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## **On the social meaning of verbal irony: A case study of Kurt Tucholsky's *Ratschläge für einen schlechten Redner***

### **Abstract**

Whoever speaks or writes ironically expresses the contrary of what is said, rhetoric would have it. Approaches to verbal irony have been further differentiated in literary, linguistic, and psycholinguistic studies, but there is no consensus on what verbal irony is. We discuss how irony can be detected from the social constellations of its use. After reviewing the complementary foci of literary, linguistic, and psycholinguistic approaches to verbal irony and its social meaning, we analyze select instances of verbal irony in Kurt Tucholsky's *Ratschläge für einen schlechten Redner* ('Advice for a bad speaker'). We find that literary and linguistic approaches are fruitfully combined in analyzing verbal irony in the *Ratschläge*, suggesting that research on verbal irony and its social meaning benefits from a cross-disciplinary perspective that builds on the notion of common ground.

### **1. Introduction**

Although irony is a prominent feature in many of Kurt Tucholsky's writings – as it is in the whole context of critical modern journalism and literature inspired by it – irony in Tucholsky's work is under-researched. One reason for this situation might be that irony overlaps with satire and parody: as these genres and ways of writing seem to be easier to detect, they have attracted most attention in Tucholsky research and neighboring fields. We claim, however, that research on irony in Tucholsky's texts and beyond not only provides us with new insights into his work and contexts of writing, but also promotes interdisciplinary research on irony. Discussing Tucholsky's *Ratschläge für einen schlechten Redner* ('Advice for a bad speaker', GA 13 [172], henceforth simply referred to as *Ratschläge*) we aim at providing an example. We chose the *Ratschläge* because it is an exceptionally ironic text that provides a rich empirical foundation for our investigation. Further, the text that was published in the liberal weekly journal *Vossische Zeitung* (1930) using Tucholsky's pseudonym 'Paul Panter' is both characteristic and atypical for his writing in its historical context.

From the very first line of Tucholsky's *Ratschläge*, in (1), the reader is confronted with irony. On the literal meaning of (1), Tucholsky appears to advise the reader to postpone the start of the actual speech with preparatory statements. The ironic meaning of (1) is the contrary: Tucholsky is advising the reader to not bore the audience with preparatory statements.

- (1) Fang' nie mit dem Anfang an, sondern immer drei Meilen VOR dem Anfang!  
'Don't start at the beginning, but always three miles BEFORE the beginning.' (GA 13 [172], 1)

The questions of what verbal irony is and to which social meaning it contributes (including the effect on the hearer or the reader of literary works) have been addressed, to varying degrees in several research traditions, including literary studies, linguistic semantics/pragmatics, and psycholinguistics. Literary research on verbal irony has emphasized the importance of contextualizing literary texts in their social and cultural environments for a proper understanding of verbal irony in such texts (e.g., Lausberg

1990; Honnelf-Becker 1996; Korthals Altes 2005; Müller 2007). Verbal irony is considered in combination with related concepts, such as sarcasm and parody, as well as other forms of irony, such as dramatic irony and forms of (self-)reflection. Literary research, however, suffers from the richness of its sources, is often limited to the description of their more or less ironic 'gestalt', and seldom manages to go as deep into textual details as linguistic approaches. Consequently, the notions of irony and the relevant findings in literary texts often remain vague.

Linguistic semantic/pragmatic research has offered detailed analyses of verbal irony in everyday language that characterize specific constellations between the speaker and the hearers (e.g., Grice 1975; Sperber & Wilson 1981, 1986; Clark & Gerrig 1984). These analyses, while differing in detail, build on the idea that the information that is mutually known to be shared between the speaker and the hearers<sup>1</sup> (that is, Stalnaker's 2002 common ground) is critical to the detection and the interpretation of verbal irony. The intended meaning of verbal irony is often, but not necessarily, the contrary of what is said. Although these views provide a clear account of irony, they have less to offer, however, by way of understanding how irony contributes to the effect of a literary work or, more generally, of why a speaker or writer would use verbal irony. This latter question is at the center of attention in psycholinguistic approaches to verbal irony (e.g., Kreuz, Long & Church 1991; Dews & Winner 1995; Dews, Kaplan & Winner 1995; Colston 1997). These approaches have found, with the help of behavioral experiments, that specific contextual constellation favor the interpretation of utterances as irony, that a speaker who uses verbal irony can be taken to have particular durable traits (such as being humorous), and that verbal irony is indicative of specific social relationships between the speaker and hearers. However, these experimental investigations into the social meaning of irony tend to work with a very narrow conception of verbal irony as expressing the contrary.

The central contribution of this article is to show that these approaches to verbal irony have complementary strengths and can be fruitfully combined in analyzing verbal irony in literary texts. By analyzing verbal irony in Tucholsky's *Ratschläge*, the article also contributes to Tucholsky research and, more generally, interdisciplinary research on irony. At the heart of our proposal is Stalnaker's 2002 notion of common ground, defined as the beliefs that the interlocutors share and recognize that they share (ibid.: 704). Specifically, we argue that both the question of what verbal irony is and the question of the social meaning of verbal irony, whether in literary works or everyday language, requires consideration of the common ground of the social agents involved (such as speakers, authors, hearers, and readers).

Our article begins in section 2 with an introduction to literary, linguistic, and psycholinguistic approaches to irony. Section 2.3 presents our proposal that the theoretical concept of common ground provides a fruitful avenue to combining these various approaches. After providing information on the socio-cultural context of Kurt Tucholsky and the *Ratschläge* in section 3, we use Tucholsky's *Ratschläge* in section 4 as a case study to illustrate how joint consideration of literary, linguistic, and

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<sup>1</sup> While the article will use 'speaker' and 'hearer' or 'addressee' when discussing linguistic approaches of verbal irony, the approaches also allow for a transfer from oral to written or signed mode of communication, and thus for the hearer to be substituted for a reader or an interpreter more generally.

psycholinguistic perspectives on verbal irony can lead to a deeper understanding of verbal irony and its social meaning in literary work. Section 5 concludes the article.

## 2. Literary and linguistic approaches to verbal irony

### 2.1 Literary approaches to irony

The use of the notion of irony in literary studies profits and suffers from the open epistemological account of the discipline. Literary studies, which at its core is still dominated by phenomenological or historical-hermeneutical approaches, focuses on interpreting acclaimed literary texts. Concepts and methodologically-reflected approaches play an important role in this endeavor, but the field mainly aims at enlightening literary texts and their contexts.

This impetus has positive and negative consequences for the study of irony. On the one hand, the concept of irony in literature remains vague and so are the results of the relevant examinations. On the other hand, literary examinations are more inclusive than those in linguistics, as they take singular expressions and sentences as well as entire texts and their linguistic structure as well as social and cultural contexts into account. According to this view, irony occurs when something could be understood as such in a specific social and cultural situation.

