' is realized as a form of longing admiration (Tissari, 2012) that falls in the category of love or affection (Kövecses, 1990; see also Wierzbicka, 1999) and is therefore, positive. This creates a semantic clash between a positive element (the *sǐ*-EDM) and a positive element (positive EV *xiǎng 'miss'*) similarly found in the [*zéi*-POS] construction, which further elucidates the metarepresentational clash between the presentation space (literal) and the reference space (figurative). A salient vital relation amongst the others then resides with Disanalogy (based on Analogy), which plays a crucial role in manifesting a contrast in any ironic blends. Even though Intentionality may not play as great a role as it does in the case of [*zéi*-POS] due to different degrees of grammaticalization, a speaker must "intend" to make use of the lexeme *sǐ* as a degree marker rather than others. Intentionality as such is highly related to, if not a direct product of, the vital relation of Cause–Effect. Lastly, a distinctive taste, which we argue to be positive irony, emerges with 5a and 5b—namely, an activated function predicated on a sematic clash (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, pp. 49, 61–64, 85–86, 129, 140). This emergent

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meaning construal is Uniqueness, which is automatically obtained in the blend.

At first glance, the two input spaces may appear to be an instantiation of the conceptual integration network of *mirror* due to their structural resemblance. However, what's at work here is indeed a double-scope—like *computer desktop* (p. 131) and *same-sex marriage* (p. 134)—not only because the *sǐ*-EDM and the participating EVs stand for different organizing frames, but because the presentation and reference spaces each profile a different function. This is what makes pragmatics interesting in that it largely operates on implicature—other than syntax and semantics alone—that replies on a speaker's cognitive capacity to exploit an available inventory of linguistic constructions for construing a (new) meaning. We may accordingly conclude that all ironic expressions operate within the double-scope network.

In addition, we propose to include a new inner-space vital relation in the blended space—*Dissimilarity*, as opposed to Similarity. In Figure 26, we have explained that via Disanalogy (predicated on Analogy), the clash between the presentation and reference spaces is identified; therefore, no inner-space Similarity relation is compressed into the blend. However, in the case of positive irony ([negative form + positive meaning]), Dissimilarity as an important inner-space relation should be compressed as a result of Disanalogy and be duly recognized in the blended space because the positive ironic scheme has retained a remarkable clash between the *sǐ*-EDM and the modified term (*miss*). What is interesting about the [XAYB] expressions as positive irony is that on the one hand, the two terms each typifies a distinct semantic prosody, while on the other hand, their mismatching properties (i.e., Property) have been pragmatically resolved in the blend.

The composed intermediate space stipulates the linguistic conditions for the metarepresentational scheme of the [XAYB] construction, which further provides for its positive

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ironic reading. Lastly but more importantly, the Intentionality vital relation must again be brought to the fore in the blend. A defining feature of irony as discussed earlier on (see Chapter 2) lies in the speaker's attitude or intention. To speak ironically, the speaker certainly needs to mean for his/her utterance to be ironic, a highly subjective decision to be made by the speaker. Intentionality, therefore, plays a crucial role in signifying any ironic content. Other crucial factors relevant to positive irony can be seen in the grounding box (as a *post hoc* analytic tool) into which the input spaces (presentation and reference), composed intermediate space, and the blended space shall feed. The box contains participants (a couple: A and B), forum (a café, which is often an ideal place for dating), circumstance (dating after a long separation), *sǐ* as a taboo-based EDM, the hearer's realization of the meaning clash between the *sǐ*-EDM and the positive EVs, and ultimately, *sǐ* as an positive ironic EDM.

More critically, we'd like to present a third diagram for the [XAYB] construction (Figure 28) which figures as a "construction" in the sense of Construction Grammars (Goldberg, 1995; Croft, 2001). Considering phenomena rooted in pragmatics, such as irony (negative or positive), humor, mockery, and pranks, context undoubtedly plays a critical and determining role. However, as a construction, the [XAYB] expressions must already encode not only the semantic or syntactic facets of language, but also those of pragmatics or discourse that incorporate specific contextual information required for being ironic. As a construction, the [XAYB] patterning must in and of itself be seen a conglomerate that, to an extent, accounts for different linguistic configurations. In a word, the presentation space and reference space must directly compress into the emergent positive ironic structure in the blend, because "the grammar of the construction confers the conceptualization of the experience" (Croft, 2021, p. 113). However, the construction's grounding box does not need to be all-inclusive; it merely needs to elaborate the

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crucial factors required for (positive) irony. In summary, Figure 27 provides a clear explanation of the process by which the [XAYB] expressions undergo transformation from a mere linguistic construction to one that can be ironically interpreted. Additionally, Figure 28 illustrates how the grammatical patterning of [XAYB] can be constructionalized as a positive ironic construction. Lastly, it warrants noting that from a constructionist point of view, it is often possible to bypass the intermediate blend and directly access the intended blend.

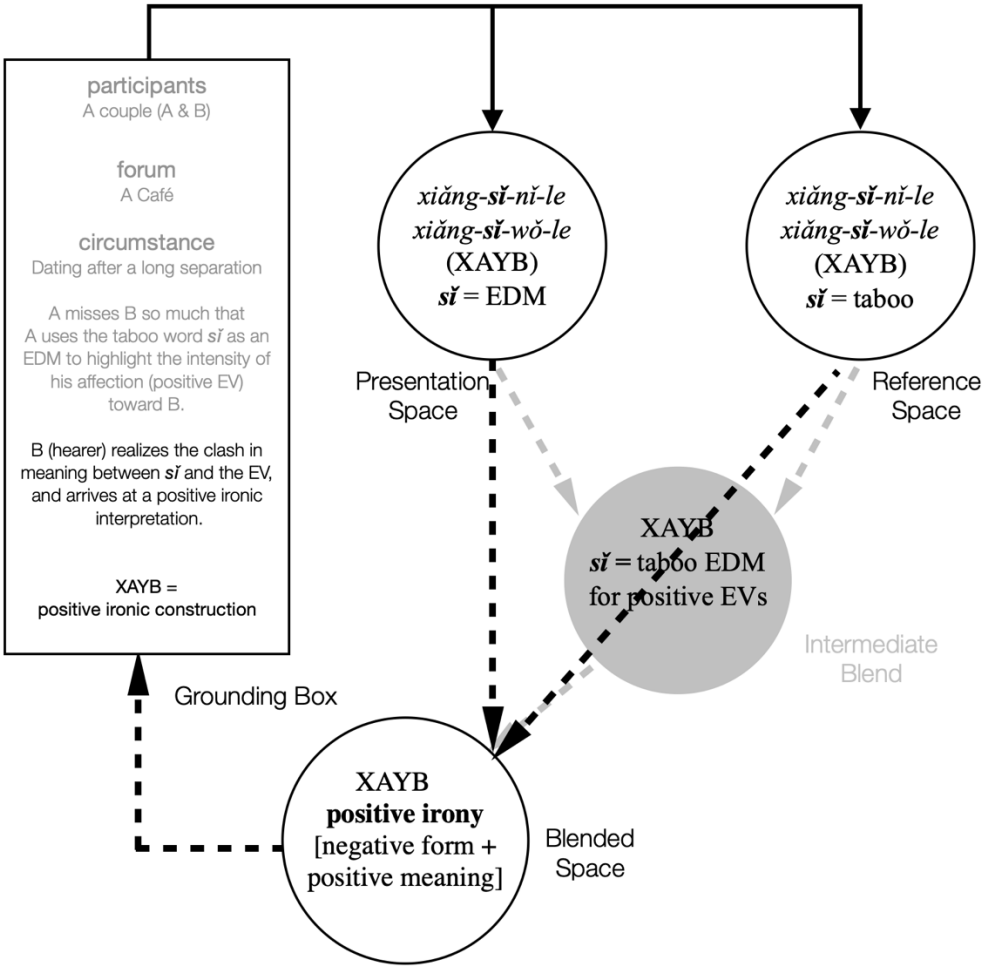

Figure 28. The [XAYB] Construction as Positive Irony

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5.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter examines how positive irony figures as a result of constructionalization based on the [XAYB] construction. As noted in Chapter 4, Radical Construction Grammar (RCG) proves to be an inclusive framework, which synergizes well with other compatible theories. It specifically allows for a theoretical-inferential model that delineates the emergence of pragmatic-discursive meanings or functions prior to their constructionalization. In an attempt to elucidate this process, remedy this, we employ Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to probe how hyperbole and metaphor—two rhetorical devices most commonly associated with irony—aid in the creation of ironic expressions. Through the scrutiny of the *sǐ*-EDM, it is evident that these figures of speech indeed operate within the overarching cognitive mechanism of conceptual metaphor.

In spite of the fact that EDMs are found to play a crucial role in crafting irony, whether through hyperbole or metaphor, CMT appears somewhat limited in its ability to shed light on the nuanced meanings encoded in the [XAYB] construction. In response to this limitation, we turn to Blending Theory to account for the emergence of positive irony by applying the cognitive mechanisms involved in conceptual integration. While both Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory are theoretically compatible, they former carries greater explanatory power due to its detailed integration networks. Additionally, we leverage the concept of grounding box (Coulson & Oakley, 2005) to explicate necessary and pertinent background information. This elucidation illuminates not only the blended potential (as depicted in Figures 26–28) but also the less obvious intermediate blend (see Figure 28).

Chapter 4 provides an explanation of how the RCG framework examines the so-called form-meaning/function pairings through the [*zéi*-POS] construction. It also brings in the foundational principles of grammaticalization and constructionalization to facilitate the

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understanding of language change within a construction (see Traugott & Trousdale, 2013). Chapter 5 takes a deeper dive into the more intricate and nuanced facets of meaning related to positive irony. It specifically investigates how positive irony emerges through conceptual blending, as part of the constructional meaning of the [XAYB] construction.

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CHAPTER 6. THE DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION: THE [*búshì…ma?*] CONSTRUCTION

The present chapter focuses on the third positive-ironic construction in Mandarin Chinese, the *búshì* interrogative ([*búshì…ma?*]) as exemplified in sentences 12a-c. The term 不是 *búshì* 'not'

12 a. 你 不是 吃 辣 嗎?
Nǐ *búshì* *chī* *là* *ma*
2SG.NOM not eat spicy PTL
'Don't you eat spicy food?'

b. 他 不是 專家 嗎?
Tā *búshì* *zhuānjiā* *ma*
3SG.NOM not expert PTL
'Isn't he a professional?'

c. 我 不是 已經 講 了 嗎?
Wǒ *búshì* *yǐjīng* *jiǎng* *le* *ma*
1SG.NOM not already say ASP PTL
'Haven't I already said that?'

comprises two lexemes, namely, 不 *bú* 'not' and 是 *shì* 'yes', literally meaning 'not yes.' The interrogative particle *ma* functions as a question particle (PTL) and typically occupies the sentence-final position. The [*búshì…ma?*] expressions are a fairly common type of Mandarin interrogatives, and their surface structures resemble regular binary or polar questions. Speakers commonly employ the [*búshì…ma?*] expressions to elicit a confirmatory response—either yes or

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no as the felicitous answer—from their interlocutors (Chao, 1968; Li & Thompson, 1981). It is important to note that [*búshì…ma?*] is a negative yes-no question (e.g., *Aren't you a linguist?*) as opposed to a positive yes-no question (e.g., *Are you a linguist?*) The use of both types of questions conforms to the logical operation of exclusive disjunction, as explained by Blackburn (1994), which holds that only one of a pair of alternatives is true, while the other is not (either X or Y, but not both).

Numerous investigations have posited that the [*búshì…ma?*] pattern commonly serves as a rhetorical question (Zheng, 1996; Tao, 2020) or a queclarative (Veloudis, 2018). Specifically, when utilizing 12a-c in discourse, Chinese speakers employ them to affirm or reassert their position on a matter, rather than merely seeking confirmatory feedback from their interlocutors. Often, a [*búshì…ma?*] expression is deployed to convey a grievance, accusation, critique, or the like, albeit veiled as a yes-no question. This permits the speaker to leverage an accessible linguistic structure to bring to mind what they perceive to be factual, even though not necessarily with malicious intent. Thus, the construction encodes no fewer than two pragmatic functions: (a) a yes-no interrogative (Type I) and (b) a rhetorical question (Type II). Both Types I and II find expression in a dyadic (two-party), if not strictly bi-personal (two-person), interaction. Prior scholarship has advanced only so far until Chuang (2022) proposes a third pragmatic function (Type III), encoded in the same construction. Chuang draws attention to the fact that the emergent Type III is typically witnessed in a triadic verbal exchange and is intended to promote "positive interpersonal bonding" (Chuang, 2022, p. 288).

Therefore, the complexity of the [*búshì…ma?*] construction lies in its ability to package three pragmatic functions (Types I-III) within a single linguistic form (see 13a–c, adapted from pp. 277–278). Without adequate knowledge of Chinese pragmatics, however, it can be

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13 a. 我 不是 說 我 要 喝 咖啡 嗎?

Wǒ *búshì* *shuō* *wǒ* *yào* *hē* *kāfēi* *ma*

1SG.NOM not say 1SG.NOM want drink coffee PTL

'Didn't I say I wanted (to drink) coffee?'

(Type I: yes-no question/two-party/decontextualized)

b. 我 不是 說 我 要 喝 咖啡 嗎?

Wǒ *búshì* *shuō* *wǒ* *yào* *hē* *kāfēi* *ma*

1SG.NOM not say 1SG.NOM want drink coffee PTL

'Didn't I say I wanted (to drink) coffee?'

(Type II: rhetorical question/two-party/contextualized)

c. 我 不是 說 我 要 喝 咖啡 嗎?

