A corpus-based investigation into lexicogrammatical incongruity and its relation to irony

by

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Abstract

Presented is a corpus-based investigation into the lexicogrammatical features of irony. A common understanding of irony is of a trope in which the *dictum* and the *implicatum* are seen as incongruous. I argue that patterns of lexicogrammatical incongruity can reflect this incongruity at the pragmatic level. Additionally, a bottom-up examination of authentic examples of ironic utterances can reveal common lexicogrammatical patterns. This study attempts to readdress the paucity of linguistic studies into irony by focusing on real-world examples of irony as a source of data.

Examples of irony were taken from two irony-rich discourse environments and ironic examples were extracted using an independent framework of irony. Commonalities of patterning were first identified, and then interrogated across the two DIY corpora, as well as two general corpora, in order to measure both frequency (raw/t-score) and fixedness. Finally, a deeper examination of the concordance lines revealed whether such patterns carry an ironic force.

Three significant findings are presented. Firstly, the study explores lexicogrammatical patterns of collocation concerning *multiple hedging*: that is, two or more lexical items which ostensibly have a hedging function, yet often frame strong evaluative or rhetorical statements. Secondly, I present patterns of collostruction in which the progressive aspect colligates with cognition verbs. It is the lexicogrammatical incongruity within these patterns that is often a source of irony. Usage of these phrases does not, however, guarantee that the statement will always be ironic. Yet, when compared within larger general corpora, these patterns demonstrate high tendencies of pragmatic characteristics related to irony. Therefore, the final results chapter argues that such patterns can be considered as having ironic *priming*.

Identification and awareness of such patterns may help audiences in accurately reaching ironic interpretations. More practically, these patterns may also help NLP methodology by building upon previous attempts of automated irony detection to create more robust algorithms. Furthermore, there are wider implications to what corpus linguistic methodology can explore in regard to connections between pragmatics and lexicogrammar.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is an investigation into whether there are identifiable lexicogrammatical features of ironic utterances. At first consideration, this may seem a little naïve as common sense informs us that verbal irony is primarily a paralinguistic phenomenon. Indeed, when I have discussed my research with a layperson, this is often the response I get. Also, when researching linguistic studies of irony, similar arguments are often found. Barbe (1995: 71) rather discouragingly sums up the common position:

> As much as we would like to find them, there are no signals that can be considered purely signals of irony. Admittedly, some utterances are understood as mildly ironic by a majority of hearers, in particular the common irony of *You're a fine friend!* or *You must be kidding!* Nevertheless, the search for unambiguous irony-criteria will ultimately fail.

However, this study contends some of the above points by arguing that there are some identifiable features of language which may contribute to the ironic effect. What follows is an exploration of these features.

By means of introduction, this chapter will justify the exploration of lexicogrammatical features of irony. Secondly, it will outline the benefits for using corpus-based methodology for this exploration and explain the advantages of using political corpora. Finally, I will present my research questions and aims.

Irony is mostly viewed as a linguistic trope whereby the *dictum* and the *implicatum* of an utterance are in contradiction (Kotthoff 2003). Such a focus means that any analysis of the implicatum will fail to uncover any common characteristics of irony at the lexical or grammatical level. I will argue that although pragmatics remains a vital aspect of irony production, there may be certain lexicogrammatical features which hint at or frame irony. Rather than being separate, what connects these features with the pragmatic function of irony is the phenomenon of incongruity. This phenomenon is influenced by the incongruity-resolution and bisociation theories concerning the creation and processing of jokes (Koestler 1964, Suls 1972, Ritchie 1999). For these theories, humour arises when two or more incongruous elements are juxtaposed together. Often, these elements are semantic (for

example, in the case of puns), pragmatic or contextual. Therefore, incongruity can be defined as a form of juxtaposition or clash of two contradicting elements. For most linguistic investigations in irony, these elements often manifest at the pragmatic or contextual level. However, this study makes the case that incongruity of irony can also be observed at the lexicogrammatical level. Incongruent features of irony at this level are evidenced using corpus-based methodology.

1.1 The case for a lexicogrammatical approach to irony

Despite controversies, it is clear that verbal irony is a worthwhile focus for linguistic study. It is a fairly common feature of communication: Gibbs (2000) argues that around 8% of spoken interaction between friends is ironic, whereas Whalen et al (2013) found that 72.8% of blog entries contain irony in some form. Yet despite its frequency, linguists continue to wrestle with how irony is formed and, more importantly, what communicative functions it serves. Irony remains quite an ethereal phenomenon: something that, superficially at least, is not easily identified at the semantic level. As Barbe (1995: 71) points out, "ultimately, irony possesses no easily identifiable independent criteria". This explains how much linguistic theory of irony focuses on certain characteristics of perhaps one form of irony, and so cannot account for irony in all its forms. Similarly, most debate is concerned with studies failing to encompass all forms of irony. Whilst this study makes no claims about solving this dilemma, it does hope to move the discussion forward somewhat by helping us to greater understand the scope of the linguistic trope. Chapter 2 will examine this position in detail as well as exploring the lack of agreement across linguistic studies of irony. As stated above, this study contends Barbe's argument by demonstrating how corpus methodology can identify lexicogrammatical similarities across real-world examples of irony.

As such, a lexicogrammatical approach to irony may have numerous advantages. Early corpus linguistics studies demonstrated that the boundaries between lexis and grammar were not as clear as once thought. Furthermore, the theories surrounding Construction Grammar (in particular, Goldberg 1995, Jackendoff 1997, Kay and Fillmore 1999, Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003) not only confirm this but also blur the lines between lexis, grammar, semantics and pragmatics. Acknowledging the concept of *constructions*, that is the idea that lexical patterns also have intrinsic semantic or pragmatic meaning, means that there is a tangible possibility that certain patterns may also carry an ironic illocutionary function or

force. If we return to Barbe's (1995: 71) argument presented at the start of this chapter, she identified some utterances which she deemed as understood to be somewhat ironic within a specific discourse community, such as *"You're a fine friend!*". I would argue that corpus tools help us to understand that this occurs more often than commonly believed. To demonstrate, this study therefore attempts to use corpus-based methodology to uncover such lexicogrammatical features.

The present study is divided into three sections, each covering a different lexicogrammatical aspect of concern within corpus linguistic methodology. These aspects are collocation, collostruction and phraseology. These will be outlined below. Through examination of two corpora of ironic utterances, three notable lexicogrammatical similarities related to the above aspects were observed. These three similarities determine Chapters 5 to 7, and so are briefly introduced below.

1.1.1 Multiple hedging

The most striking lexicogrammatical feature of ironic utterances presented in this study is the use of hedging items. The concept of hedging, outlined in greater detail in Section 3.3.2, is a paralinguistic phenomenon whereby a speaker attempts to temper or soften their claims (see Hyland 1994), either through linguistic or metalinguistic features. These could be specific words such as 'may', 'might' or 'could'; or non-verbal clues such as an uncertain tone of voice or a shrug. In this study, hedging items refer to certain lexical items which could be considered as performing this softening or tempering function. A particularly striking (and incongruous) feature of these ironic utterances containing hedging was the prevalence of utterances which contained more than one hedging item within a single clause. The frequency of such hedging items in ironic utterances, not only within specific political corpora but also within general corpora, warranted further investigation. Therefore, Chapter 5 breaks down the use of such hedging items: a lexicogrammatical phenomenon which I refer to as *multiple hedging*..

There are parallels between the concept of multiple hedging and the corpus linguistic methodological approach of *collocation*. Collocation, a linguistic phenomenon first identified by Firth (1957) and developed by Halliday (1966), is concerned with how some words tend to occur in close proximity with others more frequently than one would expect by chance. As

an example, Halliday noted how the synonyms ‘strong’ and ‘powerful’ can be distinguished by the nouns in which they describe. Therefore, we talk about ‘strong tea’ and a ‘powerful car’ rather than ‘powerful tea and a ‘strong car’ (1966: 59). In this study, I identify examples of more than one lexical items with a hedging illocutionary force collocating within single utterances. The prevalence of such collocation may reflect an important pragmatic as well as lexicogrammatical aspect of irony: namely an incongruity of quantity (presented in Table 4.2). Therefore, to investigate this feature in more detail, I first identify ‘hedging’ lexical items and then examine how they collocate with other ‘hedging’ items within the corpora. Through this approach, common patterns of multiple hedging were identified and are presented.

I have referred to ‘hedging’ in quotation marks here as it refers to both hedging and intensifying lexical items. The examination of multiple hedging within multiple corpora revealed how these hedging items not only collocate together in common lexicogrammatical patterns, but also how they can collocate with intensifying items. such as in the following example:

1. thank you for working as hard as you have to answer our questions, including, but not exclusively, those questions that you didn't like.(Laughter.)

   MR. EARNEST: There were **more than a few** of those. (Laughter.)

Although ‘more than a few’ does not feel like a marked phrase (and is, indeed, common within the general corpora), it is somewhat incongruous that an intensifying item (*more than*) collocates with a hedging item (*a few*). Therefore, this use within ironic utterances may be significant. Whether intensifying, qualifying or mixed, such phrases stand out as somewhat incongruous. Also, like ironic utterances, they break Grice's (1975, 1978) maxims: particularly those of quantity and manner (see Chapter 2 for more detail). It is therefore possible that there is a relationship between the collocation of such lexical items and ironic interpretation.

O’Keeffe et al (2007: 64) posited that roughly 20 occurrences of an n-gram per 5 million words could be considered significant. Chapter 5 uses this yardstick to focus on common collocational patterns of multiple hedging items, and whether these patterns can be considered as *constructions*; that is, patterns with a clear illocutionary function. A closer look at the concordance lines may help to reveal their rhetorical and evaluative functions, allowing

a confirmation of whether such collocations are common patterns of construction or not. The examples presented in Chapter 5 illustrate that such functions are often different than the function of hedging items in isolation. I argue that examples of multiple hedging taken from corpora illustrate an illocutionary function of hedging which has been overlooked in previous linguistic studies.

1.1.2 Collostructions and the progressive aspect

Another common lexicogrammatical feature of the ironic utterances used in this study was the use of the progressive aspect – and this usage is also somewhat incongruent. The function of the progressive as hedging or qualifying is therefore laid out in Chapter 6. Within two political corpora, there are further examples in which this hedging function is incongruent with the evaluative statement. An example is presented below:

2. I **have just been doing** a little research into the Opposition's policy on university education.

Spoken by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, this particular example from the PMQ corpus signposts a negative evaluation of the opposition's policy. It is notable that this signpost has two hedging items, the use of *just* and the progressive aspect to mark this negative evaluation. Chapter 6 examines the use of the progressive aspect in more detail, and presents some common *collostructions* (the collocation of constructions with a particular grammatical feature (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003)) which have incongruous features.

As such, Chapter 6 follows a similar methodological process as the previous. It starts with the progressive aspect as the foundation, then identifies collocates of hedging items which form a collostructional relationship within evaluative utterances. Finally, using the same yardstick by O'Keeffe et al (2007), I evaluate the fixedness and frequency of these collostructions across four corpora, and, by utilising a working framework of irony, assess whether they contribute to an ironic force.

1.1.3 Phraseology and ironic priming

Chapter 7 differs significantly from the Chapters 5 and 6 as it predominantly deals with multi-word items, which I define as p-frames, n-grams, or other patterns with little or no flexibility. This chapter identifies examples of such items which I will argue have become *primed* (Hoey 2005) with irony. These patterns were identified by the author and, as such, it is difficult to use corpus methodology to uncover new examples of utterances which can be considered ironically primed. Furthermore, as ironic priming is unestablished as a linguistic phenomenon, the examples presented in this chapter are mined through self-identification, rather than corpus methodology such as collocation or collostruction. As a result, identification of such phrases requires a level of subjective interpretation.

1.2 Benefits of a corpus-based study

Using a corpus approach helps deal with criticisms surrounding the use of data, particularly the fact that there are clear limitations in the examples used in previous studies which investigate the linguistic phenomenon. Burgers et al (2012: 291) point out that, "few studies have actually focused on irony in usage and the studies that do so, disagree on the different distinctions that can be made between ironic utterances". In fact, this is one of the more significant weaknesses addressed to most linguistic studies. Partington (2006: 182) also makes the connection and points out a significant weakness in studies into irony, which, “largely have been conducted with little recourse to ‘external’ data, that is, examples are either invented or selected anecdotally from literary sources”. A significant strength of this study is that it attempts to address this lack of focus by incorporating real-world data of ironic utterances using corpus-based methodology. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of linguistic studies of irony take a prescriptive approach: linguistic theories are top-down and laboratory created examples are used to support such theories. This study is rather unique as it starts with a data set of real-world examples of irony, and then, through a bottom-up approach, identifies lexicogrammatical similarities for further investigation. As such, it attempts to avoid prescriptive theories which make up the majority of linguistic studies into irony.

However, in order to identify possible lexicogrammatical similarities in ironic utterances, a corpus of ironic utterances needs to be significant in scope. For this reason, I

constructed a corpus of ironic utterances taken from two political discourses. The next section outlines the justification for this.

1.3 Data set: the use of political corpora

The primary reason for examining ironic utterances from a political context is its prevalence in the discourse. This type of discourse can be considered as emanating from an "irony-rich environment" (Akimoto et al 2012: 218), whereby irony is a commonly used trope. The connection between politics and irony will be briefly discussed below.

Linguistic studies into irony have often commented on the connection between irony and satire (Muecke 1969: 5; Barbe 1995: 95; Colebrook 2004: 183). Satire is used to attack "by way of ridicule or irony" (Colebrook 2004: 183) those in power, and so has consistently had a political leaning. Furthermore, Dews et al (1995) point out four social functions of irony: humour, status elevation, criticism without aggression and emotional control. This is notable as it can be argued that a politician who exemplifies these four social functions will be deemed personable as well as competent and possessing integrity, particular in an era of an increasing 'personalisation' of politics (Garzia 2011). Of further importance is the concept of duality within irony. Muecke (1969: 232-233) noted this dualism: irony has the rhetorical power to attack positions of power or to expose folly and yet is equally used for self-protecting and evasive purposes. These two positions can be mirrored in a great deal of political discourse, particularly debate. Hutcheon (1994) takes up Muecke's observations and links them more deeply with politics. In fact, her framework of the functions of irony informs much of this study's evaluation of what can be considered ironic (see Chapter 4: Methodology). These connections demonstrate that a corpus of irony based on political discourse may prove fruitful.

Therefore, based on the above argument, this study makes use of two DIY corpora comprising of data from two political contexts: parliamentary debate and White House press briefings. Two contexts were chosen for a number of important reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate two sides of English discourse and so are important for reasons of balance. Secondly, much has been made of the two cultures' differing approaches to irony. Although

much of this seems to exist in popular press rather than in serious academic discourse[1]. The following quote from the comedy actor Simon Pegg, sums up a common belief:

> Although it is true that we British do use irony a little more often than our special friends in the US. It's like the kettle to us: it's always on, whistling slyly in the corner of our daily interactions. To Americans, however, it's more like a nice teapot, something to be used when the occasion demands it[2].

This study makes no claims about cultural differences in the frequency of irony. However, as the two contexts differ in their approach to politics, there may well be uses of irony that greater encompass its different functions. It is fair to say that discussions in the two contexts vary considerably: British parliamentary discourse is often adversarial, whereas White House press briefings are a little more complex. I would argue that utilising these two discourse environments means that there is a greater chance of encapsulating examples of irony which reflect its duality outlined by Muecke and Hutcheon above. Overall, using two differing discourse contexts will lead to a wider range of ironic utterances as well as more robust findings.

Furthermore, this study is not unprecedented: other studies have utilised political contexts to analyse irony. Most notably, Partington (2006, 2007) used corpus-based methodology to examine how aspects of humour (including irony) manifested within White House press briefings. He adopted what he referred to as Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (2006: 5) which combines more qualitative methodology with the traditional quantitative approach of corpus linguistics. The present study has been influenced by this approach and such influences will be outlined in Chapter 4.

This section has outlined the three lexicogrammatical features which make up Chapters 5 to 7 of this study. The following section reflects on these features by first introducing the research aims and then outlining the main research questions.

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[1] A few examples:
https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/dec/16/americans-irony-no-joke-new-york-times-petty-crime
https://time.com/3720218/difference-between-american-british-humour/
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3433375.stm

[2] : https://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2007/02/brits-americans-irony/230909/

1.4 Research aims

Linguistic studies of irony are numerous but, as mentioned, rarely reach a consensus on its nature and function. Therefore, the aims of this study are three-fold:

Firstly, I aim to address the limitations of previous linguistic studies in which they often present a paucity of real-world examples of irony. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, a great many studies utilise laboratory-produced examples, most often created prescriptively or taken from English literature. When real-world data have been collected, the number of examples has been limited. Political discourse provides an "irony-rich environment" (Akimoto et al 2012: 218) from which to draw from. As a result, there is a greater number of spoken ironic examples to examine. A reading of the literature shows that there is a lack of consensus on how and why ironic utterances are formed. Particularly, what can be considered ironic is wider ranging than one might expect. Through the collected ironic examples, I will reflect upon leading theories about the nature and function of irony and explore strengths and possible weaknesses when applied to real-world examples.

Secondly, this study aims to demonstrate how corpus-based methodology can be used to reveal the nature and function of irony. The research data set is taken from two spheres of political discourse: Questions to the Prime Minister sessions from British parliamentary procedure and White House press briefings from the US. While bearing in mind that these two distinct political discourses could be defined as specialised corpora, the number and scope of utterances mean that this research provides a unique opportunity to draw conclusions from a corpus-based investigation relying on a significant body of data. Furthermore, this study is firmly entrenched within corpus-based theory and methodology. Each research chapter draws upon aspects of language which have previously been investigated using corpus linguistics methods. These include collocation, colligation, collostruction, phraseology and lexical priming. This study uncovers parallels between these aspects of language and lexicogrammatical characteristics of irony. Chapter 3 will describe these parallels and explain how they relate to the present study. Following this, Chapters 5-7 examine each of these lexicogrammatical features of irony in turn. By connecting lexicogrammatical features of irony with wider aspects of language, I aim to illustrate the potential for corpus methodology to examine features of language which lie above the sentence but, in fact, may have common lexicogrammatical characteristics.

Finally, and linked to the above point, the research will test the hypothesis that in some cases, there are identifiable lexicogrammatical features of irony. These features can be interrogated within a corpus and reveal a high frequency of ironic utterances. I posit that the speaker may (unconsciously or not) use these lexicogrammatical features in order to help signpost the hearer towards an ironical interpretation. These words and phrases, of course, do not guarantee the speaker is being ironic. However, they may be used in a significant number of ironic utterances to the point where I argue that these features may be considered ironically 'primed' (from Hoey's (2005) phrasing). As mentioned above, Gibbs (2000) identified that 8% of spoken discourse contains irony so this study uses this statistic as a yardstick for measuring ironic priming. This aim is perhaps the most significant as its hypothesis goes against the common consensus on irony: that is, irony is a purely paralinguistic feature and cannot be detected through linguistic clues. Furthermore, Chapter 8 will explore how these lexicogrammatical features may aid natural language processing (NLP), and how this study may be positioned within previous attempts of automated computational irony detection.

Furthermore, I will explore if the examples of irony from the two corpora exemplify previously undiscussed characteristics of irony. Further investigation will uncover if similar examples of irony can be mined within wider reaching corpora, potentially contributing to the discussion into the nature of irony. The research intends to address a question that has arisen from linguistic studies of irony, that is, why a speaker chooses to use a rhetorical device risking misunderstanding or misinterpretation. This question is no more important than in political debate, in which the speaker is addressing a number of audiences simultaneously (the addressee, the House, the media, the electorate), and in which misunderstandings can be politically damaging. Real world examples can help to examine genuine illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of irony within political discourse. This may lead to new insights into the understanding of the rhetorical function of irony.

1.5 Research questions

Based on the above aims, the present study poses four questions which have shaped the research:

1) Using corpus methodology, can irony be detected at a lexicogrammatical level?

2) If so, what are the significant/most frequent lexicogrammatical features of ironic utterances from the corpus data?

3) How do such lexicogrammatical features fit into corpus linguistics?

4) How can corpus analysis help with automated irony detection?

These four research questions will be reviewed directly in Chapter 9: Conclusion, as part of the summary of this study.

1.6 Outline

The present thesis is divided into 5 sections followed by a conclusion. These five sections are as follows.

Firstly, in Chapter 2, I present and discuss previous linguistic studies into the nature and function of irony. This is to not only highlight the accepted view of irony as a pragmatic phenomenon, but also to demonstrate the importance of incongruity in ironic utterances (see Section 2.1). This is a theme which runs through the majority of ironic theory and it is a phenomenon which I argue is present at the lexicogrammatical level of ironic utterances and which can be identified through corpus linguistic methods.

Chapter 3 is a review of such methods. This study aims to present three significant lexicogrammatical features which have been directly informed by an aspect of corpus linguistics. Therefore, this chapter examines previous work regarding these aspects. There is a discussion on the importance of collocation as one of the earliest concerns of corpus linguistics. Secondly, I make a connection between colligation and collostruction, and discuss how Construction Grammar informs the connection between lexicogrammar and pragmatic meaning, with particular emphasis on the illocutionary function of the progressive aspect. Finally, the chapter looks at phraseology and speculates on how Hoey's concept of lexical priming may explain how certain multi-word items carry an ironic meaning.

Chapter 4 is an outline of the methodology used in this study. This is followed by three chapters which each examine a lexicogrammatical feature of irony in turn.

Chapter 5 explores the concept of collocation and presents examples of ironic utterances in which speakers collocate multiple hedging items within one utterance. I will argue that this collocation leads to an incongruity between the hedging items and the strong evaluations they signpost.

Chapter 6 examines the relationship between irony and collostruction. Similar to the previous chapter, I present examples of collostructions which undermine the illocutionary force of hedging. These collostructions are related to the progressive aspect and feature cognitive verbs. Again, an incongruity between the collostructions and the strong evaluations they foreshadow is explored.

Chapter 7 posits that the phenomenon of lexical priming is also reflected in ironic utterances. It presents examples of multi-word items which seem to have an ironic illocutionary function. I argue that this is a result of the same linguistic processes initially proposed by Hoey. These examples are closest in affirming the first research question.

Before concluding, a critical evaluation of the study is presented in Chapter 8. I also examine previous research into the automatic identification of irony using NLP methodology. After this examination, I argue how the findings of this study can be incorporated into machine identification to widen the scope and produce possibly more robust results.

Chapter 2: Linguistic Interpretations of Irony

This chapter provides an overview of the most significant linguistic studies of irony which have informed the present study. As mentioned in the Introduction, the overriding theme of these studies seems to be incongruity. Incongruity provides a link between pragmatic functions of irony and lexicogrammatical features. To illustrate the main arguments of previous linguistic theories, I will be using examples taken from the corpora of Questions to the Prime Minister sessions (PMQ) and White House Press Briefings (WHPB) (see Section 4.1 for more details on the construction of these two corpora).

2.1 Irony and incongruity

Before highlighting the prevalence of incongruity within irony at the lexicogrammatical level, it is important to explore how incongruity can manifest itself at various linguistic levels: included the semantic, pragmatic and contextual. As conceded previously, it is impossible not to consider such levels as irony is primarily an illocutionary act, often constrained by context. In general terms, incongruity in irony can be summarised as a clash between what is said, the *dictum* and what is implied, the *implicatum*. In this manner, it is often referred to in linguistic circles as a violation of Grice's *Maxim of Quality* (1975). In addition, other conventional interpretations of irony often reflect Aristotle's theory of "saying something but meaning the opposite" (Barbe 1995: 38). Both these ideas loom large over much of linguistic understanding of irony, and yet both interpretations are somewhat simplistic. The following sections will show how they not only lack complexity but also fail to encompass all aspects of the rhetorical device. Nevertheless, to understand this complexity in greater depth, Grice's pragmatic theory proves to be a valuable starting point.

2.2 Grice and conversation implicature

Although not focusing on the phenomenon of irony in great detail, Grice's (1975) concepts of *conversational maxims* and *conversational implicature* help us to understand irony's incongruous nature. If viewed from their illocutionary function, ironic utterances can be interpreted as a violation of one (or more) of Grice's maxims: in particular the maxim of quality. This maxim of quality refers to truth: specifically *do not say what you believe to be false* (ibid. 47). Grice argues that conversation generally adheres to a number of maxims in

order for speaker and hearer to mutually understand each other – what he refers to as the *co-operative principle*. However, Grice is keen to point out that breakdowns in these maxims do not always lead to a breakdown in communication. In fact, violations of these maxims are not only frequent but, at times, desirable. The use of irony is one such time. When a speaker is being ironic, usually they intentionally *flout* or *exploit* (ibid. 53) this maxim of quality, and so the co-operative principle leads the listener to re-examine the message in order to understand the speaker's *conversational implicature* (ibid. 50): the speaker's intended meaning. As such, Grice's concept of the flouting of maxims has clear parallels with the idea of incongruity in irony. For Grice (1978), irony is achieved through a two-stage process: first the hearer identifies the flouting of a maxim in the speaker's *dictum*; secondly, they substitute the literal meaning with an opposite meaning: again, similar to how hearers understand a joke through the incongruity-resolution theory (Suls 1972, Ritchie 1999). Grice's concepts of conversational maxims and conversational implicature demonstrate well how incongruity between dictum and implicatum does not always lead to communication breakdown. However, as Grice's theory does not specifically focus on the phenomenon of irony, there seems to be two important oversights.

Firstly, although Grice's theory of conversational implicature explains how irony is interpreted, it does not fully explain why the ironist chooses to break a maxim, and subsequently, what the illocutionary function of irony is. Grice later develops his position (Grice 1989: 53-54) by claiming that, "I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt". It is certainly fair to state that irony must, in Booth's words, have an "emotionally charged value judgement" (1974: 44) but the extent to how charged the judgement may be or if, in fact, it is always a negative judgement is open to interpretation. Indeed, Grice's argument that irony cannot have a positive illocutionary force does not hold up to scrutiny. Hutcheon (1994) among others has noted an important function of irony is to create "amiable communities". Further examples of irony taken from the two political corpora and presented in this study also reaffirm this: in such heated environments, irony often serves to lighten the conflict. Therefore, it seems that the illocutionary function of irony is rather multi-faceted.