This view dates back to the rhetoric origins of the main concepts used in literary studies that have famously been summarized by Heinrich Lausberg in his widely disseminated textbook on rhetoric (Lausberg 1960; see, for instance, Richter/Leuthold 2022): Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*, 8, 6, 54) and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4, 34, 46) both claimed that irony refers to ways of expressing the contrary of what is said. Following Quintilian and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* irony is being used in order to decipher lies in public and persuade the audience to believe in the correct position. Building on their accounts, Lausberg categorizes irony among the "figures of thought" even if it can also be said to be a "figure of speech" (Lausberg 1960: §585): the properties of a "figure of speech" must be analyzed in its linguistic context while a "figure of thoughts" can only be interpreted from its non-linguistic context (ibid.). This categorization remains unclear because the thoughts Lausberg alludes to are also given in linguistic form, but it highlights that there is not a singular rhetorical approach to irony but rather a variety of them: irony can either be detected from the linguistic expression only or needs context. Furthermore, Lausberg (1960: §583-585) envisages irony as a means of communication that itself appears in different forms of expression encompassing different degrees of (what he refers to as) "energy": simple ironic jokes, for instance, presuppose "much energy" in contrast to sarcasm, which conveys "negative energy". According to Lausberg, irony is not only being used in order to decipher lies and persuade the audience but there are various types of irony that are suitable in different social environments. In sum, rhetoric, as Lausberg presents the field, provided literary studies with first accounts that may help to identify irony, attribute social meaning and find out more about the uses of irony.

The rhetoric account, however, is problematic in many ways. First, the notions of irony and antiphrasis become almost identical because irony is being defined as the expression of the contrary while antiphrasis is also to be understood as the implication of the contrary as expressed in one word. Second, the main categorizations of irony into figures of speech and figures of thought seem to refer to different levels of linguistic analysis, namely semantics and pragmatics, respectively. Third, even though rhetoric considers the communicative situation of ironic utterances, precisely how the communicative situation

bears on the detection and interpretation of verbal irony is not clearly expressed. Lausberg (1960) does not have a theoretical conception of 'communicative situation' or 'context', which limits the explanatory power of rhetoric analysis of verbal irony in literary texts. The classical understanding of irony as presented in lexicography, such as in the "Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft" (Braungart et al.: 2007), builds on Lausberg (1960). According to Müller (2007: 185), the author of the entry on irony, irony refers to language use that is (in German) 'uneigentlich' (which can be roughly translated as 'improper' or 'inauthentic'), that is, language use by which a meaning is expressed through an utterance with the contrary meaning. Müller regards the criterion of the expression of the contrary as essential for the definition of irony (ibid.: 185); according to him, the specificity of irony would be lost without it, and irony would dissolve in rhetoric forms like metaphor or allegory. Furthermore, the criterion highlights the distinction between litotes and irony: litotes, as Müller claims, does not express the contrary but rather emphasizes that something is the case with the help of a double negation (e.g., 'not uncommon' for 'very common').

Furthermore, Müller sheds light on the various forms that literary studies call ironic even though they need not fulfill the criterion of the contrary, including fictional and dramatic irony (ibid.: 188). According to him, these forms of so-called irony both profit from the superior knowledge an audience has in comparison to the characters in a novel or in a drama; this constellation is also described as 'discrepant information' (Pfister 1994: 79-86). These distinctions are loosely related to the notion of romantic irony because romanticism has made extensive use of these forms. Romantic irony had become a mental and stylistic feature of European literature between 1770 and 1830 by which authors expose the limitations of their writing and their literary role (Garber 1988); discrepant information, fictional and dramatic irony were amongst the literary techniques romanticists preferred in their writings.

The social meaning of romantic irony and its related fictional and dramatical forms are, in part, philosophical, drawing on early idealist theories of language and conscience. According to Friedrich Schlegel, who could be said to have invented romantic irony, the term 'romantic irony' refers to the understanding and expression of a grand dilemma: the dilemma that the absolute and that eternity can never be fully grasped linguistically (Götze 2001: 381f.; Rush 2016: 89-100). Because of their insight into and acceptance of this dilemma, romantic writers and thinkers reflect the imperfection of their writing. They aim at and maintain a romantic distance from what they say by making this imperfection linguistically recognizable, for example, by addressing themselves or the reader, with the help of self-mockery and playful attitudes towards linguistic conventions and literary genre (Maack 2002: 7-20). This is true also for approaches that build on romantic accounts of irony and use the romantic notion of the term to detect textual and mental features that could be regarded to be typically modern (Avanessian 2015: 4). There are a number of social consequences attached to romantic and modern forms of irony, among them the reflection of the role of the author and reader and the formation of groups in which romantic and modern forms of irony have served as means to create social coherence through a specific form of communication.

Other works have tended to pragmatically argue for a conception of irony that includes the various notions of irony being used in literary studies, ranging from rhetoric notions of irony to romantic irony. Honnef-Becker (1996) and Korthals Altes (2005) have criticized previous research for not explaining irony clearly. They regard irony as a verbal

strategy or general attitude, and refer to dramatic or situational irony as well as romantic irony. Horstmann and Kleymann (2019) have, again, opened up the notion of irony: they not only include rhetoric and romantic irony but also distinguish objective and illocutionary irony. They categorize all perspectives on irony so that one could easily identify the relevant understanding and sources of irony. This understanding of irony has its advantages because it considers all perspectives. At the same time, however, such an understanding could blur the boundaries to such an extent that the concept of irony becomes entirely vague. Though confusing, this inclusivity however allows for considering different perspectives instead of linguistic approaches' restrictions to one analysis of the intended meaning.

Against this backdrop, Matthias Bauer (2015) highlights that an ironic expression does not always imply a clearly contrary meaning, but may instead point to a spectrum of meanings, among them social meanings. Approaches close to post-structuralism, namely Paul de Man, emphasize the diversity of ironic meanings, "the turn into the indefinite, even indeterminable" on the one hand (Wirth 2017: 17), and on the other hand they ascribe subversive potential to irony per se (Miller 2009: 69). It is the merit of detailed textual analyses to confirm and also to question this potential. Thus, Christine Abbt (2018: 415) is able to show, using the example of texts by Christian Kracht, that irony here has a primarily restorative rather than a subversive effect: Irony can apparently also confirm the existing order. Descriptions such as this widely incorporate context into the investigation, unlike somewhat older studies that focused primarily on the situational effects of irony – in recourse to Sigmund Freud's analyses of wit. According to Wolf-Dieter Stempel (1976: 223, *passim*), the use of irony primarily follows the intention to expose the counterpart – an approach that is doubted by current psycholinguistic research (see 2.2.2).

To sum up, given the variety of the concepts of irony and the richness of references in literature itself, literary studies provides valuable insights and various more or less coherent approaches to irony. The social meaning of irony is clearly important to these approaches but there are only few in-depth and systematic studies in this respect so that the social meaning of irony remains an open question. The opposite is true for the neighboring discipline: linguistics now knows a wealth of views concerning the phenomenon of irony. These range from semantic and pragmatic approaches that characterize contextual constellations implicated in verbal irony to experimental setups that focus on the social meaning of irony.