Wǒ *búshì* *shuō* *wǒ* *yào* *hē* *kāfēi* *ma*

1SG.NOM not say 1SG.NOM want drink coffee PTL

'Didn't I say I wanted (to drink) coffee?'

(Type III: rhetorical question/three-party/contextualized)

challenging to reconcile the differences between these functions. Type I is a regular polar question that yields a decontextualized reading, while Types II and III derive a contextualized reading. The distinction between contextualized and decontextualized readings is relative rather than absolute, as verbal communication heavily relies on contextual inference, as illustrated in 13a-c. Chuang characterizes Type I as signifying the literal meaning of the sentence (13a), while Types II and III are depicted as conveying non-literal utterance meaning (13b-c). Type I is a simple yes-no question that does not necessitate specific background knowledge for implied content interpretation. Conversely, Types II and III demand a previous experience for pragmatic inferencing, which justifies their rhetorical status.

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As previously explained in Chapters 4 and 5, contextual (pragmatic) information can be encoded in a construction, albeit not comprehensively. According to Levinson (see Grundy, 2014), the interpretation of this linguistic construction must, to some extent, be "context-independent" as many utterances can convey information about their context, such as *person deixis* (referring to interlocutors), *spatial deixis* (referring to places), *tense deixis* (referring to time), *social deixis* (referring to identity or status), and *discourse deixis* (referring to prior dialogue). Discourse or social deixis can also convey (or, to "echoically mention"; Sperber & Wilson, 1986a) certain emotions or attitudes related to a specific linguistic form, even if they are not directly distinguishable (see Peirce, 1955, for "indexicality"; Sacks, 1992/1995, for "indicator terms"; Fillmore, 1997, and Hanks, 2011, for "deictics"). From a radical pragmatic perspective, as defined by Cole (1981) and Breheny (2002), "all uses of language are indexical" (Grundy, 2014), although some scholars have suggested that "many expressions have both indexical and non-indexical uses" (Potts, 2014, p. 5).

In the preceding chapters, we availed of constructionalization (Chapter 4: [*zéi*-POS] construction) and conceptual integration (Chapter 5: [XAYB] construction) to explicate the cognitive processes underlying the constructionalization of positive irony. This chapter examines the emergence of Type III positive irony stemming from the [*búshì…ma?*] construction. It specifically concentrates on the cognitive-pragmatic (meta-pragmatic) factors involved—both within and between the interlocuters—that give rise to positive irony. This is considered in relation to the various participant roles, such as *ironist*, *object*, *victim*, and *beneficiary*, involved in constructing it. To substantiate our claim, we draw upon Face Theory (Goffman, 1955) to clarify the cognitive-pragmatic mechanisms underlying Type III positive irony.

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The forthcoming sections will be organized as follows. Section 6.1 provides a synopsis of influential studies on *búshì* and the constructions deriving from it. Section 6.2 draws on Face Theory to explain the emergence of Type III [*búshì…ma?*] construction in relation to the participant roles involved in the case of positive irony. Section 6.3 leverages Face Theory to offer fresh perspectives on intersubjectivity characterizing constructions that convey positive irony.

6.1 Previous Studies

A rich literature on *búshì* as a negative operator is available across different lines of Chinese linguistic research. Many treat *búshì* as a discourse marker (Wang, 2008; Yan, 2015a, 2015b; Yin, 2011; to name only a few), while others investigate *búshì* as motivating the constructions of [*búshì wǒ shuō* (不是我說)] (Lu, 2007), [*búshì* (S) + V + (O)] (Tang, 2011), and especially, [*búshì* (S) + V + (NP)] (Ran, 2015), in which a "metapragmatic negation" (as opposed to "syntactic negation") is performed with *búshì* acting as a rapport-oriented mitigating device. Following a similar approach, still others look at distinct *búshì* constructions such as [*búshì wǒ* V *nǐ* (不是我V你)] (Li, 2014) or [*búshì wǒ shuō nǐ* (不是我說你)] (Hao, 2009; Tang & Zhang, 2016; Wang, 2017; Wen, 2015; Yue, 2011) in the spirit of a usage-based model.

Of all the construction-oriented studies on *búshì*, some also center on the syntactic patterning of [*búshì…ma?*]. Zhang (1989) is one of the earliest to have documented [*búshì…ma?*] as a rhetorical question based on selected excerpts from contemporary Chinese literature from which two important attributes are identified: (a) that the negator *búshì* and the sentence-final question particle *ma* should both be pronounced in a "neutral tone" and (b) that *ma* can be syntactically dropped (see 14a–b), because [*búshì…ma?*] is rather by nature a

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14 a. 你 不是 愛 喝 珍奶 嗎?

Nǐ *búshì* *ài* *hē* *zhēnnǎi* *ma*

2.SG.NOM not love drink bubble-tea PTL

'Don't you love to drink bubble (or boba) tea?'

b. 你 不是 愛 喝 珍奶 Ø?

Nǐ *búshì* *ài* *hē* *zhēnnǎi*

2.SG.NOM not love drink bubble-tea

'Don't you love to drink bubble (or boba) tea?'

rhetorical than a regular interrogative. Mao (2010) reports a distinguishing feature between Type I and Type II, viz., expectedness. Qi & Hu (2010) argue that the [*búshì…ma?*] expressions can be sorted into three subtypes based on a speaker's expectation—namely, (a) expected content, (b) counter-expected content, and (c) neutral content. With this "expectedness" in mind, Hu (2011) further attempts to address [*búshì…ma?*] from the perspective of "foregrounding vs. backgrounding" despite his failure to clearly define the interactions (scope-based) between the two. It is worth noting that the rationale behind Qi & Hu's categorization, if functional at all, does not seem to hold well as the authors did not provide an adequate account as to how their findings were classified as such, nor did they address with clarity the intrinsic differences between the constructions of Type I and Type II, much less Type III.

These [*búshì…ma?*] studies have all demonstrated that (a) the [*búshì…ma?*] patterning fulfills the functions of both Type I and Type II—the former acting as a regular polar question and the latter a rhetorical interrogative, (b) that a Type II speaker is necessarily and adequately

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informed of some background knowledge about the "message" conveyed in a [*búshì…ma?*] expression, (c) that Type I and Type II are essentially found in dialogical discourse, and (d) that the investigation of [*búshì…ma?*] is inherently a subject matter of "pragmatics." This notwithstanding, little to no spoken corpus was enlisted in said studies to highlight Types I and II as a dialogical phenomenon. In short, whether a [*búshì…ma?*] expression should read as Type I or Type II depends primarily on a speaker's pragmatic competence nurtured through his/her embodied (interpersonal/interactional) life experiences.

Chuang's (2022) study is the very first work to identify an emergent third function (Type III; see 13a-c) of the [*búshì…ma?*] construction based on evidence from an online qualitative survey (n = 100; 42 males and 58 females) as well as spoken data from a popular Chinese TV show called 愛情保衛戰 *Aiqing Baowei Zhan* 'Love Battle.' He treats both Types II and III as rhetorical questions in that a speaker using them does not seek to obtain any confirmatory response from the hearer to validate his/her belief that is implied in the same linguistic form. Although rhetorical interrogatives generally do not have a proposition determinable by truth values, they indeed behave like some sort of a propositional statement, only couched in interrogative language. One of Chuang's contributions is that he examines the verbal environment of the interlocutors who adopt Type II and Type III expressions. He notes that Type II carries a negative semantic prosody (negative discourse prosody) and is typically found in a two-party dialogue, in which the speaker can strike the hearer as a "critical or aggressive commentator on a topic known to both interlocutors [if not necessarily on the hearer]" (p. 285). Specifically, a Type II speaker may come off as impolite (93%), arrogant (85%), impatient (95%) to the hearer (p. 285).

Intriguingly, this semantically or metapragmatically negative expression is found to have

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emerged in a totally different setting across today's Mandarin speech communities in China. The TV show (*Aiqing Baowei Zhan* 'Love Battle') Chuang used as the source of spoken data features three participants in a conversation, viz., a TV host (*H*) attempting to resolve any problematic love issues between a couple (guests *A* and *B*), married or not. Specifically, *H* is expected to act as a disinterested and experienced negotiator, while *A* and *B* each stand their ground by trying hard to win *H*'s favor so that *H* may take sides with *A* or *B* during a televised 3-party dialogue. Note that unlike Type II, Type III features a 3-party scenario where most of the "shared knowledge" (Verhagen, 2005, 2008) exists only between *A* and *B* but not between *A* and *H* or *B* and *H*.

Surprisingly, the guests are found to start to employ Type II (with negative affect) in this 3-party setting when engaged in a conversational exchange with the host. For instance, when *A* wishes to make known to *H* that *A* used to loan money to *B*, *A* would make an utterance as seen in 15a. Or, when *B* wishes to inform *H* that *B* is never a big fan of spicy food, *B* would similarly couch it in 15b. Both 15a and 15b, if understood as instances of Type II, may easily project an

15 a.	我	不是	借	很多	錢	給	他	嗎?
	Wǒ	*búshì*	*jiè*	*hěnduō*	*qián*	*gěi*	*tā*	*ma*
	1SG.NOM	not	loan	a-lot-of	money	for	3SG.ACC	PTL
	'Didn't I loan him a lot of money?'							

b.	我	不是	說	我	不	吃	辣	嗎?
	Wǒ	*búshì*	*shuō*	*wǒ*	*bù*	*chī*	*là*	*ma*
	1SG.NOM	not	say	1SG.NOM	no	eat	spicy	PTL
	'Don't I say I don't eat spicy food?'							

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unfavorable perception. However, *H* appears to not only accept these retort-like utterances, but oftentimes also start to show empathy toward the speaker. The emergent use of this [*búshì…ma?*] construction is not a usual practice outside the Chinese Mainland (e.g., Taiwan or Hong Kong). Indeed, not all respondents of the survey accept Type III, especially when it is used in a public setting like the TV show, because the construction may be taken to easily threaten the positive face of the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987)—particularly, the host who often serves as a mentor to negotiate between the guests.

6.2 Face Theory

We argue that different participant roles (ironist, object, victim, and beneficiary) are assigned to the speaker and the hearer in accordance with the face wants required for producing positive irony. In what follows, we shall draw on Face Theory (Goffman, 1955/1967) as well as the key issues revolving around the theory (see also Thomas, 1995; Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Leech, 2007, among others) to cast new light on the mechanisms underpinning the assignment of such roles in the use of the [*búshì…ma?*] construction. It is important to note that while both Face Theory and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987/1978) are often deemed similar in their conceptual basis (with certain overlaps), it is crucial to differentiate between them when examining specific communicative functions, such as positive irony.

As a landmark in sociolinguistics, Politeness Theory has provided significant insights into the manners and norms regulating verbal communication. It primarily addresses the strategies used by individuals to mitigate face threats and to maintain harmonious social interaction. To a large extent, the theory has illuminated the intricacies of discourse, in particular reference to the negotiation of social relations. However, when considering the manifestation of

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positive irony, the theoretical underpinnings of Politeness Theory seem inadequate. Positive irony, as a nuanced rhetorical device, extends beyond the politeness strategies posited in Politeness Theory. This is largely because positive irony does not invoke the same cognitive mechanisms as negative irony. In the subsequent discussion, some relevant concepts of Politeness Theory will only be mentioned, where appropriate, to shed light on Face Theory.

6.2.1 Chinese Face for Illuminating Face Theory

The notion of face—a theoretical construct that forms the basis of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory—is used figuratively (or more precisely, metonymically) to refer to one's positive public *self*-image that one seeks to establish in reference to those of one's interactants (or interlocutors, hearers, and addressees). In fact, Goffman did not originate the concept of face himself. The term, as intimated by Redmond (2015), first appeared as an important element in the Chinese culture in the writings of two missionaries to China, Arthur Smith (1894) and John Macgowan (1912), although the latter did not seem to recognize the notion of face as an equally prevalent phenomenon in his own culture. Hu (1944) argues that the Chinese face can be divided into and represented by two monosyllabic lexemes—臉 *liǎn* and 面 *miàn*, respectively. *Liǎn* and *miàn* later expand into two disyllabic terms, namely 臉面 *liǎnmiàn* and 面子 *miànzi* in modern Mandarin (see also Mao, 1994; Pan & Kádár, 2011). Literal translation of these terms into English (or other languages) can result in misapprehension in target-language readers and leaners. Face is often recast as *liǎn* in translation works when it refers to one's physical (biological) face, outside which, however, face needs to be conceived as figuratively profiling a *social construct* (or *social construction*) *of reality* (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018)—e.g., race, gender, and beauty.

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In Chinese culture and politeness research, face may roughly correspond to *miànzi* (based on *miàn*), which embodies the moral high ground much sought after by someone who admires a social code of ethics and honor. *Liǎn* and *liǎnmiàn*, on the other hand, match up with the minimum threshold for acceptable social conduct and value. The differences can be illustrated in 16a–c below, where 16c is more often used in standard Mandarin (as opposed to

16 a. 他 是 不 要 面子 了 嗎?
Tā *shì* *bú* *yào* *miànzi* *le* *ma*?
3SG.NOM LNK not want face ASP PTCL
'Doesn't he care about his good reputation (roughly, *good public image*) anymore?

b. 他 是 不 要 臉 了 嗎?
Tā *shì* *bú* *yào* *liǎn* *le* *ma?*
3SG.NOM LNK not want face ASP PTL
'Is he gonna be so unashamed (roughly, *brazen-faced*)?

c. 他 是 不 要 臉面 了 嗎?
Tā *shì* *bú* *yào* *liǎnmiàn* *le* *ma?*
3SG.NOM LNK not want face ASP PTL
'Is he gonna be so unashamed (roughly, *brazen-faced*)?