More importantly, despite Grice's theory of conversation maxims having a wide-reaching influence on pragmatics, his definition of what irony is remains somewhat simplistic. In fact, this chapter will present further linguistic studies which reveal that this is a

somewhat narrow view of the multifunctionality of ironic utterances. For example, Barbe points out that Grice's definition has not progressed from the traditional Aristotelian definition (Barbe 1995: 38). Furthermore, Gibbs and O'Brien (1991: 524-5) make the salient and often overlooked point that the problem with the argument that the intended ironic meaning is in contrast with the stated, literal meaning ignores the fact that even non-ironic, literal statements are open to interpretation and contextual ambiguities. Despite this criticism, it is fair to say that it continues to dominate dictionary and layperson definitions of irony. Alternative analyses of irony have uncovered its linguistic and pragmatic illocutionary subtleties, many of such are outlined by Muecke (1969), Kaufer (1981) and Hutcheon (1994). Many of these illocutionary subtleties also point to incongruence as a key characteristic of their nature.

Therefore, to analyse lexicogrammatical features of irony, we first must understand its functions through an examination of its pragmatic subtleties and incongruencies. Section 2.3 selects and outlines such pragmatic characteristics. These key characteristics will also be important in establishing a framework to justify the selection of ironic utterances from the two DIY corpora; the process of which will be explained more in Section 4.2.

2.3 Identifying irony: outcomes and pragmatics

This section attempts to outline key illocutionary outcomes of ironic utterances and highlight how incongruity lies at the root of these outcomes. Although these outcomes do not directly influence the corpus-based lexicogrammatical analysis of this study, there is often a link between illocutionary force and lexicogrammatical choice.

Taking an overview of the literature, there are four key outcomes that seem to be prevalent of most ironic utterances. The following section will detail these four outcomes in light of previous linguistic studies. All these examples demonstrate the importance of incongruity between dictum and implicatum and will help to reflect the characteristics of irony at the lexicogrammatical level.

2.3.1 Humour

Few studies into irony fail to mention its humorous illocutionary force. Studies have recognised that humour is one of the main communication goals of irony (Kreuz, Long and Church 1990) and is often one of the clearest indicators that an ironic utterance should be interpreted as such. More significantly, the incongruity between the dictum and implicatum often creates surprise, which is also a significant trigger of humour (Long and Graessur 1988). A number of reasons have been suggested to why humour and irony complement each other. These include softening criticism, bonding and creating affiliation, and humorous banter. As these functions are significant in both DIY corpora, they will be discussed in more detail.

The first important effect is that humour can serve to soften intended criticism: to, in Colston's (1997) words, *sugar the pill*. Humour generally creates a positive atmosphere and so humorous irony allows the speaker to temper their irony without losing the rhetoric force. This type of irony is most clear in the WHPB corpus in which the press and the Press Secretary commonly use ironic humour to try to maintain a cordial atmosphere. The following example demonstrates how irony serves to maintain this:

1. MR. SPICER: Hey, good afternoon, everyone. It's been a little while. Hope you missed me. (Laughter.)

Q: You missed us?
MR. SPICER: Absolutely.

The ironic utterance "Hope you missed me" evokes laughter from the audience. The Press Secretary seems to be acknowledging and commenting on the speculation concerning the fractured relationship between himself and the press[3]. Whilst not obfuscating the negative evaluation, this ironic utterance is light-hearted and the press respond in kind. There are further examples in the WHPB in which humorous irony is used to both acknowledge a difficult relationship but to also lighten the mood:

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/us/politics/sean-spicer-resigns-as-white-house-press-secretary.html

2. MR. EARNEST: And as I've mentioned before, the philosophy that I brought to this job is not to insist that all of you write stories or broadcast packages that make the President look good. If that were my charge I would have gotten fired a long time ago because I failed miserably. (Laughter.)

Similar observations have been made by Dews et al (1995), whose study found that humour in ironic criticism or complaint has a more positive effect on the relationship between speaker and audience and may, despite the criticism, help create a mutual bond. It is worth mentioning in examples 1 and 2 that the audience is an active participant in this positive effect: by both accepting the ironic criticism through laughter and, in the first example continuing the irony by asking Spicer, "you miss us?". Gibbs, in his (2000) analysis of irony among friends, noted that participants often responded to humorous utterances by continuing the irony. As a result, these two examples from WHPB demonstrate how amiable communities (Hutcheon 1994) can (at times, temporarily) be formed or maintained, or antagonism can be eschewed, whilst still acknowledging the evaluation of the ironic utterances. This contrast between two illocutionary functions may also be observed at the lexicogrammatical level in Chapters 5 and 6.

Such bonds across the political divide may be viewed as unworkable and naïve in the context of combative British parliamentary debate (Murphy 2014; Waddle et al 2019; Convery et al 2021). Yet, there are occasional examples which echo the observations of Gibbs (2000), when connections are attempted across the House:

3. Margaret Ritchie - "Will the prime minister, when next in Northern Ireland, perhaps during the Olympics, come to St Patrick's country and the Mournes, meet with these people and witness St Patrick's unique heritage for himself, and where he won`t find any rebel Tories."

   David Cameron (PM) - "I don't know whether the honourable lady can erm. can guarantee that, we do have an active branch in Northern Ireland." (11th July 2012)

Ritchie is making a playful dig, rather than an attack at the Prime Minister, who at that moment was in conflict with rebel Eurosceptics in his party[4]. At worst, it could be argued

[4] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/9363477/Camerons-backbenchers-demand-EU-referendum.html

there is a somewhat ungracious sense of schadenfreude in her ironic comment. Yet, Cameron does not (or chooses not to) react negatively to the dig but rather, as with the friends in Gibbs' study, plays along and extends the irony (the Conservative Party enjoyed little support in Northern Ireland). These examples help to exemplify the unifying effect of irony which Hutcheon observed as the inclusionary function of irony (see Figure 2.1 below). It is worth pointing out that in all of these three examples above, the criticism remains an important function despite this inclusionary force.

Describing examples of humorous irony as playful digs relates to previous observations of how it is linked to illocutionary functions of "humorous derision" and "banter" (Pogrebin and Poole 1989; Seckman and Couch 1989) which were observed in such specific discourse communities as police officers and factory workers. Parliament and White House press briefings prove no different as my research illustrates examples of humorous derision within both discourse environments. Although, it is clear that such derision has varying levels of intensity. One such light-hearted example is below:

4. David Cameron (PM) – "I not only join my honourable friend [George Freeman (Con)] in praising the Movember[5] campaign but I also praise his efforts that are lurking tentatively under his nose.

Although Cameron is being critical ("lurking tentatively"), the criticism is in jest and it would be difficult to argue that he is displaying a negative attitude; the ironic teasing "I praise his efforts" triggers laughter but the irony does not imply overt criticism of such efforts. This example is not unique: the following is a light-hearted example taken from WHPB:

5. Q: You also said the President will take the First Lady someplace warm after they leave office next Friday. I was just looking ahead on the 10-day forecast and some of the hot spots that the President has gone to lately -- or frequently, actually. (Laughter.) And in Honolulu, it's going to be in the mid-70s, but chance of rain –

[5] Referring to the UK's annual cancer charity campaign: https://uk.movember.com/

MR. EARNEST: Yeah.

Q: -- probably not ideal, right? (Laughter.) Palm Springs, kind of in the low 60s -- it's 65 degrees here today. So weather can be unpredictable. (Laughter.) Do you have any more to say about where the President might go when he leaves office?

MR. EARNEST: I don't at this point. I admire your investigative journalism, though. (Laughter.) That was excellent work.

Like Cameron, Earnest's ironic praise cannot be interpreted as straightforward criticism, as the journalist's information is also ironically detailed. Both create a light-hearted atmosphere in the commonly tense discourse environment and the perlocutionary effect seems to be humour as the attendants also react with laughter. There are, however, examples in which humorous derision can be viewed as more critical in force. The following are from the PMQ and WHPB consecutively:

6. JC - I join the Prime Minister in congratulating Leicester City on their amazing achievement. I hope that what he has said is not an indication that he is going to support another football team, rather than sticking with the two that he has already.

7. What are the administration's plans to increase security on the Canadian border? And does the administration have any plans to build a wall there? (Laughter.)

   MR. SPICER: Well, we're obviously concerned -- thank you -- at all sorts of immigration in this country

It is notable in example 7 that Spicer acknowledges the humorous barb, ironically framed as a question, and responds with an ironic expression of thanks. This demonstrates that even when most critical, the affiliative function of ironic humour can remain (Seckman and Couch 1989: 328), providing a face-saving effect which can temper criticism. Overall, the incongruent function of humour and irony serve to help participants in the two political discourse communities negotiate their complex relationships of conflict and cooperation. For this

reason, laughter as a paralinguistic reaction was the first stage in identifying real world examples of irony (see Chapter 4: Methodology).

At the start of Chapter 1, I draw parallels between the incongruity-resolution theory of humour and the interpretation of irony. Indeed, the relationship between irony and humour is somewhat symbiotic in as much as humour is an important aspect of irony as irony can be of humour (Nash 1985; Barbe 1994: 93ff.; Hutcheon 1994: 25-7; Attardo 2001, 2013). In fact, one can see this relationship most clearly in satire, a humorous genre which combines the two for either dramatic or rhetoric purposes (Colebrook 2004: 131-52) As the two DIY corpora are taken from political discourse environments on which satire often comments, this relationship may be particularly pertinent. Cognitive studies into the two phenomena help trace this symbiotic relationship back again to the importance of incongruity in the construction and processing of both.

2.3.1.i Humour, incongruity and the two-stage process

As mentioned, it is in the construction and interpretation of both humour and irony that they are most similar. Both irony and humour often require a two-stage cognitive process in which the audience attempts to bridge a disparity between the surface level meaning and the deeper illocutionary force. It has been argued that this incongruity is not only a source of irony, but the surprise in encountering it is also the cause of humour (Long and Graesser 1988, Dews et al 1995). Suls' (1972) incongruity-resolution theory is a cognitive model which explains how humour may arise in a specific statement. Firstly, most humorous statements contain a form of incongruity which elicits surprise. This is similar to Koestler's (1964) concept of *bisociation*: in which an idea has two *incompatible* elements creating a clash. An important difference is Koestler did not only apply his concept to humour but found parallels in examples of creativity or innovation. However, this incompatibility or incongruity seems to be a common source of humour. According to Suls, the audience firstly recognises such incongruity in the speaker's statement; then tries to consolidate this incongruity and, if consolidated, uncovers the humour.

There are disagreements in how the two stages are cognitively processed (Gildea and Glucksberg 1983, Long and Graesser 1988, Ritchie 1999), but all would seem to agree that

incongruity lies at this two-stage cognitive process. The above studies concentrate on humour and metaphor, yet similar theories have been posited in relation to irony (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995, Giora 1997, Colston 2002). These theories seem to originate from Grice's (1978) own argument that irony is also achieved through a two-stage process (see Section 2.2 above). Nevertheless, the two-stage processing of irony as well as the complex ironic examples of criticism and amiability taken from the two political corpora demonstrate that incongruity seems to be an important factor in irony construction. In the next section, I will outline how this is also the case for the function of evaluation.

2.3.2 Irony as evaluation

When Kreuz et al (2009) asked participants to list the most common illocutionary functions of ironic utterances, they discovered that evoking humour was second only to emphasising a point. Therefore, for interpreting an utterance as ironic, it is important that it has a rhetoric, and in particular an evaluative function: as Partington argues, evaluation is the "engine of persuasion" (2007: 1554). Other researchers have also confirmed that evaluation is central to irony (e.g. Kaufer 1981; Attardo 2000b; Kottoff 2003; Burgers et al 2012). However, there are important key differences in how ironic evaluations seem to differ from more straightforward evaluative statements. This section will first examine irony's rhetoric and evaluative characteristics and then argue how such utterances demonstrate a pragmatic incongruity regarding rhetoric and evaluation.

In the examples 1-7 presented above, it can be observed that all contain evaluative statements. Furthermore, these real-world examples of ironic evaluation can be viewed as demonstrating a pragmatic or illocutionary incongruous functions, as there is a perceived clash between the ostensibly evaluative meaning and the illocutionary force. For example, ironic evaluation can be directed to the self (example 2 and Cameron's response in example 3) and, as previously pointed out, can also have an inclusionary function (Hutcheon 1994: 54-5) such as example 1. The below example from the PMQ corpus further highlights the possibility of an inclusionary function within ironic evaluation:

8. On the bus to the Commons today, I foolishly revealed to a fellow passenger that I was a member of Parliament [sarcastic booing]. After some light hearted and customary abuse, [laughter] our conversation turned to life, the universe and

commuting.

Here, it is clear that the ironic utterance is interpreted as inclusionary as the audience responds with laughter while continuing and indulging in the irony with their own boos. Yet the nature of the evaluation is complex. This particular evaluation is self-directed (it is aimed at an inclusionary 'we' or speaker and audience). However, this example demonstrates an incongruent pragmatic clash because the primary (successful) illocutionary effect is not evaluation but to create laughter and bonding. In this way, it serves in contrast with the more critical evaluation with which the utterance concludes. Overall, this real-world example shows how multi-layered ironic utterances can be.

The two political DIY corpora are particularly significant as they are taken from two discourse environments in which evaluation and rhetoric are important communicative tools. They can also reveal how irony is constructed and how speakers indicate irony to the audience. It is certainly true that irony must incongruently contain a literal and non-literal meaning. However, misunderstandings in these discourse environments can be particularly damaging: particularly as all utterances are recorded for public interest, without the recording of paralinguistic features such as tone or gesture (see Chapter 4: Methodology). Awareness of this incongruity of meaning may help the speaker to avoid the audience (whether it is the audience at the time of speaking or the audience reading it after the event) misunderstanding or overlooking the irony. The following section will highlight various examples of ironic utterances from the two corpora in order to demonstrate how ironic evaluation is formed.

2.3.2.i Incongruity in evaluation

Linguists have explored two areas of incongruity regarding irony in evaluative utterances. The first is related to intensity of an ironic criticism and the second concerns illocutionary force and pragmatic intention. Each will be discussed in detail.

In his discussion of why an ironist would use such an indirect method of evaluation, Colston (1997) points out that linguistic studies of irony seem to demonstrate a *duality* of intensities in many ironic utterances, echoing Koestler's (1964) bisociation. Irony has been viewed as both diluting and intensifying evaluative statements. For example, Dews and Winner (1995) present a *tinge hypothesis* by suggesting that irony reduces the level of

offensiveness in criticism. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) incorporate irony into their studies into politeness theory and advocate the trope for its ability to reduce threat. Conversely, numerous studies have emphasised irony's function as biting criticism or mockery (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989; Brownell et al 1990; Kreuz et al 1991). In fact, in his own research, Colston found that the intensifying function significantly outweighs the diluting function (1997: 44-5). The present study tends to view this duality in similar terms to that of Hutcheon (1994): as two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, it seems that the hedging or face-saving characteristics of ironic utterances can actually serve to intensify evaluation. This incongruity can be clearly seen in the two political discourse environments of this study. Both are discourses which are heavily protocoled and, ostensibly at least, value politeness as part of these protocols. As a result, both demonstrate examples of irony which play with this duality. In his corpus study of irony, Partington (2007: 1561-3) identifies examples of irony which have elements of *meiosis* or *litotes*: that is lexical elements which point to understatement. Similarities can be seen in this study.

To demonstrate this, below are examples taken from the PMQ corpus. In the combative atmosphere of Parliament, rhetoric and evaluation are common. However, an analysis using the PMQ corpus reveals a significant number of ironic evaluative statements which utilise elements often linked to face-saving strategies and hedging. Below are two such examples with the elements highlighted in bold:

9. JC – I know this is very funny for all the Conservative Members, but **I do not suppose there are too many** Conservative MPs who have to go to a food bank to supplement the food on their family's table every week.

10. TM – **I find it a little confusing**, given that only two years ago in the Scottish referendum, the Scottish National party was campaigning for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, which would have meant leaving the European Union.

The use of meiosis and hedging items has been recognised as being useful strategies for saving face (Brown and Levinson 1978). However, in ironic utterances taken from the corpora, there are lexical items which can be interpreted as hedging, and yet the statements (such as examples 9 and 10) have a strong evaluative force, further demonstrating the idea of pragmatic incongruity. Therefore, these opposing intensifying and tempering forces of irony are perhaps more closely connected than they have been presented in previous literature. The

incongruity between these two functions can have both a humorous and critical illocutionary force. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that evaluation is often expressed through incongruity. There are a number of theories in how incongruity is important in ironic evaluation.

Not only are ironic evaluative statements veiled in meiosis, they are also incongruently expressed through non-evaluative illocutionary functions: most commonly, questions or requests. Partington (2007: 1563-5) identified such forms of irony as 'problematic': difficult to categorise within previous linguistic studies. As protocol of Questions to the Prime Minister Sessions requires Members to contribute only in the form of a question, there are frequent examples of such pragmatic incongruity: the questions asked in examples 3 and 8 above are indicative. However, similar illocutionary incongruences can be identified in the WHPB corpus. The following are two such examples:

11. MR. SPICER: Look, Eamon, I've discussed this earlier. I'm not going to start getting a "lessons learned" while we're in the middle of debate of a current bill. We'll have plenty of time -- if you want to stop by over the weekend, we can talk about -- (laughter) -- to sit down with you on that.

12. Q: Thanks, Sean. There were some quotes floating around last night from anonymous administration officials saying –

    MR. SPICER: What? (Laughter.)

    Q: What a surprise, right? (Laughter.)

In example 11, Spicer uses an ironic invitation to break the tension between himself and the press. Similar to example 1, the ironic utterance serves to break the tension while simultaneously acknowledging it. In example 12, Spicer uses mock-incredulity to criticise the frequency of members of the press using anonymous sources, which also sees the press continuing the irony. In both of these examples, an evaluative illocutionary effect remains part of the irony: Spicer is commenting on the fractious relationship between the White House and the press. These examples demonstrate that irony can be expressed ostensibly through any number of illocutionary functions and yet the utterance will maintain an

incongruently evaluative function. Consequently, the idea of pragmatic 'insincerity' will be explored in more detail.

An important aspect of Gricean theory concerning irony is that the ironist *intentionally* flouts the speech maxims. Clark and Gerrig (1984), Glucksberg (1995) and Kumon-Nakamura et al (1995) all take this theory and add a deeper element of paralinguistic and attitudinal incongruity. All of these studies also further understanding of the illocutionary purpose of expressing evaluation using irony. They argue that when a speaker is flouting a maxim, this act is performative and involves a conscious pretence or, in Glucksberg's term, *pragmatic insincerity* (1995: 52). For Clark and Gerrig (1984), this means adapting the role of an injudicious person. Utsumi (2000) builds on this idea by arguing that in ironic evaluative utterances, the speaker demonstrates this injudiciousness by commenting on an incongruity between their supposed expectations and the reality. Example 12 above illustrates this pragmatic insincerity. Kumon-Nakamura et al agree that irony is an expression of such incongruity but that this expression must be allusional (1995: 4-5). Because this intentional pretense creates another layer of deception for the audience to navigate, there are two specific victims of irony: the intended target of the evaluation and those who fail to comprehend the irony. The fact that irony can be overlooked and misunderstood is a significant reason why it is considered to have such a rhetoric force: that a certain level of intelligence and sensitivity is needed to understand it. This idea is reinforced by Hutcheon (1994: 54) who points out that irony can also have an elitist and exclusionary force.

If such theories are accurate, then this makes ironic utterances mostly (but not exclusively) negative statements, as the speaker expresses their attitude towards the failed expectation. Wilson and Sperber also argued similarly that, "[irony's] main use is to criticise or to complain. Only in special circumstances is irony used to praise, or to point out that some proposition lacking in normative content is false" (2016: 131). They illustrate their point with the example of ironically announcing, "how graceful" when someone is clumsy seems plausible, yet exclaiming, "how clumsy" when someone is graceful feels somewhat unusual. This theory serves well to explain how irony serves an evaluative and rhetoric illocutionary effect, even when the speaker is in jest (such as examples 4 and 5). Yet it is worth noting that these examples are somewhat contradictory to Wilson and Sperber's argument. As mentioned above, neither of these examples can be interpreted as genuine

criticism. Rather, these point to what Gibbs (2000: 10-11) refers to as the nonserious 'banter' of irony; the function of which is to lighten the mood in the combative environments. John Bercow, in his role as the Speaker of the House employed a similar tactic to lightly admonish Members when being too rowdy.

13. Calm yourself, Mr Campbell. You are supposed to be a senior statesman in the House. Calm down. Take up yoga, as I have told you before.

Again, we can observe an illocutionary incongruence: Bercow is ostensibly giving advice, yet this veils criticism aimed towards Campbell.

However, it is example 1 which most effectively demonstrates the complexity of illocutionary forces that ironic utterances can evoke. Ostensibly, Spicer is negatively evaluating the relationship between himself and the media. Of course, there is no expectation of an affectionate relationship between the press and the press secretary; yet by drawing attention to the tension, Spicer's comment serves to temporarily diffuse it. It has been previously pointed out that despite having a predominantly rhetorical or evaluative illocutionary force, irony can evoke a sense of solidarity between speaker and audience (for example: Hutcheon 1994: 54-5; Van Mulken et al 2011). Examples 3 and 4 demonstrate this function and it is difficult to argue that Utsumi's implicit display theory fully accounts for it. I argue that to view irony in terms of incongruity better reflects its varied superficial illocutionary functions and deeper evaluative force. Utsumi and Kumon-Nakamura both argue that irony is referring back to an expectation which failed to manifest. It seems that irony can invoke or refer to wider reaching phenomena than a perceived expectation. To support this observation, the theory of irony as echoic is pertinent.

2.4 Irony as echo

What Clark and Gerrig and Kumon-Nakamura et al have in common is that they argue that irony is referring to something outside of the ironic utterance itself: whether an unrealised expectation or a conscious pretense. The above section has noted that when compared with real-world examples taken from the two corpora, these ideas of evaluation in irony can be somewhat limiting in scope. However, it seems clear that the common reactions to irony (most often laughter or anger) demonstrate that the perlocutionary effects of irony

are somewhat greater than those of simple evaluation. Sperber and Wilson's (1981, Wilson and Sperber 1992) echoic theory of irony explains some of these wider implications.

Similar to Grice and Kumon-Nakamaura et al, Sperber and Wilson (1981) take up the idea of a two-stage processing but argue that the onus is on the speaker rather than the audience. For them, an ironic utterance comprises of two illocutionary functions. Initially, irony consists of 'echoing' a thought, belief or expectation that can be attributed to another individual, group or a common belief in general. Ironic utterances intend, "to draw attention to some *discrepancy* between a description of the world that the speaker is apparently putting forward and the way things actually are" (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 128, my italics). For Wilson and Sperber (ibid.), irony creates an incongruence between the medium and the message by distancing the speaker's attitude and position from what is uttered. I would argue that this is a wider reaching theory than Utsumi's as it affirms the importance of incongruity (or, in their words, discrepancy) in ironic utterances and does not view irony simply as either the opposite of what is stated or a negative evaluative statement.

When examining the real-world ironic examples from both corpora, examples of echoing are somewhat difficult to categorise. For Wilson and Sperber, the ironic utterance can be attributed to an individual, group or a common belief. However, Wilson and Sperber (1992) argue that when a speaker is being ironic, they are, rather, *echoing* a previous utterance and, by doing so, conveying their own attitude towards this utterance. The previous utterance is usually a literal utterance preceding the present discourse. An example from the PMQs corpus is the following:

14. What I would say to my hon. Friend is that, almost uniquely, I am not going to prejudge what is in the Chancellor's Budget. However, I think that we can say that it is—if you like, Mr Speaker—a kaleidoscope Budget".

    The Speaker - "I am so encouraged that the Prime Minister is using my language. Good on him!"

Cameron's utterance echoes John Bercow's speech at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee address to Parliament. Cameron may be expressing his own derision or mockery at Bercow's

controversial choice of phrase used in reference to the Queen[6]. Nevertheless, Bercow responds to the utterance by sidestepping Cameron's derision, thus demonstrating that an audience can react to either the literal or intended meaning, despite understanding both.

In the above example, both the ironic utterance and the echoed referent are within contemporary parliamentary discourse. The following example is somewhat different:

15. Alan Whitehead (Lab) - "Why is the prime minister fiddling as the country floods?"

Whitehead is echoing (with some rephrasing) the famous quote of Nero[7] to criticise the government's perceived inaction during the 2013 flooding incidents. It may well be that Wilson and Sperber's theory can be widened to encompass examples of ironic echoes that reference wider 'external' discourses; cultural touchstones within the collective consciousness of speaker and audience.

There are similar examples in the corpus where the attribute can be seen as external to the political discourse. Although related to echoic theory: these I would class as identifiable echoes or 'explicit mentions' in Wilson and Sperber's terms, these particular examples are echoing from discourse outside of the present context. As a result, these examples of juxtaposition demonstrate a form of contextual or discoursal incongruity. This form of irony is common enough to influence this study's ironic framework presented in Chapter 4. Consider the following examples:

16. DC - "When standing at this Dispatch Box, I am sure that we all try to **float like a butterfly and sting like a bee**, although that is not always possible in the circumstances that we face."

17. DC – "When I read that the Labour party was going to ban McDonnell from its party conference, I thought that was the first sensible decision it had made, but it turns out that it was not the job destroyer that the Labour party wanted to keep away from its conference; it was one of Britain's biggest

[6] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-17490161
[7] https://www.history.com/news/did-nero-really-fiddle-while-rome-burned

employers. No wonder Labour MPs are in despair. Frankly, **I'm lovin' it**"

Here, Cameron's incongruent echoes from another discursive community are specific and identifiable. The first example is a eulogy at the time of Muhammed Ali's death and Cameron uses Ali's words to employ a self-deprecating irony. The second is an ironic attack in response to Labour banning McDonald's from opening a food stall at their conference[8]. Cameron is using cultural echoes which are external to parliamentary discourse to bring humour to his evaluations and perhaps elevate his credentials as an 'everyman', au fait with these cultural touchstones[9]. Humour rises from the incongruity between such phrases from pop culture and the formal discourse environment of parliament. I would argue that these examples are in line with echoic theory and yet Wilson and Sperber do not directly refer to this kind of echoic irony. In the next chapter, I connect this external discourse echo with Hoey's (2005) theory of semantic association.