## **2.2 Linguistic approaches to irony**

### **2.2.1 Semantic/pragmatic analyses of verbal irony**

Grice 1975 is among the earliest pragmatic analyses of irony. For Grice 1975, two meanings are centrally implicated in ironic utterances: the literal meaning (which is calculated from the conventionally specified meanings of the uttered words, and the way the words are put together) and the ironic meaning, which arises as a conversational implicature. In order for the hearer to calculate the ironic meaning, the literal meaning must be blatantly false, that is, the hearer must recognize that the speaker obviously disregards (i.e., "flouts") the first Maxim of Quality ("Do not say what you believe to be false"). For instance, according to Grice (1975: 53), a speaker who utters "*Fritz has been a fine friend*" in a context in which it is obvious to the hearer that the speaker does not regard Fritz to have been a fine friend, implies that the speaker is trying to get across a

proposition that is obviously related to the one that is literally expressed, such as the contrary (in our example: that Fritz has not been a fine friend).

Linguists since Grice 1975 have noted that not all ironic utterances involve the speaker flouting the Maxim of Quality (Sperber/Wilson 1981, 1986; see also Grice 1978). For instance, in a situation in which person A has complained that they don't want to work anymore because they are tired, and person B, who has been working much harder than person A, responds incredulously with *You're tired?!?*. As discussed in Sperber and Wilson 1981 (306), B's utterance is a case of verbal irony even though the literal meaning of this utterance is not blatantly false. Furthermore, the intended meaning of B's utterance is not the contrary of the literal meaning or "some obviously related proposition" (Grice 1975: 53). Rather, B appears to use verbal irony here to communicate an attitude towards A or A's utterance.

Two prominent post-Gricean analyses of verbal irony are Sperber and Wilson's (1981, 1986) Echoic Mention Theory, and Clark and Gerrig's 1984 Pretense Theory. The former assumes, contra Grice 1975, that the ironic meaning of an utterance does not arise as a conversational implicature from the literal meaning in combination with context. Instead, under the Echoic Mention Theory, ironic utterances are analyzed as utterances that *mention* (rather than *use*)<sup>2</sup> a proposition that has been previously expressed or that is salient in the context (such as the proposition that Fritz is a fine friend or the proposition that the addressee is tired, in the examples above). Common ground is critical to recognizing verbal irony: the hearer must realize that the utterance mentions a proposition that is in the common ground of the speaker and the hearer. Common ground, consequently, is also essential to interpreting the social meaning of irony: the hearer must recognize "the speaker's attitude to the proposition mentioned" (Sperber/Wilson 1981: 308), that is, whether the speaker chose to echo a salient proposition "to suggest that he finds it untrue, inappropriate, or irrelevant" (ibid.: 307).

On Clark & Gerrig's 1984 Pretense Theory, the speaker S, in making an ironic utterance, pretends to be S', an uninformed, foolish version of themselves, speaking to a primary addressee A, and simultaneously to A', a real or imaginary audience that is not discovering the speaker's pretense. What S' is saying literally is considered to be injudicious or uninformed (e.g., that Fritz is a fine friend, when Fritz in fact is not a fine friend), which triggers a "hostile or derogatory judgment or feeling such as indignation or contempt" (Grice 1978: 124; as cited in Clark & Gerrig 1984: 122). The common ground between the speaker S and the addressee A is again critical because A can only detect the verbal irony if they, unlike A', can successfully detect S's pretense. Clark & Gerrig 1984 emphasizes the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee: when the addressee A detects the verbal irony, they are "drawn into a conspiracy" with the speaker S (ibid.: 313).

Linguistic analyses of verbal irony generally share the assumption that the ironic meaning intended by an utterance with verbal irony arises "by standard reasoning processes" (Sperber/Wilson 1981: 309), that is, by the hearer reasoning over the speaker's utterance and the information in the common ground. As illustrated above, the interlocutors' common ground is important to detect the verbal irony, to understand the intended

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<sup>2</sup> A *used* expression contributes its meaning to the meaning of the expression in which it occurs, whereas a *mentioned* expression involves reference to the expression itself: For instance, the expression *cat* is used in *The cat is on the mat* and mentioned in *The word 'cat' has three letters*.

meaning of the ironic utterance, as well as to understand who the irony is targeted at. In the Echoic Mention Theory, the "natural target" of the ironic utterance is the individual who originally expressed the proposition being echoed (Sperber/Wilson 1981: 314). In the Pretense Theory, both the pretend speaker S' and imaginary audience A' may be the target of the irony (Clark/Gerrig 1984: 122-124).

Common ground is also implicated in an apparent asymmetry observed with verbal irony: for instance, in the absence of prior conversations about the weather, it is more feasible for a speaker to use a positive utterance, such as "The weather is great!", to convey that the weather is, in fact, terrible than to use a negative utterance, such as "The weather is terrible!", to convey that the weather is, in fact, great. The linguistic literature on verbal irony generally agrees that this asymmetry arises from the kinds of societal norms that are part of the common ground and that result in speakers being more expected to comment on success and excellence than failure and mediocrity (e.g., Sperber/Wilson 1981: 312; Clark/Gerrig 1984: 122; Jorgensen et al. 1984: 115; Kreuz/Glucksberg 1989: 376). Thus, whereas these societal norms suffice to identify a positive utterance as ironic and understand its ironic meaning, the identification of a negative utterance as ironic may necessitate a interlocutor-specific common ground.

### **2.2.2 Psycholinguistic approaches to verbal irony**

Psycholinguistic research on verbal irony is primarily concerned with understanding the social meaning of verbal irony, that is, what hearers/readers infer about speakers/writers who use verbal irony, about the hearers or the targets of irony, and about the relationship between the interlocutors. In other words, these approaches primarily consider the question of why a speaker or writer uses an ironic utterance rather than its literal counterpart. To investigate this question, psycholinguistic approaches have carried out behavioral experiments that compare participants' ratings of ironic utterances to those of their verbal counterparts.

Research in this area generally assumes that ironic utterances achieve a broader set of communicative goals than literal utterances, and that ironic utterances "convey information that literal utterances do not" (Dews/Winner 1995: 4), such as "displaying anger in a socially approved way" (Kreuz et al. 1991), reminding hearers of attitudes shared with the speaker (Gibbs 2000), surprise (Colston 1997), humor (Gibbs 2000; Roberts/Kreuz 1994), the speaker being in control (Dews et al 1995), or a bond between the speaker and hearer (Clark/Gerrig 1984, Gerrig/Gibbs 1989). The two most frequently identified communication goals, which are also primary objects of psycholinguistic investigation, are the expression of criticism and humor (Dews et al. 1995, Dews/Winner 1995, Colston 1997, Gibbs 2000). These studies suggest that speaker intentions such as being funny, humorous, mocking or amusing, as well as being critical, annoyed, condemning, or insulting may be more or less salient in ironic speech depending on a variety of factors.