Taiwan Mandarin). In contrast, politeness as a folk alternative to face stands for a set of collectively agreed-on behaviors known as "being respectful and considerate of other people" (OED). The Chinese view of face (*miànzi*) not only puts into perspective face and politeness as two different social constructs, but serves to clearly delineate Goffman's Face Theory. In fact, face and politeness (notably, the latter) have been submitted under different lines of research as a

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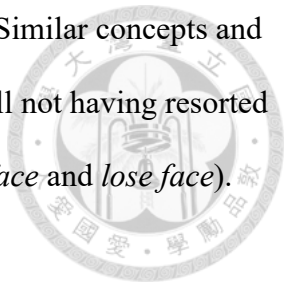
significant subject matter in almost all ancient cultures (Terkourafi, 2011). Similar concepts and expositions can be found across a wide range of culture studies, however, all not having resorted to the metonymic use of face to the same end as has Chinese (e.g., *to save face* and *lose face*).



6.2.2 Face and Facework

As a sociologist and social psychologist, Goffman (1955) defines face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 213). That is, face is the goal interactants seek to achieve. He further posits that,

> [j]ust as the member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also, he is expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present, and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings. In consequence, he is disinclined to witness the defacement of others. (p. 215)

We take the above statement as the mainstay for any occasions of interpersonal bonding (including positive irony) as a metapragmatic goal, because it foregrounds the relevance of maintaining or negotiating the positive image (i.e., desired public self-image) of both the speaker and the hearer during interaction, and is hence a social-interactional phenomenon. This marks only the very first step. To proceed to preserve one's face, one then needs to manage facework during the conversation with one's interactants.

Facework can thus refer to "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing

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consistent with face" (Goffman, 1974, p. 228). More importantly, facework serves to prevent incidents "whose effective symbolic implications threaten face [i.e., threatening event, deed, expressions or incident]" (Goffman, 2005, p. 216). As paraphrased by Watts (2003),

> [t]he construction of our own concept of self and the work we do in social interaction to enable others to construct, reproduce and maintain their self-concepts can be called **facework**. All human social interaction consists of facework of one kind or another, and it may sometimes include linguistic politeness as one of its aspects. (p. 130)

In this vein, facework can be regarded as the process comprising "utterances that are open to interpretation as polite" (p. 130) where the interactants are socially situated. The relationship between face and facework is therefore a *goal* (face) vs. *process* (facework) distinction. It must also be recognized that face wants, negative or positive, must be directed at the hearer within a social-interactional setting (i.e., between speaker and hearer) rather than deriving solely from the speaker's intrapersonal communication. Otherwise, a discussion of face wants would not be able to reflect the nature of social-psychological interaction in human society.

To examine the interactions between the participant roles (i.e., how they are assigned) on the basis of the various face considerations, we must keep in mind that all positive ironic expressions may involve a specific stance-enabled *footing*, viz., "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (Goffman, 1981, p. 128). As illustrated by the brief exchange between President Nixon and a female reporter (Helen Thomas) in Goffman's seminal work *Forms of Talk* (1981,

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pp. 124–125), the President "force[s] a female professional out of her role as a professional…that implies a social definition…" by joking about her outfit (Marks, 2012, pp. 3–4). The joke, however likely to be perceived as sexually (i.e., teasing a female wearing slacks and pants) or racially (i.e., a connotation between the slacks and China) improper from today's perspective, was meant for forming a bond with a well-known female professional. Crucially, the extent of interpretive reversal (from negative to positive interpretation of an ironic expression) the listener can achieve is directly proportional to the degree of solidarity established between the speaker and hearer (Myers Roy, 1981, p. 420). According to Goffman, the President successfully changed the dynamics between himself and the reporter via a footing shift disguised as a joke. Footing as such can therefore be understood as "the stance that a participant adopts towards other participants in verbal interaction" (Watts, 2003, p. 274).

Alternatively framed, the shift in footing in positive irony can be regarded as a speaker's "meta-message," signaling to the hearer that the speaker is entering a state of "play" (Bateson, 1972), and thereby, his/her positive-ironic utterance is not meant to be taken at face value (Myers Roy, 1981, p. 421). This meta-message closely aligns with Goffman's (1974) concept of "play frame," in which the application of positive irony serves as a strategic move by the speaker to toy with the hearer's expectations, directing the hearer toward the literal meaning, while intending something else entirely. The play frame typically characterizes non-serious scenarios and is devoid of harmful intent. The hearer's successful interpretation of this ironic utterance can be viewed as a counter-move, which signals the hearer's grasp of the game's rules and competence to engage with the speaker's game (see also Fine, 1983; Sutton-Smith, 1997). As such, positive irony can function to "set up a situation for ironic exchange" (Myers Roy, 1981, p. 421).

We contend that positive irony is an effective way to display a change in the speaker's

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relationship with the listener by exhibiting a significant shift in stance and attitude (i.e., footing shift), which is often linguistically marked through the politeness strategy involving what Goffman refers to as threatening event, deed, expression, or incident, or what Brown and Levinson term as *face threatening acts* (FTA; Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987, p. 65–82). The strategy may not only be bald on record (blunt and direct) but also *bold* on record (cheesy and sassy). Thus, every positive-ironic expression may serve as an indication of a shift in footing and reflects the ironist's attitude, irrespective of the speaker's proficiency in rhetoric.

In the process of facework, different face wants are therefore evaluated, guiding the ironist toward the choice of a specific positive-ironic construction (e.g., [*búshì…ma?*]) prior to verbalizing it. According to Brown and Levinson, these evaluations are the different aspects of "face as basic wants" as a social-interactional construct (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987, p. 62). Thus, it is crucial to examine positive irony through the lens of the dynamic interaction between the different participant roles, and how this interaction influences their respective face considerations, if relevant. These considerations are indeed enacted within each PR's individual "theory of mind" (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Saxe & Kanwisher, 2003; Wellman & Liu, 2004; Astington & Baird, 2005), signifying a person's social-cognitive capacity to attribute mental states—beliefs, intentions, desires, emotions, knowledge, and so on—to oneself and to others, recognizing that others possess distinct mental states from one's own. The concept of theory of mind can be understood to correspond to the "model of mind" in the field of Cognitive Linguistics (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Knoblich et al., 2001; Stalnaker, 2002; Papafragou & Musolino, 2003; Kissine, 2012; Van Hout & Janssen, 2018). As facework is a cornerstone of verbal communication, every member of a specific culture or speech community must possess a rudimentary comprehension of the desired face wants of themselves and others engaged in the

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conversation for a successful use of positive irony (and other rhetorical devices).

6.2.3 Face for Type III [*búshì…ma?*] Construction

Like the other positive-ironic constructions, Type III [*búshì…ma?*] operates on the [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$] schema. In producing a Type III expression, the speaker needs must calculate the face wants desired by both him/herself and his/her interactant so as to maintain a desired speaker-hearer relationship (i.e., positive interpersonal bonding). The facework for positive irony is more complex than that of negative irony. On the one hand, the ironist cares for his/her own face wants. That is, the speaker wishes to preserve his/her positive face (positive public self-image, be it to be appreciated, respected, complimented, etc.), meanwhile trying to keep up his/her own negative face (i.e., not anticipating any subsequent counteraction). On the other hand, the ironist has to provide for the hearer's face wants. The speaker wishes to maintain the hearer's positive face (e.g., to be liked or respected by the speaker) and negative face (e.g., not to be imposed upon by the speaker; see Kitamura, 2000). Facework as such may therefore appear to be highly unlikely due to a flagrant FTA element ([*búshì…ma?*]) in play.

As noted by Chuang (2022), Type II represents the most salient use of [*búshì…ma?*], viz., a rhetorical question serving to threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Specifically, type II is an exemplar of bald-on-record politeness, fundamentally ruling out the other politeness strategies (i.e., positive, negative, and off-record). Therefore, face (politeness) does not seem to be of concern to the speaker, because the FTA is so plain sailing that it leaves the hearer no room for not taking it in. This constitutes a typical case of Type II [*búshì…ma?*], where the speaker attends to his/her own face wants alone, without seeking to maintain a positive interpersonal

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relationship. The speaker is therefore not a positive ironist (nor a negative one). Type II can be viewed as an archetype of bald-on-record politeness or, as could be preferred by some, bald-on-record *impoliteness*, where potential conflict and offense may ensue.

Type III [*búshì…ma?*] construction emerges out of its Type II counterpart. To be precise, Type III is refashioned to serve a rather different purpose—for creating a positive interpersonal bond. In this case, the speaker looks out for the hearer's face wants by exactly applying an FTA-charged expression (Type II). The kind of facework at issue is much more complicated, because it is generally assumed to be counterintuitive to bond with someone by doing the opposite—notably, via a bald-on-record strategy that features little to no minimization of imposition.

For a positive ironist, the FTAs are every inch a rhetorical device whereby the speaker clinches a footing shift that enables himself/herself to stay in or perch back on the catbird seat of conversational dynamics. This explains why some politeness theorists may have criticized Brown and Levinson or Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) for not taking into account the "cultural face" from other human societies than the Western world, or rather, just the Anglo world (Wierzbicka, 1991). For example, Matsumoto (1989) and Ide (1989) do not see Brown and Levinson's theory as adequate for explaining the politeness strategies in Japanese culture. Mao (1994) further concludes that both Chinese and Japanese cultures evaluate the concept of face from the perspective not only of the speech environment involving the speaker and the hearer (i.e., public self-image), but also of the community as a whole (i.e., public image).

6.3 Assuming the Participant Roles of Positive Irony

Previous studies on irony have either provided a mere simplistic description of the relationship between the speaker, the hearer, and irony, focusing mainly on the characterization of ironic

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expressions, or have been limited to a two-party (dyadic) interaction. However, our research has discovered that the interactions between the three roles appear more intricate and complex in the case of positive irony. Muecke (1969/2020) in his seminal work, *The Compass of Irony*, distinguishes between *object of irony*, which is what the speaker is being ironic about, and *victim of irony*, who is someone directly involved in an ironic situation because of his/her "confident unawareness" (p. 34; see also Muecke, 1970/2018). In fact, the object of irony may represent a wide range of things, such as a person, an event, a situation, and even a statement (i.e., the very original instantiation of "echoic mention"; see Sperber & Wilson, 1986a). It is whatever is being targeted in a way that creates an ironic effect.

The victim of irony, on the other hand, is the person or group who is directly or indirectly affected by the ironic statement or action. This could be someone who is the subject of ridicule, criticism, or mockery, or it could be someone who is being indirectly targeted by an ironic expression. In other words, a victim of irony may or may not be the object of irony, although Muecke (2020, p. 35) notes that objects of irony are often victims of irony. Moreover, the victim of irony is often the person who is not in on the joke or who fails to see the ironic distance between what is being said or done and what is meant, no matter s/he is the object of irony or not. Muecke notes that when objects and victims of irony overlap, the former can divide into two classes, (a) Subtype I: those to whom the ironist speaks ironically and (b) Subtype II: those about whom the ironist speaks ironically. This classification, however, is mainly based on Western literary classics such as Greek, Roman, and English literature, rather than real-life verbal communication. The first subtype refers to a character to whom the ironist speaks in a given play, while the second subtype refers to a character of whom the writer speaks with an ironic tone (e.g., Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* or Evelyn Waugh in *Helena*). This categorization of

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irony roles can be represented in a notional scheme, as shown in Figure 29, where a solid line with an arrow (→) characterizes an intended ironic relation that extends from the speaker to the hearer, while a dotted line (⇢) depicts a non-intended relation.

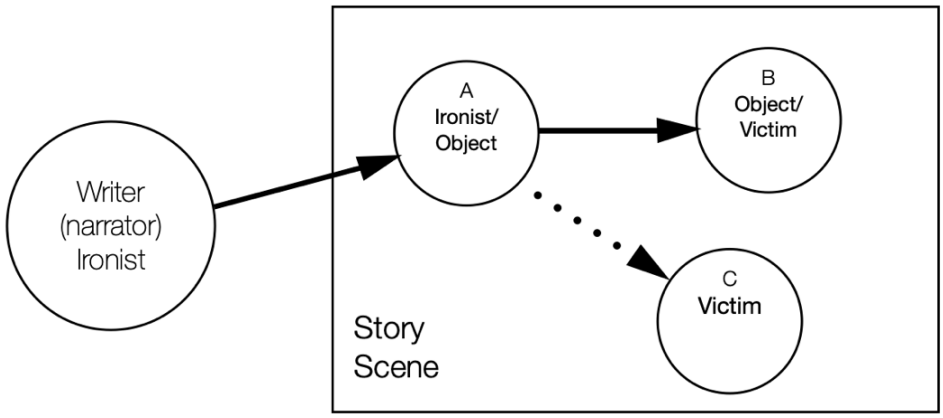

Figure 29. Muecke's assignment of "irony roles" (our creation; Muecke 1960/2020, pp. 34–39)

As an example, person *A* (the ironist) speaks ironically to person *B* (the object of irony) in subtype I. If *B* is unaware of the irony and takes *A*'s words literally, *B* may become a victim of the irony. If there is a person *C* who overhears the conversation, there is a possibility that *C* may also become a victim of the irony if *C* takes *A*'s words literally against him/herself, even though *C* is not the intended target. As a meta-ironist, the writer or narrator can utilize irony to comment on *A* (object of irony) in subtype II, which pertains to *A*'s behavior, speech, or ideology that warrants ironical treatment. Such a technique of assigning irony roles is frequently evident in dramatic and situational ironies in literary works, with the intention of entertaining readers or viewers.