In fact, there are a number of examples already presented which seem to be relevant to Wilson and Sperber's theory but also widen its original scope. In example 1, Spicer uses the well-established, almost cliched set phrase, "did you miss me?". The irony emerges as this phrase is an echo from a different discourse community or environment to that of what is expected at a press briefing: most likely as a question asked when reunited with a loved one. By echoing a phrase from an outside discourse, Spicer draws attention to the irony and creates a surprising and amusing incongruence. The following example from PMQ is similar:

18. Tim Farron (LD) - "You are all very kind" [responding to jeers][10]

Again, "you are all very kind" is characteristically a response to, for example, praise, a round of applause or warm expressions of gratitude, and not a conventional response during debate at the House of Commons. These utterances become ironic when echoed in an incongruous discourse environment such as a political press briefing or parliamentary debate.

[8] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/17/labours-nec-bans-mcdonalds-stand-from-party-annual-conference
[9] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36540101
[10] Context available here: https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/776806/Tim-Farron-laughed-down-Commons-Prime-Minister-s-Question

Furthermore, there are examples of cliched set phrases which develop an ironic meaning. Take the following example:

19. TM - " I gently remind the right hon. Gentleman that he went to a grammar school and I went to a grammar school, and it is what **got us to where we are today** — but my side might be rather happier about that than his."

May is using the cliched phrase, "got us to where we are today", often used figuratively to highlight professional success. A Sketch Engine search of [GET where (0,5) today][11] in the BNC corpus reveals 11 occurrences. There are 3 examples below which have a similar illocutionary meaning:

20. I've worked too damned hard to **get where** I am **today** to let it all be ruined by some silly, irresponsible female.

21. You must have studied hard to **get where** you are **today**, starting up your own company.

22. And you didn't **get where** you are **today** by people thinking you're getting ideas above your already lofty station.

This cliched meaning is triggered in the ironic utterance. Because of this, irony emerges from an incongruity between the cliched figurative meaning and a more literal one of May being more successful as leader, while Corbyn is 'merely' in opposition. It is clear that both meanings are triggered and that ironic incongruence is contained within the phrase as some of the audience pre-empt her punchline by laughing before her explanation “but my side might be rather happier”. Therefore, I wish to expand on Wilson and Sperber’s theory by arguing that irony is not simply an echo of a previous utterance. Rather, ironic utterances often echo statements from external discourse communities, or established, cliched expressions. Irony from such cliched expressions influenced the theory of ironic priming outlined in Chapter 7. Irony emerges, therefore, not only through incongruity of semantics, but also incongruity of the discourse environment. This can be particularly pertinent in specific discourse communities such as the two political discourses used in this study, and will influence the methodology or irony detection in the frameworks outlined in Chapter 4: Methodology.

[11] Capitalisation denotes a lemma search; (0,5) denotes a collocation window span of 0 to 5 words between *where* and *today*.

2.5 Context and protocol

If we view irony as a pragmatic feature of language, it seems that context would also play an important role in its illocutionary force. This section examines how incongruity within the specific political contexts can also lead to irony.

To understand many of the examples of irony in the two political discourse also requires understanding the importance and nature of protocol within the discourse environment. Both White House press briefings and, particularly, British parliamentary discourse follow important protocols of conduct and behaviour. Bull et al (2020) point out how the ritualistic protocols of Prime Minister Questions are often exploited to make attacks on the opposition. We can see such exploitation and incongruity of politeness in some of the ironic barbs. A clear example involves the role of the Speaker of the House. The Speaker's role is to mediate the questions from the gathered MPs and the answers of the PM (ibid. 68). The role is politically neutral and all questions are in fact ostensibly addressed to them. Yet, in the following example, we can see how Miliband, as Leader of the Opposition exploits a number of the protocols of Parliament in his ironic attack:

23. I do not think that was quite a complete answer to my question. Let us see if we can press the Prime Minister a bit further about how he is going to vote.

In example 23, irony emerges through multiple factors. Firstly, Miliband uses a number of hedging items (*do not think, quite a*) to veil his attack in ironic politeness. This is a common feature of irony in the two political discourses and will be discussed in greater detail, particularly in Chapter 5. More significantly is how Miliband uses the protocol of addressing the Speaker directly to create an ironically conspiratorial effect (*let us see*), reflecting Hutcheon's (1994, see Figure 2.1) aggregative function of irony as creating 'in-groups'. Such conspiratorial talk, of course, clashes with the objective role of the Speaker, and this clash creates the humorously ironic effect. Therefore, example 23 further demonstrates how irony develops through an exploitation of discourse norms.

A far less aggressive example involves the Speaker himself (in this case, John Bercow). Apart from mediating questions, another important role of the Speaker is to police interruptions in order to facilitate smooth and civil debate. How successful they are in this

role is open to debate, and Bercow himself has been critical of MP's conduct in Parliament[12] from PMQs. However, in example 24 he uses irony to playfully condemn a MP. In order to calm the MP during a particularly rowdy and heated exchange, the Speaker makes this interjection:

24. I'm very worried about the health of the Health Minister who`s so overexcited he might suffer a relapse [laughter] and I`m a compassionate chap, I don`t want that to happen

Here, Bercow is trying to calm the MP by adopting the role of someone concerned about their health (Clark and Gerrig's (1984) *pretense theory* of irony) rather than chastising them for their behaviour. This face-saving pretense is effective as it is met with laughter – presumably from both sides of the political aisle – and so the ironic function is understood.

Such irony is very much determined by the specific discourse environments in which it arises and is therefore an important consideration when evaluating the limitations of this study. This is an attempt to analyse general lexicogrammatical features of irony and so the problems of including such specific examples need to be taken into account (see Section 9.3 and 9.4).

Another important consideration for any linguistic study into irony is the problem of subjectivity in irony detection. This problem will be explored in the next section.

2.6 Schema / irony framework for irony selection

As utterances are not explicitly marked as ironic, determining what is ironic or not requires an unavoidable degree of subjectivity. This may well be due to the fact that the *contradictory* function of irony (Hutcheon 1994: 44ff.) makes it difficult to pinpoint. This proves problematic for any research seeking to use real-world examples. Despite this, it is important for any linguistic study that a high degree of consensus of what is ironic be reached. The advantage of the present study is that within political corpora, paralinguistic reactions such as laughter, cheers and jeering are recorded and used to pinpoint ironic utterances. However, as stated above, for an utterance to be considered ironic, there has to be

[12] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10532233

some element of incongruity. Also, for many ironic utterances, a non-ironic literal interpretation must also be present. This begs the question of whether it can be determined with certainty that the speaker intended the ironic interpretation, and studies into ironic utterances can often be open to disagreement. Further clouding the issue is, as outlined above, the frequent lack of consensus within the literature towards the varying nature and function of verbal irony. However, there have been attempts to consolidate these varying opinions. One such attempt is Hutcheon's (1994: 45) summary of the functions of irony in Figure 2.1. Hutcheon explores irony from an English literature perspective but her framework for the functions of irony is impossible to ignore for a linguistic study. This framework captures how there is also an incongruity of function within irony's illocutionary force. Hutcheon's framework is displayed in Figure 2.1 below.

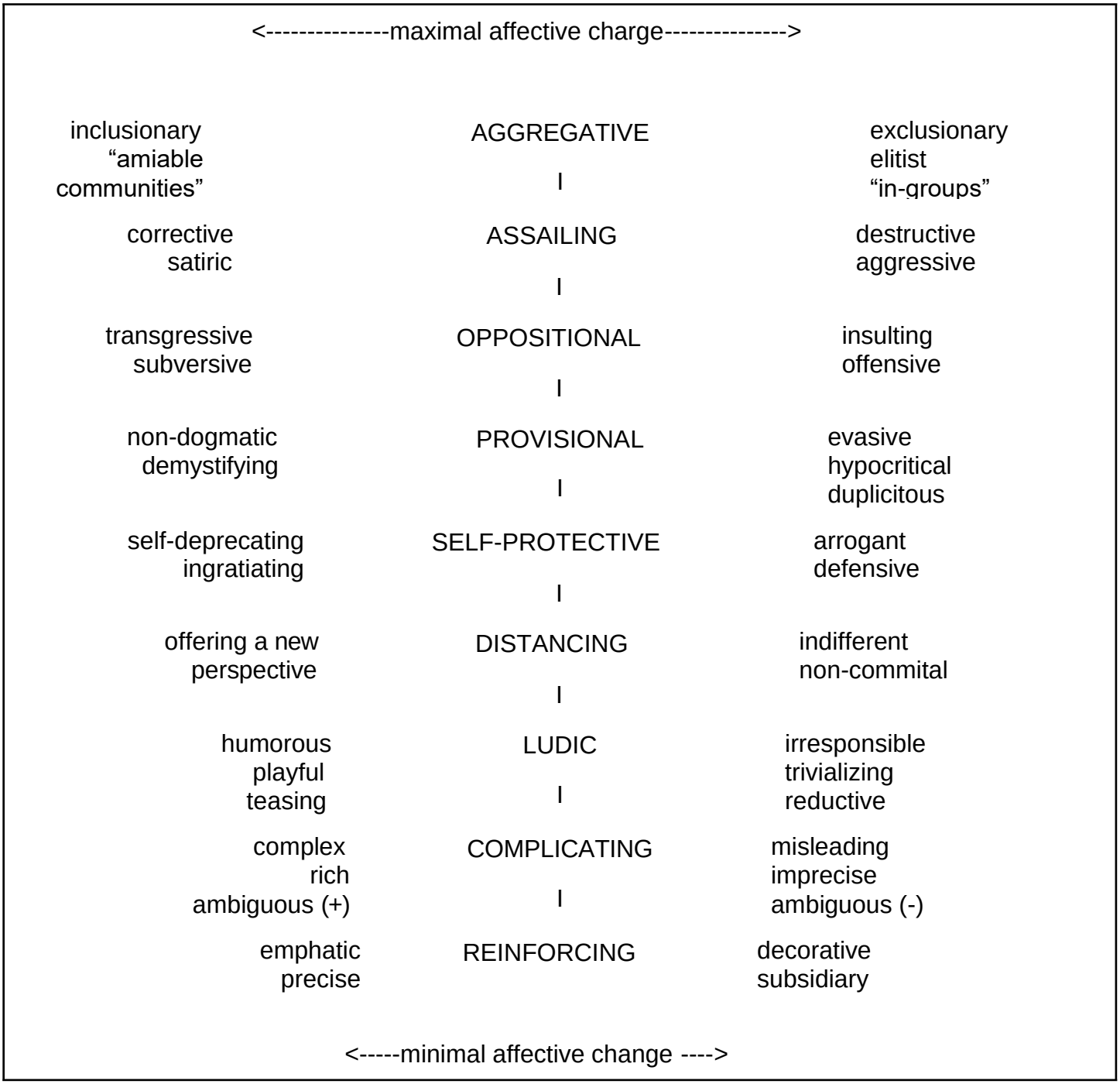


Figure 2.1: Functions of Irony. Taken from Hutcheon (1994: 45)

Within the centre column Hutcheon outlines the main functions of irony, ordered so the higher the position the function is, the more controversial its function. It is notable that Hutcheon views these functions as a continuum, with unclear boundaries between functions (ibid. 46). Viewing the functions of irony as a continuum provides an explanation for the limitations in singular definitions such as those presented above. Furthermore, throughout these functions, Hutcheon's insists on irony's 'edge': that irony has a clear but controversial

attitudinal and emotive element, and Hutcheon organises these functions by considering such controversy. With this controversy comes a variance in incongruity, or *affective charge* between positive and negative functions. What Hutcheon identifies is that each function has positive and negative illocutionary effects, and that it is not easily determined which of these illocutionary effects is prevalent in an utterance.

Not only does Hutcheon identify incongruity within positive and negative illocutionary functions, she also points to the emergence of irony through a clash of 'discursive communities' (ibid. 89-92). Her term is similar to that of 'discourse communities' (Swales 1988) but Hutcheon emphasises that such communities are often constrained within specific social and political contexts and constructs such as class, race, gender and nationality (1994: 92). This theory accounts for Wilson and Sperber's echoic theory, which argues that irony can often be considered as echoes within a particular discourse community. Yet it also expands upon the idea of ironic environments in which I will explore in more detail.

Hutcheon points out that we all belong to multiple discursive communities which overlap, and may occasionally conflict, within our lives. It is within this overlap that irony can also emerge (ibid.). Such examples of discursive overlapping can be seen in examples 3 and 8 discussed above. As the examples of irony are taken from two specific contexts, there may be other examples which overlap with other discursive communities. However, this is a lexicogrammatical study into irony and therefore makes only passing references to pragmatic features. That is not to say that lexicogrammatical choices may be influenced by particular discursive communities: these will be explored within Chapters 5, 6, and particularly Chapter 7's examination of lexical priming and phraseology.

As mentioned, Hutcheon's observations are from a literary perspective. Yet similar attempts have been made in the field of linguistics. Burgers et al's (2011) Verbal Irony Procedure (VIP) framework (Figure 2.2) is a linguistic-based attempt to produce a systematic method for detecting irony in discourse that consolidates previous literature. This framework developed from an attempt to provide an objective overview of the literature and this overview led to a selection of four commonalities. These commonalities are: a) that irony is implicit, b) that irony is evaluative, c) that it is possible to distinguish between a non-ironic and an ironic reading of the same utterance, and d) the difference in readings means a certain type of opposition may be observed. However, based on initial observations from the two

corpora, the VIP framework overlooks some significant theories of irony. In particular, examples of incongruity from overlapping discursive communities (Hutcheon 1994) and ironic echoes (Wilson 2006).

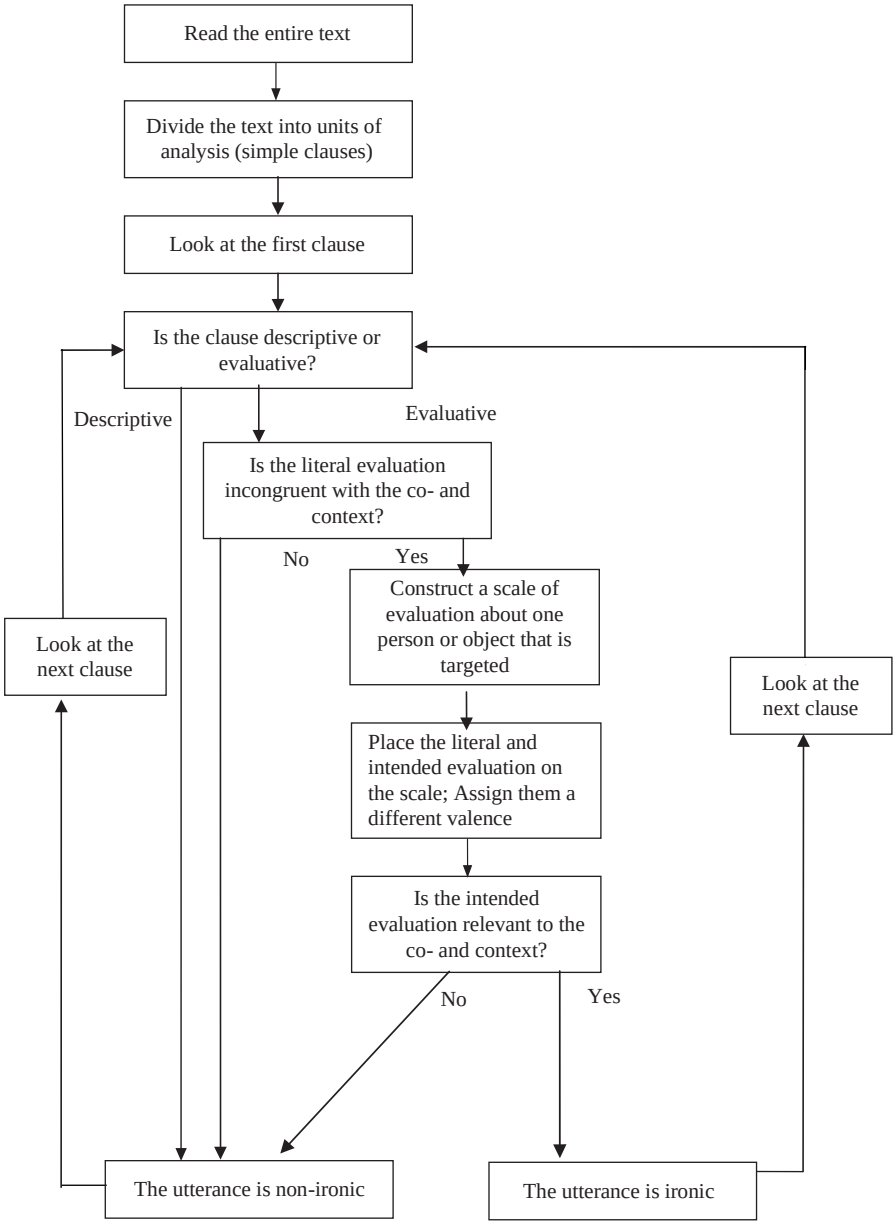


Figure 2.2: Verbal Irony Procedure Framework (taken from Burgers et al 2012: 195)

Certainly, Burgers et al's framework is effective in its attempt to present a systematic process to identify irony, and the present study seeks a similar approach. However, the following example presented earlier (example 15) demonstrates some possible limitations of the VIP framework in greater detail:

25. Why is the prime minister fiddling as the country floods?

As in section 2.3 and 2.4 above, the ironic echo here creates an overlap of discursive communities by referencing a wider discourse outside of Parliament. Such cultural touchstones need to be within the collective knowledge of speaker and audience if the audience is to appreciate the irony. The incongruent overlapping not only creates humour but also adds to the illocutionary force of the utterance. Burger et al's framework seems to overlook such examples of irony. This study posits that a framework focusing on incongruity provides a wider encompassing and more robust approach to recognizing irony.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main linguistic theories of irony and has attempted to recognise the importance of incongruity within all these theories. This outline has been supported by examples taken from the present study's own corpus of real-world examples of irony (Appendix 1). Much of the theories here focus on irony's pragmatic function: such as its humorous effects, its importance in evaluative statements and how it is used to echo previous utterances. However, this study contends that incongruity in irony can also be identified at other linguistic levels: including semantic, contextual and discoursal. Using a corpus of real-world examples of irony can help to uncover such incongruity.

Despite this variety, it is perhaps easier to start with a consideration of pragmatic features in order to systematically identify real-world examples from the two corpora. This chapter has also presented two established frameworks of irony which take their pragmatic functions as a starting point. Chapter 4 will demonstrate how these frameworks helped to mitigate the subjectivity of identifying real-world examples of irony, as well as incorporating elements of incongruity at various linguistic levels.

However, the present study is not simply focused on pragmatics. I argue that the above incongruent paralinguistic features of irony have clear parallels at the lexicogrammatical level. Also, I will establish that these lexicogrammatical examples of incongruity can be identified using corpus linguistic methodology. Therefore, in the next

section, I will examine how the above pragmatic features of irony are reflected at the lexicogrammatical level.

Chapter 3: Corpus Linguistics and Irony

The previous section examined the relationship between linguistic studies of irony and the concept of incongruity, and argued that this concept may well be observable at the lexicogrammatical level of ironic utterances. In fact, this study aims to look at incongruity in three different areas of linguistics often related to corpus methods: collocation, colligation and collostruction, and phraseology. Therefore, this chapter examines previous corpus-based studies (and the importance of incongruity) in these relevant areas to demonstrate how they have helped shape this research.

It will initially provide an overview of corpus-based studies into two important areas of linguistics. Firstly, I will outline how corpus linguistic research has attempted to account for irony. Secondly, I will explore corpus-based investigations into semantic prosody and evaluation. These are two linguistic tropes which, along with incongruity, are intrinsic to the nature of irony and so are worthwhile of consideration. Thus, the main purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the feasibility of using corpus-based methodology for identifying irony.

3.1 Introduction – the case for corpus

The following section will outline justification for a corpus-based approach by referring to previous linguistic studies of the phenomenon of irony. However, there have been few linguists who have examined irony using corpus methods, with Louw (1993) and Partington (2006; 2007) being rare exceptions. Furthermore, of the two studies mentioned, only Louw's identifies specific lexicogrammatical features of ironic utterances.

Ironically, Louw's (1993) study was perhaps more influential on the notion of semantic prosody than on irony itself. His corpus study examined collocations of items with incongruous semantic prosody. For Louw, semantic prosody was important in creating ironic meanings and he presents a number of examples from the Bank of English corpora to illustrate this. For example, he points out that the word *utterly* appears to have mostly a negative semantic prosody in which the adjectives that follow it are overwhelmingly negative. However, he also noted some positive collocational exceptions that seemed to carry an ironic intention. One example taken from Louw (1993: 37):

1. I think it's oh utterly grand of you to give us all

Louw argues that the irony in example 1 is self-evident and I would further argue that the use of 'oh' here contributes to emphasising the irony. As a result, Louw's work demonstrates that it is possible to identify irony, although possibly a certain form, at the lexicogrammatical level. Despite these findings, there has been little follow up to Louw's study. In contrast, this study attempts to build upon Louw's findings and so I will refer to his study further in this chapter.

Similarly, Partington's studies (2006; 2007; with Duguid and Taylor 2013) are also corpus-assisted but take a more discourse analysis approach which focuses on the pragmatic characteristics of irony. Indeed, he coins the phrase *corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS)* to explain this process. Also using a corpus of White House press briefings with an additional corpus of political TV interviews, he is able to highlight some of the complex and subtle uses of irony in real-world discourse. Notably, he illustrates that speakers in White House press briefings can manipulate both the dictum and implicatum and evoke both meanings simultaneously (2006: 205): an effect of irony which will also be discussed further in this study. Importantly, his work demonstrates that there is room for further corpus-based analyses of irony.

Related to the present study's research questions, Partington also points out some lexical features (2007: 1561-3), but these are more often related to utterances of *explicit irony*, whereby the speaker uses discourse markers such as "it is ironic that". As such, Partington's study is characteristic of most linguistic research of irony, in which it focuses primarily on its pragmatic and discoursal features. While not disregarding the importance of such research, this study will argue that lexicogrammatical features of irony can often reflect these pragmatic characteristics. Because of this, a corpus-based study which uses a wider range of real-world ironic utterances may also help to identify characteristics of irony at the lexicogrammatical level. Central to this identification is the argument that incongruity is a key to all ironic utterances.

This point was reflected in the previous chapter which demonstrated how linguistic theories of irony seem to suggest that incongruity is prevalent in most ironic utterances. Such incongruity is mostly recognised at the pragmatic level. However, the present study builds

upon Louw's observations regarding incongruent semantic prosody by arguing that incongruent illocutionary features of irony seem to have clear lexicogrammatical parallels and that real-world examples of irony often demonstrate these characteristics. Understanding how incongruity can occur at the lexicogrammatical level can lead to greater understanding of how ironic utterances are constructed. Such understanding can be reached through corpus investigations into these lexicogrammatical similarities. Therefore, this chapter outlines how lexicogrammatical features related to corpus-based linguistic research can inform an investigation into incongruity at the lexicogrammatical level. It will illustrate how a corpus linguistic approach can be beneficial to further understand not only the function but also the nature of ironic utterances.

To demonstrate how such an investigation can be made, it is useful to explore how corpus-based methods have helped us to understand other linguistic tropes. As well as incongruity, another important aspect of irony is evaluation. As Chapter 2 pointed out, linguists generally agree that only evaluative utterances can be considered ironic. Along with incongruity, the ironic utterances used in this study all have elements of evaluation. By uncovering linguistic features which appear hidden or counter-intuitive, corpus linguistic methods have helped reach a greater understanding of, among other elements, the nature of evaluation. Therefore, before examining the three lexicogrammatical features in more detail, it is important to outline how corpus linguistics has influenced understanding of both semantic prosody and evaluation. As such, it is worth tracing this ideological progression, and highlight not only important influences but also points of departure from the present study.

3.2 Evaluation and semantic prosody

The concept of semantic prosody determines much of present corpus linguistic methodology (Sinclair 1991: 74 - reviewed in Stewart 2010: 6-7). As mentioned, the immediate advantage of early corpus linguistic studies was that they often highlighted aspects of lexicogrammar which had been non-intuitive. Semantic prosody is one of these aspects and its initial usage became a somewhat encompassing term for such non-intuitive characteristics. Sinclair pointed out that some lexical items tend to have positive or negative connotations and these connotations only appear when concordances are examined. However,

the definition expanded and referred to how, in Sinclair's words, items "show a tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment" (Sinclair 1991: 112). Initial theories seemed to view semantic prosody as a result of association through collocation and co-text. Sinclair's colleague Louw (1993: 157) viewed semantic prosody in similar terms of connotation or association: "[semantic prosody is a] consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates". It was through analyses of large bodies of text that these elements of prosody were able to become observable.

The concerns of semantic prosody with positive and negative connotation led to corpus-based studies examining the linguistic area of evaluation. In fact, Sinclair pointed out that semantic prosody is attitudinal (1996: 87). As a result, corpus-based studies expanded upon simple collocation to examine wider patterns of language and encompass more pragmatic functions of language.

Hunston has been instrumental in developing this idea in two ways. First, she shifted emphasis away from singular lexical items and collocation to longer, more functional units of meaning. For example, Hunston's (2007) examination of the phrase *to the point of* demonstrates that evaluation can also occur at this phraseological level. The incongruity of this phrase lies within it connecting, "a less saturated [negative] evaluative item with a more saturated one (as in *thin to the point of emaciation*)" (ibid. 261). Similar to Louw's (1993) observation of irony at the lexical level, this pattern can also be flouted for ironic effect by slotting in incongruous evaluative items, or, as Hunston puts it, "*discontinuity* between the norm and the individual example to account for the recognition of a variety of stylistic effects" (2007: 261, my italics). Arguably, it can be argued that one such effect could very well be irony. The previous section highlighted how evaluation is an important aspect of irony and so it is reasonable to suggest that within ironic utterances discontinuity between pattern and lexical item may be linked with discontinuity between the stated and implied evaluation.

Secondly, this idea is strengthened if we consider that Hunston and Thompson's work in evaluation (2000; also Hunston 2004) has shown how it is often expressed through wider linguistic features. Here, they are situating semantic prosody within the wider concept of

connotation. They argue that an utterance's evaluative force is often contained within the lexical items' connotation rather than 'real' meaning. Hunston (2001: 21) points out that evaluation is not "restricted to particular lexical items" and so wider considerations of language must be made. This means that the initial methodology of corpus linguistics should also be widened. Hunston and Thompson (2000: 38) argue that semantic prosody can be seen as a rhetoric tool, "exploited by speakers to express evaluative meaning covertly". It is only through examination of corpora using modern methodology that the researcher can uncover and categorise these connotative meanings. Indeed, Hunston argues that "semantic prosody can be observed only by looking at a large number of instances of a word or phrase" (2002: 142), and so huge corpora need to be employed. It will be the contention of this thesis that the same argument can be applied when looking at incongruity and its rhetorical function within utterances.