One of the factors centrally implicated in the understanding of irony and its social meaning is the social relationship between the interlocutors and their common ground. According to Kreuz, Long, and Church (1991), irony can strengthen the bond between speakers and hearers by virtue of familiar propositions and attitudes being echoed. Gibbs (2007: 7), on the other hand, took a more nuanced position, arguing that "some forms of irony are affiliative, whereas others are sources of estrangement between individuals", whereas sarcastic comments about individuals outside a social group may express group

solidarity. Whether the victim of the ironic remark is the familiar hearer or an unfamiliar bystander does not, however, seem to modulate the social meaning of the utterance (Dews/Winner 1995: 11). Pexman and Zvaigzne (2004) found that ironic compliments were judged as more humorous and teasing in relationships of solidarity between the speaker and the hearer than in relationships of non-solidarity.

In addition to ironic utterances achieving a broader set of communicative goals than their literal counterparts, psycholinguistic research has also observed that the social meaning of an ironic utterance is muted compared to that of the literal counterpart because the ironic meaning is tinged by that of the literal meaning of the utterance. According to this so-called Tinge hypothesis, ironic criticism, for example, is thought to be perceived as less critical because the positive evaluative tone of the literal meaning tinges or colors the hearer's perception of the intended meaning (Dews/Winner 1995: 3; see also Pexman/Olineck 2002). Ironic criticism thus allows the speaker to critique without appearing as annoyed or insulting as if the critique was expressed literally (Dews/Winner 1995: 8). Conflicting with the Tinge Hypothesis, Colston (1997) found that ironic criticisms need not dilute the perceived condemnation compared to literal criticisms and may even be perceived as sharper and more critical than literal criticisms; along similar lines see Cutler (1974), Gibbs (1986), Grice (1978), Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Perret (1976) and Muecke (1980). The differential results of these experimental investigations may be due to several factors, such as the designs of the experiments (e.g., whether the materials were presented in writing or auditorily), the rating scales used, the topics of the ironic remarks (e.g., offensive behavior vs. poor performance), or whether the victim of irony was the addressee or a bystander, or the extent to which the speaker is involved in the event denoted by the ironic utterance (Dews et al 1995, Colston 1997).

In sum, the social meaning of irony is multifaceted: speakers may use irony to add humor, to soften the blow of criticism, to add a layer of criticism to a seemingly positive utterance, or to express their anger in a socially acceptable way. Understanding the speaker's intention requires consideration of the common ground between the speaker and their audience. It is an open question to what extent these results generalize beyond the use of irony in constructed dialogs and beyond cases in which ironic utterances convey the contrary.

### **2.3 Finding common ground: Bringing the approaches together**

We propose that the theoretical concept of common ground can serve to fruitfully combine literary and linguistic approaches to verbal irony, despite their diverging foci. As illustrated above, linguistic approaches already make use of common ground, both to characterize verbal irony and to understand its social meaning. Specifically, an utterance is ironic if the interpreter, relative to the common ground that they share with the speaker (or signer or author), can deduce that the speaker is not committed to the proposition expressed by the utterance. As illustrated above, this non-commitment may manifest itself in different ways: the proposition expressed may be blatantly false, it may be merely being mentioned by the speaker (rather than used), or the speaker may be merely pretending to be committed. The social meaning of an ironic utterance, such as the speaker being humorous or scathingly critical, is assumed to be inferable from information available to the interpreter in the common ground.

Central insights from literary approaches to verbal irony can be straightforwardly couched in the theoretical concept of common ground. Specifically, the more inclusive



goal of literary approaches, that is, the analysis of entire texts in their linguistic, social, and cultural contexts, translates to a consideration of how the common ground between the relevant cognitive agents evolves while reading a text, interpreting the author's intentions, and learning about the social and cultural context in which the text came into existence. In other words, literary approaches force the analyst to consider information that is generally sidelined in linguistic approaches to verbal irony.

The conceptualization of verbal irony in relation to common ground also allows for a more fine-grained investigation into the sources of information in the common ground that give rise to verbal irony, such as whether the information originated in prior linguistic utterances, in the visual field of the relevant cognitive agents, in shared societal or cultural norms, or in a common deductive process. Cases in which relevant information is not in the common ground of the relevant cognitive agents but, for instance, only available to the audience of a play, as may be the case with dramatic irony, can also be clearly distinguished (though we do not pursue such cases further in this article). This perspective leaves open the possibility that a particular expression or text passage is an instance of verbal irony if specific social and cultural aspects are taken into consideration, and not ironic in their absence.

In sum, verbal irony is characterized by the complex interplay of several sources of information, including the literal meaning of the utterance (the proposition expressed), the specific situation in which the utterance was made or the work was written, prior linguistic context, information about the speaker's or writer's socio-political stances and goals, and information about the cultural and political circumstances in which the utterance was made or the work came into existence. Cognitive agents differ in which of these sources of information are available to them, as a consequence of which multiple possible common grounds between the speaker/writer and the relevant cognitive agents must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of verbal irony. In general, the more relevant information is available in the common ground, the more subtle the possible interpretations.

One successful combination of the two approaches can be found in Mattusch's (2000) contribution to this publication, where she harnesses the Echoic Mention theory to analyze the irony in Carlo Goldoni's *La Locandiera*. In a similar vein, the remainder of the article serves to illustrate the fruitfulness of the interdisciplinary, common ground-based approach to verbal irony on the basis of a case study of verbal irony in Kurt Tucholsky's *Ratschläge*. Section 3 provides details on the social and cultural context in which the *Ratschläge* came into existence. In section 4, we then show how the theoretical concept of common ground can serve to fruitfully combine literary and linguistic approaches to verbal irony and its social meaning.

### **3. The socio-political context of Kurt Tucholsky and his *Ratschläge***

Born in 1890 in Berlin to a well-off Jewish family, Kurt Tucholsky was able to write short opinion pieces for different newspapers without financial worries thanks to a moderate inheritance after his father's death in 1905 (Zwerenz 1979). These early works already displayed Tucholsky's skepticism toward rigid hierarchies and political manipulation though less harshly than his later works (am Zehnhoff 2020). Shortly after leaving organized religion in 1911 (Zwerenz 1979), his wartime experiences cemented his radical pacifism and left-leaning politics, which also cleared up his view on his life's work: his self-assigned responsibility was to use his literary capabilities and satire as a

weapon (Tucholsky 1919a; 1929) to combat the emerging warmongering and nationalists in the first democratic republic in Germany. This led to his works becoming increasingly political and to Tucholsky, resigned to the growing Nazi influence, leaving Germany in 1924 for France. He died in his Swedish exile in 1935.

This self-assigned political responsibility might also explain the lack of research on irony in Kurt Tucholsky's work: while his work is rife with irony, it is almost always used as a means in parody and satire, which the majority of Tucholsky research is focussed on. Tucholsky had an inclination for language games, aptly borrowing the style and idiosyncrasies of the topic at hand (a reviewed book, public speeches, or individuals) to make his point (Mayer 2015). With journals and newspapers as his main venues, the daily or weekly publication cycle encouraged Tucholsky's bias for short essays and reviews on current political or cultural events and his own latest interests. *Ratschläge* is an outlier here: although it is a parody, it lacks the explicit (political) target and motivation of other texts from this late creative period but is still full of irony derived from the same background of Tucholsky's view of the German cultural and political landscape.