Muecke's role classification elucidates the complex metarepresentational aspects inherent in irony. However, in real-world communication, there is no such powerful narrator to assign

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roles of irony without being actively involved in face negotiation. More importantly, in a real conversation, the victim of irony does not need to be someone unaware of the speaker's ironic intention, however implicit or explicit the ironic content. Rather, the victim is often bluntly targeted, particularly in the context of positive irony. In order to demonstrate the interplay between the interlocutors in the context of positive irony, we propose three different interaction schemes for all three positive-ironic constructions. In these schemes, the ironist-to-object relation is indicated by a solid arrow line (→), whereas the ironist-to-victim relation is depicted by a dotted arrow line (⇢).

Interaction Scheme I (Figure 30) is frequently identified (most common) in instances of positive irony, within which the [XAYB] and [*zéi*-POS] constructions operate. The [XAYB] construction (see Chapter 5) confines the interaction to two persons (a dyadic relation), primarily due to its inherent nature as an alternate construction which limits its interlocutors to *nǐ* 'you' and *wǒ* 'I.' In this interaction network, the hearer—targeted as object of irony—is fully aware of the speaker's intent to foster a bond, and, consequentially, falls victim to the speaker's positive irony. Interestingly, the [*zéi*-POS] construction (see Chapter 4) has potential applicability to Interaction Scheme II (Figure 31). This scheme similarly depicts a 2-party relation within a specific context. Nevertheless, the ironist may direct ironic intent toward parties other than the primary hearer within the immediate context, even in the absence of direct interaction with these third parties.

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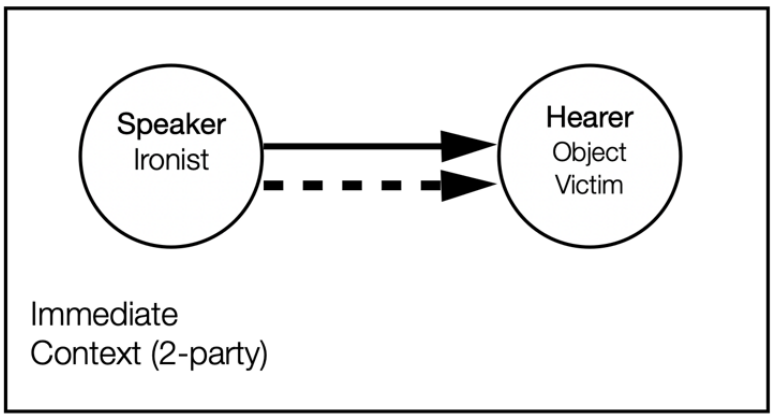

Figure 30. Interaction Scheme I

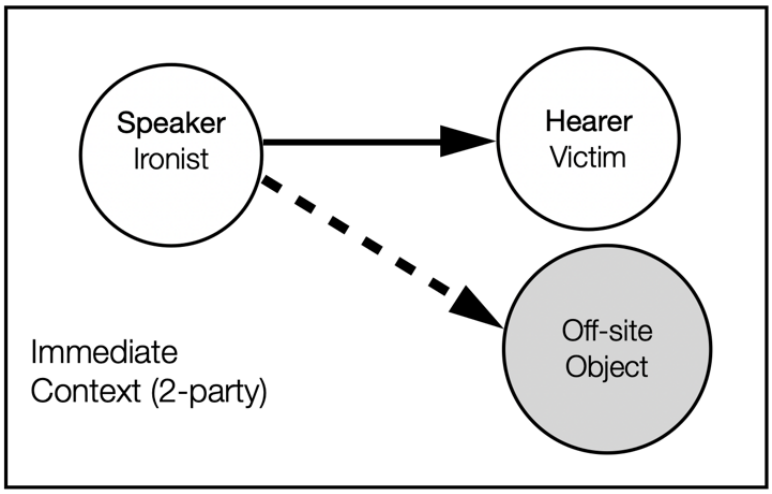

Figure 31. Interaction Scheme II

For instance, the speaker may utilize the [*zéi*-POS] construction to remark on a third party that is not physically present (off-site) in the interaction network, but rather inferred from the dialogue between the interlocutors. This third party could be a person, object, or situation. To establish a bond with the hearer, as illustrated in 17a, the speaker may use the expression 你今天真賊帥 *Nǐ jīntiān zhēn zéi shuài* 'You look so freakin' cute' to compliment a male friend. In this case, 17a operates within Interaction Scheme I. However, the speaker may also make a remark

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about the hearer's girlfriend, as in 你女友賊高賊辣 *Nǐ nǚyǒu zéi gāo zéi là* 'Your girlfriend is freakin' tall and sexy' (see 17b). In such a scenario, the hearer continues to be the victim of irony (speaker's addressee), but the object role of the speaker's irony here is assigned to the hearer's girlfriend, who remains oblivious to the fact that she is being targeted. To elaborate, the object and victim of irony reference the same person in Figure 30, whereas in Figure 31, the roles of object and victim are assigned to different individuals.

17 a. 你 今天 真 賊 帥！ [Interaction Scheme I]
Nǐ *jīntiān* *zhēn* *zéi* *shuài*
2SG.NOM today really *zéi*-EDM handsome
'You look so freakin' cute today!'

b. 你 女友 賊 高 賊 辣！ [Interaction Scheme II]
Nǐ *nǚyǒu* *zéi* *gāo* *zéi* *là*
2SG.GEN girlfriend *zéi*-EDM tall *zéi*-EDM sexy
'Your girlfriend is freakin' tall and sexy!'

Interaction Scheme III, as previously explained, presents an unusual and somewhat peculiar scenario for positive irony to be effectively conveyed, that is, through the involvement of a third on-site participant. This scheme, akin to Interaction Scheme I, illustrates the interactional dynamics between the speaker and the hearer, with the former serving as the ironist and the latter occupying the object and victim roles. The sole distinction between Interaction Schemes I and III pertains to the inclusion of this third on-site individual.

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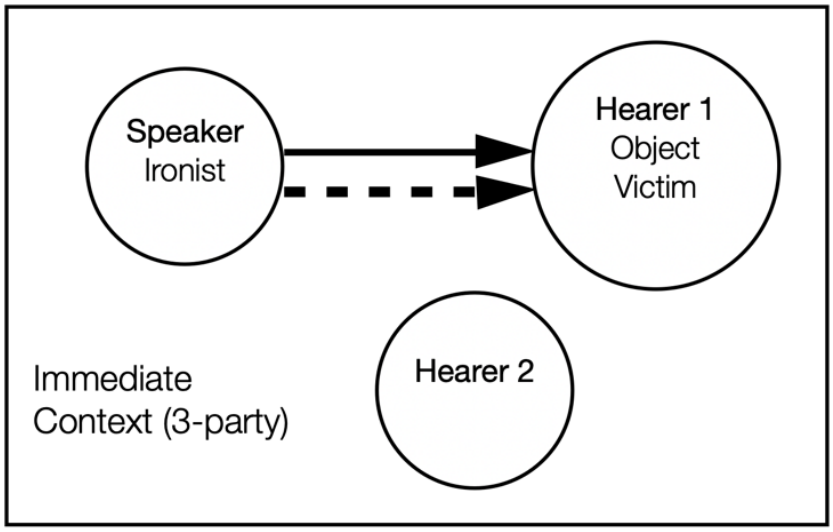

Figure 32. Interaction Scheme III

Despite our attempt at extrapolating Muecke's role classification to account for positive irony, a critical inadequacy or limitation is identified in this endeavor. The challenge arises from the absence of a traditional "victim" in cases of positive irony, as Muecke's taxonomy was crafted to characterize the relationship between the conversational figures and the narrator (writer) in literary works. To more accurately adapt to and reflect the nature of positive irony, we propose replacing Muecke's (1969/2020, 1970/2018) "irony roles" with the term "participant roles" to underscore the distinct functions of the latter in contrast to those of the former. Given this, we further propose three revised interaction schemes as presented below.

Specifically, we remodel Interaction Scheme I (Figure 30) into Interaction Scheme VI (Figure 33) not only by substituting the term "beneficiary" for "victim" in the hearer domain, but also endowing the ironist with the beneficiary status. This adjustment is premised on the fact that when the hearer is targeted (object), s/he is purposed to receive the ironist's positive affect (e.g., praise)—thus, assuming the role of a beneficiary— rather than derision or ridicule in positive irony. Consequently, no victim is discernible in such a scenario. Even more significantly, the

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ironist also benefits from his/her bald-on-record strategy for bonding. The same modification is made to Interaction Scheme II (Figure 31) by substituting "beneficiary" for "ironist" and "victim," as illustrated by Interaction Scheme V (Figure 34). Similarly, the ironist benefits as a beneficiary. However, it should be noted that the off-site participant remains a victim of irony, rather than a beneficiary. This is primarily due to the victim's ignorance about being the object of irony. It warrants mentioning that in this case, the off-site participant doubles as both an object and victim of irony, while the hearer is solely cast in the role of the beneficiary.

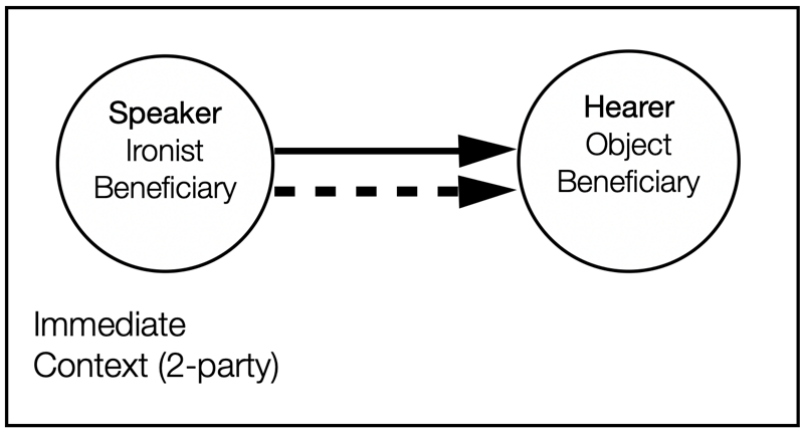

Figure 33. Interaction Scheme IV

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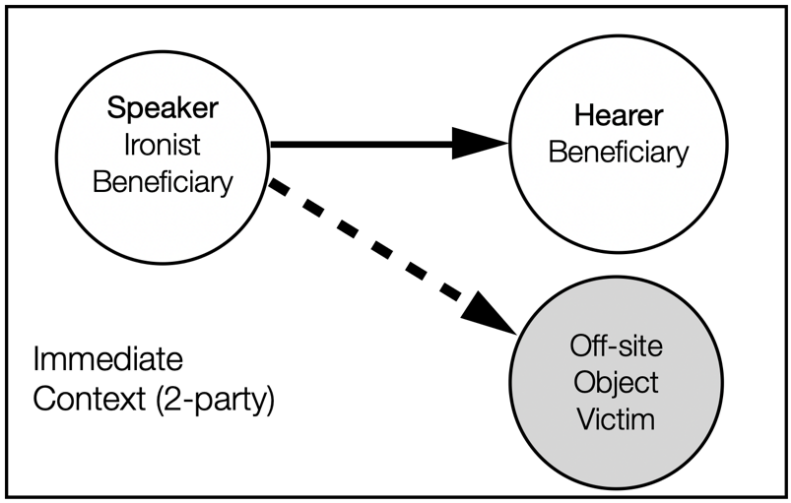

Figure 34. Interaction Scheme V

We apply a comparable adjustment to Interaction Scheme III (Figure 32), as demonstrated in Interaction Scheme VI (Figure 35). This alteration involves the replacement of "victim" with "beneficiary" and the treatment of the ironist as a beneficiary, thereby presenting a fresh context for positive irony. Interaction Scheme VI entails the speaker (ironist), identified as guest *A* on a TV show, who uses the [*búshì…ma?*] construction to establish a connection with only one of the two on-site hearers, namely the TV host *H*, while disregarding the other, guest *B*, who is physically present.

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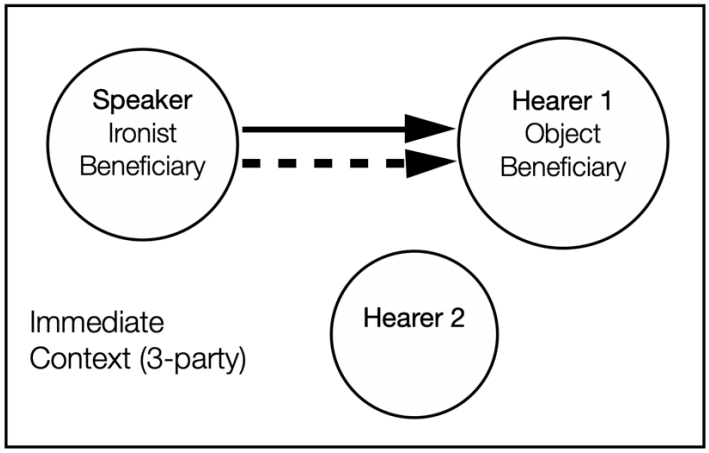

Figure 35. Interaction Scheme VI

6.4 Concluding Remarks

To sum up, Interaction Scheme IV (Figure 33) might represent the most typical scenario (a dyadic relation) wherein the unique [XAYB] construction and a significant portion of [*zéi*-POS] construction operate. Interaction Scheme V (Figure 34) introduces a new potential modality for expressing positive irony within two-party interactions. This is underpinned by the observation that ironists often have a broader range of targets at their disposal in natural verbal exchanges. While this scheme appears to involve only two participants in the immediate context, the speaker, in reality, deploys irony toward an entity (person, object, event or idea) that is not physically present, turning it into a victim of irony as a means of fostering a connection with the hearer. Both the hearer and the ironist adopt the role of beneficiary in this scenario. This interaction network could be conceptualized as a quasi-triadic relation. Furthermore, Interaction Scheme VI uncovers an entirely new context for positive irony, where three participants (a triadic relation) engage in an on-site interaction, forming a triadic relation. In essence, our study re-analyzed and re-invented the traditional irony roles, thereby enabling us to distinguish between the various irony participants, including ironist, victim, object, and beneficiary.