However, despite semantic prosody being relevant to the present study, it does not fully cover what I determine as lexical incongruity. Semantic prosody is predominantly used to highlight the relationship between connotative evaluation and collocation. Although there are some corpus studies dealing with colligation, their reach is limited and often colligation has been subsumed into wider theories such as Pattern Grammar (Hunston and Francis 2000) and Construction Grammar (notably Goldberg 1995) which see lexis and grammar as intrinsically linked (Stubbs 2001: 65). In fact, despite adopting the term 'colligation', Sinclair (1991:110) viewed grammar as more of a concern of the open-choice principal, with colligation as somewhat abstract and "not directly observable" (Stubbs 2001: 88). As such, to understand the incongruity behind the utterances examined in this study, I feel it is also fruitful to examine the relationship between corpus linguistics and Construction Grammar (see Section 3.4).

Three areas which have been influenced by a corpus linguistic approach are collocation, colligation (and Construction Grammar) and phraseology. In recent years, these three areas have been arguably three of the most significant foci of corpus-based methodology. Each area will be examined separately in relation to two important criteria: firstly, how corpus linguistics has shaped them and secondly, how they relate to both incongruity and, by extension, irony. As a means of illustration, examples from the two DIY

corpora will demonstrate this relationship where necessary. These areas relate directly to three areas of lexicogrammatical incongruity in ironic utterance and so are also reflected in Chapters 5-7: in these sections, corpus data will be presented and explored in more depth.

3.3 Collocation

As outlined briefly in Section 1.1.1, collocation refers to the phenomenon that certain lexical items tend to occur in close proximity with others more frequently than we would expect by chance. This initial collocational relationship between lexical items was viewed by Firth (1957) and Halliday (1966) as being separate from grammatical structures. For example, Halliday (1966: 61) highlighted that the collocates *strong* and argument can manifest itself in a wide variety of structures: for example, "*he argued strongly, I don't deny the strength of his argument, his argument was strengthened by other factors*". However, data from corpus linguistics studies have blurred the early distinction between collocation and grammar, giving rise to the term lexicogrammar: representing the symbiotic relationship between the two. The following section will outline the relationship between corpus linguistics and collocation, focusing on how incongruity is associated with this relationship. Following this, I will outline the illocutionary function of hedging and also demonstrate how collocation and incongruity shape how hedging is utilised in ironic utterances.

3.3.1 Collocation within corpus linguistics

When linguists discuss the merits of corpus linguistic methodology, one of the most recognised applications is furthering the understanding of collocation. In fact, it could be argued that one of the more significant practical applications of the discipline is to empirically demonstrate collocation as an important linguistic phenomenon which can also inform semantics. The term itself was coined in linguistic terms by Firth (1957). Firth in his oft-quoted remark, made the link between the meaning of a word and "the company it keeps". Although the terminology was novel, the idea of a syntagmatic relationship between words and their semantics can be identified in Saussure's (1916) work. Nevertheless, what Firth did was to emphasise that this relationship between words is often interdependent. He points to the example of how the two collocates *night* and *dark* inform particular semantic qualities of each other: that *dark* informs of an aspect of *night* and vice versa. He referred to this symbiosis as "meaning by collocation" (1957: 196) and argues for recognition of this

additional aspect of semantics. Firth further argued that lexis can be measured for their *collocability*: that is, how the collocates of a particular word impress upon and influence its core semantic meaning. This theory has proved to be significant in semantic theory and has greatly influenced corpus linguistics by providing justification for corpus methodology. Since then, corpus-based studies have uncovered other features of collocability. Therefore, this thesis builds on Firth's definition in that 'incongruent' relationships between collocates can also often be significant.

To demonstrate this, we can return to Firth's prior example of the collocational relationship between *night* and *dark.* As stated by Firth, these two lexical items have a collocational relationship formed through similarity of semantic qualities. However, strong collocational relationships can also form between items which seem to have little in common, and appear to have a semantic clash. Such a relationship can be observed with the collocates *dark* and *day*. At the semantic level, there seems to be an incongruity and incompatibility between these words, in contrast with Firth's examples. However, a cursory corpus investigation reveals the two lexical items of having a significant collocation. In the BNC corpus, there are 161 co-occurrences of *dark* and *night* (t-score 12.38, 58th most common co-occurrence). Yet there are also 86 co-occurrences with *days* (t-score: 8.87) and 29 with *day* (4.16). This points to the fact that it is not only lexical items with similar semantic values that can have a collocational relationship.

Furthermore, this incongruent collocational relationship may point to differing illocutionary forces. In the above example, the incongruity in semantic meanings (*days* are not generally *dark*) leads to a metaphorical evaluative "meaning by collocation". Examples 2 and 3 (taken from the BNC) demonstrate this:

2. Whatever bargains they could find made their way to Poland in **its dark Communist days**

3. It also reminds him of possibly **his darkest day** in the […] a defeat from which Allison never really recovered.

Therefore, corpus investigations into collocation may have a wider ranging influence than Firth's initial observations suggested. Firstly, it is worth highlighting that there is a perceived

connection between metaphor and evaluation and that metaphor often carries an evaluation or affect (Bednarek, 2009; Martin, 2020; Fuoli et al, 2022). Furthermore, collocations can result in creative and novel pairings, and through incongruent collocations, both metaphorical and evaluative meanings can emerge. These collocational incongruences mean that collocation also has a semantic meaning-making element. As a result, this meaning-making can also have an influence on the relationship between collocation and irony.

As mentioned, when *dark* collocates with *day*, the illocutionary effect is not only metaphorical but evaluative. It may be that the incongruity creates this markedness in the collocation. To demonstrate further, we can return to Louw's (1993) observations. Importantly, it was Louw's development of the concept of semantic prosody which first saw the potential for corpus linguistics to identify irony at the lexicogrammatical level. Louw's corpus investigation outlined above found that irony often occurred through an incongruity of collocation. This incongruity is similar to the above example of *dark* and *day* yet Louw developed the idea of semantic prosody by focusing on auras of positive and negative evaluation and highlighting incongruity in semantic prosody which led to an ironic illocutionary force.

However, the collocation *dark day* is not, in itself, ironic. From Louw's perspective, what is lacking is a pairing of both positive and negative evaluative items. It would be difficult to identify a negative semantic prosody to the word *day.* What these initial observations demonstrate is that Hunston's observations regarding connotation can inform us of numerous meanings above the word.

Despite Louw's study being undoubtedly influential in the field of semantic prosody, there has been little follow-up on these original findings with specific regard to irony. I hope to build on his study while making two distinctions. Firstly, in Louw's research, examples of collocational irony are marked and unique in occurrence. In the singular examples Louw provides, irony occurs only when there is an intentionally or unintentionally marked collocation, or, in his words, a "*collocative clash* which is perceived, albeit subliminally, by the reader" (1993: 30). In order for the reader to perceive this, "there must be a sufficiently consistent background of *expected collocation*" (ibid. my italics). So for Louw, collocational

irony occurs when the speaker subverts established semantic prosody in collocations. In contrast, the present study aims to demonstrate that a significant number of ironic utterances are conventional and seem to follow recognised patterns.

This leads on to the second distinction: the examples presented in this thesis are not unexpected as focus is always given to frequency. In Firth's words, the examples of irony presented here are examples of "expectancies" (1957:195): that is, they are not considered marked. In fact, corpus methods are utilised to demonstrate that textual irony can be canonical within large discourse communities. Therefore, this chapter posits that the presented collocations are incongruent, and yet this incongruity is not unique or marked but rather canonical in the discourse community. Furthermore, the collocations in this study are related to *hedging*. The next section will introduce and focus on this particular semantically incongruent collocation and how it can create an ironic effect.

3.3.2 Collocation, incongruity and hedging

This section will demonstrate how such incongruity can play out at the collocational level involving items of *hedging*. *Hedging* can be defined as lexical items which have a softening or qualifying illocutionary force on rhetorical or evaluative utterances. Lakoff describes hedging words as "deintensifiers" (1973; 471). It is fair to say that hedging can also refer to certain paralinguistic features such as tone or gesture, but such features are outside the scope of this study. Indeed, Lakoff (1973: 472) initially outlined common hedging lexical items which helped to inform this study (Table 5.1). What distinguishes this study is that the corpus data reveals more than one hedging item collocating within singular utterances. This seems to violate Grice's Maxim of Quantity and so can be interpreted as an incongruous use of hedging: there is no ostensible reason why one hedging item alone can deintensify a statement. However, when these multiple hedging items collocated together, they seem to have a reverse intensifying illocutionary force. What is notable is that the incongruity between this softening and intensifying function, as well as the incongruous use of multiple hedging items, often leads to irony. By means of demonstration, the following is taken from the PMQ corpus:

4. I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that to all the young people across the country looking for work that **sounds like** a **rather** complacent answer.

In this example, Miliband uses two hedging items together: the use of the lexical item *rather* and the hedging verbal phrase *sounds like*. Yet these two hedging items are framing a strongly negative criticism of the PM's answer. There is much research into the importance of *litotes*, *meiosis* and *understatement* in the formation of irony (Matthews et al, 2006; Partington, 2016; Neuhaus, 2016; Walton, 2017) which are all related to hedging. Therefore, the following section will first detail the nature of hedging lexical items within linguistic studies and examine how they are formed structurally, as well as demonstrate how incongruity between hedging items and the strong evaluations they frame is a common cause of irony.

3.3.2.i Background to hedging

The majority of research into hedging views it in terms of its pragmatic function of tempering a statement. As such, hedging has mostly been examined by linguists concerned with phenomena above the sentence level such as logical pragmatics, discourse analysis and politeness theory (for example, Lakoff 1973, Brown and Levinson 1987, Fraser 1980, Markkanen and Schröder 1997). Also, the majority of contemporary linguistic research is rather narrow in scope, focusing on the lexical features of hedging within academic writing; such as quantifying its prevalence in research articles (Kim and Lim 2015, Yang et al 2015), or prescribing its importance in undergraduate and postgraduate essay writing (Hyland 1994). Therefore, much of what is understood by 'hedging' stems from research in academic discourse. It is worth briefly exploring this research in more detail and to point out differences from other discourse environments.

3.3.2.ii Hedging in academic discourse

As mentioned above, in the realm of academic English, investigations into the nature and function of hedging are numerous. It is fair to argue that much of this investigation is prescriptive in nature. Within the Higher Education environment, advice to hedge in

academic essays (particularly in the soft sciences) is ubiquitous[13]. Linguists such as Hyland (1994; 1996; 1998) have emphasised both the prevalence and importance of hedging in academic writing: primarily as a resource for expressing "uncertainty, scepticism, and deference" (Hyland 1998: 350). Students are told that to avoid controversy, statements must be appropriately hedged. Similarly, when seeking publishing in academic journals, researchers are encouraged to temper their claims to avoid criticism or backlash.

Although, it is worth pointing out that hedging is not always explicit: Plappart (2019) uses corpus methodology to examine published articles in the hard sciences, observing that the function of hedging often manifests itself in scientific journals through *epistemic implicature*: for example, careful use of verb phrases such as *associated with* or *have* which 'imply' hedging, rather than relying on explicit hedging items. This is similar to Hunston's (2001: 21) observation of evaluation as being "expressed prosodically throughout the clause" rather than in one or two specific lexical items. Plappart's study is particularly important as it demonstrates that corpus methodology can be used to identify more pragmatic features of language.

Furthermore, the commonly held opinion that hedging is necessary in academia is not entirely universal and that there are some opponents (for example, a populist criticism by Pinker 2014). Importantly, from his quantitative study of hedging phases in academic discourse, Meyer (1997) argues that because of its face-saving nature, 'hedging' in academic discourse serves to, paradoxically, strengthen the argument. It is fair to argue that he is rather dismissive of the concept of "hedging", and further points out that "genuine hedging" (1997: 22) is rarer than thought. However, it is notable that Meyer seems to argue that such academic hedging is disingenuous and that it is simply a phenomenon of discourse conventions, as this thesis will posit that patterns of hedging have similar ironically disingenuous functions. While not disagreeing with this reasonable claim, it seems that it is not only in academic discourse that lexical items considered 'hedging' have a strengthening function.

[13] For example, http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/hedge.htm

3.3.2.iii Hedging outside of academic discourse

In everyday spoken discourse, hedging is perhaps even more commonplace. Yet, despite this, it is often viewed in a negative light: researchers have made observations that it may make the speaker sound unintelligent (Daily-O'Cain, 2000) or unattractive and lacking in confidence (Blankenship and Holtgraves, 2005). As such, there is limited research in this area. However, it is worth bearing in mind that these studies concentrate on specific lexical items in isolation, for example, hesitation interjections or discourse markers such as *like* rather than syntactic structures of hedging. There are some analyses, however, which point out the valid function of hedging, for example as a way to make a story more memorable (Liu and Fox Tree 2012). There may well be parallels with this function of hedging and the use of hedging in ironic utterances. In conclusion, Meyer (1997) points out that the pragmatic functions of hedging are not always clear or singular, and that these multiple pragmatic meanings can appear to be in opposite. Thus, this may prove to be a rich source for irony. From the literature, it is fair to say that the illocutionary force of hedging items, positive or negative, is by no means simply to qualify statements. The following section will point out that this is certainly the case in political discourse environments.

3.3.2.iv Hedging in political discourse

As the previous section illustrated, lexical hedging is not confined to academic discourse. However, there is little research into the illocutionary force of hedging within other discourse environments. This thesis will be an attempt to readdress the balance through observations of authentic discourse, initially taken from two political discourse communities. Developing on what Meyer (1997) hints at, I will suggest that the semantic use of hedging lexical items may not be as clear-cut as they ostensibly appear. As an initial illustration, the following two examples from a political discourse context, namely Questions to the Prime Minister sessions (PMQs) from British parliamentary debate, do not seem to have the function of, in Hyland's words, uncertainty or deference (hedging items are in bold):

5. The right hon. Gentleman does not **seem** to **quite** understand what the vote on 23 June was about

6. I know this is very funny for all the Conservative Members, but I do not **suppose** there are **too many** Conservative MPs who have to go to a food bank to supplement the food on their family's table every week

It is clear that PMQs is a combative and rhetorical discourse environment, yet in both examples, the speakers are using hedging items. However, this is not to serve the established illocutionary force. In example 4, the speaker is criticising their opponent for what they perceive as a lack of understanding of the Brexit vote. Using hedging items adds an ironic, humorous sting to the criticism. Similarly, in example 4, the speaker's attack is direct and biting, and the use of hedging seems to have the reverse effect of deference. Overall, the use of hedging in these two examples does not fully match the functions laid out in academic and conversational discourse studies of hedging. This may be due to a syntactic characteristic of both these examples.

Notably, in examples 3 and 4, hedging items are not in isolation but are used concurrently within an utterance. I argue that this is not an unusual lexical phenomenon and that many utterances contain two or more hedging items. Similar observations have been touched upon previously: for example, Meyer points out that in academic discourse, "hedging expressions tend to group themselves into elaborate formulae" (1997: 23) but does not further explain this. Therefore, in this thesis I will use corpus-based methodology to present reoccurring patterns of collocation whose collective functions are incongruous with the hedging function of the collocates in isolation. These *collocational patterns* (Oakey 2008) have the characteristics of a collocational relationship in the manner of how they have a clear function which both shapes and is shaped by the specific lexical items within it. This not uncommon phenomenon within utterances I refer to as *multiple hedging* and makes up the research presented in more detail in Chapter 5.

Ironic utterances which incorporate multiple hedging subvert this hedging or deferential function for evaluative and rhetoric effect. Corpus-based collocational analysis can reveal such common utterances. However, colligational analysis can also reveal similar examples of irony. This process is described in the following section.

3.4 Colligation

The second important lexicogrammatical aspect of this thesis is colligation. As mentioned in Section 3.3, corpus-based studies have blurred the boundaries between lexis and grammar, and colligation can be seen as evidence of this. Colligation is similar to collocation as they both refer to lexicogrammatical features co-occurring. However, colligation examines how certain lexical items and grammatical structures tend to collocate. Again, it is an incongruity of colligation in relation to hedging within evaluative utterances which can point to irony. This section will outline how the concept of colligation has developed in corpus linguistics, particularly by paying attention to the concept of *collostruction*: an important theory of Construction Grammar.

3.4.1 Corpus linguistics and colligation

In his initial research in corpus linguistics, Sinclair (1998: 20) identified colligation as one of the key components of co-selection of a lexical item (the others being: collocation, semantic prosody and semantic preference). Despite this, other than as a secondary consideration regarding fixedness in multi-word expressions, the idea of colligation still remains relatively unexplored. One reason is perhaps that early corpus technology made it difficult to examine the relationship between lexical items and grammar, as opposed to simple lexical collocation. Since then, corpus searches using, for example, CQL (the Sketch Engine) have made this easier. However, Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) argue that it was the shadow of generative grammar theory that led to early corpus linguists being reluctant to examine this in more detail. An important development was Hunston and Francis' (2000) influential Pattern Grammar approach which sought to provide a comprehensive collocational and, to some degree, colligational map of the language by eschewing traditional separation of lexis and grammar. Through corpus methodology (in particular, the ability to examine concordance lines within a corpus), this truly lexicogrammatical approach attempted to prioritise the importance of patterns in determining how lexical items are used. This meant the concept of collocation developed from Firth and Halliday's initial observations, and the notion of fixed and semi-fixed patterns of collocations were observed. In this regard, Pattern Grammar shares some important similarities with the theories of Construction Grammar.

Construction Grammar grew out of rising opposition to Chomsky's (1980) theories of Generative Grammar. Early construction grammarians, similar to Hunston and Francis, rejected the notion of language as two separate but bisecting systems of lexis and grammar. Rather, they view language as a lexicogrammatical phenomenon and much in the same way as Firth viewed the collocational relationship as symbiotic, construction grammarians view the relationship between lexis and grammar much in the same way. For example, Römer (2009) argued for the "inseparability of lexis and grammar". This inseparability is how *signs* or *constructions* are formed.

This inseparability results from the idea that both lexis and grammar have a meaning element. This is one reason why they eschew generative grammar in favour of Saussure's concept of *signs*. Saussure posited that a sign was the pairing of a word's form (signifier) and meaning (signified). Construction grammarians use the more encompassing term *constructions* and apply it to all components of the lexicon: from concrete components such as morphemes and words, to more abstract components such as partially filled or open constructions (Goldberg 2013: 17). Taxonomy of constructions always pays close attention to meaning. So, for example, the *comparative construction* is an example of a partially filled construction and the *resultative construction* is an example of an open construction (Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013: 2, Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003: 212). Such constructions are highlighted in the table below:

	Comparative construction	**Resultative construction**
Construction type	Partially filled	Open
Structure	[X *BE* ADJ$_{comparative}$ *than* Y]	[X V Y X]
Meaning	'*X is more ADJ than Y'*	'*X causes Y to become Z by V'*
Example	`my side might be rather happier about that than his`	`his question tempts me to go down a number of routes in answering him`

Table 3.1: Outline of two abstract constructions (Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013: 2) (Examples taken from PMQ corpus)

Similarities with Saussure's concept of signs continue as construction grammarians argue that the relationship between form and meaning is "partially arbitrary" (Croft and Cruse 2004: 257) rather like the relationship between signified and signifier. It is on this point that

Construction Grammar, to a certain extent, differs from Hunston and Francis' (2000) Pattern Grammar and it has important implications for the corpus-based studies of irony.

As stated, a construction is a pairing of linguistic form and semantic or pragmatic meaning or use. Furthermore, Goldberg makes the point that, "some aspect of the form or some aspect of the meaning/use is *not strictly predictable* from the component parts or from other constructions […] in the language" (Goldberg 1996: 68, my italics). In this way, constructions can be viewed as creating an incongruous clash with the lexical items which make up their construction. Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003: 212) reinforce this idea by defining a construction as, "*any* linguistic expression, no matter how concrete or abstract, that is directly associated with a particular meaning or function, and whose form or meaning cannot be compositionally derived". As mentioned, parallels can be drawn with the concept of Pattern Grammar: Hunston and Francis' definition of a pattern could be equally viewed of as a construction. An important distinction is that Hunston and Francis do not associate meaning to specific patterns: rather patterns are specific words and structures which commonly co-occur with a word. Therefore, patterns contribute to a word's meaning but do not have a specific associated meaning or function. So, in Pattern Grammar theory, the examples in Table 3.1 would be categorised by structure but not by meaning. In fact, the first example is categorised as **ADJ-COMPAR *than* n** (Francis et al. 1998: 372) and the second **as V n to-inf** (Hunston and Francis 2000: 53, Francis et al. 1996: 291).

If we accept irony as having a pragmatic meaning, then it is also reasonable to assume that there may be certain constructions which could be considered ironic. Also, ironic utterances can be viewed as somewhat abstract and not strictly predictable. Using Construction Grammar theory, this thesis will present constructions which seem to point to an ironic function, and which can be viewed as incongruent at both the syntagmatic, semantic and pragmatic level. These constructions are what Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) refer to as collostructional.

3.4.2 Collostructions and Construction Grammar

The term collostruction, coined by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) draws on both Construction Grammar and colligation. They argue that there is an identifiable relationship

between lexical items and the grammatical structures in which they occur. Based on this argument, clear similarities between collostruction theory and Pattern Grammar can also be made. Stefanowitsch and Gries are directly influenced by Pattern Grammar and emphasise the importance that lexical items only colligate with patterns that are *semantically compatible* and not strictly and simply syntactically compatible (ibid: 213). So, for construction grammarians, the fact that Chomsky's famous sentence "Colourless green ideas sleep furiously" (Chomsky 1957) is syntactically possible is unimportant, as the construction is not a "repositor[y] of [a] meaningful unit" (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2013: 211). Nor do the *collexemes*, the lexemes that are attracted to this particular construction, contribute to a discernible meaning. As an example of corpus methodology, collostructional analysis focuses on form. Such methodology is adopted in this study in Chapter 6, which focuses on a collostruction concerning the progressive aspect. Along with the ethos of Pattern Grammar methodology, this chapter will demonstrate how the meaning of the progressive construction is incongruous to certain meanings of the *collexemes* and that this incongruity can lead to an ironic illocutionary function.

In order to understand this fully, a greater examination of linguistic research into the progressive aspect needs to be conducted. The following section will illustrate research into the meanings of the progressive aspect and how this relates to the collostructional research outlined in Chapter 6.

3.4.3 Progressive aspect

A perfunctory examination of the progressive aspect from a prescriptive teaching approach reveals one distinct function: describing temporal actions. However, if we adopt the broad teaching goals of the communicative approach, it is pedagogically problematic to start with this function and purpose of the progressive as it is not the most common usage. Additionally, Römer's (2005b) corpus-based study, demonstrates that the progressive aspect has a number of lexical and grammatical restrictions which are not considered in the majority of EFL textbooks. Her study seems to demonstrate that more consideration of the progressive aspect using corpus-based methods would be beneficial.

Such elementary teaching of the progressive aspect which tends to focus on its function to illustrate events or actions occurring in a temporal moment in time is not only incomplete but also unrepresentative of its main functions. However, within more prescriptive analyses of grammar there is mention of the politeness and softening function of the progressive aspect (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 710; Swan 2005: 456); but such mentions seem perfunctory: a more in-depth and sensitive analysis is needed. For example, Swan (ibid) makes a connection between the pragmatic function and the semantic meaning of the continuous tense: "[progressive forms] sound less definite than simple forms, because they suggest something temporary and incomplete". However, if we consider this example from PMQ (spoken by Tony Blair in his role as Prime Minister), the function seems somewhat different:

> 7. Surely that is better than the policies in so far as one can understand them of the Opposition. **I have just been doing a little research** into the Opposition's policy on university education. The leader of the Conservative party wrote to party members after he was elected leader to say that he was going to scrap all tuition fees?

In this case, Blair is criticising the opposition by ironically pointing out what he deems as obvious flaws in their proposals, so the use of politeness or softening language appears marked. As in examples previously presented, the speaker utilises other hedging items ('just', 'a little'), along with the progressive aspect, to further mark his utterances. As a result, the use of the progressive aspect is far more varied and nuanced than language teaching suggests and it is worth investigating the scope of pragmatic functions the aspect can evoke.

Therefore, through corpus methods Chapter 6 will explore common patterns which utilise the progressive aspect, and how these patterns may contribute to the rhetoric and/or ironic force of an utterance. This will determine whether Blair's use is an anomaly. I hope to pick up on the point raised by Römer; a point that is central to much corpus linguistics studies:

> In connection with questions about the appropriateness of linguistic descriptions it is of major importance to find out whether the progressive forms of a larger number of verbs all behave the same (or at least in similar ways), i.e. whether their preferred contexts and functions are roughly comparable so that it is justified to talk about the progressive as an underlying grammatical construction which allows for many different verbal realisations or surface forms but *carries a meaning (or meanings) of its own*, more or less independent of the respective surface form. (Römer 2005b: 128 (my emphasis))

This study, through careful examination of real-world corpus data, will highlight important pragmatic features of the progressive aspect. When combined with certain lexical items in recurring patterns, this aspect can be used to express strong rhetoric. Furthermore, in many cases, this seems to undermine the surface, softening function mentioned earlier; it is this undermining or incongruity that could be considered as irony emerging at the lexicogrammatical level. As a result, it will be argued that the progressive aspect carries a meaning which has not been fully explored within the literature. It is only through corpus methods can we map the nuances of meaning within this grammatical feature.

Despite this claim, the current study is not unique in investigating the progressive aspect using corpus methodology. In fact, previous corpus studies have already revealed that the function of the progressive aspect is not singular and that, rather, it carries many functions. Mindt (2000: 248-265) lists nine separate functions of the aspect based on his own corpus investigation. In order of frequency, these nine functions are: ‘incompletion’, ‘temporariness’, ‘iteration/habit’, ‘highlighting / prominence’, ‘prediction’, ‘volition / intention’, ‘emotion’, ‘politeness / downtoning’, and ‘matter-of-course'. Mindt noted that the last three functions only take up around 5% of all progressive use in his collection of general corpora. Through my examinations, I note that this number seems rather low.