For the cultural landscape, Tucholsky rejected what he considered a German insistence on old monarchical values. He criticized the continued adherence to authority and tradition both in politics and in culture, as he saw bureaucracy and false severity upheld as values (Mayer 2015; Zwerenz 1979). When he published the *Ratschläge* in 1930, Tucholsky had lived abroad for five years already, and he had earlier framed his ambiguous, often negative relation to Germany in *Wir Negativen* (Tucholsky 1919b) as a stern attitude of tough love towards his country. Politically, Tucholsky was invested in the democratic ideal of the post-war revolution, making the faulty, intransparent processes and flawed representatives of the Reichstag a frequent target of his satire (Mayer 2013).

#### **4. Analysis of irony in Tucholsky's *Ratschläge für einen schlechten Redner***

Having introduced the social and cultural context in which the *Ratschläge* came into existence, we are now ready to analyze verbal irony and its social meaning in this work from the perspective of the common ground. We begin by introducing in (2) several sources of information that can form part of the common ground: these information sources include some that linguistic approaches to verbal irony and its social meaning would standardly consider, such as the grammar of German (2A) and prior linguistic context (2B), as well as some more standardly included in literary approaches, such as the rhetorical rules of the German Reichstag (2D) and the literary context of Tucholsky's work (2E):

- (2) Sources of information
  - A. German grammar, to determine the literal utterance meanings
  - B. Prior linguistic context: for each sentence, the prior sentences in the *Ratschläge*
  - C. Norms about what constitutes a good speech
  - D. Rhetorical rules of the German Reichstag during the Weimar Republic
  - E. Kurt Tucholsky's socio-political stances and intentions, and his work in its literary contexts
  - F. Socio-political circumstances of early 20th century Germany, ...
    - a. ...as experienced by a contemporary of Tucholsky
    - b. ...as reconstructed by a current reader or analyst

As mentioned in section 2.4, these sources of information are not available to all readers of the *Ratschläge*. Consequently, different readings of the work are possible, including different interpretations of the verbal irony and its social meaning. Our analysis in this section considers three types of common ground:

- (3) Three types of common ground
  - A. Simple common ground: The relevant information consists of (2A-C).
  - B. Contemporary common ground: The relevant information consists of (2A-E) and (2Fa).
  - C. Reconstructed common ground: The relevant information consists of (2A-E) and (2Fb).

The simple common ground in (3A) is the common ground of Tucholsky with a reader nowadays who does not know anything about Tucholsky or the socio-political context of the *Ratschläge* (2D-F). At the other extreme is the contemporary common ground in (3B): This is the common ground of Tucholsky with a reader who was his contemporary and familiar with him and the socio-political context of the *Ratschläge*. Present-day readers and analysts may acquire the information in (2D-E), but they do not share the information in (2Fa) with Tucholsky in the same way as an individual who was Tucholsky's contemporary. For this reason, we consider the reconstructed common ground in (3C), which is the common ground of Tucholsky, a reader who was his contemporary (see 3B), and the analyst, who is acquiring information in (2D-E) and (2Fb) for the purpose of interpreting the *Ratschläge*.

We begin our analysis by considering verbal irony and its social meaning with respect to the simple common ground.

#### 4.1 Irony and its social meaning with respect to the simple common ground

There are many expressions in Tucholsky's *Ratschläge* that are straightforwardly read as ironic because the proposition expressed (the literal meaning) is blatantly false relative to the simple common ground. In other words, it is straightforward for readers that share the simple common ground with Tucholsky to deduce that Tucholsky is merely pretending to offer this advice. Examples include (1), repeated here for convenience, as well as the expressions in (4)-(6).

- (1) Fang' nie mit dem Anfang an, sondern immer drei Meilen VOR dem Anfang!  
'Don't start at the beginning, but always three miles BEFORE the beginning.' (GA 13 [172], 1-2)
- (4) Sprich mit langen, langen Sätzen.  
'Speak with long, long sentences.' (GA 13 [172], 50)
- (5) Trink den Leuten ab und zu ein Glas Wasser vor – man sieht das gerne.  
'Show the people every now and then how one drinks a glass of water – that is well-received.' (GA 13 [172], 64)
- (6) Sprich nie unter anderthalb Stunden, sonst lohnt es sich gar nicht erst anzufangen.  
'Don't speak for less than one and a half hours, otherwise there's no point in getting started.' (GA 13 [172], 88)

On Grice's analysis of irony, the intended interpretations of these examples are the contrary of the literal meanings, given well-known norms about what makes for a good speech: in (1), that a good speech should not begin with preparatory statements; in (4), that a good speech consists of short sentences; in (5), that a speaker should not fidget too

much, for instance by interrupting the speech to drink water too often; and, in (6), that a good speech should not run for 90 minutes or more.<sup>3</sup>

Why would Tucholsky use ironic utterances to convey this advice rather than literal ones? The psycholinguistic research reviewed in section 2.2.1 suggests that interpreters may take Tucholsky use ironic utterances to convey the advice (rather than literal utterances) because ironic utterances convey particular social meaning. With respect to the simple common ground, three types of social meaning are particularly plausible. First, humor: Given that speakers/writers who use ironic utterances have been found to be more humorous than speakers/writers who use literal utterances (e.g., Dews et al. 1995, Dews/Winner 1995, Gibbs 2000), it is plausible that readers who share the simple common ground with Tucholsky take him to be humorous in conveying his advice. A second social meaning readers may infer is that of a strengthened bond with Tucholsky (e.g., Clark/Gerrig 1984, Kreuz et al. 1991, Gerrig/Gibbs 1989). By using imperative sentences, Tucholsky is pretending to give advice to an unknown addressee. The reader sees through the pretense, recognizing that Tucholsky is committed to the contrary proposition, therefore feels delight in the intimacy shared with Tucholsky. Finally, one might also hypothesize that Tucholsky is taken to critique speakers by giving this ironic advice. Specifically, one can read Tucholsky's advice as echoically mentioning propositions that characterize bad speeches that he, like the reader that shares the simple ground with him, have observed (including, for instance, the proposition that a bad speech consists of long, long sentences, or the proposition that a bad speech goes on for more than 90 minutes). From Tucholsky echoically mentioning these propositions, the reader may infer that Tucholsky has an attitude to these propositions, such as finding them inappropriate.

As just illustrated, the simple common ground suffices to identify verbal irony and its social meaning in the *Ratschläge*. However, it is easy to point to examples of verbal irony where the simple common ground does not suffice to identify what Tucholsky intended. For instance, in (7), both the imperative and the statement that follows it are obviously ironic, but the literal meaning of the statement does not flout the maxim of quality (as speaking freely can, indeed, give a restless impression). The reader who shares the simple common ground with Tucholsky will recognize from the obviously ironic interpretations of preceding linguistic utterances that Tucholsky is not committed to the truth of this statement, but the intended meaning is not obviously some related proposition (for instance, if it were the contrary, (7) would mean that speaking freely does not give a restless impression). Likewise, the expression in (8) is obviously ironic, but its literal content neither obviously false nor is the intended meaning some related proposition.