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Our examination of the three positive-ironic constructions sheds light on a distinct ecosystem of interpersonal connections distinctly grounded in positive irony. We initiated our examination with the most prevalent form of positive-ironic interaction, represented by the dyadic relation in Interaction Scheme IV. Subsequently, we introduced Interaction Scheme V, wherein the speaker established a bond with the hearer at the expense of a third party—an off-site victim of irony. Much like negative irony, this irony victim could be a person, object, situation, event or thought. Finally, we unveiled Interaction Scheme VI, which encompasses a triadic network and stand as the most intricate among the three schemes. In the realm of positive irony, interpersonal bonding operates through some sort of contradiction, where "impoliteness is at least to some extent parasitic on politeness" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 355). We will now advance to illustrate how the constructional use of positive irony contributes to the reconstruction of intersubjectivity.

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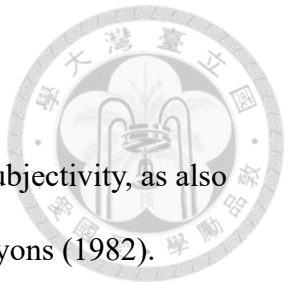
CHAPTER 7. INTERSUBJECTIVITY



According to Traugott (1995, 2003), subjectivity is a prerequisite for intersubjectivity, as also outlined in the works of Bréal (1900/1964), Benveniste (1958/1971), and Lyons (1982). Subjectification is a process that involves the acquisition of subjectivity and entails shifts from more objective to more subjective meaning (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004; Traugott, 2007). This process is a "semasiological" one "whereby linguistic expressions acquire subjective meaning" (Cuyckens, 2010, p. 4), and can be schematized as [objective meaning > subjective meaning] (Traugott, 2003b, 125–126). For instance, *be going to* can function as an alternative form of *will* (future-tense marker) by "grounding" and "lexicalizing" a speaker's perspective as noted by Traugott & Dasher (2001/2004, p. 82) and observed by Bybee & Pagliuca (1987), Hopper & Traugott (1993), and Tabor (1994). This shift in meaning proceeds from an "allative" meaning (objective: a spatial motion) to a "future" meaning (subjective: a speaker's temporal perspective), as explained by Evans & Green (2015/2006).

A particular area of investigation in the study of subjectification centers on perspectival shifts from a "syntactic subject" (sujet d'énoncé) to a "speaking subject" (sujet d'énonciation), as demonstrated by the development of raising constructions for control verbs like *promise* and *be going to do X*, which involve directional movement for a specific purpose (see Langacker, 1990, 1995, 1999). Another area of research examines how meanings tend to become increasingly grounded in the speaker's subjective belief state or attitude toward the content and manner of expression (Traugott, 2003b, p. 125; also see Traugott, 1989, 1995, 1997, 1999a). This aligns with what Traugott (1988, p. 409) terms "Semantic-pragmatic Tendency I," which explains the transformation of the word *æfter* 'after' from a spatial preposition to a temporal preposition in

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Old English. Examples of subjective expressions can be found in a range of linguistic forms, including degree modifiers (*pretty*), focus particles (*only*), connectives (*and, but, and then*), discourse markers (*well*), self-directed interjections (*Oh!*), self-directed swear words (*Dang!*), epistemic modals (*must*), speech act verbs (*I promise to*), and even raising verbs (*seem* and *appear*) (Traugott, 2007, p. 298). Thus, subjectivity pertains to the ways in which "natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs" (Lyons, 1982, p. 102).

Traugott builds upon Lyons's definition of subjectivity to frame intersubjectivity as "the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of his or her awareness of the addressee's attitudes and beliefs, most especially their 'face' or 'self-image'" (Traugott, 2003b, cited in Traugott, 2010, p. 4). She further defines intersubjectivity as "the ambient context in which linguistic change takes place and to which linguistic change contributes" (Traugott, 2010, p. 3). In other words, intersubjectivity can be recognized not only as an interpersonal status from a constructionist standpoint but also as a meta-pragmatic environment where language change occurs and where such change in turn fuels more intersubjectivity potential.

To put it differently, intersubjectivity can be considered not only as an interpersonal social status from a constructionist perspective but also as a meta-pragmatic context in which language change occurs and generates more potential for intersubjectivity. This highlights the importance of face and politeness as essential components of intersubjectivity. While subjectivity denotes a speaker's perspective and attitude, intersubjectivity refers to a speaker's awareness of the hearer's self-image, which is related to the face wants desired by both speakers involved in a verbal exchange. Moreover, subjectification encodes a speaker's attitude (speaker-centered:

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subjectivity), while intersubjectification encodes a speaker's attention (addressee-centered: intersubjectivity). This distinction is generally consistent with Halliday and Hasan's (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 1994) "interpersonal" meanings, which imply two functions: (a) "subjective and oriented toward the speaker," and (b) "intersubjective, oriented toward the addressee" (Traugott, 2010, p. 30).

7.1 From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity

From RCG's perspective of constructionalization (the historical perspective), intersubjectification can be seen as a semasiological process "whereby meanings come over time to encode or externalize implicatures regarding [the speaker's or the writer's] attention to the 'self' of [the addressee or the reader] in both an epistemic and a social sense"' (Traugott, 2003b, p. 130). Traugott argues that intersubjectification stems from subjectification (i.e., subjectification > intersubjectification), and that both mechanisms are a diachronic mechanism of language change (notably, an RCG perspective), even though subjectivity and intersubjectivity are synchronic and gradable concepts (Traugott, 2007, 2010). It should be noted that both subjectification and intersubjectification are types of "semantic reanalysis," whose alignments are "pragmatically inferred in the context of communication", that is, both mechanisms are "extralinguistic (presumably neurological)" (Traugott, 2007, p. 300). Based on such semantic reanalysis, then, is (inter)subjectification semantics- or pragmatics-motivated? The answer lies unequivocally with the latter.

Some may have wrongly assumed that Traugott prioritizes the semantic aspects of language over the pragmatic ones, given her frequent mention of semantic reanalysis. However, this is an oversimplified interpretation of Traugott's understanding of semantics and

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semanticization. According to Traugott (2010, p. 3), semantic change refers indeed to the process of semanticizing pragmatics, wherein subjectivity and intersubjectivity projected by the speaker, rather than the hearer, become the pragmatic factors (among others) that are transformed into semantics. This transformation is facilitated through a specific "subtype of semantic reanalysis" known as (inter)subjectification (Traugott, 2012b, p. 557). Traugott (2010, p. 30) further posits that (inter)subjectification "involve[s] the [semantic] reanalysis as coded meanings of pragmatic meanings arising in the context of speaker-hearer negotiation of meaning." That is, through this process, (inter)subjectification can contribute to the emergence of meaning in a given form through "invited inferences" rather than mere implicatures (p. 3). In particular, the speaker is the one who prompts implicatures and encourages the hearer to infer them (Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004, p. 5). We argue that this is especially true for cases of positive irony, as such invited inferences require some level of interactional perspective from a constructionist standpoint (Traugott, 2018, p. 19).

In accordance with Traugott's stance on intersubjectivity and intersubjectification, our perspective may also align with those of Narrog (2014) and Brems et al. (2014). Narrog differentiates three main categories of semantic change: (a) speaker-oriented, (b) hearer-oriented, and (c) discourse-oriented, with the first corresponding to subjectification and the second and third roughly aligned with Traugott's concept of intersubjectification. Brems et al. also propose two types of intersubjectivity, which reflect Traugott's notions of intersubjectivity: (a) textual intersubjectivity and (b) attitudinal intersubjectivity. Both Traugott and Narrog focus on the "encoded" meanings in linguistic constructions that are motivated by the context or discourse. Although many theories of intersubjectification agree that meaning is shaped by the context of interaction between speakers and hearers, there are still differences in their approaches. While

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Nuyts (2014) studies intersubjectivity in terms of the mutual understanding between speakers and hearers, he does not examine the encoding of meaning in constructions. Similarly, Verhagen (2005) grounds intersubjectivity in argumentation theory, emphasizing coordination between the cognitive systems of speakers and addressees, rather than linguistic coding. Nevertheless, one lingering question is how Traugott's intersubjectification approach can be integrated with Croft's RCG approach to examine the positive-ironic constructions in this study, given that her earlier works are primarily concerned with lexical and grammatical forms (notably, lexical/discourse markers).

In fact, the concern raised does not contradict any investigation of positive irony. Instead, it serves as a diagnostic and critical tool that we can utilize to examine the various positive-ironic constructions. For instance, although degree modifiers (e.g., *sǐ*; see Chapter 4) are subjective rather than intersubjective (as noted by Traugott, 2007, p. 298), they can pragmatically or discourse-functionally presuppose a communicative context involving at least two interlocutors. Within this context, the speaker subjectively uses a given construction to convey a positive-ironic intention that targets the addressee's social self (face) from an intersubjective perspective. In this way, irony can effectively accomplish the locutionary agent's illocutionary force and achieve the intended and expected perlocutionary effect or outcome. Without intersubjective considerations as such, this would not easily take place. It is noteworthy that Traugott's approach to (inter)subjectification is highly congruent with Croft's RCG model since both consider language change as a "change in use" (Croft, 2001; Traugott, 2010). At its core, language change is a phenomenon that is grounded in usage and evidenced by constructions.

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7.2 Face as a Diagnostic Tool for Intersubjectivity

As noted by Watts (2003, p. 25) a more fitting approach to "linguistic politeness" must return to Goffman's concepts of face and facework, since face presents a universally applicable notion, while politeness may display marked or nuanced disparities among different cultures and societies. In what follows, we will clarify, through a theoretical-inferential progression, the integration of intersubjectivity as an essential element of constructional meaning as illustrated in the [*búshì…ma?*] construction (see Chapter 6).

In employing the positive-ironic construction of [*búshì…ma?*], it is imperative that the speaker (Guest *A*) possess a subjective understanding of the construction, which intrinsically conveys a negative semantic prosody, such as a complaint or accusation. At the linguistic level, when an individual utilizes this expression, it might appear that s/he is indifferent to the face wants of his/her hearer (addressee or interactant), owing to the unfavorable connotations inherent in the construction. Nonetheless, as a manifestation of positive irony intended for interpersonal bonding, the speaker is acutely aware of his/her purpose in employing the construction. The speaker must be cognizant of the form's function to adeptly utilize it in an environment where a verbal faux pas could lead to misinterpretation and potentially jeopardize his/her relationship with Host *H*. As such, Guest *A* must possess an adequate understanding of the potential consequences associated with the use of the [*búshì…ma?*] expression. Crucially, Guest *A* must take into account some factors in order to ensure successful communication.

From a local standpoint of face, factors may encompass, but are not limited to, (a) the speaker him/herself, (b) the speaker's interactants (e.g., Host *H* and Guest *B*), (c) the live audience, and (d) future television viewers. Within a remarkably short span of time, the speaker must dynamically assess the face wants of various on-site interactants and off-site observers,

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with some potentially having a greater influence on his/her core considerations, while others may have a less substantial impact. Of utmost importance, the speaker should endeavor to preserve both *H*'s (*H*'s subjectivity) and his/her own (*A*'s subjectivity) face wants, although we assume that preserving *H*'s face is a more desirable objective for *A*. Thus, by employing a [*búshì…ma?*] expression in this context (a television talk show), *A* can maintain both *H*'s and his/her own face when a connection is established (i.e., between the two subjectivities). This suggests that intersubjectivity can be attained through specific language use in an interaction, particularly from the speaker's viewpoint. However, it remains uncertain whether any degree of intersubjectivity has been achieved on the side of the hearer.

From a global viewpoint, Guest *A*, as the center of locutionary force, must possess some knowledge that extends beyond the immediate context. This encompasses, but is not restricted to, the background knowledge of (a) the primary reason for *A* and *B*'s participation in the television show (e.g., a specific relationship issue), (b) the various experiences, both positive and negative, that *A* and *B* have shared in their relationship, (c) the TV host's widely recognized social image as an expert in resolving such love matters, and (d) the general public's opinion (a cultural, collective face) on an individual's love issue(s) being scrutinized publicly. These factors also contribute to the intricate face spectrum that *A* may need to navigate in order to determine the appropriate "linguistic politeness" to employ through specific language forms. Among the factors mentioned above, (d) may be the most decisive element influencing *A*'s global face strategy, as Chinese individuals often prioritize the collective cultural face desired by the broader society, to which individual roles or identifies are frequently subjected. This notion is aptly encapsulated in the well-known Mandarin idiom, *Jiāchǒu bùkě wàiyáng*, which translates to 'Family scandals should not be made public.' This community-first perspective on preserving one's family face

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may seem perplexing to individuals from outside the culture (e.g., individuals in many Western societies), because a troubled love relationship is not typically perceived as a family scandal and, as such, is not much considered in Western-based theories of politeness. This cultural face often supersedes an individual's personal face when addressing matters such as filial piety and marriage. Intersubjectivity can indeed function within a complex cognitive system that feeds into pragmatics in a meta-representational manner (metapragmatically), encompassing the cultural and societal dimensions relevant to the world the speaker lives in.