Römer’s (2005a: 95-106) own corpus analysis of the spoken corpora in both the British National Corpus and the Bank of English finds a more balanced spread of the functions. However, she classifies these functions slightly differently to Mindt. For the purpose of this study, I will draw attention to the functions ‘politeness / softening’ (c. 12% of

all uses of the progressive), 'emphasis / attitude' (c. 9%) and 'shock / disbelief' (c. 0.5%) as all of these functions are evaluative and so can, theoretically at least, be expressed ironically. Römer also identifies a 'gradual change / development' function (c. 5%) which, while relevant, is interpreted slightly differently in this study. What Römer's study teaches us is that corpus methodology can be used to explore the connection between lexicogrammar and meaning, thus reinforcing the ideas proposed by construction grammarians. This study will develop this idea by exploring how pragmatic meanings can also be exploited at the lexicogrammatical level.

The link between collostructions involving the progressive aspect and irony will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6. Additionally, Chapter 7 outlines ironic utterances with more fixed patterns. Because of this, a greater consideration of the relationship between phraseology and irony will be conducted in the next section.

3.5 Phraseology

As mentioned in Section 3.4.2, Chomsky's famous utterance "Colourless green ideas sleep furiously" was to illustrate the syntactic freedoms that, he argues, language users have. Corpus linguistic methodology, along with Construction Grammar theory has led to linguists disputing this point, perhaps starting with Sinclair's (1991) concept of the *idiom principle* which argues that speakers have a number of "semi-preconstructed phrases" which frame communication, and continuing with the idea that language is made up of constructions: and that language users are, in fact, restricted to these and so 'creative' language is a result of a combination of previously established form-meaning pairings (Goldberg 2006: 22). Both humour and irony can therefore be viewed as potentially occurring when this combination is incongruous, and sections 3.3 and 3.4 have highlighted how this might occur at the lexical (collocational) and grammatical (colligational) level.

However, I would argue that Chomsky's sentence, through use and reuse, has become imbibed with a meaning. The sentence has entered the lexicon of international linguistics, is a subject of memes, and has its own Wikipedia entry. It could be viewed as a

more specialised cousin of "the cat sat on the mat": as an example used to illustrate a grammatical or linguistic point but one that has very little functional use outside of this context. For construction grammarians (for example: Croft 2001; Goldberg 2006; Bybee 2006) this 'meaning' has arisen through exposure and re-exposure to constructions. This idea is reflected in linguistic theories concerning phraseology (notably: Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992; Lewis 1993; Biber and Conrad 1999; Wray 2002). More relevant to this study is the parallels that can be drawn with Hoey's (2004) theory of *lexical priming* which also examines how meanings both semantic and pragmatic can change over time. This section will first look at previous linguistic studies of phraseology, and then outline the relationship between phraseology and irony. Finally, it will present the connection between Hoey's theory and the examples of irony discussed in Chapter 7.

Sinclair's concept of the idiom principle has influenced much corpus linguistic research into phraseology. In particular, corpus software has allowed researchers to investigate re-occurring n-grams and p-frames within corpora and has subsequently revealed how these may likely be stored in the mental lexicon as singular items. N-grams are fixed patterns of lexis across a recognise (n) span: for example, *how do you do* is a common 4-gram. P-frames are also multi-word items but differ in the fact that they are not completely fixed: some lexical items can be interchanged. Further studies have also classified such n-grams and p-frames in terms of their functions (Biber et al 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006). The majority of these functions have an interpersonal aspect: often used to organise discourse, demonstrate stance or show politeness. For example, *how do you do* is a recognised common formal phrase, used when introduced to a stranger. Below are examples taken from the two DIY corpora which demonstrate this interpersonal function of multi-word items (highlighted in bold):

8. **I am tempted to say** that I probably ought to sit down and enjoy that for the rest of the day

9. **For what it's worth**, today happens to be National Leave Work Early Day.

10. Well, **as I mentioned yesterday**, **I was just trying to** get you guys to laugh

There are a number of pragmatic functions in the above examples. All the phrases have an organisational function in that they are used to frame statements. In example 8, the speaker uses the multi-word phrase to show stance. In examples 9 and 10, the phrases frame a more descriptive statement, as well as example 10 also having a phrase used to show hedging or politeness. Significant to this study, the phrases in examples 8-10 show how multi-word items can be utilised to frame ironic utterances. Chapter 7 will present further examples which demonstrate how speakers use multi-word items to signpost irony for the audience. Studies in phraseology differ from studies in collocation as phraseology is concerned with *where* syntactically do certain items collocate. Therefore, unlike a simple collocational search, this requires an examination of the concordance lines with the corpora.

Such signposting of irony has previously been discussed in studies. Attardo's (2000: 6) investigation into irony identified two communicative factors: *irony markers* and *irony factors* which he defines as "indices of irony and irony itself". For Attardo, the majority of irony markers are paralinguistic phenomena (such as a facial gesture or ironic tone of voice). However, I will argue in Chapter 7 that phrases such as those in examples 8-10 can serve the same illocutionary function. Yet this is not the only ironic force that such phrases possess. Along with Construction Grammar theory, Hoey's (2004) concept of lexical priming can be applied to certain phrases which I argue have developed an *ironic priming*. Before demonstrating the function and process of ironic priming, it is worth reflecting on other previous studies which have also explored the relationship between phraseology and irony.

3.5.1 Phraseology and irony

The significance of phraseology in ironic utterances has been previously explored and within these studies, incongruity remains a common theme. Partington (2011) traces this history by starting with Louw's (1993) observations of *collocational irony* outlined previously, continuing with Gibbs' (1993) term of *evaluative oxymoron* and finally concluding with his own (Partington 1998) identified pattern of irony which he terms *unusuality*. These three phenomena have a significant common element: irony emerges through unexpectedness and a novel subversion of 'the norm'. What is considered as 'the norm' varies across the three examples of lexical irony. An interesting comparison can be

made with the first two examples. For Louw, irony emerges through incongruous collocation of positive and negative semantic items. His oft-quoted example *bent on self-improvement* (Louw 1993: 164) is taken from a work of fiction by the novelist David Lodge. This is notable because, as such, the example, along with others presented in Louw's study, is intentionally marked and novel. In terms of construction, evaluative oxymoron differs little from Louw's collocational irony except that the relationship between positive and negative evaluative elements can be closer than lexical collocation: Partington (2011: 1789) presents the compound word *bittersweet* as an example, and similar noun phrases *champagne socialism* and *Chinese democracy* demonstrate that evaluative oxymoron can manifest itself as fixed multi-word items. Another important difference between these two phraseological ironies is that evaluative oxymorons, in Partington's words (ibid: 1790), "very occasionally […] develop into […] well-worn canonical [terms]". Examples which Louw presents do not have this canonical potential; the novelty of their incongruity remains an important element of their ironic force. Partington's own theory of unusuality in irony has clear parallels with Goldberg's (2006) theory of how creativity in language is formed. Partington argues that established phrases are often, "available for ironic exploitation" (2011: 1793) which reflects Goldberg's own observation that speakers, "are at once impressively creative and impressively repetitive" (2013: 26). Language creativity and exploitation is often through incongruous use of cliché. This exploitation is most often an incongruity with semantic prosody. An example from WHPB (in bold) illustrates this:

11. Q: Thanks, Josh. Speaking of outrage, House Democrats --

MR. EARNEST: Yeah. (Laughter.)

Q: -- after meeting with James Comey, and they expressed all kinds of emotions -- anger, concern, lost confidence, yes, outrage --

MR. EARNEST: **I think Washington psychiatrists are going to be doing a brisk business in the years ahead.** (Laughter.)

In the BNC, there are 7 occurrences of the phrase *brisk business* and there are a further 952 occurrences in the enTenTen15: both with a similar occurrence ratio of 0.06 per million tokens. It is fair to argue that it has a positive semantic prosody in that brisk business is desirable for any business. However, in example 11, Earnest incongruently exploits the phrase with *Washington psychiatrist*, thus shifting the focus of the evaluation to implying the

negative mental health of House Democrats, rather than the economic benefits for psychiatrists. Again, it is the incongruity which is the source of both the irony and humour.

The above examples point to novelty or unusuality as the determining factor in phrasal irony. However, the present study's corpus investigation into real-world examples of irony reveals examples which re-occur across corpora. This seems to suggest that certain phrases have a tendency to become ironically primed. What I will try to demonstrate in Chapter 7 is that similar patterns of incongruity do tend to have elements that become somewhat canonical and primed. To understand this, it is important to explore what is meant by ironic priming.

3.5.2 Phraseology and *ironic priming*

The previous section pointed out Partington's argument that evaluative oxymorons can become canonical, even "well-worn". The process by which that occurs is identical to the phenomenon of *priming* outlined by Hoey (2004). This section will demonstrate Hoey's theory and explain how it relates to phrasal irony.

An important factor of the theory of lexical priming is that it is overarching and covers all levels of discourse: from the lexicogrammatical level to wider concepts of pragmatics and textual discourse. However, Hoey tends to ground the theory at the lexical level (2005: 158-9). This theory further establishes restrictions on the language user which are ignored by generative grammar. As Hoey (ibid. 152) states, "[generative grammarians] have not been interested in *probability* of occurrence, only possibility" [my italics]. The effectiveness of corpus linguistics methodology in identifying probability may well hasve led to Hoey identifying the importance of naturalness (ibid. 2-5) in understanding limitations on language production. He views priming as the phenomenon of an individual's encounter and re-encounter with particular lexical items, and how these encounters imbue (or *prime*) these items with, in his words, "a rich and complex web of socially embedded, genre-sensitive collocations, semantic associations, colligations and text colligations" (ibid. 160). Subsequently, an individual's mental lexicon is both singular, but also context-determined and shared with other discourse communities. This may explain how ironic utterances such as

example 9 (which requires an understanding of what 'National Leave Work Early day is) are interpreted by the audience as such.

Furthermore, Hoey (2005) built upon Louw's (1993) concept of semantic prosody by putting forward the notion that priming is not simply concerned with positive or negative evaluation. He prefers to use the wider term *semantic association*, which includes priming of text and genre, as well as *pragmatic association*. Parallels can be made with the examples of ironic echo set out in Section 2.3. In these examples, the speaker creates an incongruity between two discourse communities or genres and, in Wilson and Sperber's terms, echoes one genre within another. Here are other examples which highlight the incongruity of genres (example 12 is taken from the PMQ corpus, example 13 is taken from the WHPB corpus):

12. It is **a truth universally acknowledged** that fish and chips taste best on the beaches of Skegness

13. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon. Happy Valentine's Day. I can sense **the love in the room**. (Laughter.)

These examples above point to a form of irony which intersect both Hoey's theory of semantic association and Wilson and Sperber's irony as echo. In example 12, the speaker is echoing Jane Austen's well-known opening to *Pride and Prejudice*, humorously and ironically contrasting it with fish and chips in Skegness. In the second example, Spicer creates an ironic incongruence between the professional environment of the press room and the phrase *sense the love in the room*. This particular phrase *love in the room* has 123 occurrences in the enTenTen15 corpus, which seems to suggest that it is a recognisable phrase, and these occurrences overwhelmingly express genuine affection. Therefore, the semantic associations of two genres can often incongruently intersect with humorous or ironic consequences.

However, this is perhaps not the most common form of ironic priming. Specifically, Hoey defines pragmatic association as when words or phrases are primed with particular "set[s] of features that all serve the same or similar pragmatic function" (2005: 26). It is something similar to pragmatic association which leads to hedging collocations in Section

3.3. If ironic priming exists, then it is more likely to be an example of this pragmatic association. The examples of ironic priming presented in Chapter 7 will demonstrate certain phrases that through encounters and re-encounters have been "cumulatively loaded" (ibid. 8) with an ironic context and illocutionary force. This will be evidenced through multiple occurrences of the phrases within an ironic context.

3.6 Conclusion

This section has two main purposes. Firstly, to outline previous corpus-based studies into irony. Many of these corpus-based studies focus on its pragmatic functions. Despite being an underdeveloped area of study, this section has pointed out that there is some scope for examining irony at the lexicogrammatical level.

Secondly, it has highlighted three key features of corpus-based research which are echoed in the lexicogrammatical features of irony found in this study. These three features are collocation, colligation and collostruction, and phraseology. Each of these features will provide a focus for Chapters 5 through 7. Collocation will inform how phrases of multiple hedging often occur within ironic utterances. Colligation and collostruction will help to explain how the relationship between the progressive aspect and cognitive verbs create patterns which have an ironic function. Finally, both phraseology and the corpus-informed theory of lexical priming help us to understand not only how such lexicogrammatical patterns can have an ironic force but also how phrases can develop an ironic function over time within a discourse community.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

This chapter is an outline of the various stages of the present study in which I establish the general corpus-based methodology as well as illustrate how collocation, colligation and phraseology influenced these methods. First, it will account for the data set, and also describe how the DIY corpora were constructed. Secondly, it will outline the research process in how the study attempted to answer the research questions. Finally, finding parallels with the three aspects of corpus linguistics highlighted in the previous chapter, I will briefly explain how the three aspects of lexicogrammatical features of irony were identified and explored; this will also act as an introduction to Chapters 5 to 7.

4.1 Data Set

The study draws upon four data sets. Two were compiled by the author and two are established general corpora. The following will discuss the nature of each in turn.

4.1.1 PMQ Corpus

The first DIY corpus is taken from Prime Minister's Questions (hereinafter PMQ). The PMQ corpus comprises of sessions covering the administrations from Tony Blair to Theresa May, dating from December 2011 to May 2018. In total, nine MPs (including four Prime Ministers) answered questions during these sessions. Data was directly extracted from Hansard online[14] and the corpus comprises of approximately 3.3 million words. Transcriptions were copied directly from the website and then converted to a plain text file for interrogation using The Sketch Engine corpus software. Before interrogation, there was some cursory cleaning of the data. This included removing line numbers from the Hansard website, and the customary listing of engagements made by all Prime Ministers at the dispatch box:

1. This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

[14] https://hansard.parliament.uk/

This was removed primarily because it is scripted and may well cloud any concordance results. Ideally, names, parties and constituents (for example, “Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)”) would have also been removed. However, for purposes of contextual reference, these remained.

Commentators such as Mollin (2007) have pointed out limitations with Hansard transcriptions. Transcribers omit false starts and hesitations as well as correcting factual areas and avoiding "extra-factual, contextual talk" (2007: 187). More importantly, lexicogrammatical choices are changed to more formal and 'parliamentary' alternatives. Below is an example (non-ironic) which shows common discrepancies between what is said and what is transcribed. The first is recorded by the author of this study, the second is the transcript directly taken from Hansard. Both refer to the Prime Minister David Cameron speaking on 27th April 2017:

2. erm, first of all, let me join the right honourable gentleman in praising those who campaigned so hard and so long, er, to get justice for the victims of, of Hillsborough. This whole process took far too long but I think it is right and I paid tribute to the honourable member, right honourable Member for Leigh that we had the Jones report, that we responded to the Jones report.

3. Let me join the right hon. Gentleman in praising those who campaigned so hard and for so long to get justice for the victims of Hillsborough. This whole process took far too long, and it is right that we had the Jones report—I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham)—and responded to it.

Time constraints mean that an accurate verbatim transcription of PMQs is beyond the boundaries of this study. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the research is investigating common lexical features of ironic utterances and therefore verbatim transcription which often differs only in terms of stutters and false starts is arguably not particularly relevant to this area of lexicogrammatical study, and that the Hansard transcriptions are adequate for research. An important element which is limited within the PMQ corpus is members’ reactions to speech (such as laughter and jeers). Hansard often records laughter and jeering together as ‘Interruption’. However, it is rather difficult to

measure specific reactions to possible irony in the corpus alone. To combat this, available audio transcripts of PMQs from official sources[15] were sought, allowing for a cross-checking of the Hansard results with the actual recorded utterances. This point will be explored more deeply in Section 4.1.3 below.

Before examining the examples of irony in the PMQ corpus, there are some key characteristics of this specific discourse which need careful consideration. Firstly, there are established rules and protocols of discourse within Parliament which shape the language (Bull et al: 2020). Perhaps most importantly is the rule that MPs do not speak directly to each other, but rather questions and answers are directed towards the Speaker of the House. The Speaker is also responsible for deciding who can ask a question, but also ruled responsible to keep interruptions and aggressive behaviour to a minimum. Secondly, MPs must use honorifics or titles when referring to other members, and refrain from using 'unparliamentary language' such as referring to another MP as a liar[16]. Because of this, there are a number of examples of irony which directly play with these conventions. These will be discussed in more detail in the relevant results chapters.

The purpose of using PMQs as a basis for exploring irony is threefold. Firstly, Partington (2006: 182ff) has extolled the virtues of using political based corpora as a source of using irony. Secondly, PMQs is noted as a rich source of irony, albeit a stylised and combative form. Finally, the accessibility of Hansard means that it is relatively straightforward to create a large corpus of naturally occurring spoken discourse to lexicogrammatically analyse.

4.1.2 White House Press Briefings

As mentioned above, the PMQ corpus is taken from a highly stylised, unique political discourse. Therefore, a contrasting corpus was created for the purposes of balancing against this. This contrasting corpus is a collection of White House press briefings covering the administrations from George W. Bush to Donald Trump (hereinafter WHPB). Spoken data in the WHPB corpus consist of discourse between the Press Secretary or various spokespersons

[15] These were obtained from: https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/official-prime-ministers-questions-pmqs-podcast/id444786081; and up until 17th May, 2013 from: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/series/pmqs
[16] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/jan/01/notes-and-queries-query-05753224500

of the President and the associate press in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room. There is no recorded dialogue of any President within the corpus. Discourse is similar to PMQs in that the assembled (in this case the media) ask questions to a single person. Also, like PMQs there is a sense that politeness and conventions are important elements of the discourse, despite there being no established rules such as those in the British Parliament. However, there are a number of important differences that may well shape the irony used by the participants. Firstly, questions are asked directly to the Press Secretary and the Press Secretary often refers directly to each member of the press, often communicating on first name terms. Despite this familiarity and directness, official transcripts of the briefings do not record names of members of the press, as each response is attributed simply to the letter *Q*. Below is a short example which demonstrates this, taken from 7th December 2016 with Josh Earnest as Press Secretary:

2. Q Are you saying their bank account affects someone's capability?

MR. EARNEST: Not at all. I think it -- I don't think it would actually have much of an impact at all on anybody's ability to serve the country.

Q Why did you say it then?

MR. EARNEST: Mostly to be funny. (Laughter.) And it got a couple of chuckles.

Q Thanks for spelling that out. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: I guess that goes to that old adage, though, if you have to explain the joke, it wasn't that funny. (Laughter.) So maybe it wasn't. Cheryl.

Q Okay, the CR.

MR. EARNEST: Yes.

Q Yes, it came out last night -- April 28th, a lot of riders, but a lot of funding. Will the President sign it?

This extract demonstrates the directness of conversational responses compared with the greater formality of PMQs, and so proves to be a suitable counterpoint to the other DIY corpus.

The WHPB corpus data were collected from the official White House website[17] in a similar way to the PMQ corpus. The WHPB corpus comprises of approximately 3.7 million words, with at least 1 million words from each of the last three administrations: George W.

[17] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings

Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. As the above example demonstrates, transcriptions are significantly more accurate than Hansard's, with false starts, mistakes and paralinguistic features such as laughter remaining in the records. For this research, I had no access to audio files, so relied solely on the written transcriptions. However, based on the presence of paralinguistic features, I am confident that they are accurate enough for the needs of the research. The transcriptions were converted into plain text file using the above procedure but no cleaning of the data was deemed necessary.

4.1.3 General corpora

To compare the results from the two DIY corpora, two general reference corpora were needed. The reasoning behind this was that the two DIY corpora were initially constructed to be used to mine for real-world examples of irony but they lack scope as specialised corpora. Therefore, two general corpora were accessed to explore these patterns within wider discourse. As the two political corpora are taken from British and American political discourse, a British and an American corpus were chosen to represent these two discourse environments. Through the Sketch Engine software, I accessed the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC) completed in 1994, and the enTenTen English corpus dating from 2015 (hereafter enTenTen15).

Both of these corpora have significant advantages and disadvantages, which, by utilising both, often cancel each other out. First and foremost, both are wide in scope: BNC has over 96million words and 112 million tokens; enTenTen15 has over 13 billion words and 15 billion tokens. It is this breadth of scope which is the biggest factor in their selection. Another important factor is that the BNC is predominantly British discourse, whereas enTenTen15 is mostly crawled from US websites[18]. Thus, these two corpora provide a balanced reflection of the two political corpora.

BNC was constructed with a care to represent discourse as a whole. There is a 90% : 10% split between written and spoken discourse, drawing from a wide range of written texts and real-world speakers from various backgrounds, all meticulously curated. In this regard,

[18] Web crawling through the Sketch Engine is an automated process in which minimal filters are applied such as language, spam, duplication and incomplete content (https://www.sketchengine.eu/blog/build-a-corpus-from-the-web/)

the BNC provides a more balanced overview of (predominantly British) discourse than either of the highly specialised DIY corpora. Furthermore, there is a balance between formal and informal discourse. Apart from its Anglocentrism, a significant disadvantage with the BNC is its age: no discourse presented is younger than 28 years.

EnTenTen15 provides a counterbalance to this. Firstly, its much wider scope is a result of its less discerning approach to curation. It is comprised of over 33 million documents harvested randomly from the Internet using the SpiderLing web-crawler (Suchomel and Pomikálek, 2012). The breadth of the scope means that the texts are not as carefully curated as the BNC, although incomplete data and spam were removed, and the texts were classified across the broad categories of arts, business, games, health, home, recreation, reference, science, sport, society, and technology[19]. Nevertheless, a closer inspection reveals that a significant amount of this data is taken from Internet forums and contains occasional grammar and spelling errors, as well as, at times, somewhat discriminatory viewpoints (at this point, it is worth stating that examples presented in this study are used purely for their lexicogrammatical features and that the content of these expressed opinions should be disregarded and ignored). However, there are advantages to this: often these texts feel more informal and spontaneous than published articles. During this study, the enTenTen15 corpus often proved to be the most fruitful due to its sheer scope.

It is also worth mentioning that in this study, there is no reference to what category these lexical patterns are taken from, or whether they are spoken or written, formal or informal. The focus of the present study is evaluating these patterns' frequency and fixedness. Therefore, the next section will outline how these patterns were first identified within the examples of irony, and then how they were evaluated across all four corpora.

4.2 Methodology: identifying lexicogrammatical features of irony

Identifying possible lexicogrammatical features of irony required a four-stage process. The following section will outline the research process. To illustrate the process, I will incorporate examples of utterances from the WHPB corpus.

[19] Information on the enTenTen15 data can be found here: https://www.sketchengine.eu/ententen-english-corpus/

4.2.1 PMQs and White House Press Briefings: identifying ironic utterances

The first stage was to identify real-world examples of irony from the two DIY corpora. Determining what is ironic or not requires an unavoidable degree of subjectivity, but a high degree of consensus may often be reached on whether an utterance can be considered ironic. However, for an utterance to be considered ironic, a non-ironic literal interpretation of the dictum must also be possible. As these ironic utterances were collated solely by the author, two significant stages of irony detection were taken to reduce this subjectivity. These two stages involve identifying paralinguistic responses and formulating an objective framework.

4.2.1.i Laughter as a signal for irony

Firstly, as both DIY corpora were taken from transcripts which involve interactive conversation, audience responses to utterances were discernible. Therefore, by focusing on paralinguistic reactions to certain statements, I was able to mine possible examples of irony. The most telling reaction was laughter; as stated in Chapter 2, humour is one of the most common functions of irony. Therefore, laughter was used as an initial step in identifying real-world examples.

There were important practical reasons for choosing this as a starting point. Firstly, the feature is easily identified within the two corpora. Data of the White House Press briefings transcribe laughter in their transcriptions (see Example 4) and so these were readily sourced through the Sketch Engine. There are 1155 occurrences of the word *laughter* in the WHPB corpus. A sample of some of these can be seen in Figure 4.1.

You have?(Laughter.) Q: Yes.	(**Laughter**.)	MR.FRATTO:One of those unnamed so
office, say, maybe tomorrow?	(**Laughter**.)	MR.FRATTO: I don't have anything on
to him about what's on my mind.	(**Laughter**.)	MR.FRATTO: We'll keep that in mind
the top of the list for that.	(**Laughter**.)	I don't have anything scheduled
Republican thinking, actually.	(**Laughter**.)	Do you agree that by January

Figure 4.1: Sample of concordance lines from the search *laughter* (WHPB corpus)

This does mean that the examples of irony taken from the White House corpus all have the perlocutionary effect of audience laughter. Hansard transcriptions rarely have such

paralinguistic features. However, I was able to access audio recordings of PMQs, and note paralinguistic reactions such as laughter and jeering against the official transcriptions. Once these examples were extracted from both the WHPB and the PMQ corpora, I was able to apply an objective framework of irony to them in order to discern their ironic force.

4.2.1.ii Applying an irony framework

As mentioned above, ironic interpretation is predominantly a subjective process, which makes it difficult to study the trope using 'real-world' examples. This term begs the question of whether it can be determined with certainty that the speaker intended the ironic interpretation. Further clouding the issue is (as mentioned) the sometimes lack of consensus within the literature towards the nature of verbal irony. Any linguistic study into irony needs to take into account these difficulties.

However, there have been attempts to consolidate these varying opinions: particularly Hutcheon's (1994) and Burger et al's (2011) irony frameworks (see Chapter 2). This study followed a similar approach in mining its own data for a collection of ironic utterances. In order to mitigate the subjectivity involved when identifying ironic utterances from the two corpora, an analytical framework (following guidelines set out by Craswell and Poore 2011: 41-2) was developed and applied. Using the current literature outlined in Chapter 2 as a reference point, I constructed a working framework which attempts to encapsulate the varying facets of irony by focusing on the notion of *incongruity* at various linguistic levels: pragmatic, semantic, contextual. These facets can be seen in Table 4.2, along with corresponding examples of irony from Appendix 1. The reasoning being that, as Chapter 2 outlined, in irony there is almost always an incongruity between the literal utterance (S) and the intentional message (S*). Therefore, this framework focuses on the most salient examples of incongruity taken from the literature:

Type of incongruity	Example from ironic corpora
An incongruity of semantic "pointed contrast" (Holdcroft 1983: 505)	[1A: 29, 1B: 4]
An incongruity of quantity (under/overstatement)	[1A: 24, 1B: 52]
An incongruity of pragmatic force	[1A: 43, 1B: 19]
An incongruity of illocutionary formality / politeness	[1A: 2, 1B: 94]
An external incongruous 'echo' (contextual incongruity)	[1A: 49, 1B: 63 & 64]
An incongruity with the discursive environment (contextual incongruity)	[1A: 56, 1B: 80]

Table 4.2 - Framework of incongruity for ironic utterances (examples from Appendix 1(A and B))

In order to mine for ironic examples, this framework was then applied to the utterances which prompted laughter in both political corpora. Utterances which contained one or more of these elements were noted. Therefore, at this stage, there was no a priori judgement determining whether these utterances were ironic or not. This allowed for a bottom-up approach which prioritised incongruous characteristics of the utterances themselves, rather than relying on established categorisations and definitions of irony. This often required examining the wider context surrounding the concordance lines. To demonstrate this process, we can return to the concordance lines in Table 4.3. In this table, we can see the process of determining whether a humorous statement is ironic or not, through its incongruity. If there is no perceivable incongruity, then the utterance is dismissed as non-ironic. There could also be a case, as in the last example, that an utterance can have more than one observable incongruent features.