- (7) Sprich nicht frei – das macht so einen unruhigen Eindruck.  
'Don't speak freely – doing so gives a restless impression.' (GA 13 [172], 15)
- (8) [Context: Use as a model the other professional speakers, the Reichstagsabgeordnete. Have you ever heard them speak freely.]  
Die schreiben sich sicherlich zu Hause auf, wann sie "Hört! Hört!" rufen.  
'Surely they prepare at home already when to yell 'Hear! Hear!'' (GA 13 [172], 28-29)

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence that the irony is straightforwardly detected also comes from the use of the *Ratschläge* in didactic materials aimed at teaching rhetoric; e.g., [<https://argumentorik.com/blog/allgemeine-rhetorik-tipps/best-rhetorik-tipps-kurt-tucholsky/>]

The Echoic Mention Theory and the Pretense Theory are better suited than Grice's analysis to identify (7) and (8) as ironic. For (7), the Echoic Mention Theory takes Tucholsky to merely echo the common ground proposition that speaking freely gives a restless impression, thereby not committing himself to that proposition. Under the Pretense Theory, Tucholsky in (8) pretends to be an uninformed, foolish version of himself, addressing the hyperbolic statement to a primary addressee (who Tucholsky hopes will recognize the pretense) and, simultaneously, an addressee who does not discover the pretense. Tucholsky and the primary addressee (such as the reader who shares the simple common ground with him) detect the uninformed nature of the statement, as a consequence of which Tucholsky is not taken to be committed to it.

Although readers who share the simple common ground with Tucholsky can recognize the verbal irony in these two examples, by virtue of the interpretation of prior linguistic utterances in the *Ratschläge* and norms of what makes a good speech, such readers have difficulty deriving the intended meaning and the social meaning of these examples. This, we argue, is due to the impoverished nature of the simple common ground, which does not suffice to derive the attitude that Tucholsky has towards the propositions that speaking freely gives a restless impression or that Reichstagsabgeordnete prepare to when to yell 'hear, hear'. To derive the intended and social meanings one must consider the reconstructed common ground.

#### **4.2 Irony and its social meaning with respect to a reconstructed common ground**

In this section we consider instances of verbal irony and its social meaning that only become apparent with respect to a reconstructed common ground, that is, with respect to a common ground that considers not just literal meaning, prior linguistic context, and norms of what constitutes a good speech (i.e., 2A-C), but also the socio-political circumstances of early 20th century Germany, rhetorical rules of the German Reichstag during the Weimar Republic, and Kurt Tucholsky's socio-political stances and intentions, and his work (i.e., 2D-E and 2Fb) as far as these aspects can be reconstructed. We aim at providing at least three ways in which reconstructed common ground affects the understanding of irony; they are different in that they offer different ways of understanding irony: (i) examples where verbal irony and its social meaning become apparent and gain complexity with respect to the reconstructed common ground, (ii) examples that at first appear to be ironic but, with respect to the the reconstructed common ground, are perhaps not ironic, (iii) examples where we cannot reconstruct the common ground, and perhaps don't understand what is intended.

The first paragraph we engage with here is the passage in (7) which does not, especially as presented here, out of context, appear to be ironic, as a speech can indeed be considered a monologue.

- (7) Eine Rede ist, wie könnte es anders sein, ein Monolog, wie? Weil doch nur einer spricht, was?  
'A speech is, how could it be otherwise, a monologue, yes? Because only one is speaking, right?'  
(GA 13 [172]: 68f.)

Two distinct sources of information provide cues that Tucholsky is being ironic here, criticizing the major rhetorical habit of the Reichstag, that speeches had to be considered as monologues. In doing so Tucholsky highlights what he perceives as bad rhetorical rules and habits of the Reichstag. The first source is the preceding linguistic material and its

interpretation: At this point in the *Ratschläge*, the reader has already encountered several pieces of advice and other statements that are obviously ironic (as detailed in the previous section). As such, readers are likely to suspect that Tucholsky did not intend the literal meaning of this passage, but something else. And, as one reads on, that suspicion is confirmed:

- (8) Du brauchst auch nach vierzehn Jahren öffentlicher Rednerei noch nicht zu wissen, daß eine Rede nicht nur ein Dialog, sondern ein Orchesterstück ist: eine stumme Masse spricht nämlich ununterbrochen mit.  
'After fourteen years of public speaking you do not yet need to know that a speech isn't even just a dialogue, but an orchestra piece: a silent mass is continuously joining in.' (GA 13 [172]: 69-74)

Tucholsky clarifies with (8) that giving a speech is not a monologue (by using the factive predicate *wissen* 'know'), that is, that he believes the contrary of (7) to be true. That Tucholsky intends to flout the maxim of quality with (7) may very well only become apparent to the general readership after reading (8). But those readers that share a more specialized common ground with Tucholsky may already understand this after reading (7); Tucholsky has been reported to remark on the quirk of people in Berlin to monologue at each other instead of engaging in dialogue (Eik 2012: 86). The relevant information that such readers may share with Tucholsky is that the form of a speech as a monologue is directly opposed to his self-image as a writer: he was very much concerned with the impact his texts were having, with choosing topics and communication methods that were suitable to different target audiences, and he considered the role of the author as the one who handles language as their tool (Mayer 2013). Tucholsky was particularly upset that members of the Reichstag did not speak freely, despite it being an explicit rule: instead of engaging in dialogue with one another about the nation's concerns, the members of the Reichstag held preplanned monologues, presenting statistics, newspaper articles, etc. without much concern for the effect on the – limited – audience. Readers armed with such a common ground would immediately recognize Tucholsky's intent with (7) and the intended meaning.

The following example shows that specific reconstructed common ground is required in order to confirm an intuitive understanding of irony:

- (9) Kündige den Schluß deiner Rede lange vorher an, damit die Hörer vor Freude nicht einen Schlaganfall bekommen. (Paul Lindau hat einmal einen dieser gefürchteten Hochzeitstoaste so angefangen: «Ich komme zum Schluß.»)  
'Announce the end of your speech long before so that the hearers do not have a stroke from joy. (Paul Lindau once started one of those dreaded wedding toasts like this: I'll finish.)' (GA 13 [136], 80-84)

The first part of this quote can be understood without any specific historic context. Tucholsky alludes to general rhetoric rules, also in effect today. He exaggerates in that he includes false biophysical consequences of all-too exciting speech in his advice. What is said is obviously false and the contrary is meant. Furthermore, Tucholsky is pretending to act in the interest of the audience that might not want to be stressed by a talk. The second part of the quote, however, suggests that some irony as well as its social meaning can only be understood if the reader shares a more specialized common ground with Tucholsky, in this case, a contemporary common ground that includes information about Paul Lindau and, more generally, theater and journalism in the Weimar Republic.