Chuang (2022) notes that the television host consistently accepts the ostensibly impolite [*búshì…ma?*] expression from his guest without retaliating with statements such as *Wǒ zěnme zhīdào?* 'How do I know?' or *Wèi shá wǒ gāi zhīdào?* 'Why should I know?' and certainly not with *Shōu qǐ nǐ de xiǎo xīnsī* 'Put away your little tricks.' The host's reaction divulges crucial information: *H* possesses a clear understanding of *A*'s "language in use." This observation further substantiates the establishment of speaker-hearer intersubjectivity. If the host were to act otherwise, intersubjectivity that nonetheless exists would be perceived as a byproduct of interaction through some generalized conversational implicature, signifying two subjectivities in interaction, but not as one encoded (i.e., not intersubjectified) in the [*búshì…ma?*] construction (Type III). To differentiate between intersubjectivity and the presence of dual interactional subjectivities, we will offer further clarification in the subsequent section.

7.3 Shared Knowledge, Invited Inferences, and Facework

From the psychological standpoint (i.e., developmental, social, and cognitive), intersubjectivity is generally understood as the shared understanding and mutual agreement between individuals participating in a social interaction (see Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1995; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Gallagher &Hutto, 2008; Reddy, 2008). From the cognitive linguistic

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perspective, intersubjectivity is considered to be facilitated by the presence of certain *shared knowledge* among interlocutors (Lewis, 1969; Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987; Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Schiffrin, 1987; Tomasello, 2003). Vital for effective communication, shared knowledge is also referred to as *common ground* (Stalnaker, 1978, 2002; Clark, 1996), *mutual knowledge* (Lewis, 1979; Clark & Marshall, 1981; Grice, 1989; Fussell & Krauss, 1992; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Brennan & Clark, 1996; Keysar et al., 1998; Stalnaker, 2002), and *shared mind* (Verhagen, 2005) as a *shared mental space* (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). Shared knowledge assists interlocutors in the formation and interpretation of context, references, implicatures, indirect speech acts, idiomatic expressions, and so forth. In fact, background knowledge and shared knowledge are two closely related but different concepts. Background knowledge (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Dijk, 2008) indeed pertains to the individual knowledge each participant brings to a conversation, encompassing personal experiences, beliefs, assumptions, and cultural norms and conventions unique to an individual and potentially unknown to others.

Nevertheless, background knowledge becomes shared knowledge through communication. As interlocutors exchange information or experiences, their individual background knowledge contributes to establishing shared knowledge. Conversely, shared knowledge must be developed and sustained during a conversation to ensure successful communication. In instances of positive irony, shared knowledge is doubtless a requirement, drawing upon relevant background knowledge (see Relevance Theory by Sperber & Wilson, 1986). In a sketch, an ironist extracts from his/her background knowledge of relevance and measures it against the immediate context to form shared knowledge, which enables him/her to employ a particular construction of positive irony. Notably, the process of utilizing background

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and shared knowledge inherently involves connecting two subjectivities, specifically, from subjectivity toward intersubjectivity.

Drawing on shared knowledge, the ironist gets to invite the hearer to infer his/her implicature (therefore, invited inferences) conveyed through the use of the [*búshì…ma?*] construction. From the perspective of constructionalization, implicatures are conceived as "potential syntax-based pragmatic contexts for semasiological change" (Traugott, 2018, p. 20). Although Horn (2009) attempts to tease apart implicatures (speaker meaning) from inferences (hearer interpretation), she also admits leakage between the two. Thus, we will follow Traugott's (Traugott, 1999b; Traugott & Dasher, 2001/2004) Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change (IITSC) by conflating implicatures and inferences and viewing the two as closely intertwined in bringing about new meaning, where the speakers intentionally and usually unconsciously encourage their hearers to make inferences (see Keller, 1990/1994).

According to Traugott, the invited inferences arise as a result of implicatures, and over time, they can become conventionalized as part of a given expression (i.e., constructional meaning or function). In simple terms, when a speaker produces an implicature, s/he invites the hearer to infer additional information from the context, which "involves joint construction of meaning" (Traugott, 2018, p 23). This is especially evident in cases of positive irony, where it is challenging to conceive of a scenario in which a speaker employs an ironic expression without expecting the hearer to perceive or comprehend the intended meaning, whether this hearer be a direct recipient or a nearby observer. Finally, the [*búshì…ma?*] construction is particularly relevant to the concept of invited inferences, as it is an inherently interactive bipolar question—regardless of whether it is Type I, II, or III—that encourages the hearer to respond to the speaker.

The process of invited inferences can be more intricate than typically assumed. As this

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process relies on shared knowledge where the speaker and hearer (two subjectivities) navigate their communication, ironists need to master a range of metapragmatic strategies. According to Goffman (1974), both speakers and hearers must recognize the *frame* (p. 21) being used (i.e., *framing*) in their conversation, or in other words, they must have a shared, relevant framework (p. 21). These frames are "cognitive structures" or "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21) that shape our perceptions and interpretations of the world by organizing and guiding our understanding of social situation (therefore, metapragmatic).

In the case of [*búshì…ma?*], the speaker must apply a particular frame to a given situation, that is, a televised talk show where guests' troubled relationships are publicly exposed and mediated by a renowned TV host. We define this frame as a *frame of bonding*. This frame is multilayered, built at least upon (a) a *natural frame* (pp. 22–40) connected to the event occurring in physical context and (b) a *social frame* (pp. 83–124) that indexes the rules, norms, and expectations that shape our understanding of social interaction.

For Type III [*búshì…ma?*], such framing operates on a particular language use that signifies the ironist's footing (Goffman, 1981, pp. 124–159), marking the alignment or stance the ironist (Guest A) takes toward the hearer (Host H). When Guest A adopts a positive-ironic bonding frame, s/he creates a discrepancy, rather than an opposite meaning, between the literal meaning of [*búshì…ma?*] and the intended function. By utilizing [*búshì…ma?*], the guest attains a shift in his/her stance, manifested in his/her adoption of a perspective that is not in line with the meaning of the linguistic construction. More precisely, the [*búshì…ma?*] patterning includes a negation word "not" that may significantly impact the intersubjective nature of communication demonstrated by the construction (Dancygier, 2012). From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, negation intrinsically prompts an intersubjective mental space by engaging the hearer's

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subjectivity in the interaction. This occurs as the speaker's shift in footing compels the hearer to identify the positive-ironic intent and adjust his/her interpretation accordingly. In simpler terms, when [*búshì…ma?*] is employed, it calls for intersubjectivity with the goal of attaining positive irony to facilitate bonding. This aligns with Hopper and Traugott's view that "grammaticalization can be thought of as the result of the continual negotiation of meaning that speakers and hearers engage in" (Hopper & Traugott, 1993/2003, p. 98). This is especially true in instances of positive irony. The development of the constructional meaning of [*búshì…ma?*] is not a haphazard human creation, as positive irony inherently involves a delicate maneuver.

In summary, in the context of positive irony, these concepts are interconnected. Positive irony replies on intersubjectivity, as the speaker and the hearer must share a mutual understanding of the positive-ironic intent behind the utterance. This shared understanding fosters a sense of bonding and reciprocity between the interlocuters, as they collaborate to create meaning and established rapport. More importantly, this positive-irony-for-bonding function is encoded in the [*búshì…ma?*] construction. This process of embedding a pragmatic-discursive function in an expression is referred to as pragmaticization by Diewald (2011), which traces the evolution of an expression from an "utterance token", to an "utterance type", and finally to a "coded meaning" (Levinson, 1983, pp. 20–21). The so-called meaning may not be a meaning as understood in a traditional lexical-semantic sense but rather a communicative goal (function) to be achieved by the speaker through metapragmatic maneuver. Most importantly, in the case of positive irony, intersubjectivity is encoded within a linguistic form, making it intersubjectified.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

It is evident that analyzing positive-ironic constructions requires a pragmatic approach,

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specifically, cognitive pragmatics (i.e., cognitive-functional approach), which highlights how intersubjectivity underpins encoded potential (e.g., positive irony). As such, it is crucial to differentiate between the intersubjectivity that may be naturally associated with a given linguistic form as a pragmatic manifestation and its development into an encoded meaning or function, before delving further into the topic at hand (Traugott, 2010, p. 6; see also De Smet & Verstraete, 2006). To put it differently, intersubjectivity may manifest itself as a synchronous phenomenon in everyday communication, but this does not necessarily imply that it is encoded as an integral part of a construction's meaning.

In this chapter, we account for intersubjectivity as the cognitive basis for the function of positive irony (i.e., interpersonal bonding) based on the [*búshì…ma?*] construction operating within the broader [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$] construction. Without intersubjectivity, this bonding construction would fail and be taken as straightforward criticism toward the hearer, resulting in undesirable misunderstanding that compromises the relationship between the interlocutors. In other words, from the perspective of RCG, what is encoded in a construction must be carefully inspected taking into account various constructional factors—syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive, each engaging in some form of cognitive operation.

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CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

This doctoral dissertation explores the relationship between intersubjectivity and positive irony, offering an intellectual venture into the artistry of language through the lens of Radical Construction Grammar (RCG). Using the constructionist approach, we reformulated the understanding of intersubjectivity—therefore, reconstructing it— through constructionalized positive irony. Specifically, if positive irony can be encoded in a given form, then intersubjectivity is necessarily encoded (intersubjectified). Through the examination of positive irony, we have gained not only a deeper understanding of how language is used to convey complex ideas and emotions but also how individuals navigate the intricacies of communication.

In the final stretch of this study, we will summarize our findings, discuss the significant challenges we faced during the research, and explore the potential future of the study in the following ways. Section 7.1 revisits our research endeavors and provides a succinct overview of the intellectual path we have pursued. Section 7.2 elucidates the major obstacles encountered during our quest for knowledge, highlighting the insights gained throughout the process. Concluding the chapter, Section 7.3 delves into the research limitations, implications, and applications to illuminate the potential impact of our findings on both the academic sphere and practical scenarios.

8.1 An Overview

A theoretical account was meticulously constructed to probe the complexities of reconstructing intersubjectivity through positive irony, conceptualized as [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$]. Our methodology was grounded in the principles of the RCG framework,

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whereby we investigated three positive-ironic constructions found in modern Chinese (notably, Mainland Mandarin). The primary objective of the research centers not only on constructionalized intersubjectivity through the positive-ironic exemplars investigated, but also on their individual analytical frameworks as the means to validate this aim.

The constructions investigated are: (a) the [*zéi*-POS] construction, (b) the [XAYB] construction, and (c) the [*búshì…ma*] construction. First, we used the [*zéi*-POS] construction to explain the key mechanisms for encoding a pragmatic-discursive meaning or function in a specific linguistic pattern (see Chapter 4). In doing so, we also highlighted the shared commonalities on constructionalization between Traugott and Croft, which have contributed to the examination of language change. This fusion of methodologies clarifies the rationale behind adopting an RCG approach for this research. Second, we explored the [XAYB] construction to understand how meaning arises from a construction by examining the rhetorical devices frequently utilized to craft positive irony (i.e., hyperbole and metaphor), which is actualized through the processes of conceptual integration to expound on human ingenuity in linguistic artistry (see Chapter 5). Finally, we analyzed the [*búshì…ma?*] construction to uncover how intersubjectivity can be encoded for a social-interactional purpose (i.e., rapport building) through the employment of positive irony (see Chapter 6). Each construction played a vital role in unveiling a unique theoretical aspect, and when woven together, they formed a rich and intricate fabric, contributing to the research's core significance.

Consequently, the positive-ironic constructions may serve as verbal cues to signal several things to the hearer: (a) hinting at the speaker's use of a figurative twist (positive irony), which implies that the words being used by the speaker must not be taken at face value; (b) conveying the non-literal expression's intention to nurture an interpersonal bond, steering clear of

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criticisms, accusations, and other ill-intentioned comments; and most significantly, (c) showcasing the speaker's conversational stride or momentum (e.g., footing shift) through a given linguistic choice. However, the last aspect might not be immediately obvious to all, as the more subtle metapragmatic layers of language, akin to other metalinguistic elements, are often grasped only by adept communicators. At their core, these verbal cues serve as indicators of relevance, helping to disambiguate meaning by guiding the hearer toward the intended message, all while easing the cognitive effort required to process it (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Carston, 2002). Essentially, the speaker wields these verbal cues to create a mutual cognitive environment between conversational partners, illuminating the immediate context, mutual and background knowledge, and specific assumptions.

Lastly, our approach to reconstructing intersubjectivity hinges on the examination of constructionalized positive irony—[negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$]. This schematized patterning clarifies that our inquiry delved into not merely the "local, brief effect" irony brings to verbal communication, but also "a global effect on a large section of talk" (Myers Roy, 1981, p. 420) as a social payoff. With this global effect, positive irony may serve as "a tool by one person, strategically affecting the other members of the group, or as a tool for the whole group…against some outside force" (p. 420).

8.2 Major Challenges

We faced several substantial hurdles that challenged our understanding and determination throughout the course of this research. The initial obstacle revolves around formulating a fresh, if not all-encompassing, concept of positive irony, a task that demanded a thorough examination of existing theories and the development of a distinct perspective on this multifaceted subject (see

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Chapter 2). The subsequent challenge involved determining if pragmatic-discursive meanings could be recovered from a specific linguistic construction itself, rather than being solely contingent on the immediate context involving the interlocutors. This challenge pushed us to explore the interplay between linguistic structure and situational variables, and to consider the various ways in which meaning can be shaped by both factors. Lastly, the third challenge we encountered pertained to our decision to employ the RCG framework over other linguistic frameworks or approaches when studying positive irony and intersubjectivity. This choice necessitated a deep understanding of various theoretical perspectives, and required us to justify our selection of RCG as a preferred tool for our inquiry (see Methodology).