Extract	Ironic?	Type of incongruity
MR. FRATTO: No, I don't think we've indicated that. I mean, I think we've -- Q: Well, I've been told that. MR. FRATTO: You have? (Laughter.) Q: Yes. (**Laughter** .) MR. FRATTO: One of those unnamed sources somewhere?	Yes	An incongruity of pragmatic force (surprise).
Q: Does the President plan to have a news conference before he leaves office, say, maybe tomorrow? (**Laughter**.) MR. FRATTO: I don't have anything on the schedule on that right now, but we'll see, and you'll all be the first to know.	Yes	An incongruity of formality / politeness (demanding request for the President).
MR. FRATTO: Well, I think the President -- as you know, you've seen the transcripts -- the President has spoken to many reporters on various subjects, and wide-ranging subjects. And I think a lot of the things that are on your mind at this time -- I don't say that -- Q: They haven't been able to talk to him about what's on my mind. (**Laughter**.) MR. FRATTO: We'll keep that in mind and keep you right near the top of the list for that. (**Laughter**.)	No	No incongruity here
MR. FRATTO: I'm sorry, he said that we need a -- Q: He said that's why we need a second stimulus package. MR. FRATTO: Because of the size of the deficit? Q: Because in the long run, it would bring the deficit down because -- it's sort of Republican thinking, actually.(**Laughter**.)	Yes	An incongruity of "pointed contrast" - this is a request from the Democrat Party. An incongruity of formality / politeness

Table 4.3 - Sample of ironic interpretation using the irony framework

Identifying incongruity in utterances which create laughter seems to be an effective method of uncovering ironic utterances. However, to make this identification process more robust, I incorporated a second framework of irony which attempts to identify the illocutionary function of irony. This framework takes pragmatic, not lexicogrammatical incongruity as its basis. This is a problem as illocutionary function is also vital in understanding whether an utterance is ironic or not: incongruity alone cannot determine this. Because of this, a distinction must be made between irony and other utterances which may seem to break Grice's maxims: for example, lying. There are certain illocutionary intentions made when a speaker is being ironic, so this second framework intends to capture these.

Lying is not the only illocutionary act which is problematic; there are certain illocutionary intentions made when a speaker is being ironic. Hutcheon (1994) investigated irony from a literary and philosophical perspective, yet her overview of the functions of irony proved to be an invaluable tool for construction of the illocutionary intentions of irony framework. Her astute observation that there is a duality to the function of irony is particularly pertinent to political discourse. Irony's varied functions range from face-saving to face-threatening, and can lie on either edge of, in Hutcheon's terms, irony's 'sword'. This duality can be seen clearly in Press Secretary Sean Spicer's interactions with the press; a relationship that was reported as uncertain and, at times, even hostile.

3. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon. I want to thank Sarah for standing in for me on Friday. She did a great job. I missed you all tremendously. (Laughter.) Now that I realize that we can do that a little more I'll spend a little more time at the Pentagon.

4. MR SPICER: With that, be glad to take your questions. April.

Q: Why thank you, Sean. (Laughter.)
MR. SPICER: How are you today?
Q: I'm fine. And how are you?
MR. SPICER: Fantastic. (Laughter.)

These simple 'pleasantries' are hiding a number of interesting illocutionary intentions. From the laughter, it is clear that this interaction was ironic, and it is clear that there is a mutual distrust (dislike?) between parties. Yet, it is similarly clear that open hostility would be unproductive to both. Therefore, the illocutionary irony and the perlocutionary laughter has the curious effect of not only making it clear that there is a mutual distrust, but also allowing participants to save face in light of this.

Real-world examples like these not only illustrate the complicated functions that irony can utilise but also that multiple functions can appear within one utterance. Hutcheon's table of irony (1994: 47 – see also Figure 2.1 in this study) illustrates the ambiguities that can arise when being ironic. As a result, a distillation of her framework provides the basis for compiling intentions of irony use within political discourse.

An important intention is laughter which, along with evaluation, all examples exemplify. However, this framework identifies the common illocutionary functions within the ironic utterances. These are outlined in the following table (4.4):

Type of illocutionary function	Example from corpora
An intention to make the audience laugh	[All]
An intention of evaluation	[All]
An intention of distancing from an ideological / evaluative position	[1A: 106, 1B: 38]
An intention of including audience within an evaluative group	[1A: 86, 1B: 46]
An intention of excluding (parts of) audience within an evaluative group	[1A: 6, 1B: 47]

Table 4.4 - Framework of illocutionary intention for ironic utterances

This framework was then applied to the list of ironic utterances mined from the framework of incongruity in Table 4.2. The results of this can be seen in Appendix 2A and 2B. Similar to the previous framework, some utterances may contain more than one illocutionary function. To demonstrate this process, Table 4.5 below outlines the illocutionary functions of the three utterances mined in Table 4.3.

Utterance	Type of illocutionary function
MR. FRATTO: No, I don't think we've indicated that. I mean, I think we've -- Q: Well, I've been told that. MR. FRATTO: You have? (Laughter.) Q: Yes. (**Laughter** .) MR. FRATTO: One of those unnamed sources somewhere?	Laughter, Evaluation, Inclusion (despite criticism)
Q: Does the President plan to have a news conference before he leaves office, say, maybe tomorrow? (**Laughter**.) MR. FRATTO: I don't have anything on the schedule on that right now, but we'll see, and you'll all be the first to know.	Laughter, Evaluation, Inclusion (despite criticism)
MR. FRATTO: I'm sorry, he said that we need a -- Q: He said that's why we need a second stimulus package. MR. FRATTO: Because of the size of the deficit? Q: Because in the long run, it would bring the deficit down because -- it's sort of Republican thinking, actually.(**Laughter**.)	Laughter, Evaluation, Distancing, Exclusion

Table 4.5: Categorisation of illocutionary functions (a sample of 3 utterances from WHPB)

Such categorisation of illocutionary functions was not such an easy process as many utterances can have multiple functions. Also, this sometimes required external contextual knowledge to determine the function. For example, in the second example from Table 4.5, the journalist may well be referring to President Bush's reluctance to speak to the press[20], and so is making a playful jibe at Fratto (Bush's final deputy press secretary). Also linked to this point, and examples 5 and 6 above, is the fact that many examples of irony seem to have a function somewhat between inclusion and exclusion. The press secretary and the press are often at odds, yet irony seems to serve a purpose of acknowledging and yet easing this conflict. Nevertheless, this is not a direct concern of this study and so will only be briefly reflected on in the conclusion (Chapter 9: Section 9.6).

[20] https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/01/19/fortress-bush

In fact, the purpose of such illocutionary analysis is to produce a robust sample of real-world examples of irony in order to identify lexicogrammatical similarities. Therefore, from the DIY corpora, two sub-corpora were extracted comprising solely of ironic utterances: 106 from PMQ and 105 from White House Press Briefings (see Appendix 1A and 1B). This extraction was through the two-step filtering process of the two irony frameworks in order to attempt to mitigate the problem of subjectivity in irony detection. This prescriptive, top-down approach was to allow for a bottom-up approach in the main part of the research. This will be outlined in the following section.

4.2.2 Identifying lexicogrammatical patterns

Once the corpora of ironic utterances were established, the utterances were analysed in terms of lexicogrammatical similarities. At this stage, the process was done manually by examining the utterances directly with no pre-conceived ideas of what possible lexicogrammatical similarities might emerge. However, this manual analysis did mean that I focused on linguistic phenomena such as semantic prosody and preference. Through this, elements of incongruity started to appear at the lexicogrammatical level. Such elements were at the lexical but also the grammatical level, and seemed to most closely relate to incongruity of quantity or politeness. Furthermore, I uncovered fixed and semi-fixed phrases which seemed to have an ironic force. These initial observations led to a wider investigation of three specific areas of incongruity. These three areas make up the following three results chapters and so are briefly introduced in Section 4.3 below. However, the following section will explain the corpus-based methodology of this investigation.

4.2.3 Evaluating lexicogrammatical patterns within political corpora

Following identification of these three areas of lexicogrammatical irony, the two DIY corpora were analysed using the Sketch Engine software. This served three purposes. Firstly, it was important to establish whether these lexicogrammatical features were unique to the corpus of irony or whether they appeared in non-ironic utterances. Secondly, this study aimed to evaluate the fixedness of the lexicogrammatical features and whether a corpus-based study could identify similar examples. Finally, I was able to incorporate the two irony frameworks (Tables 4.2 and 4.4) to evaluate whether other uses of these patterns may carry an ironic force. Whether these patterns had an ironic force or not is discussed in greater detail in the

following research chapters. How I was able to mine for these patterns in each of the different areas required a slightly different methodological approach. These will be outlined in Section 4.3.

4.2.4 Evaluating lexicogrammatical patterns across general corpora

Finally, two general corpora (BNC and enTenTen15) were utilised as a source of comparison. These served an important function for the reliability of the study as I was able to evaluate the frequency and fixedness, as well as the illocutionary function of these patterns in wider and more general discourses. This also builds upon the process outlined in Section 4.2.3 above. I used these two corpora to first measure the frequency (raw frequency / t-score) of the lexicogrammatical patterns within more general discourse: both Anglo-centric and US-centric. Secondly, through a collocational analysis, I identified any lexicogrammatical variations of these patterns. Finally, through a careful analysis of the concordance lines, I was again able to apply the two frameworks of irony in order to evaluate the ironic force of the patterns. Furthermore, a closer inspection of the wider context surrounding the concordance lines allowed for a more sensitive analysis of the illocutionary functions of such patterns, and whether these were different to the two political contexts. Again, the findings of such analyses will be outlined in Chapters 5-7.

4.3 Foci of study

As introduced above, this study focuses on three lexicogrammatical features. These will be outlined separately, along with the differing methodology.

4.3.1 Multiple hedging

The most striking similarity between the examples of irony was the use of hedging items. The prevalence of such items may reflect an important aspect of irony: namely the incongruity of quantity in Table 4.2, but also incongruity of illocutionary force between the softening function of hedging and the strong evaluation it frames. However, the frequency of such hedging items, not only within the political corpora but within singular ironic utterances, warranted further investigation. Therefore, Chapter 5 describes the investigation and analysis of the use of such hedging items. A particularly striking feature of these ironic utterances

containing hedging was the prevalence of utterances which contained more than one hedging item within a single clause. The chapter focuses on this lexicogrammatical phenomenon which I refer to as *multiple hedging*. There are parallels between the concept of multiple hedging and the corpus linguistic methodological approach of collocation. Therefore, in this particular sub-study, I first identify 'hedging' lexical items and then, using the concordance lines, examine how they collocate with other 'hedging' items within the corpora. As mentioned in the Introduction, these items can be both tempering and intensifying items. From this approach, common patterns of multiple hedging were identified and presented.

Roughly using O'Keeffe et al's (2007: 64) yardstick of frequency of n-grams in a corpus to be considered significant (20 per 5 million words within a corpus), Chapter 5 focuses on common collocational patterns of multiple hedging items within these positions, and whether these patterns can be considered as constructions; that is, patterns with a clear illocutionary function. A closer look at the concordance lines may help to reveal their rhetorical and evaluative functions, allowing a confirmation of whether such collostructions are common patterns of construction or not. The examples presented in Chapter 5 illustrate that such functions are often different than the function of hedging items in isolation. I argue that examples of multiple hedging taken from the four corpora illustrate an illocutionary function of hedging which has been overlooked in previous linguistic studies.

4.3.2 Collostructions and the progressive aspect

Another lexicogrammatical feature of the ironic utterances which seemed to have an incongruent function was the use of the progressive aspect. As such, Chapter 6 follows a similar methodological process as the previous. It starts with the progressive aspect as the foundation, then identifies collocates of hedging items which form a collostructional relationship within evaluative utterances. Then, using the same yardstick by O'Keeffe et al (ibid), I evaluated the fixedness and frequency of these collostructions across four corpora, and, with help from the working framework of irony, assessed whether they contribute to an ironic force.

4.3.3 Phraseology and ironic priming

Chapter 7 differs significantly from the previous two chapters as it deals with n-grams, or lexical clusters with little or no flexibility (Greaves and Warren 2010: 213). As such, it is difficult to use corpus methodology to uncover new examples of utterances which can be considered ironically primed. Furthermore, as ironic priming is not an established linguistic phenomenon, the examples presented in this chapter are mined through self-identification, rather than corpus methodology such as collocation or collostruction. As a result, identification of such phrases required rather more subjective interpretation.

As mentioned in Section 3.4, Attardo (2000) differentiates between irony markers and irony factors. Irony markers alert the audience to interpret the utterance as ironic. These can be paralinguistic features such as a wink or change in intonation, or even the context of the utterance. Whereas irony factors are an intrinsic part of the irony; if removed, the utterance can no longer elicit an ironic interpretation. It could be argued that such lexical patterns presented in Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 are more closely related to irony markers: they are often used to incongruently frame a strong and/or humorous evaluation but rarely intrinsically have elements of incongruity which can be deemed ironic. The features presented in Chapter 7 differ in that they are not only established lexical clusters, but they also contain ironic elements. In this regard, they demonstrate closer ties to Attardo's concept of irony factors. Below are two examples from PMQ which may well demonstrate this phenomenon:

5. **I thought for a moment** the Prime Minister was going to say 'Brexit means Brexit' again.

6. **The last time I looked,** Cardiff was actually in Wales.

Both 'I thought for a moment' and 'the last time I looked' occur more than once in the PMQ corpus, having a similar ironic illocutionary function. What is different between examples 5 and 6, and the patterns in Chapters 5 and 6 is that the ironic incongruity can be identified within the lexical clusters. Unfortunately, we can only determine this through a working knowledge of a shared collective discourse, and so automating a search for ironically primed lexical clusters is beyond this study. So, Chapter 7 first identifies such potentially ironically

primed lexical clusters from the corpus of irony, then further explores their frequency and illocutionary function within the four corpora.

To determine whether ironic priming is indeed a viable concept, two conditions must be met for any lexical cluster. Firstly, the cluster must have a high frequency within a corpus, and that the cluster must have a high degree of fixedness. This is because frequent and fixed clusters can be determined as idiomatic expressions serving an illocutionary function. Also, their frequency means they could be determined as a feature of a collective discourse. Secondly, an examination of the concordance lines determines if the clusters are related to irony. If the case is that they commonly appear as signposting ironic evaluation, then it can be reasonably claimed that they may meet the requirements to be determined as ironically primed phrases.

4.4 Summary of research process

In order to illustrate the key stages of the methodology, Figure 4.6 outlines the step-by-step research process for the present study.

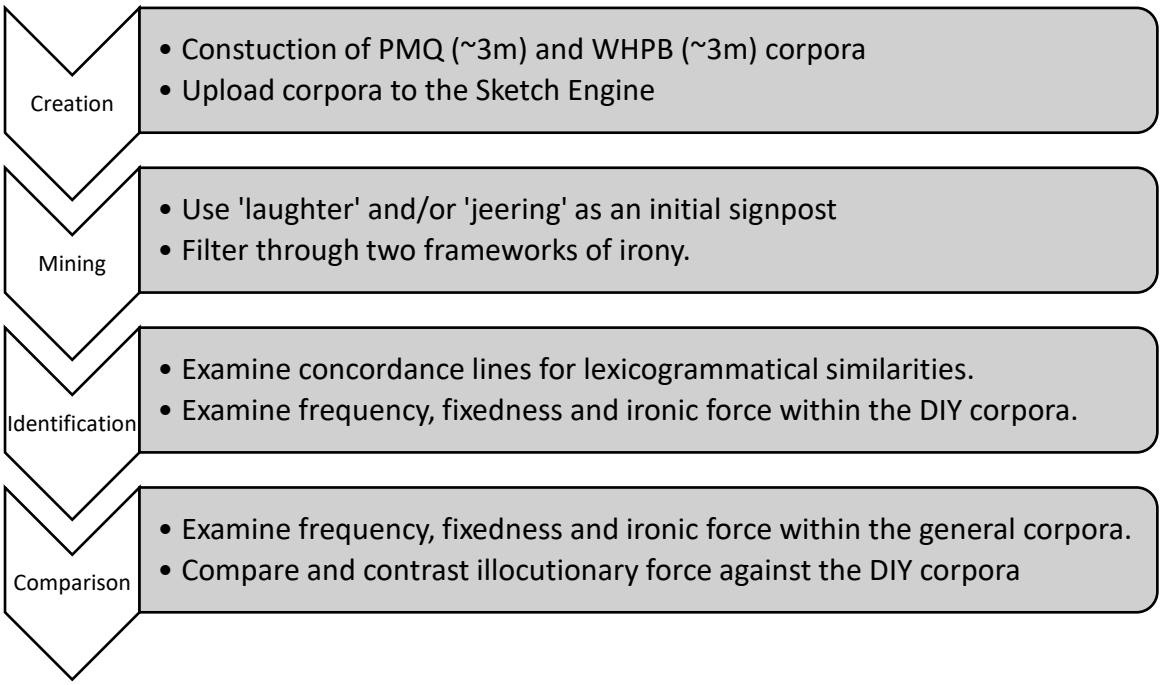


Figure 4.6: Outline of methodological process of present study.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the data set used in this study and has briefly outlined the methodological process undertaken in the three separate corpus-based investigations into lexicogrammatical features of irony. It has explained the rationale behind the selection of each corpus after outlining their advantages and disadvantages. It has also demonstrated how each of the research chapters reflect an aspect of corpus linguistic methodology. I have tried to demonstrate how the present study is firmly rooted in the findings related to collocation, collostruction and phraseology, and so can therefore be considered as a continuation of similar corpus-based studies. Further specific methodological processes will be described when relevant in each of the following three chapters (5-7).

Chapter 5: Collocation and Multiple Hedging

5.1 Introduction: collocation and hedging

The first research chapter utilises corpus linguistic based theories to further illustrate the relationship between collocation, illocutionary force and irony. It builds upon previous corpus studies concerning both evaluation and irony by first demonstrating how incongruity is also an important feature of collocation and also arguing that incongruent collocations can help to frame ironic utterances. Much of this incongruent collocation is a lexical phenomenon I identify as *multiple hedging*. I will present examples of how such collocation is common when framing evaluative or rhetoric utterances, and explain how this framing is incongruous. Because of this, I will argue that they have a strong salience for irony.

Therefore, this chapter will first describe the nature of multiple hedging in greater detail, demonstrate its rhetoric function and ironic force, and then finally provide examples from the four corpora to illustrate not only the prevalence but also how multiple hedging commonly occurs in fixed and semi-fixed patterns, and so is not a simple collocational relationship similar to the examples identified by Firth and Halliday. Furthermore, this chapter will examine whether these common n- and p-gram patterns of multiple hedging can be considered as constructions; that is, patterns with a clear illocutionary function. It will be argued that these functions are often different than the function of the hedging items in isolation

5.2 *Multiple hedging*: towards a definition

Chapter 3 outlined how the term hedging has developed in linguistic theory. Predominantly, the term refers to lexicogrammatical items which have a softening or tempering force. However, for the purposes of this study, the term 'hedging' refers also to those lexical items which have the opposite strengthening or intensifying effect. This is because this chapter identifies multiple hedging as a phenomenon whereby more than one softening or intensifying lexical item collocates together within a single clause and modifies the subject or predicate. As such, this is a theory which is based on lexical rather than

grammatical collocation (Benson et al 1986). An initial speculative overview of the utterances revealed that speakers often relied on multiple uses of hedging vocabulary which may enhance the rhetoric effect. Through this initial analysis, it became clear that a more focused corpora investigation of the nature and function of the collocational relationship of multiple hedging items may shed light on the use of incongruity as a rhetorical device. The further corpus investigation reveals examples in which more than one softening item or both a softening and an intensifying lexical item incongruently collocate. Below are two examples from the PMQ corpus which demonstrate these two forms of multiple hedging (hedging items are in bold):

1. I **find** that a **rather** curious question from the hon. Gentleman.
2. I am simply relieved that it is no longer my party that has this habit of replacing its leader on **quite such** a regular basis

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are no common collocations of multiple intensifying items which have an incongruent and ironic softening function; ironic utterances which contain multiple hedging appear to only have an intensifying rhetoric force. The next section will outline the investigative process which was used to uncover such examples of multiple hedging from the four corpora.

5.3 Methodology

By examining the two DIY corpora directly and building upon Lakoff's (1973) initial observations, Hyland's (1998) framework, and both Carter and McCarthy's (2006: 223-4) and Holmes' (1988) corpus-informed overview, I initially identified seven aspects of syntax that may include hedging items. These seven aspects are: *hedging main verbs, modal verbs, adverbs of degree, adverb of certainty, adverbs of frequency, indefinite pronouns* and *discourse markers*. As this is a lexical collocational analysis, these aspects are all lexical in nature. These are laid out in Table 5.1 with two examples from each corpus: first from the PMQ corpus and then from the WHPB:

Aspect of syntax	Example items	Example sentence
Hedging main verb	(I) suspect, find, wonder (it) seems, appears	I **suspect** that many Members on the Opposition Benches might be familiar with an unscrupulous boss For what it's worth, today **happens** to be National Leave Work Early Day.
Modal verb	may, might, could	He **may** even find that are some of the things that I`m gonna say that he **might** agree with That's quite a negotiation. We **may** need you
Adverb of degree	rather, a bit, too	Mr Speaker, where did it **all** go wrong? Yeah, elaborate **a little** more than "yes"?
Adverb of certainty	definitely, probably, certainly	Yes, let me just, because he **obviously** wasn`t listening earlier, let me remind him I think her first birthday wish would **probably** be that you guys are incredibly nice.
Adverb of frequency	sometimes, occasionally	there is a price for intervention, there is also **sometimes** a price from non-intervention There are secrets that I think that even journalists **occasionally** would acknowledge should be kept secret in order to protect the American people.
Indefinite pronoun	something, anywhere, nobody	We have seen **something** of a renaissance in manufacturing, particularly in the automotive sector, the private sector hasn't done **anywhere** near as much as the government has to safeguard
Discourse marker	for the most part, generally, in a manner of speaking	**I have to say**, no wonder they want to change the exam system, the Chancellor can`t get the maths right **I mean**, don't make me make the podium move.

Table 5.1: Possible syntactical classifications of hedging lexical items

This table shares similarities in construction with Hyland's (1998: 102ff.) comprehensive framework for hedging in scientific articles in academia, as Hyland used similar corpus methods to categorise hedging. As such, apart from similarities in methodology, there is a significant crossover in identified lexical items of hedging. However, there are two important differences. Firstly, Hyland's framework distinguishes between *lexical hedges* and *strategic hedges* (ibid: 103). Strategic hedges are more syntactic and phraseological constructions, including examples of which I have determined in Table 5.1 as *discourse markers*. Some of

Hyland's strategic hedges lie at a pragmatic level, as they are categorised by their illocutionary force. However, this chapter focuses on collocational relationships at the syntactic level, and is, therefore, not concerned with phraseological modality. Secondly, Hyland further classifies the general word classes by illocutionary force. For example, he divides the lexical verbs into *epistemic judgement* and *evidential* verbs (ibid 120-6). This study is primarily concerned with collocation and so further pragmatic categorisation is not necessary at this stage. However, a later re-examination of Hyland's framework with regards to illocutionary function may be useful.

In order to identify examples of multiple hedging, it was important to establish what lexical parts of an utterance can be considered as 'hedging'. For this, Table 5.1 provided a useful starting point. This framework was applied to the sample of 211 ironic utterances taken from the two DIY corpora: Questions to the Prime Minister sessions (PMQ) and White House press conferences (WHPB). A total of 32 examples of multiple hedging were identified: accounting for just over 15% of the total number of ironic utterances. Table 5.2 outlines the specific examples of multiple hedging across the two corpora. A cursory glance at this table reveals two significant characteristics of the DIY corpora. Initially, in the PMQ corpus, speakers utilise multiple hedging far more than the speakers in the White House corpus: 21 out of 106 utterances (20%) compared with 10 out of 105 (9.5%) in the White House corpora. Secondly, at this stage, I have only identified specific utterances in isolation, so it is difficult to determine whether they are anomalies and examples of utterances only within specific discourse environments, or whether they point to common collocations of multiple hedging within wider discourses. These are common challenges that one may encounter when using specialised corpora such as these (Koester 2010: 69-71). To overcome these challenges, these multiple hedging collocations were firstly examined within the two political corpora and then further compared within two general corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC) and the enTenTen15 corpus (enTenTen15).

PMQ corpus	WHPB corpus
I think it is fair to say	for what it's worth, (today) happens to (be)
(I) wonder if this has anything to do (with the fact)	I think (her first birthday wish) would probably (be)
I find (that a) rather (curious question)	I believe (you're referring to 18 U.S. Code 1913) if I'm correct
I am not sure that (I) quite (share the enthusiasm)	well, now (you are) really (getting)
seems to me pretty (profound)	probably not particularly
may find it difficult to (believe)	probably not (ideal,) right?
(I am) not entirely sure	quite such (a deep well)
well (the word) does not seem to (have travelled) very (far)	maybe (that's the understatement) of the day
I thought for a moment	more than a few (of those)
my side might (be) rather (happier)	seems very (formal) here
(does) not seem to quite	
(I) suspect (he) might (get) a few more	
(do)not suppose (there are) too many	
(I am) tempted to say (that I) probably ought to (sit down)	
(I) find (it) a little (confusing)	
(it is) very (subtle) all (this)	
the last time I looked, (Cardiff was) actually	
quite a lot of	
(I) recognise (that this) may very well (be)	
no doubt (he will have plans for a) slightly more (enjoyable)	
(Tory modernisation has) never (got) quite as (far) as	

Table 5.2: Multiple hedging items taken from PMQ and WHPB corpora

This study is an account of real-world examples taken from two corpora. Table 5.2 was used as a starting point to identify and assess common patterns of multiple hedging. As the table demonstrates, hedging can occur at various syntactic positions within a clause. Because it uses real-world examples, the study is limited and so cannot claim to provide a comprehensive overview of the nature and function of multiple hedging in discourse in general. Rather, this investigation focuses on two important aspects of multiple hedging revealed from these examples. Firstly, I outline multiple hedging collocations involving hedging main verbs. Secondly, I examine the incongruent collocation of both hedging and intensifying lexical items. Although these may not provide a complete picture of the nature and function of multiple hedging, it does provide a starting point and a clear justification for possible future study.