Paul Lindau was a theater director, dramaturg, and author who was close to the journalists of the *Weltbühne* (Tucholsky's main venue) and thus active in similar circles as Tucholsky

until he died in 1919. Lindau was both renowned and decried as a literary pundit for his satiric travelogs and commentary. These parallels between the work and social circles of Lindau and Tucholsky serve as a reconstructed common ground for modern readers, who cannot however know for certain if the two have interacted. Keeping this in mind, the reference to Lindau is ironic in that Lindau himself spoke ironically as he did not come to an end but gave a long speech. Speeches like this were feared because of their length, on which Lindau commented by the phrase 'I'll finish', an ironic formula that already reflected bad manners of speech and had become a tradition already in Tucholsky's time. This analysis relies on speculation however, since readers missing the contemporary common ground of Tucholsky's relationship to Lindau and the original wedding speech in question do not know if Tucholsky only borrows the irony from Lindau or if there is a now lost social meaning of Tucholsky endorsing Lindau or distancing himself from the quote. In other words, irony here has an excluding function, it weakens the bond between Tucholsky and the reader, as readers who do not share the contemporary or reconstructed common ground with Tucholsky might not understand what Tucholsky intended here. Furthermore, it is helpful to know that Tucholsky, as a journalist and writer, had always paid attention to the effect of his text. He always considered the right tone for his publication (for the proletariat's *Arbeiter Illustrierte*, the educated middle-class clientele of the *Weltbühne*, the cabaret scene). Especially concerning political messages, Tucholsky had concrete recommendations for the most effective way to convey a message: he pleaded for clear, direct appeal to the reader, language on the reader's level and topics that included solutions instead of commiserating the conditions or echoing manifestos. There are a number of instances in *Ratschläge* that derive their ironic content from this specific knowledge about Tucholsky's intentions. "Kümmere dich nicht darum, ob die Wellen, die von dir ins Publikum laufen", for example, the rejection of the interest in the effect of a speech, is just as opposed to Tucholsky's own image of good writing and rhetoric as is his quote that cites Lindau. Thus, while a reconstructed common ground fails for sufficiently analyzing the latter, here it adds a layer of meaning that is otherwise not accessible.

The reconstructed common ground also adds a layer of meaning to examples like (5) and (6), repeated here for convenience:

- (5) Sprich nicht frei – das macht so einen unruhigen Eindruck.  
'Don't speak freely – doing so gives a restless impression.' (GA 13 [172], 15)
- (6) [Context: Use as a model the other professional speakers, the Reichstagsabgeordnete. Have you ever heard them speak freely.]  
Die schreiben sich sicherlich zu Hause auf, wann sie "Hört! Hört!" rufen.  
'Surely they prepare at home already when to yell 'Hear! Hear!'' (GA 13 [172], 28-29)

The parliamentary processes in Tucholsky's time were highly conventionalized and rigid, both through regulation and tradition, so that even interjections could from time to time seem rehearsed. Speakers included parts in their speeches that were meant to evoke specific reactions from their own party, the opposition or even coalition partners (Mergel 2002). Especially the party leaders who were well versed in parliamentary ductus were able to control the crowd expertly and often integrated the expected crowd reactions into later punchlines (e.g., Trimborn 1920). Readers who are aware of these circumstances as well as Tucholsky's disdain for them recognize that (5) and (6) are meant to merely convey the contrary of the literal meaning; rather, Tucholsky here is criticizing and

poking fun at contemporary members of parliament and the rigidity of the parliamentary processes. He may have preferred to do so in this indirect fashion after having been denied entry to the parliament once in 1927, on the grounds of being chief editor for the government-critical *Weltbühne*, thus experiencing firsthand the ramifications of openly criticizing parliamentary works and representatives.

In addition to revealing more instances of irony, the reconstructed common ground can also make seemingly straightforward instances of irony more complex and, sometimes, more difficult to interpret.

- (10) Fang immer bei den alten Römern an und gib stets, wovon du auch sprichst, die geschichtlichen Hintergründe der Sache. Das ist nicht nur deutsch – das tun alle Brillenmenschen.  
'Always start with the ancient Romans and whatever you speak of, always provide the historical background for it. That is not just German – all glasses-wearers do it.' (GA 13 [172], 40-42)

When stating that using too much history and background is not just German but a quality of all *Brillenmenschen* 'four-eyes', a reader who shares the simple common ground with Tucholsky might read this as ironic: in the context of Clark and Gerrig's Pretense Theory (1984), Tucholsky appears to pretend to be somebody who admires the stereotypically stuffy and educated German, thereby poking fun at this stereotype.

Although this reading is present and probably intended by Tucholsky, readers who are aware of his ambivalent relationship to Germany and German culture might arrive at a different interpretation of (10). By the time the *Ratschläge* were published in 1930, Tucholsky had lived in exile (first in Paris and then Hindås) for over six years and had given up plans to move back to Germany. This was partly due to the rise of fascism, as he noted in his 1934 request for asylum in Sweden (Tucholsky 1934), but it also followed a long history of criticism of his perception of German culture. The democratized post-war Germany was seen as a work in progress by Tucholsky, who like many of his left-leaning peers, regarded the revolution as failed and unfinished (Laqueur 1976). In his early years, he assessed his negative writings on Germany to be a necessary means for the country's betterment. He saw a state unable to inspire its citizens to democracy and therefore criticized the Weimar constitution sharply (Mayer 2013: 406,420) but also the underlying German tendency to romanticize the late monarchy's bureaucracy and historic claim (Riha 1992; Mayer 2015: 83). This latter belief in institutions he saw as a uniquely German trait (as evidenced by raving reviews of the French people in his travelogs from Paris). This was known by his contemporaries and especially the right weaponized it as a way of denouncing Tucholsky as a subversive Jew. With this information in mind, it is possible to interpret (10) as not ironic, but as speaking to Tucholsky's actual view of German demeanor.

Stressing the *Brillenmenschen* a further interpretation is possible: 'Brillenmenschen' might refer to erudite speakers, hence, to all those who aim at legitimizing their claims with the help of historical examples. These 'Brillenmenschen' are not necessarily problematic from a political point of view but the paragraph is rhetorically stretched. This interpretation, however, is not based on the social and political context of the time but on intellectual and literary contexts such as the tradition of satire and polemic against erudite writers. Following this context, Tucholsky's attack on them might also be understood as a laconic remark that is not necessarily ironic. It is only the following example that confirms the correctness of an ironic reading.



- (11) Du hast ganz recht: man versteht es ja sonst nicht, sehr richtig, wer kann denn das alles verstehen, ohne die geschichtlichen Hintergründe ... sehr richtig! Die Leute sind doch nicht in deinen Vortrag gekommen, um lebendiges Leben zu hören, sondern das, was sie auch in den Büchern nachschlagen können ... sehr richtig. Immer gib ihnen Historie, immer gib ihm.  
 'You are quite right: one just doesn't understand it otherwise, quite right, who can understand all that without the historical background ... quite right! The people didn't come to your talk to hear living life but that, what they can also look up in books ... quite right. Let them have the history, let 'em have it.' (GA 13 [172], 49-55)

The interpretation of (10) is aided by an intratextual reference, the addition of (11), which is clearly ironic with a meaning that contradicts the literal one. The second, literal interpretation is only present through the knowledge of Tucholsky's opinions and not helped by other text passages or the text's overall ironic tone.