In response to the very first challenge, we have formulated a definition of positive irony from a cognitivist/functionalist standpoint. Specifically, the metapragmatic schema of [negative form + positive intention$_{_bonding}$] governs how positive irony is produced for positive interpersonal bonding, in which a negative form can be manifested at different levels, such as lexical, phrasal, or sentential, despite the morphosyntactic peculiarities and their relationships with discourse in Chinese. However, given the nature of positive irony, each level of manifestation must imply a pragmatic-discursive consideration. While we did not set out to dismiss previous definitions of positive irony, we found them to be limiting in scope (see Literature Review for more details). Our investigation revealed that positive irony extends beyond mere ironic praise or compliments, and can be viewed from a higher cognitive plane, one that encompasses metapragmatic motivations for specific pragmatic-discursive uses of language. We pinpointed this metapragmatic motivation (or function) as one that fosters positive interpersonal connections (i.e., rapport building), a role that is applicable to all three positive-ironic constructions examined in our study.

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Nonetheless, a subsequent inquiry arises regarding the connection between positive irony and the conventional notion of irony (i.e., negative irony). More precisely, should positive irony be equated with irony? In our thesis, we approached positive irony from a metapragmatic perspective, focusing on the higher level of cognitive workings during verbal communication. The hesitation to accept positive irony as a legitimate concept can be ascribed to the public's limited familiarity with the phenomenon. In the case of irony, the dominant schema [positive form + negative intention] links it to negativity, which hinders people from thinking beyond this framework. Lakoff and Mark's introduction of conceptual metaphor theory in the early 1980s faced initial resistance from the literary community. The prevailing view at the time considered metaphor to be merely a literary device. However, the researchers sought to demonstrate that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but are deeply embedded in human thought and cognition. Over time, this novel perspective on metaphor has gained widespread acceptance and has significantly impacted the field of cognitive linguistics. In a sense, our view on positive irony does not markedly diverge from a select few prior perspectives: Both positive and negative irony are subtypes of irony. As noted by Giora and Attardo, positive irony could be a precarious strategy due to the possibility that the hearer might interpret the speaker's positive-ironic utterances at face value, potentially leading to undesirable misunderstandings. This ostensible "weakness" of positive irony is, in fact, the very aspect that accentuates the need for our theoretical approach (RCG), whereby a pragmatic-discursive function, beyond mere lexical meanings, can also be encoded within a linguistic construction (e.g., positive or negative irony). In other words, "constructionalized irony" may serve to eliminate unwanted misunderstandings and streamline communication.

This very last challenge calls for a more in-depth explanation, particularly for those who

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contend that pragmatic meaning can only be derived from a specific context. Human language is a complex inferential system that pushes our ability to accurately interpret meaning, given the inherent flexibility and adaptability connecting language and thought. As a consequence, pragmatics, a linguistic discipline dedicated to the study of context-dependent meaning, has emerged as a beacon to illuminate the path toward the understanding of these complexities. As pragmatics evolves, context has ascended to its deserved prominence, serving as a key component in enhancing the construal of meaning. Indeed, context is a dynamic force that has suffused all aspects of pragmatics, offering a rich tableau of background information and situational variables that enrich language interpretation. Some may argue that pragmatics focuses solely on contextualized meaning, while, semantics, conversely, deals with decontextualized meaning. This dualistic perspective, however, oversimplifies the intricate relationship between these two enduring branches of linguistic inquiry. Specifically, putting context (notably, immediate context) on a pedestal as the primary tool to demarcate pragmatics and semantics might inadvertently cloud the continuum of language change between the two, while mistakenly assuming context to be the sole pathway to achieve pragmatic meaning.

Indeed, pragmatization (Van der Auwera & Plungian, 1998; Traugott, 2002, 2008; Haspelmath, 2016; Kuteva et al., 2019) or pragmaticalization (Diewald, 2011), which often involves pragmatic strengthening, is a process that traces how a specific morpheme or lexeme that conveys a specific meaning or function becomes more generalized and applicable in a wider range of contexts. Understanding the meaning or function of such a construction may not necessitate context-informed knowledge, as a specific meaning or function can be encapsulated in a particular form. Nevertheless, previous pragmatic research on irony, especially positive irony or similar subjects, exhibits an imbalanced predilection for context-dependent phenomena,

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leaving context-independent occurrences relatively uncharted, which underscores the need for further research. In fact, the charming merroir-terroir of pragmatics, notably metapragmatics, need not always require sourcing or retrieval from the immediate context.

Recent advancements in construction grammars have enabled scholars to scrutinize pragmatic-discursive functions that may also be encoded in specific linguistic structures, if not all. Through an RCG lens, these structures may retain their pragmatic meanings or functions across varied contexts. That said, pragmatics remains the least addressed topic in most acclaimed constructionist accounts, as it is often more convenient to perceive the form-meaning pairing as a match-up between form and semantics (i.e., form-semantics pairing), in which conventionalized meaning appears less elusive. Many such meanings can also be found in dictionaries or grammar books where cognitive explanations are often lacking. As a result, we prefer to dub the form-meaning pairing as form-function pairing, particularly from a metapragmatic, as well as RCG-inspired, perspective. This form-function pairing concerns not only an individual's semantic knowledge of a given linguistic pattern but also the cognitive workings underpinning such language use. Examining these form-function pairings may prove to be a challenging endeavor, as the functional construal of these pairings must, to some extent, be grounded in semantics but cannot be sufficiently explicated by semantics.

In this study, we embarked on the less coveted task of investigating intersubjectivity based on this concept of form-function pairing. The function's sole objective is to create social connection, only wrapped in a seeming verbal teaser that challenges the conventional idea of negative semantic prosody (i.e., positive irony). However, positive irony is but a vehicle to elucidate our ultimate subject matter, viz., intersubjectivity. More crucially, we advanced a theoretical argument that intersubjectivity must be encoded in a positive-ironic construction. In

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stating this, we do not intend to diminish the significance of context. Instead, when a positive-ironic construction is utilized, it invokes a particular pragmatic function that sparks a whole spectrum of potential contexts or scenarios to which this pragmatic function is applicable (i.e., for the purpose of establishing rapport between conversational partners). When speakers resort to this construction, they must presumably have some intersubjective negotiation going on in mind. It is not so much the use of the construction that sparks intersubjectivity at this stage of constructionalization. Rather, it is the user, mindful of the bonding function invested in a positive-ironic construction, that opts to use it to create an interpersonal bond. This explains why intersubjectivity must be, and has been, grammatically constructionalized in the cases of positive irony.

In earlier pragmatic research, the primary focus was on how intersubjectivity emerges from the immediate context involving the interlocutors, whereas in our study, we argued that intersubjectivity can be encoded in a linguistic form, which facilitates a speaker's need to make a social connection. That is, by employing an RCG approach, intersubjectivity can be "re-constructed." To comprehend the relationship between language and thought, we must meld the analytical tools of traditional pragmatics with metapragmatic reasoning and elaboration. The former pertains to how language is actually used (i.e., linguistic behaviors) based on social-interactional considerations, while the latter concerns the underlying motivations that inform these behaviors and considerations. To elaborate on the metapragmatic aspect of language use, we therefore introduced the method of conceptual blending to enhance explanatory adequacy.

8.3 Research Limitations, Implications and Applications

The objective of this section is to showcase the far-reaching potential of our work by igniting a

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passion for continued inquiry and fostering progress in the wider academic sphere. By delving into the limitations (Section 7.3.1), broader implications (7.3.2), and practical applications (7.3.3) of our research findings, we seek to not only elevate the impact of this doctoral dissertation but also spark curiosity and encourage further exploration within the academic community. The ideas to be raised are based on the discoveries made throughout our research endeavor.

8.3.1 Limitations

Distinguished British biologist and Nobel laureate Peter Medawar (1915–1987) once said, “The scientific method is a means to an end, and the end is knowledge. But if knowledge is not falsifiable, it does not count as knowledge” (Popper, 1968, p. 316). In a similarly thought-provoking yet light-hearted manner, another esteemed British biologist Thomas Huxley (1825–1895) quipped, “Science is organized commonsense where many a beautiful theory was killed by an ugly fact” (Goldacre, 2009, p. 1). These statements underscore the significance of acknowledging the limitations or constraints inherent in a systematic organization of scientific reasoning. While we aimed to produce insightful and valuable research, this study inevitably has its own limitations that remain unaddressed. By recognizing and critically reflecting on these weaknesses and constraints, we hope to offer readers a more comprehensive understanding of the study’s context and interpretation, while also situating its contribution within the broader literature, which signifies our commitment to scientific rigor and a systematic perspective.

A major limitation common to all irony research, including the present study, pertains to the arduous task of formulating an all-encompassing definition of irony, be it negative or positive. The difficulty arises because irony frequently intersects with other linguistic

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phenomena, such as sarcasm, humor, satire, and paradox. Our study did not aim to disentangle these intricate relationships, as we believe that such an undertaking is impractical. Consequently, we did not pursue a so-called "clear-cut" characterization. Establishing specific criteria for positive irony is challenging, given its often contextual-dependent and cultural-specific characteristics, which may lead to potential inconsistencies or ambiguities in the research. This primary limitation is intrinsically linked to another issue, which is the subjectivity involved in determining what qualifies as or constitutes irony.

In fact, the perception of positive irony can exhibit substantial variation among individuals, thereby complicating the objective evaluation of its impact. Factors including personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic knowledge may all contribute to the way individuals interpret and respond to positive-ironic expressions. This subjectivity presents a formidable challenge for researchers aiming to draw generalizable conclusions from their findings. The present study concentrated on linguistic exemplars of positive irony in Mandarin Chinese, suggesting that the same model of positive irony may not be directly applicable to other cultures or even within specific subgroups of the same culture.

Another considerable limitation pertains to the RCG framework employed in this research to investigate positive irony. This limitation is applicable to all constructionist approaches to grammar when examining pragmatic-discursive occurrences in language. Fundamentally, the RCG framework is a syntactic theory that takes into account not only syntactic and dimensions but also the pragmatic-discursive aspects of language. Nevertheless, the ability to decode encoded information hinges on a researcher's capacity to reason and elaborate, therefore leaving certain notable weaknesses. For instance, despite the framework's aim to address the pragmatic-discursive aspects of language, it lacks effective tools for

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disambiguating various layers of meaning abstraction related to positive irony. Even when a construction is ascertained to be positive-ironic, the construction-induced meaning may exhibit subtle differences that reflect nuanced cognitive planning on the part of the speaker. Furthermore, this research does not delve into the interaction between established positive-ironic constructions and immediate contextual factors, which may emphasize other modalities of human communication. It is possible that a positive-ironic construction may assist other linguistic constructions in co-constructing a specific communicative strategy, such as how positive irony may function as a footing shift device or discourse marker that enhances particular (con)textual meanings.

While constructionist frameworks have recognized pragmatics as the most vibrant and dynamic aspect of language, and concentrated on higher-level cognitive driving forces (i.e., syntactic schemata) behind language use, these frameworks need to be integrated with other explanatory theories in terms of meaning itself. Examples may include, but are not restricted to, Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which may facilitate the incorporation of pragmatic-discursive functions into any constructionist accounts. By integrating these complementary frameworks, researchers can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, ultimately enriching the analysis of positive irony and other pragmatic-discursive phenomena.

This raises an additional concern germane to all constructionist approaches in language research. To thoroughly comprehend irony, it may be necessary to incorporate a multimodal framework, as positive-ironic constructions, while serving as linguistic cues to facilitate conversation, are inherently limited in several ways. Contextual cues often encompass both verbal aspects of language (e.g., linguistic nuances and tone of voice) and non-verbal elements

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(e.g., facial expressions and body language). Including these additional cues can more accurately capture the dynamic and engaging nature of ironic expressions. Nevertheless, such inclusion presents a considerable challenge, as it suggests that an ideal study of irony, as well as investigations of other pragmatic phenomena, may require the integration of diverse analytical disciplines (such as phonetics, phonology, sociology, and cultural studies) and technologies (including audio and video recording) to elucidate the multifaceted nature of irony. However, conducting such a comprehensive study may not be feasible due to the specific focus of a research project (a preferred research design) or limitations in a researcher's expertise. Consequently, researchers must carefully balance the scope and depth of their investigations, acknowledging the potential constraints and seeking to address them through interdisciplinary collaboration and methodological innovation. The synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives will not only enhance the richness of the analysis but also contribute to a more robust understanding of the complex linguistic landscape that underpins the use of positive irony.

8.3.2 Implications

Exploring intersubjectivity through the RCG framework casts light on various aspects of contemporary pragmatic research. Notably, intersubjectivity is not merely an aftereffect of conversation; it can be an integral part of a linguistic form (i.e., constructional meaning). Moreover, this encoded intersubjectivity should be tied to a specific metapragmatic motivation aimed at achieving a communicative goal. As a result, the interplay between positive irony and intersubjectivity could provide a novel avenue for examining grammaticalization, particularly since grammaticalization is believed to be more connected to subjectification than intersubjectification (Traugott, 2010, p. 38), and because intersubjectification "involves coding

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of greater attention to the addressee" (p. 34).

In fact, a significant portion of grammaticalization research (including Traugott's own work) has centered on pragmatic and discourse markers that convey procedural meanings. These linguistic units fit well within the traditional purview of grammaticalization processes (i.e., from lexical to procedural, grammatical, or functional). As highlighted earlier in this research (see Chapter 4), constructionalization goes beyond that, encompassing a variety of language change stages. This study can inspire future research to move past the realm of pragmatic and discourse markers (more context-dependent) and delve into more encoded potential, considering that certain pragmatic occurrences, like irony, are intrinsically oriented toward the addressee's attention (more context-independent). Additionally, the scope could broaden to cover excessive degree modifiers rooted in taboo or expletive words and phrases, as they may often be used to forge irony or other expressions that aim to captivate the addressees. Indeed, this implication is both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural.