This examination was conducted with three research goals in mind. Firstly, by focusing on frequency and common collocations, I determined whether such multiple hedging patterns were frequent enough to be considered established or, at the very least, unmarked. This is important as, unlike the collocations presented by Louw (1993), I argue that multiple hedging collocations which have an incongruent illocutionary force are not marked or incongruent in terms of occurrence within the discourse environment. Secondly, a wider examination of common hedging collocates within general corpora allowed for a wider view of how hedging items collocate together in utterances, without being constrained by the specific examples from the two political corpora. Finally, concordance lines and larger contextual data were then qualitatively analysed to determine the function and rhetorical effect of these collocational patterns, whether they indeed were used in rhetorical utterances, and if they had a strengthening illocutionary force.

5.4 Hedging and main verbs

One important aspect of hedging illustrated in Table 5.1 is the use of main verb, and examples of such hedging main verbs can be seen in Table 5.2. Therefore, this investigation uses this feature as a starting point. Table 5.3 presents the most frequent main verbs used in multiple hedging from Table 5.2. These roughly correspond with Holmes' (1988) corpus informed list of hedging lexical verbs: only *find* and *wonder* are not present on her list. When used in ironic utterances of multiple hedging, four of these are commonly found in the first person, whereas one is most commonly used in the third. Because of this, an initial search of

the lemma of the first four verbs was conducted, followed by a collating of the co-occurrences of these four verbs collocating with *I* within a span of +1 to +4[21] (Brezina 2018: 67), as well as a search of the n-gram *SEEM to me*. The table presents the raw frequencies of co-occurrences across each of the four corpora. Capitalisation denotes a lemma search of the particular verb.

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
I [0,3] THINK	3583	17,400	73,565	4,192,884
I [0,3] FIND	144	114	9,678	1,015,718
I [0,3] WONDER	76	939	4562	365,319
I [0,3] SUPPOSE	39	23	8105	40,152
SEEM to me	34	39	1185	72,541

Table 5.3: Frequencies of hedging main verbs across four corpora

It is worth bearing in mind that the occurrences in Table 5.3 do not directly correspond with occurrences of multiple hedging. However, this starting point allows for a more focused investigation into the most common hedging verbs within the corpora.

With Table 5.3 as a starting point, a further collocational analysis of the five main verbs was conducted. This analysis takes into account both the frequency and the t-score of each collocation. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of hedging lexical items considered have high frequencies within each corpus, and so a t-score analysis is useful for exploring such highly frequent items. Secondly, as this study aims to highlight common or unmarked lexicogrammatical features of irony, frequency is an important consideration when identifying multiple hedging collocations. This analysis is a move towards identifying patterns of multiple hedging.

The following sections outline such common collocations of the five main verbs in turn. Also, due to the prevalence of multiple hedging examples in Table 5.2, this analysis will firstly and predominantly focus on the PMQ corpus.

[21] "+1 to +4" denotes a collocation window span from 1 slot to 4 slots to the right of the node word (in this case "I"). In this thesis, a negative number denotes positions to the left, positive denotes positions to the right.

5.4.1 *THINK*

Of the hedging verbs, *think* is significantly the most common across all of the four corpora. Starting with the PMQ corpus, presented in Table 5.4 are the most common hedging collocations with I (0,3) THINK from a -5 to +5 span around the node THINK.

Collocation	Frequency (t-score)
would	251 (15.36)
might	22 (4.53)
could	21 (3.64)
probably	18 (4.18)
rather	16 (3.80)
quite	15 (3.74)

Table 5.4: Hedging collocations of *I (0,3) THINK* (-5 to +5 span): PMQ corpus.

From the table, it is clear that *would* is significantly more frequent than the other hedging items. An examination of the concordance lines reveals two relatively common n-gram patterns using both hedging items: *I would have thought* (98 occurrences) and *I think it would* (20). Both of these collocational patterns are used to frame rhetoric utterances and may therefore have a possible ironic force. However, on inspection of the concordance lines, the patterns do not have the incongruous nature of ironic utterances which utilise multiple hedging. More specifically, *I think it would* can be seen as a pattern for framing an argument, but an argument without a strong evaluative force, as these examples highlight:

3. Of course, the most recent focus on building up the Afghan army and on the co-ordination between Afghanistan and Pakistan is right, but **I think it would** help to acknowledge that some of the early objectives were **slightly** lofty, **slightly** vague and the co-ordination was not there

4. So **I think it would** be **rather** odd if people were to suggest that high levels of health spending were somehow inconsistent with membership of the single currency

This pattern seems to fit in well with the conventional function of hedging as deference and politeness and therefore does not serve an ironic function. Despite this, it is worth pointing

out that there are notably more than two hedging items in both examples 3 and 4, and this suggests that collocations of greater numbers of hedging items are not unusual. Whether multiple hedging has an ironic force is yet to be seen.

In contrast, one important characteristic of the n-gram *I would have thought* may be that it occurs more often as a negative evaluative phrase and consequently has a stronger rhetorical force. This seems to be in contrast with *would say*, identified by Bloor and Bloor (2007: 104) as having a traditional hedging function. The following examples are representative of its use:

5. **I would have thought** that with all the things happening in the part of the world that the hon. Lady represents, she could have come up with a better question.

6. **I would have thought** that, coming from the north-east, the hon. Lady should be celebrating the fact that Nissan is going to build its new car in Britain instead of whatever nonsense it was that she read out

These examples are worthy of further investigation as they seem to demonstrate an important negative and possibly ironic evaluative illocutionary force. In particular, examples 5 and 6 share pragmatic similarities with the concept of irony as failed expectations (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995; Utsumi 2000). Despite this potential for irony, it would be remiss to present this pattern as an example of multiple hedging, as the auxiliary verb *would* is an example of hedging at the grammatical rather than lexical level. Therefore, it is important to return to the other examples of hedging collocations from Table 5.4. Despite being lower in frequency, they have t-scores over 3, which is above the threshold which Weisser (2016: 209) considers as significant.

In contrast, the second most frequent collocate (*might*) has a clearer ironic force. This can be uncovered through a deeper analysis. Concordance lines of *thought* collocating with the hedging item *might* in the PMQ corpus reveal how this multiple hedging is used to frame criticism. Examples 7 to 9 illustrate:

7. I have to say, I **thought** the hon. Gentleman **might** have taken a different tack today, because if you read the newspapers, you can get quite nostalgic. You've got Blairites fighting Brownites; you've got Peter Mandelson taking out a great big loan. I **thought** the hon. Gentleman **might** get all nostalgic on us; it is just like the old days.

8. He said that it takes a long time to complete these projects. I **thought** he **might** say that but 80% have not even been started, despite the promises of three years ago. More promises, no delivery.

9. I like the new style. I **thought** that I **might** miss Punch and Judy, but this is much more refreshing.

The allusional pretence theory (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995) posits that ironic utterances often negatively point to a *failed expectation,* and I would argue that patterns used in the ironic utterances of examples 5 and 6 clearly demonstrate this illocutionary force. However, in examples 7-9, the collocational hedging serves a somewhat different function despite maintaining this irony. In 7 and 8, the pattern rather points to a realised but unsatisfactory expectation. The negative evaluation lies in the predictability of the target, and so the collocation of 'hedging' items does not have a conventional hedging or politeness function. In example 9, the utterance ostensibly inverts the allusional pretense theory, evidenced by the speaker expressing pleasant surprise in the following *but* clause. This is made by the Prime Minister in response to a question by an opposing backbencher, praising the Prime Minister's policies. However, when considering the reaction of the other MPs (many respond with laughter and jeering), it is doubtful that the pleasant surprise should be taken at face value. Notably, it is the only example which is succeeded with a *but* clause, so there are some illocutionary differences between these examples and Kumon-Nakamaura et al's theory. Despite differences in illocutionary meaning, what examples 7-9 do show is that collocation of multiple hedging items can indeed have an incongruently strong rhetoric force.

The use of multiple hedging is not unique to the past tense form: patterns of *might* with THINK in the present tense have similar evaluative functions. In the following examples, the hedging items serve a traditional politeness and deference function. However, this function is clearly ironic:

10. I have here the leaflet that Labour put out in Scotland. I **think** the SNP **might** be interested in this. It says: At the General Election we need to stop the Tories being the largest party

11. I **think** that the Prime Minister **might** find careful reading of the Council of Europe report particularly rewarding. It says that rendition involves disappearances, secret detention and unlawful transfers to countries that practise torture.

12. If they are looking for volunteers for the Olympic team for hypocrisy, I **think** we **might** have the decathlete

In examples 10 and 11, the criticism is hidden behind ironically polite speculation or suggestion. This is common in many examples of ironic utterances from the PMQ corpus. In contrast, example 12 demonstrates how the collocation pattern can be used for direct, if amusing, criticism. The frequency of such patterns suggest that the rhetorical illocutionary function in such multiple hedging collocations is not marked or unusual. Furthermore, a wider collocational investigation reveals that similar illocutionary functions are mirrored with other hedging items outlined in Table 5.4.

Specifically, collocational patterns with *probably* also echo examples 7 and 8 above in how the hedging frames a failed expectation (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995). This expression of disappointment commonly serves as direct criticism. Examples 13 to 15 below demonstrate this:

13. What the right hon. Gentleman is doing is thoroughly irresponsible, and I **think** he **probably** knows it.

14. I **think** that we can **probably** tell the difference between a ray of sunshine and the hon. Gentleman on this issue, as on so many others.

15. I **think** that that **probably** sounded better in rehearsal than it did at the Dispatch Box.

Although all these examples have a negative evaluative force, and have similarities with Kumon-Nakamura et al's theory, not all point to an ironic force: example 13 is a clear admonition but lacks a clear ironic force, whereas examples 14 and 15 are more humorous. Yet even in example 13, there is a pragmatic function of these hedging items which is not only incongruous but also unexplained by the literature. I argue that the stylistic use of multiple hedging is notable in evaluative statements because the understatement creates an illocutionary clash with the strong evaluation it frames. As a result, stronger evaluative and ironic illocutionary forces tend to appear with such patterns of multiple hedging.

These evaluative and ironic forces also appear with similar hedging items *rather* and *quite.* Many of these collocation patterns tend to follow the same grammatical form: with *think* functioning as a hedging reporting verb and the hedging collocate modifying the subordinate clause. There are, however, notable patterns of collocation that are unique for

these two hedging items. Firstly, there are four occurrences of *rather* before the main verb, below in examples 16-18:

16. I have no plans to visit Southend--and I **rather think** that the hon. Gentleman did not either, until he saw the writing on the wall in Basildon

17. I am happy to debate the past with the Prime Minister any day of the week, but I **rather think** that the British people are more interested in today and tomorrow than in yesterday.

18. I **rather think** that the right hon. Gentleman prepared his second question before he had heard the answer to the first.

This collocation pattern of *rather* in the L1 position from the node *think* makes up 25% of the total collocations of the two hedging items. Yet it is an uncommon pattern among the other hedging collocates, so it may be worth exploring further in general corpora to determine whether it is a product of the PMQ discourse environment.

Secondly, although not different in syntactic structure, there are significant examples of *quite* with the negative form of the main verb; *could* is the only other hedging item with similarly significant collocations with the negative form of *think*. Examples 19 and 20 highlight the pattern used in evaluative utterances, and both example 19 and 21 are clearly ironic, demonstrating an incongruous mock-ignorance. Furthermore, example 21 incorporates a marked use of *quite* after the modal *cannot*:

19. I do not **think** that was **quite** a complete answer to my question. Let us see if we can press the Prime Minister a bit further about how he is going to vote.

20. Policing is another area of public services that I do not **think** the Government are getting **quite** right.

21. - Does my right hon. Friend agree that perhaps an extreme form of control freakery happens when a leader of a party who is unable to control his Back Benchers seeks the assistance of another party leader to help him along the way a little?

    - I **cannot quite think** to what my hon. Friend is referring.

Yet, a wider examination within the general corpora of hedging collocates with the main hedging verb *think* reveals that overall, there are syntactically similar collocation patterns. The most common being the use of *think* as a reporting verb and as a second hedging item within the subordinate reported clause (example 20). Also, when multiple hedging items

collocate, the illocutionary force of these utterances tends to be that of strong, often negative evaluation, and so the use of hedging items appears incongruous. This seems to point to the theory that the use of multiple hedging can facilitate an ironic effect. Yet these findings are from a small corpus of a unique discourse environment. It is important to investigate whether these patterns are found in other corpora.

In a similar manner as with the PMQ corpus, the following explores collocations with the most common hedging main verb THINK across the other three corpora. As Table 5.3 illustrated, this is the most common hedging verb across all four corpora. A greater number of occurrences means a greater number of possible hedging collocates and so may provide a wider overview of how multiple hedging is constructed. Table 5.5 ranks these hedging collocations by frequency with their corresponding t-scores:

WHPB	**BNC**	**enTenTen15**
would (25.08)	*would* (62.70)	*would* (524.5)
just (19.86)	*just* (45.83)	*just* (314.71)
some (17.67)	*could* (37.34)	*could* (304.70)
pretty (16.72)	*might* (37.04)	*might* (246.17)
something (13.55)	*something* (29.53)	*most* (216.39)
most (13.79)	*quite* (28.87)	*something* (222.73)
quite (12.10)	*probably* (26.92)	*may* (164.60)
probably (11.44)	*bit* (26.88)	*pretty* (170.38)
actually (10.57)	*actually* (25.49)	*little* (154.54)
could (8.66)	-	*actually* (156.61)

Table 5.5: Most frequent hedging collocations of *I* [0,3] *THINK* across three corpora (-5 to +5 span) (t-scores in parentheses)

As with the PMQ corpus, all three corpora have *would* as the most frequent hedging collocation. Yet significantly, further inspection of the concordance lines in the WHPB reveals that this collocation is most commonly used in a different syntactic pattern. From a random sample of 200 from WHPB, there are no examples of *would have thought.* In fact, in 732 concordance lines, only 10 use the past tense *thought,* including two examples which evoke laughter.

22. Q: He feels energized about energy? Is that what you're saying?
    MS. PERINO: As soon as I said that, I thought you would pick it up.
    (Laughter.)

23. And finally, Chiefs and Steelers -- what's your –
    MR. EARNEST: I thought you would never ask.(Laughter.)

Despite these infrequent examples, the lack of the n-gram *would have thought* in the WHPB corpus is likely due to the fact that, as explained, speakers can be viewed as conduits and so there is limited personal reflection in their utterances.

The collocation pattern is more significant in the BNC (24 occurrences in the random sample of 200) and, to a lesser degree, the enTenTen15 corpora (9). Again, there are examples when the collocates frame a negative evaluation and so this may not be a unique function to the discourse environment of the PMQ corpus. Examples 24 and 25 are from the BNC and examples 26 and 27 are from enTenTen15:

24. Goodness me, are you both so young that you can't even share any
    thing? I **would have thought** you both grown out of those things any
    way.

25. 'It's so kind of you to have my welfare at heart. I **would**
    have thought it would **quite** amuse you to see me with my hands full
    of spikes!'

26. I **would have thought** Scalias dissent in Roper would have shamed
    other justices from invoking international law as a basis in their
    opinions.

27. I **would have thought** that everyone out there that was **concerned**
    about good public administration would see the common sense in
    observing what the Tax Office says about confidentiality provisions

Again, we can observe incongruity in these patterns in terms of the form and function. The speakers are expressing negative evaluations through the ironic function of a failed expectation (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995). As mentioned above, this is likely a colligational pattern rather than a collocational relationship. However, there are further hedging collocations in these utterances such as *quite* in example 25 and the mild adjectival phrase *concerned about* in example 27; again, demonstrating that multiple hedging is not limited to two hedging collocates.

Additionally, this multiple hedging pattern is not only used to frame an ironic framed expectation. There are 18 examples of *I would think* as well as two *I would like to think* in the BNC. The use of the hedging collocates concurrently seems to intensify rather than temper the argument made. At the very least, despite being categorised as such, the following examples demonstrate that there is certainly no clear hedging force behind these 'hedging' collocates:

28. I **would like to think** that the Foxley Wood and Stone Bassett decisions might mark a positive turning point. Until now, under this Government, everything has been left to the hazards of private development and the initiative of county councils. But the not-in-my-backyard arguments are hard to resist at local level.

29. I **would think** they're more trouble than they're worth

30. You broke your nose? What the heck? Are you sure? I mean, you played football and basketball and all that ... I **would think** that such sports would have toughened your nose sufficiently such that it would've resisted breaking

However, such a strong evaluative function does not account for the majority of the occurrences of this pattern in the BNC. Therefore, its prevalence in the PMQ corpus could well be due to the combative nature of parliamentary debate and could be viewed generally as a notable but not overly salient pattern with an ironic function created through multiple hedging.

Other hedging collocations demonstrate a greater similarity of function between the PMQ and the general corpora. Initially, the hedging item *rather* is far more frequent in the PMQ corpus. However, in the general corpora it is well above the threshold of t-score significance (BNC: 18.82, enTenTen15: 92.26). Similarly, uses of this multiple hedging are generally evaluative: both positive and (mostly) negative. The following examples taken from enTenTen15 demonstrate this function:

31. I actually **think** it's **rather** silly to debate the science, because this the role of the scientific community as a whole,

32. I **think** it **rather** lacking in grace that Brian Hayes and/or the American Scientist chose not to reply explicitly to Dr Connelly in the magazine

33. you're not allowed to be sexual and I **think** that's **rather** hideous.

34. In fact, I **think** it's **rather** brilliant.

Again, there is an incongruity between the hedging items and the strong evaluation of the statement or adjective that they hedge. Furthermore, concordance lines from the BNC show the humorously ironic force of this particular collocation. Examples 35-38 demonstrate a negative, albeit light-hearted, evaluation in which the hedging serves to lighten:

35. I **think** we have given **rather** a gloomy vision of what being a parent is and probably rather a er, a wo one one that will make you think twice if you were thinking of doing it!

36. Hunt says something like, 'Luckily, I never made no-sex a rule before a race. I never thought that it had to be a 'rule'.' I **think** that's **rather** cute, coming from someone who led, before, during and after a race weekend, the kind of life that would exhaust most even if they did not, additionally, have to engage in one of the most physically demanding sports in the world.

37. 'So what does God think about me?' 'I **think** he **rather** likes you,' Ginny said. 'But that may just be wishful thinking.'

38. Well it certainly isn't a witch-hunt. And I **would think** it's **perhaps rather** foolish of Mr Coombes to **actually** raise this issue.

The first three examples illustrate Hutcheon's (1994: 49) identification of the playful, teasing nature of some irony. Conversely, example 38 is somewhat different in the fact that it uses a high number of hedging items (in bold) which seem to emphasise and draw attention to a strong criticism. It comes from a political context, specifically a TV news interview, and so this may be why it resembles the use of multiple hedging in the PMQ corpus. Either way, this demonstrates that multiple hedging is not confined to one form of irony.

It is also worth analysing the use of the pattern *rather think* in comparison with the PMQ corpus. There are no examples of this pattern in WHPB. In contrast, there are 69 occurrences of *I* [0,3] *rather think* in the BNC compared with a comparatively smaller 994 in the enTenTen15, which seems to suggest that the pattern may be more common in British discourse. There also appears to be a difference in function between the two general corpora. In the BNC, it is used in ironic statements, as these examples illustrate:

39. 'Yes, I do know the dictionary definition of strumpet, and I love it when you talk dirty,' he growled, his eyes glittering with wicked amusement. 'But I **rather think** my modest, high-minded, fastidious, idealistic wife has a long way to go before she qualifies for that description.'

40. Now then, those in favour of the amendment standing in the name of ex-Councillor please show. Well, those against. I **rather think** there's more than two.

However, in the enTenTen15 corpus, the majority of examples of this collocational pattern frame a counter point. For example, 187 of the 994 occurrences are preceded with *would*, and have a similar illocutionary force as examples 41 and 42 below.

41. While haters call the pirates an "epidemic" or "scourge," I'**d rather think** of them as junkies. Or maybe teenage kids wrestling with puberty.

42. At this moment, I **would rather think** of the father and husband who, unlike me, was not able to step off the train and onto the platform at 7:40 this morning, than about the twisted reasoning and motives of those who killed him

Also, 116 occurrences of clauses using this pattern are preceded with contrasting adverbs or conjunctions *although, but* or *however*. Examples 43 and 44 demonstrate this:

43. I hope they will take on board all the well meant criticisms re their policies from Jews and Gentiles alike, but I **rather think** they are past the point of ceasefires and intend to wipe out the Hamas infrastructure.

44. know that there are those who have suggested that a military engagement with Iraq might distract us from the war against terrorism broadly and al Qaeda specifically, but I **rather think** we can, in fact, do both

Despite this difference in function between the two general corpora, it is clear that the multiple hedging pattern maintains a strong rhetoric force, contrasting with the ostensible hedging meaning of the collocates. Although we cannot always identify an ironic meaning, it is clear that the incongruity serves a rhetorical function. For this reason, it is reasonable to suggest that these patterns have a strong potential for irony.

In the two general corpora, there are further occurrences of concurrent hedging collocations which are worth highlighting. Similar to *rather*, *quite* also collocates in the -1 slot from the main verb node, but with far less frequency. There are 10 occurrences of *quite think* in the BNC and 199 in the enTenTen15. Of these examples, only 7 of the 199 are the positive form of the verb. Yet, within these negative occurrences, there are concordance lines which frequently demonstrate a playfully ironic illocutionary force, flouting the incongruity of quantity in their understatements:

45. I have to say, I don't **quite think** our bodies, brains, and social systems are fully adapted to the geographical expanse that characterizes the modern world.

46. Towards the end of the line you get bogus information, though, like the "Sicambrian King of Canada" and Helen of Troy. Yes, that Helen, the daughter of Priam. Somehow I don't **quite think** she fits in. :)

47. Maybe Après Ski could be a launched as company selling yogurt or Aide-de-Camp as a shop selling transvestite gear. I am even toying with the idea of going into waste management in France but I can't **quite think** whether to call my new venture À la Carte or Cul-de-Sac.

Notably, there are also ironically understated examples which use multiple hedging in which the collocation pattern is not used with the first-person pronoun.

48. I'm not sure you liberal loonies **quite think** things through sometimes, but it's amusing none the less.

49. I do find it hilarious though that cardinals over 80 can't vote for a pope but can become one! Someone didn't **quite think** that one through. But that's the catholic church for you; full of contradictions.

Perhaps more significantly, examples 45-49 are all patterns with the negative form of the verb. As these examples demonstrate, it seems that it is this negative form which has a stronger rhetorical or ironic force. Therefore, a wider search of this negative form was conducted revealing similar illocutionary forces. A sample of 200 occurrences of *I* [0,3] *(n't) think* collocating with *quite* (-5 to +5 span from the node *think*) reveals related examples which mirror this force:

50. McColl doesn't have his finesse but is still looking to create something I **don't think** he is **quite** sure of himself. Just bang the drum and somebody will come along to put the money in, and look like a hero to the masses at the same time.

51. I've always wanted to try the different coffee blends at starbucks (what does Organic Yukon blend mean, anyway?) but I **don't think** I can **quite** tell the difference between them all!

52. Ah Christmas lights. Sunday night I turned down our little dead end dirt road and my eyes popped. The neighbors at the end of the road across from us had put up their lights. I **don't think** I was **quite** ready for lights before Thanksgiving.

Examples 50-52 are evaluative, and the multiple hedging serves to draw attention to this evaluation. Again, it is the incongruity between the negative evaluation and the understating hedging which makes these statements ironic. In contrast, there are no occurrences of *quite* collocating with *I* [0,3] *(n't) think* in the WHPB corpus, despite the positive form collocating

with a t-score of 12.10. It is also worth pointing out that of the 21,966 occurrences of *I* [0,3] *THINK* collocating with *quite*, only 2,218 are the above negative form of the verb, so this is far less frequent than the positive form. However, as examples 50-52 highlight, the pattern is often used in ironic negative evaluations, and so we can speculate that it is unsuitable for White House press briefings discourse in which diplomacy and clarity of message is vital.

Table 5.5 also reveals that a hedging item highly frequent across the three corpora, but not the PMQ corpus, is *just*. Therefore, its commonality deserves further scrutiny. A significant number of these collocations occur in the L1 slot from the node THINK (59 out of 200 occurrences in the BNC, 48 out of 200 in enTenTen15). Also, there are some colligational changes in the tense of the main verb which also seem to change the illocutionary force. These three examples are representative of the patterns across three tenses, and demonstrate this difference of force:

53. I don't necessarily mind people robbing from the rich but when it's poor people robbing from the poor, it's a really wank off, really wanky thing to do, you know, I **just think** it's disgusting.

54. but I **just thought** it might be nice to to give him a break away from home

55. No, I know I **was just thinking** if I could ring him up now.

Example 53 demonstrates that the item *just* can intensify rhetoric or evaluative phrases, despite being classified as a hedging item[22]. Furthermore, it is only when it collocates with the simple present tense that it has this intensifying function: examples 54 and 55 do not have such a function. Therefore, I will focus on the collocate in the simple present, whilst bearing in mind that this somewhat crosses over into the area of colligation: a feature which is not the main focus of this chapter.

When collocated with the main verb in the negative form, *just* does not lose its incongruity as an intensifying function. Examples 56 and 57 demonstrate:

56. Well, I **just don't think** I can stay now that man has arrived. He frightens me so much, you see.

57. 'I **just don't think** you should have told them that I don't have any confidence with women.' 'Oh that's what's bugging you.