Here, we see how the reconstructed common ground thus complicates and facilitates the interpretation of irony at the same time. Both the ironic interpretation, i.e., following Clark and Gerrig (1984), as well as the literal interpretation hold some weight and it is up to the reader to reconstruct which message prevails. While this might give weight to Bauer's (2015) account of ambiguity in irony occurring due to the concurrent literal and ironic meaning, we cannot be sure if Tucholsky intended one interpretation over the other – leading to ambiguity because of the lost contemporary common ground, or if he intentionally left this ironic instance underspecified to allow for both interpretations to stand on their own. Common ground can thus show us the complexities of irony and thus the boundaries of simple accounts that contrast a literal with an opposite meaning.

## 5. Discussion and concluding remarks

Analyzing select instances of verbal irony in Tucholsky's *Ratschläge* allowed us to show that existing literary, linguistic, and psycholinguistic approaches to irony and its social meaning can be fruitfully combined, even if there is no consensus (yet) on what verbal irony is. We argued, specifically, that the theoretical concept of common ground provides a way in which the information that literary and linguistic approaches to verbal irony and its social meaning have considered can help overcome contextual blind spots. Discussing how irony can be detected from the social constellation of its use, we found that considering specific types of information can clarify an ironic instance and make it understandable at all (context of theater and journalism in example 9), make an ironic utterance more complex or even lead to two or more meanings (example 10, based on either socio-political context or the context of satire and polemics against erudite writers). Furthermore, intratextual reference sheds light on the correct use of social and historical context in the analysis (examples 8-10) can help the interpretation of an ironic instance. Looking at our examples (9)-(11), the search for specific sources of information seems necessary, the most important one being Tucholsky's interest in and his ways to view the Reichstag with its peculiar rhetoric rules. Observing our own interpretations critically, however, the decision for a specific information source, and thereby for common ground with Tucholsky, was not always clear as the analysis of (9) shows where two different common grounds lead to different interpretations. Furthermore, we found that (10) cannot be understood without information about the history of theater and journalism in the Weimar Republic.

Our examples show that the analysis of irony depends on the type of common ground that the reader shares with Tucholsky. While literary studies provided us with a loosely woven framework for the analysis of verbal irony only, the extensive conception of the work in

its contemporary context benefited our subsequent separation of the different types of common ground for the linguistic approaches. Future interdisciplinary research on irony and its social meaning will have to shed more light on the choice of the information sources that may help to establish common ground between the author and the reader when it comes to the analysis of irony. In addition to that, the relevant forms or types of common ground and the ways in which the particular common ground is established merit attention. Common ground requires an overlap of thoughts from author and reader but this overlap need not be complete.

For Tucholsky research, this discussion is fruitful in many respects: historically, it allows a precise contextualization of his *Ratschläge* with regard to the target of his attack, that is, the Reichstag and its rules of speech. In addition to that, we can conclude that Tucholsky's use of irony has a multifold social meaning: first, *Ratschläge* was originally written as a piece in the weekly journal *Vossische Zeitung*, deploying irony to explore institutional, rhetoric and political problems in the Reichstag (explorative function of irony). A contemporary reader would catch all allusions to the Reichstag and political ductus included in the *Ratschläge*. Assuming Kreuz, Long and Church's (1991) hypothesis that irony is highly effective in achieving communicative goals and aiding in memorization, Tucholsky may have utilized irony to better convey his (disapproving) stance on the political system.

Second, the use of irony surprises and thus entertains the reader (entertaining function of irony). Particularly the joint publication with the *Ratschläge für einen guten Redner* (advice for a good speaker), which is also humorous and somewhat hyperbolic in its exaggerated use of the advice (i.e., bullet points, no structure, very short) but without any evident irony, the surprise and entertainment factor is clearly one part of Tucholsky's goal as a journalist.

Third, Tucholsky was concerned with text impact, from effective communication and topic choice for different target audiences and political messages to the role of the author as the one who handles language as their tool (Mayer 2013). In *Ratschläge*, Tucholsky provides the reader with numerous and multifold ways to interpret the Reichstag and the speeches given there; the fact that he reacts to this forum in intense literary form proves how important the Reichstag was for the public at the time and that the art of rhetoric was held at high esteem. Irony, in this light, claims an educative function that not only informs the electorate, thereby fulfilling a democratic function, but also bringing the electorate together, in the sense of a community-building function.

Fourth, a precondition for these functions is the fact that irony accuses institutional, rhetoric, political and moral mistakes, pointing to these mistakes in a way that they may seem worse than they are and utterly ridiculous. Irony not only tinges what is expressed but highlights it. Tucholsky denounced the subservience, the earlier persistent imperial cult, later NS-cult, of the supposed democratic Republic. This context also explains the dig at the Reichstag representatives, as his criticism of the Republic's democratic errors became severe and pressing before 1930. Irony also has an excluding function that creates in- and out-groups, acceptable and non-acceptable behavior and belief.

Analytically, the combination of the approaches discussed helps us better analyze Tucholsky's *Ratschläge*. Below the level of the much-discussed parody, it becomes apparent that he uses irony as a stylistic device. The various linguistic approaches to irony were useful in identifying expressions in the *Ratschläge* that receive an ironic interpretation against the simple or the reconstructed common ground. Although no single

approach to irony covers all of the instances of irony observed, what appears to be common to all instances of irony (and analyses thereof) is that an expression is ironic if the interpreter, relative to the common ground that they share with the speaker, can deduce that the speaker is not committed to the proposition expressed by the expression, for instance by the speaker pretending to be somebody who endorses the proposition or the speaker making clear that they are merely echoing the proposition (see section 2.2). Future investigations of irony in literary texts may reveal additional mechanisms by which speakers and writers distance themselves from propositions expressed.

Tucholsky's *Ratschläge* discusses principled recommendations for good public speeches, many of which can be understood today even against the background of the simple common ground. The use of irony makes the presentation of these recommendations funnier, as humor is a rather common social meaning of verbal irony, as discussed in section 2.2.2. We were also able to develop hypotheses about the social meaning of irony for expressions that receive an ironic interpretation against the reconstructed common ground: generally, we suggested that in these cases irony allows Tucholsky to make vivid which forms of expression impede or even hinder political discourse in the Weimar Republic. We also suggested that the ironic expressions convey Tucholsky's stance towards the topic (such as the style of speeches given in the Reichstag) or particular individuals (such as the members of the Reichstag), including annoyance or mockery. Since, however, psycholinguistic investigations of the social meaning of irony are limited in their empirical scope (namely to obviously false expressions in constructed discourses), these hypotheses deserve further empirical investigation.

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