Peering through the lens of positive irony, the big question to be raised next could be: Why do individuals employ negative linguistic forms (verbal) or communicative techniques (non-verbal) in a conversation while anticipating positive responses from their interactants? Some might suggest that these are simply more attention-catching (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Gibbs, 2000; Utsumi, 2000; Colston, 2007). Nonetheless, why do negative forms or meanings make better linguistic signposts for seizing attention? What motivates their usage, and where do these motivations lead in relation to human communication?

We propose that future investigations into these inquiries may benefit from interdisciplinary approaches, namely neurolinguistics (cf. Shibata et al., 2007; Bohrn et al., 2012; Spotorno et al., 2012) or psycholinguistics (cf. Gibbs, 1994; Menninghaus et al., 2015; Kuperberg & Jaeger,

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2016). Through the examination of neural mechanisms involved in language processing and comprehension (i.e., neural correlates of various linguistic forms and their corresponding pragmatic functions and motivations), a deeper and alternative comprehension of positive irony may be attained.

Lastly, we advocate for a re-evaluation of the traditional categorization of figures of speech. When studying figurative language, these artistic tools often huddle together like a box of assorted crayons, as if they all belonged to the same league of creative expression and shared the same level of significance. Indeed, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, understatement, irony, and so forth, are often lumped together under a sweeping term. This mixed-bag approach has, to some extent, muddled the waters for researchers seeking to unravel the true essence of these linguistic treasures. It is time to rethink the current approach and explore these figures of speech with a renewed sense of curiosity and open-mindedness. As we ventured through our research, we distinguished between pragmatic and metapragmatic motivations, suggesting that these expressive tools should also be organized within a metarepresentational hierarchy. Some are meant to lay the groundwork for others. Take hyperbole, understatement, and metaphor, for example. It is fitting to pace these rhetorical tools on the same level, as they are pragmatic instruments that help convey higher cognitive purposes. Speakers do not whip out hyperbole for its own sake. There must be an impetus that nudges a speaker to opt for hyperbole over a straightforward expression in a conversation. While irony is a rhetorical device, it actually sits at a loftier perch. To achieve irony, speakers must select from available lower-level devices (such as metaphor and hyperbole), but there must also be an overarching motivation that propels the speaker to adopt an ironic expression. In our study of positive irony, the motivation is to build rapport between conversation partners. If a speaker wishes to create a funny or amusing effect,

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like humor (which is not deemed a figure of speech), s/he could turn to other lower-level devices for support. To attain humor, though, speakers are found to often employ irony (positive or negative), which is bolstered by its subordinate devices. Despite their time-honored status in the literary world, the categorization and understanding of rhetorical devices should undergo a major makeover, taking into account not just their structural aspects (formal) but also pragmatic and metapragmatic facets of language use (functional).

8.3.3 Applications

The fascinating aspect of positive irony lies in its capacity to cultivate interpersonal bonds between interlocutors despite its inherently precarious nature. This phenomenon warrants further investigation, specifically in the realms of stand-up comedies (Provine, 2001; Shatz & Helitzer, 2005; Hurley et al., 2011; McGraw & Warner, 2014) and late-night comedy talk shows (Webb, 2018; Gray et al., 2009), as they provide fertile ground for understanding positive irony's role in promoting bonding.

Stand-up comedy is a form of entertainment wherein a comedian performs before a live audience in venues like comedy clubs, theaters, television, radio, and online platforms. It involves the delivery of routines comprising jokes (often "dark and edgy"), anecdotes, observations, and humorous commentary on various subjects, often rooted in personal experiences. Comedians engage with the audience, reacting to their responses and sometimes improvising new material on the spot. The objective of stand-up comedy is to evoke laughter while offering an amusing yet insightful experience. Notable comedians include Jerry Seinfeld, Chris Rock, Joan Rivers, Wanda Sykes, and Dave Chappelle. Late-night comedy talk shows, on the other hand, air during late evening or early morning hours and consist of monologues,

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comedic sketches, and interviews with guests, often celebrities or public figures. These shows, known for their humorous tone, feature hosts who use irony-like comedy to comment on current events and popular culture. Examples include *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, *The Late Night Show with Stephen Colbert*, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, and *The Late Late Show with James Corden*. Expanding our research scope to encompass these comedy genres is advantageous as they offer a wealth of verbal and non-verbal cues, such as gestures, intonation, facial expressions, and specially crafted props. Analyzing these shows can deepen our understanding of the relationship between positive irony and the multimodal tools available to the speaker, shedding light on human communication from both physical and cognitive perspectives.

More importantly, the investigation of these comedy genres allows for the exploration of instances where positive irony falls short and where the intricate socio-cultural elements are inevitably involved. This could be indicative of a multifaceted communicative psychology, as positive irony, by its nature, needs to convey a sense of rudeness, malice, or inappropriateness, irrespective of whether it is intended as a jest or otherwise.

A notable instance of positive irony transpired during the 94th Academy Awards ceremony in 2022 (Desta, 2022; Harris, 2022; Yahr, 2022) when Chris Rock, a renowned comedian and presenter, humorously commented on Will Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, referencing her closely cropped hair. Given Jada Pinkett Smith's struggle with alopecia, a medical condition causing her hair loss, Will Smith perceived the joke as offensive. In response, the actor ascended the stage and slapped Chris Rock before returning to his seat. The incident garnered significant media attention and sparked discussions surrounding the boundaries of humor, public decorum, and the appropriate reactions to perceived slights. It was generally

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believed Chris Rock harbored no ill intentions toward the Smith couple. From our standpoint, Chris Rock was simply utilizing positive irony to establish rapport with the Smiths and the live audience. The comedian later clarified that his intention was to draw a parallel between Jada Pinkett Smith's hairstyle and that of the famous actress Demi Moore in the film *G. I. Jane*, a comparison the Smiths appeared not to accept. Subsequently, Will Smith posted a YouTube video in which he apologized to Chris Rick for his aggressive conduct during the live television broadcast. While the interaction occurred in a triadic setting, the participant roles indeed functioned within a dyadic format. This can be a prime example of unsuccessful positive irony.

Another well-documented instance involves Canadian (Quebec-based) stand-up comedian Mike Ward, who is widely known for his politically incorrect humor addressing race and religion, among other subjects. In 2010, Ward made a joke about the then-thirteen-year-old boy Jeremy Gabriel, who was born with Treacher Collins Syndrome, which caused Gabriel's facial bones to be abnormally structured. At the time, Gabriel (aka Petit Jeremy) was gaining fame as a young singer with an upcoming album release. During his stand-up, Ward called Gabriel (off-site party) "the kid with a subwoofer on his head" due to the boy's hearing aid, also commenting on Gabriel's appearance as "ugly" (Coletta, 2021). Ward's irony later led to a ten-year lawsuit against him filed by Gabriel and his mother. The case ended up in Canada's Supreme Court, which eventually ruled that Ward's words were "disgraceful" but "not discriminatory" (Coletta, 2021). Ward was intending to bond with his audience, but apparently not with Gabriel, by mocking the boy's physical features. Note that the strategy he employed was not only a blunt criticism (ugly) but more crucially, an ironic expression (a kid with a subwoofer on his head). The ensuing question is whether this ironic utterance qualifies as positive irony, given that it appears as negative irony to Gabriel? In fact, the crux of the matter lies in whether

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the artist wants his audience to sympathize with his own stance. The sincerity of Ward's court testimony is undoubtedly open to debate and beyond the scope of this discussion. According to Ward, he had no intention of causing harm to Gabriel. Instead, as a comedian, Ward's joke about Gabriel was a well-intentioned one (if not all positive in form), because what he also meant between his stand-up lines was that Gabriel was a talented teenage singer despite his physical challenges—after all, the boy was striving to realize his dream.

The Ward-Gabriel incident elucidates several aspects of positive irony in stand-up comedies in relation to that of the positive-ironic constructs. First, the ironist can aim their humor at a third party, be it off-site or on-site. Secondly, when off-site, the third party becomes the unwitting recipient of irony, with their face wants disregarded or undesired by the ironist. However, when on-site, the situation grows more complex as the ironist must navigate the third party's face wants, which may challenge their connection with the audience. Third, the ironist's focus of irony coincides with their beneficiary of irony—the audience, whose face wants are attentively catered to by the ironist. When delivering a negative remark, the ironist ensures the audience's positive face remains intact, acknowledging them as the "capable audience that grasp the humor" by aligning with his viewpoint. Concurrently, the ironist upholds the audience's negative face, aware that his provocative language won't antagonize them. The Ward-Gabriel case manifests within our revised interaction framework for a triadic setting (refer to Section 6.3). Failures of positive irony unveil not just socio-cultural influences but also an intricate interplay of psychological elements that interconnect with positive irony.

Indeed, exploring positive irony bears cross-cultural and cross-linguistic significance. In certain cultures, individuals often greet each other, particularly close friends and family, using cheeky, sassy, or even blatantly offensive expressions. We perceive such bonding strategies as

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operating on positive irony. Diverse forms of positive irony are found in well-studied cultures, such as English (Norrick, 2001; Dynel, 2016), Chinese (Li & Huang, 2019; the "positive irony" is not directly referenced), Italian (Traverso & Colleoni, 2016), Spanish (Sánchez-García, 2013; Bernal Triviño, 2019), and lesser-studied cultures, such as Sisaala in northern Ghana (Sanka et al., 2022; see also Samanani et al., 2023) and Yoruba in Nigeria (Dare & Sanni, 2019). These studies cast new insights into irony from a cultural standpoint; however, none approached the phenomenon from the perspective of positive irony. Undoubtedly, positive irony warrants recognition, as most irony-for-bonding occurrences indeed represent instances of positive irony. Comprehending positive irony not only enhances cultural awareness but also cultivates cross-cultural understanding of human society.

Intriguingly and perplexingly, positive irony can take on a drastic form in certain realms of human culture where the art of "dissing" is employed, particularly in pop music and drag queen culture. The term, also referred to as "battle rap" (see Forman, 2002; Krims, 2000), is prevalent in hip-hop or rap music as a form of competition or verbal sparring between two or more rappers, aiming to showcase superior skills and lyrical prowess (Toop, 1991a, 1991b; Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005; Forman & Neal, 2012). Dissing is also prominently observed in drag queen culture, more commonly known as "throwing shade" or "reading" (see Feinberg, 1996; Harris, 1998; Hennen, 2005), where the skill serves as a form of playful banter or competition between queens during performances or pageants (Woofter, 2017). In both music and drag queen culture, dissing presents itself as an aggressive form, wherein the "diss rapper" or the "reading queen" does not soften their malicious language. Essentially, they express their true intentions, aiming to hurt. However, if the artist delivers a skillful diss (or reading), s/he gets to forge bonds not only

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with his/her rival diss rappers (or reading queens) but also with the audience present. In a sense, the harsher and more spiteful the disses and readings, the stronger the bond that forms.

Through positive irony, we can delve into a vast spectrum of communicative possibilities in the human world. When the strategy of positive irony is employed, regardless of whether the ironist successfully forms a bond or not, the language being used is typically not palatable to many. Even worse, the linguistic materials involved often deviate significantly from political correctness. In fact, positive irony may also serve as a vital instrument to disentangle the intricate relationship between irony and humor. In past irony studies, many scholars have wrestled with the distinction between irony and humor (Oring, 1994; Gibbs, 2000), due to their closely intertwined nature (Attardo, 1991, 2001, 2002, 2017). This conundrum arises because a humorous effect is often conveyed through irony, while at the same time, ironic expressions frequently garner a humorous perception. Both irony and humor involve the employment of language in unexpected or unconventional manners, engendering a sense of surprise or incongruity. By examining positive irony, the distinction can be re-evaluated based on the metapragmatic functions involved in the process, potentially resolving the longstanding enigma.

Lastly, it is imperative to emphasize that this research does not champion the use of malicious language; rather, it concentrates on the positive-ironic occurrences in verbal communication, reflecting the complexities of our cognitive machinery. Although language may lack the precision of cutting-edge technology, it serves as a remarkable medium for investigating the intricacies of human cognition, where input is channeled through language to generate the intended output for the listener's benefit or, if intended by the speaker, detriment. We hope that this exploration of positive irony not only augments our understanding of the linguistic and (meta)pragmatic dimensions of language use but also cultivates a more profound appreciation of

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the society we live in, fostering empathy for one another and minimizing misunderstandings across cultural boundaries.

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ENDNOTES

[1] 《莊子・秋水》(*Zhuangzi ・Qiūshuǐ*) by 莊子 (*Zhuangzi*); circa 476–221 BC.

[2] 《荀子・修身》(*Xúnzi・Xiūshēn*) by 荀子 (*Xúnzi*), circa 300 BC.

[3] 《史記・龜冊列傳》(*Shiji・Guīcè Lièzhuàn*) by 司馬遷 (*Sima Qian*); circa 91 BC.

[4] 《說文解字》(*Shuowen Jiezi*) by 許慎 (*Xu Shen*); circa AD 100–121.

[5] That is, 西周金文 (*Xīzhōu Jīnwén*) or otherwise known as 鐘鼎文 (*Zhōngdǐngwén*), which refers to the inscriptions on ancient bronze objects during the Western Zhou Dynasty; 1045 BC – 771 BC.

[6] If from a non-lexical source, the grammatical expression then consists in "CONVENTIONALIZATION OF DISCURSIVELY SECONDARY MEANING" (Boye & Harder, 2012, p. 17; capitals original). For example, word order evolves to carry part of a given pragmatic meaning that is not originally encoded in the word order.

[7] Note that Hopper (1991) indeed chooses *grammaticization* over *grammaticalization* to indicate that not all forms develop into grammatical material.

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