[22] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/hedges-just

This pattern is echoed in the enTenTen15 corpus. Again, it is the collocation with the present tense form which has the intensifying force and function. This hedging collocation pattern can intensify both formal and informal utterances. The examples below demonstrate the range of formality in its usage, but also show that the illocutionary force is not lost:

58. I was not compensated for this review or giveaway. I **just think** Holley's newest book is totally swell.

59. Some days, I **just think** things suck.

60. I **just think** the worst thing would be to call him up to fill Pena's role of defensive replacement

61. I **just think** drawing a line between who can drive and who cannot drive in Riyadh and having a major conference of opposition groups trying to get at a common set of negotiating principles so that we can end the civil war in Syria is **a bit of** a leap.

62. I **just think** that it is **kind of** alarming how life-and-death it is to people in England.

Here, there are examples of the pattern used in positive (58) as well as negative evaluative statements which are both formal and informal in register. Notably, in examples 61 and 62, there are further hedging items (highlighted in bold), yet despite these, both remain strongly negative evaluations. This could be viewed as contrasting with examples 58 and 60 which both use intensifiers (*totally* and *the worst thing*). This seems to suggest that multiple hedging may be more prevalent in formal evaluative utterances. It is notable that the relationship between such multiple hedging items and the strong evaluations which they frame are incongruent. However, what is inconclusive at this stage, is whether multiple hedging has an ironic force.

The examples in this section demonstrate not only the commonality of the phenomenon of multiple hedging but also the variety of common hedging collocations within discourse. What is clear is that despite its meaning at the semantic level, when collocated with other hedging items, the verb *think* can often frame strong evaluations. This incongruity is certainly marked; however, it cannot be said that it *always* leads to irony. Nevertheless, the examples presented here often have an ironic force and so this suggests that there may well be a salience for irony.

Furthermore, *think* is a highly common verb: the 22nd most common verb in the enTenTen15 corpus and the 11th most common in the BNC. It is also 4th and 12th in WHPB and PMQ respectively. Therefore, with further research, more multiple hedging patterns may be revealed. Unfortunately, this limited study does not attempt to provide a complete overview of multiple hedging, but rather suggest its function as a device to frame irony by focusing on examples from the two DIY corpora. Therefore, the following section investigates the less frequent hedging main verbs which occur in the PMQ corpus. As in the above section, these are FIND, WONDER and SUPPOSE.

5.4.2 *FIND, WONDER, SUPPOSE*

As the corpus data will demonstrate, *find, wonder* and *suppose* are all used to express uncertainty, deference or politeness when framing arguments or evaluations, particular in informal discourse. These hedging main verbs in Table 5.3 are of lower frequencies in the PMQ corpus, so any conclusions must be made with caution. However, concordance lines reveal similar patterns of multiple hedging as with *think*. *I* [0,3] *FIND* has 5 occurrences with the collocation *quite* and 3 occurrences with *a little*. With *I* [0,3] *WONDER*, there are 3 occurrences with *sometimes*. *I* [0,3] *SUPPOSE* has one other reoccurring hedging collocation (4 occurrences of *should*), but there are also significant occurrences (8) of SUPPOSE in the negative form. Despite the somewhat low frequencies, the concordance lines reveal that these collocational patterns echo the same illocutionary force of those previous highlighted with the hedging verb *THINK*. Because of this, it may be worth examining these collocations in greater depth.

A survey of the concordance lines of *I* [0,3] *FIND* demonstrate that the utterances tend to be rather fixed. Three of the five occurrences of *quite* have the same adjective succeeding the hedging item:

63. I **find** it **quite** extraordinary that the Labour party wants to look at changing the status and giving away something people absolutely consider to be their right

64. I **find** it **quite** extraordinary that he seeks to suggest that there is somehow no evidence that the police are putting forward for the case that they are making.

65. I **find** it **quite** extraordinary that he thinks that that would be a preferable state of affairs

Examples 63 and 64 are spoken by David Cameron and 65 is spoken by Tony Blair, both speaking in the capacity of Prime Minister. As such, it is difficult to determine lexical variety and fixedness of these patterns from only two speakers, as these may be individual lexical habits. This is another important reason why comparing these patterns within a general corpus is vital. It is clear, however, that this collocation often frames utterances which have a strong illocutionary force. Similar forces can be seen if we investigate collocational patterns with *a little.* Two out of the three occurrences express a critical evaluation, although the multiple use of hedging is clear:

66. he right hon. Gentleman has taken that line for some time, he took it with my predecessor, but I **find** it **a little confusing**, given that only two years ago in the Scottish referendum, the Scottish National party was campaigning for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, which would have meant leaving the European Union.

67. I am a little surprised, given the hon. Gentleman's background, that he said what he did about Hinkley Point. Hinkley Point is actually privately funded, this is not money that is coming from the Government to develop Hinkley Point, so I **find** that **a little strange**.

The evaluative statements in examples 66 and 67 are further 'hedged' with the collocating 'soft' adjectives *confusing* and *strange*. Thus, there is a greater investigation of the use of such adjectives within the general corpora in this chapter below. Examples 66 and 67 also demonstrate that multiple hedging can contain more than two hedging items to create a strong ironic force. However, examples of three or more collocating hedging items can only receive a cursory mention in this limited study.

As with the 2-gram *rather think* in examples 16-18, other hedging items can be concurrent and form n-grams. In the case of *sometimes* and *wonder*, this collocation can have a unique illocutionary force. Here, examples 68 and 69 seem to point to a critical or incredulous stance:

68. I think that in this House we sometimes take for granted the people who work so hard to keep it working and keep it going, and I **sometimes wonder** what they think of all the antics we get up to in this House.

69. I **sometimes wonder** whether there are any limits to the anti-Europeanism on the Opposition Benches.

In these examples, there seems to be a pragmatic irony: there is not a genuine question pondered here but a negative evaluation. Furthermore, I would argue that these two examples demonstrate Hutcheon's (1995: 44ff) contradictory nature of irony: that it can have both an inclusionary and exclusionary function. In example 68, the speaker is reaching across the political divide with the inclusive *we* and, by including all politicians in their criticism, is making a self-deprecating statement. On the other hand, example 69 demonstrates the negative evaluative function of irony, and arguably the use of these multiple hedging items is central to understanding the strong criticism. This particular n-gram is an effective illustration in how collocation is an agent of meaning making.

Similar observations can be made about the other hedging verbs. In the case of SUPPOSE, there is a notable evaluative collocative pattern with *should* which seems to have a meaning above the two hedging collocates. In example 70 below, there is a similar function as with example 68. In contrast, examples 71 and 72 are more critical:

70. I congratulate those responsible, Antony Gormley and others, on the 100 naked men outside my hon. Friend's door. That is a lot better than what is outside my door, which is the media every morning, my apologies for that, but I **suppose** we **should** be grateful: at least they are clothed.

71. Let us hope we can find out today where the Prime Minister does stand. I **suppose** I **should** congratulate him on one thing, deciding on the date of his speech. Well done. Another example of the Rolls-Royce operation of No. 10 Downing street

72. I **suppose** that I **should** not be surprised that the minute there is a difficulty, they withdraw their support from the right proposal.

These examples demonstrate that this pattern can evoke some of the varying characteristics and functions of irony. It is clear that these statements are critical, even if example 70 is light-hearted. The use of hedging here does seem to mark this criticism through a subversion of the politeness or deference function. This example demonstrates the connection between collocation and phraseology, and the difficulties in categorising each. This will be explored in more detail within the general corpora below.

Certainly, the nature of Questions to the Prime Minister sessions are both adversarial but also entrenched in notions of politeness and etiquette. It cannot be ignored that participants both playfully subvert the conventions of this politeness as well as the rules and

conventions of Parliament and parliamentary discourse. However, that does not mean that such playfulness and subversion of politeness conventions for rhetorical effect is unique to this discourse environment. As such, it is important to investigate these patterns in wider contexts. Therefore, I will compare these findings not only in the other political corpus (WHPB) but also the two general corpora. What is notable with infrequent multiple hedging collocations is that they often occur in more fixed patterns. Additionally, it is often these collocational patterns which more clearly demonstrate an ironic force. Therefore, as I move to the general corpora, I will demonstrate how the data reveals multiple hedging collocations which form more fixed phraseological patterns.

In the enTenTen15 corpus, there are over 1,000,000 co-occurrences of FIND collocating with the first-person pronoun. A further collocational analysis reveals some notable collocates which frame strong rhetoric, and which were not immediately apparent in the PMQ corpus. The first notable hedging collocate for discussion is *interesting* (26,688 co-occurrences, t-score: 162.73), which may not immediately seem to be a hedging item until examined in context. Similar to the adjectives in Examples 66 and 67, this can be interpreted as a 'soft' adjective. Therefore, the following will explore similar soft adjectives within this phrase. Secondly, I will outline collocations of the hedging verb *think* with *I (0,3) find* (11,369 co-occurrences, t-score: 103.34). Because both of these collocational patterns are highly frequent in the two general corpora, they are worthy of further investigation.

5.4.2.i *I FIND it (interesting) that*

This example demonstrates the blurred boundaries between collocation and phraseology. It is significant that *interesting,* an adjective that in this context has a softening illocutionary effect, is the most common adjectival collocate of *I* [0,3] *FIND.* A closer inspection of the concordance lines reveals that these collocates form a p-frame often used for signposting strong evaluations. Although there is some flexibility in how these hedging items collocate, it is best exemplified by searching the pattern *I FIND it interesting that* (3,205 occurrences, enTenTen15). Within the concordance lines, it is clear that this pattern commonly frames evaluative or rhetorical points:

73. **I found it interesting that** the only photo repeated twice in the poster was the blonde – subliminal message or did the poster maker just think she was hot?

74. **I find it interesting that** Apple's devices appear to be considered untouchable by so many reviewers.

75. **I find it interesting that** Obama is selling his plan as a middle class tax cut that aids small businessmen when in fact it is a lower-income tax increase that has no beneficial consequences to the economy.

76. **I find it interesting that** we've had very little talk of why we're doing this. Why we're here on this issue right now, why not 10 years ago or 15 years ago?

In the above examples, there is an incongruent clash between the hedging items in the n-gram and the evaluative statement that it precedes, which can be interpretated as causing an ironic effect. It could also be argued that the choice of adjective further adds to the ironic hedging of these statements. Despite the adjective having a somewhat positive evaluative force, in examples 73-76 the pattern is used to signpost negative evaluation. This suggests that the *I find it (ADJ) that* p-frame may have a negative *priming* effect (see Chapter 7) on the adjective choice. To demonstrate this further, Table 5.6 highlights the most common adjectives which slot into this pattern:

I find it	*interesting*	(56.55)	*that*
	ironic	(26.02)	
	odd	(24.99)	
	strange	(23.78)	
	fascinating	(23.14)	
	amazing	(22.74)	
	funny	(18.56)	
	amusing	(17.29)	

Table 5.6: Most common collocates of *I find it (ADJ) that* (enTenTen15 corpus: t-scores in parenthesis)

It is fair to point out that *ironic*, *odd* and *strange* are the only adjectives which have a predominantly negative prosody. However, if we examine the concordance lines of the other positive adjectives, it is clear that the pattern most commonly signposts negative evaluations. Below are examples of three adjectives with a predominantly positive semantic prosody:

77. personally, **I find it fascinating** that if a police officer were to hand me his "patrol rifle" at the range to try out, it would instantly transform into an "assault weapon"

78. I know America cannot save the entire world but **I find it fascinating** that I haven't seen too many posts about the plight of these lost souls... Have we become that hardened as a society?

79. Given the dire financial position of the Council over the past number of years **I find it amazing** that the Council would spend such excessive amounts of money renting private properties

80. **I find it amazing** that Kirk and the Dem Senators all missed their Constitutional Law classes when the 4th and 6th Amendments were discussed.

81. **I find it funny** that WMATA continues to have breakdowns, rail problems, and overcrowded cars -- yet it's trying to expand before solving these EXISTING problems first.

82. Now, **I found it funny** that this article was on Fox News, home of paranoid conspiracy theories and paranoid conspirators

In all of the above examples, the p-frame is used to express negative evaluations. In short, the pattern primes these adjectives for a more negative semantic prosody: adjectives such as *interesting* and *fascinating* are rather used to express disbelief, and adjectives such as *funny* or *amusing* point out ironic (in the situational sense) events or happenings. Therefore, this seems to suggest that phraseology plays an important role in interpreting such collocations.

5.4.2.ii *I think you'll find that*

There are 11,369 co-occurrences of *think* with *I (0,3) find* (-3 to +3 span: t-score: 103.34) in the enTenTen15 corpus. Like the above p-frames with *interesting*, these hedging collocates are frequently used to frame rhetoric. If we examine further collocates in a -2 to +2 span from the node word *find*, we see *you* is the most common collocate (t-score: 54.97). So, another signposting n-gram emerges which is most commonly expressed as *I think you'll find that* (715 occurrences in enTenTen15). The meaning of *find* in these patterns is more closely synonymous with *notice* or *discover*, rather than *experience* in the above examples. As a result, this phrase more likely makes a rhetorical than an epistemic point. The irony emerges when the evaluation clashes with the hedging pattern which signposts it. The below examples demonstrate:

83. **I think you will find that** the three leading proponents of this bailout (other then the big 3 CEO's) are Barrack Obama, Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi.

84. Because **I think you will find that** their never ending list of outrages against small groups of women is designed to keep women from conquering the real issues that affect all of us.

In examples 83-84 the pattern frames strong and often confrontational rhetoric which seems to contrast with the collocating hedging items. Arguably, this contrast or incongruity is the source of the ironic force which, in turn, strengthens the rhetoric. As discussed previously, the pattern varies in the PMQ corpus, as members are not addressed directly with *you.* However, it still maintains the same confrontational tone:

85. If he will listen to what we are doing, **I think that he will find** it very difficult to oppose the measures that we are taking to help the car industry, to help the banks, to help the unemployed, and to help those people who are home owners

86. **I think the hon. Gentleman will find** that what I actually said was that the number of 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training has come down.

87. The Prime Minister mentioned the Criminal Justice Act 2003. I checked the record, and **I think Members will find** that the Prime Minister and I voted the same way. I did not support the Act because I do not believe in letting people out of prison half way through their sentences; the Prime Minister did not support it because he could not be bothered to turn up.

Despite all three examples above having the same negative evaluative force, example 87 is notable as it is inclusive to the whole House of Commons. In this way, the pattern demonstrates Hutcheon's (1995: 54) observations of the contradictory aggregative nature of irony: that it can simultaneously form both inclusionary and exclusionary groups. However, it is also notable that this pattern only occurs 6 times in the WHPB, and of these 6 occurrences, none signify a rhetorical argument. The irony here emerges from a clash between the softening signposting phrase and the strong evaluation it frames. In contrast, the following explores a multiple hedging collocation which illustrates both pragmatic incongruity and irony.

5.4.2.iii *I WONDER how/why (anyone)*

In their summary of irony and politics, Partington and Taylor (2017: 193-4) point out the link between rhetorical questions and sarcasm. From the enTenTen15 corpus, we can see a pattern which serves a similar function to the rhetorical questions Partington and Taylor describe. In the corpus, there are 381,322 occurrences of *I* [0,3] *WONDER*. Two collocations which have similar frequencies and t-scores are *anyone* (t-score: 85.46) and *people* (84.96). Both of these terms can be considered as having a hedging function: *anyone* being an indefinite pronoun, which in this context is similar in meaning to the general nondescript noun *people*. An examination of the concordance lines reveals a collocational pattern which seems to have a strong rhetorical force. This can be defined in its core form as *I wonder (wh-) anyone*. Initially, concordance lines with *if* and *whether* in the +1 slot were excluded: generally, these patterns did not point to rhetorical utterances. Examples 88 and 89 demonstrate how this pattern is mostly used to frame enquiries:

88. The other ferry took people across the river but they headed west to go to Cayo. **I wonder if anyone** has photos of the two ferries.

89. This site brings back some good memories!! **I wonder if anyone** might know of some of my old friends who I knew there in that area during the mid to late 1960's??

When this pattern collocates with a *wh-* question, the evaluative function seems to emerge. Notably, these *wh-* questions are predominantly *how* (t-score: 14.51) and *why* (13.55). However, examples 90 to 95 demonstrate the range of fixedness of this particular p-frame:

90. **I** really do **wonder how anyone** in my dearly beloved movement expects us to believe that One Nation Labour won't itself become that UKIP we all fear – but all on its triangulatory and ingenious lonesome.

91. The recent Medicare report on variation in hospital "prices" is not exactly news. In fact, **I wonder why anyone** (including the NY Times and NPR) covered it, let alone make it a lead story.

92. Today, after a long week in the field, **I'm wondering how anyone** could possibly work their way out of the despair they inherited with birth when so many forces conspire against them, especially women.

93. As I left the bleak building, **I wondered how anyone** ever thought it a good idea to put disadvantaged people into institutions where they were deprived of dignity and love.

94. **I have** often **wondered what anyone** could ever see in mind-altering drugs since to me the most sublime state is to be well and whole

95. **I am wondering when anyone**'s going to notice when the EU mandates the ODF as the community standard and that the majority of systems we're running don't support it

As these examples illustrate, the pattern does have some lexical variety; both in terms of tense (example 92 and 95 are present continuous, example 94 is present perfect) and choice of *wh-* question. Despite this grammatical and syntactic flexibility, the pattern maintains a predominantly critical or sceptical evaluative function. So, the pragmatic use of the question is incongruous and is, therefore, the root of the ironic force. Yet this is not the only hedging collocation with *wonder* which creates an ironic effect.

5.4.2.iv *sometimes* and *often WONDER*

Example 94 in the previous section demonstrated further hedging collocation with the adverb of frequency *often.* The collocation of *often* with *wonder* is not infrequent and there are a number of occurrences within the general corpora which illustrate this further collocation. Therefore, this section explores the collocation of *wonder* with hedging adverbs of frequency in more detail. The following examples reveal how other adverbs still evoke an ironic effect:

96. **Sometimes I wonder** why anyone ever bothered to hire me and make me responsible for a sector, if at the same time they keep dismissing me because I'll know better one day

97. Given the above facts, **I often wonder** why anyone would embarrass themselves commemorating the presidency as most occupants of the Oval Office have shown themselves entirely unfit to begin with.

As outlined in Table 5.1, some adverbs of frequency can also be classified as hedging items. Yet in the examples above, and across the concordance lines of these adverbs collocating with *I wonder (wh-) anyone,* there does not seem to be any change in rhetoric force. This seems to be in line with the idea that multiple hedging often has the incongruent effect of strengthening the claim. As such, this provides justification for further examining the nature and function of such hedging adverbs of frequency.

In the enTenTen15 corpus, there are 8,746 occurrences of *often* collocating with *I* [0,3] *WONDER* (excluding patterns of *I* [0,3] *WONDER how often*). In contrast, *sometimes* co-occurs 6,845 times, although notably, 2,089 of these occurrences include *sometimes* as the

first word of the sentence. If we further examine common collocations, we not only see a range of tenses in the pattern, but similar *wh*- question words also occur.

98. As for their references to Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir's "regular forces," **I often wondered** how there could be anything "regular" about the hordes of fighters who operate lawlessly and jointly with the Janjaweed death squads.

99. And it's beyond pathetic. **I often wonder** how some of these people get (or keep) their jobs.

At the semantic level *often* is greater indicator of frequency than *sometimes,* and therefore, if it is defined as a hedging item, it is certainly of a lesser degree. *Sometimes* is viewed as a stronger hedging item, and yet a corpus investigation of enTenTen15 reveals no noticeable difference in criticism or rhetoric in examples of this pattern:

100. Life is very tough; **sometimes I wonder** where I will get my next meal.

101. **Sometimes, I wonder** why people bother paying for slimming therapies.I mean, doesn't it make more economical sense just to diet and exercise on your own?

Both examples 100 and 101 point to a strong negative rhetorical or evaluative effect. Similarly, despite a semantic difference between the adverbs of frequency, there seems no difference in function between examples with *often* (98-99) and *sometimes* (100-101). However, there does tend to be some illocutionary difference. An examination of the concordance lines reveals a greater number of these patterns signpost ironic utterances:

102. **I sometimes wonder** if the Monty Python scriptwriters are running the Church of Scotland – essentially they are helping godless secular humanism to be lifted to the status of state religion

103. No matter how much he goes in the garden he always seems to have some left to mark with. On walks **I sometimes wonder** if he is just a big furry tank of pee.

104. Kri, yes getting feedback is so nice. **Sometimes I wonder** if anyone out there is listening ;-)

105. He gives a funny little throaty laugh. "God, Larry, **sometimes I wonder** what you're on."

In the above examples, there is a variety in terms of ironic function. However, all are evaluative and all have a clear target for their evaluation (although example 104 is self-

deprecating irony). Together with the elements of humour, all fulfil important criteria for irony. In summary, both adverbs of frequency, when collocated with other hedging items, tend to have an incongruous intensifying effect to rhetoric or evaluative utterances. Importantly, there is no significant difference in semantics or evaluative force between the two adverbs of frequency when collocating with other hedging items. Yet from the enTenTen15 general corpus, it appears that *sometimes* is used more often in clearly ironic or amusing evaluative utterances. Despite this observation, it is difficult to determine why that may be the case.

5.4.2.v SUPPOSE

Like the PMQ corpus, the enTenTen15 corpus has a number of concordance lines (2,327) with the pattern *I suppose I should* and this pattern continues to signpost evaluative statements.

106. Most clients – especially given the insurance expenses and uncertainties – will be looking for cheapness in design (**I suppose I should** use the euphemism 'cost effectiveness').

107. So begins our two and a half day journey back to Moscow. **I suppose I should** get all romantic about such a trip but, after all, it's just a train

108. At one point, there's a picturesque lake that stinks of methane and pollution. **I suppose I shouldn't** be surprised that there are no reeds, ducks, or even bugs anywhere nearby.

There is another pragmatic link here with Kumon-Nakamura et al's (1995) allusional-pretense theory. In examples 106-108, the pattern is used to frame a failed expectation falling upon the speaker: the use of the first-person pronoun determines this. Certainly, the failed expectation is in contrast to the expressed evaluation: in example 106 identified by the noun *cheapness* which contrasts with the expectation *cost-effectiveness*; and in examples 107, a contradiction can be identified in the use of *but*. This seems to suggest that the collocational phrase may have an intrinsic ironic or evaluative illocutionary meaning.

Example 108 furthers demonstrates a common collocate with the pattern *I suppose I should*: *surprise* is the most common adjective and the 11th most common collocation overall with a t-score of 11.11 (enTenTen15 +1 to +5 span from the node *should*). Again, it points to

an ironically failed expectation: implying that the speaker (*I*) was surprised. The following examples demonstrate this further:

109. Having spent the better part of a decade working toward repatriating wolves to the hunting grounds of their ancestors in the Southern Rockies, **I suppose I shouldn't be surprised** by the shrill rhetoric coming out of public officials in Moffat County Colorado.

110. At one point, there's a picturesque lake that stinks of methane and pollution. **I suppose I shouldn't be surprised** that there are no reeds, ducks, or even bugs anywhere nearby

Yet the n-gram frames a negative evaluation in both examples: in example 109, there is a clear negative noun phrase *shrill rhetoric* and in example 110, the speaker uses the verb phrase *stinks of methane and pollution*. In the majority of the 124 occurrences in the enTenTen15 corpus, the phrase follows a similar function. The pattern is ironic as it does not frame a sense of genuine surprise but rather an expression of disappointment or criticism.

Further examination of this pattern reveals other common adjective collocations: *grateful* (t-score: 6.92), *happy* (4.86), *thankful* (4.79) and *flattered* (4.58). All of these adjectives are positive and yet the patterns have similar negative evaluative functions, albeit occasionally ironically light-hearted. Examples 111-118 below highlight two examples for each of these four adjective collocates, and demonstrate the ironic force of such hedging collocation:

111. Brr - another chilly start to the day - mind you **I suppose I SHOULD be grateful** - after all it IS only minus 4 this morning!

112. it has become rather beside the point to complain of how unlike reality a movie is, though it is otherwise presented as realistic. **I suppose I should be grateful** that there are no aliens, elves, or hobbits popping up

113. **I suppose I should be happy** with the half a loaf I have received from Governor Hogan considering the absolute disaster we've had to endure under eight years of Martin O'Malley.

114. **I suppose I should be happy** that the Yankees are beating up on a slumping Indians team, but if anything it's just a reminder to me about how pathetic they were against Boston

115. After a few months of listening to the children begging and pleading for their own chickens, we finally broke down and caved in to the whining. **I suppose I should be thankful** that they just asked for chickens. They do not realise (yet) that most of the neighbor kids also have horses!!!

116. how very nauseating. It's easy to tell people not to throw bottles and plastic bags in the ocean, and **I suppose I should be thankful** for that. But through the entire show – and indeed, throughout the entire park – climate change was not mentioned once

117. **I suppose I should have been flattered** that my company was more fun for Jack than sitting in a hotel room filling out his expenses claim

118. **I suppose I should be flattered** by the amount of time she invested in making a fool of me and walking away with ten thousand dollars

It is fair to argue that this particular pattern has an ironic force through the contrast between the positive emotional adjective and the negative evaluative stance. The multiple hedging phrase marries these two contrasting evaluative items through the failed expectation theory of Kumon-Nakamura et al (1995), and so the hedging items collectively signpost this ironic evaluation.

The above examples demonstrate that hedging items, when collocating together, often frame strong evaluative or rhetoric utterances. This creates an incongruity between their semantic meaning and the overall meaning of the utterance. This incongruity is often the root of irony and so the patterns of hedging collocation presented above demonstrate a high potentiality for irony. However, it is not simply conventional hedging items collocating which creates this potentiality. The next section looks at incongruous collocations of hedging and intensifying items.

5.4.3 Intensifiers and hedging

So far, this investigation has been concerned with collocational patterns concerning hedging items. Yet within the ironic examples from the two DIY political corpora, there are a few occurrences of intensifiers or boosters also collocating with more conventional hedging items. The incongruity of a hedging item collocating with an intensifying item seemed particularly noteworthy and yet the occurrence of such phrases is commonplace, e.g. "quite a lot of" (744 occurrences in BNC), "may well" (3663 occurrences). Without investigating real-world use of these phrases, it is hard to determine if their function is predominantly hedging or intensifying or something different. It has been discussed that both the uses of under- and overstatement have a particular rhetorical or ironic force, so an exploration of what meanings

are created through multiple hedging and how they are used within general discourse may prove fruitful. This section will outline the functions of these patterns and overall demonstrate that they have a similar ironic force to previous examples of multiple hedging items.

From the above ironic examples from the two DIY corpora (Table 5.2), there are four multiple hedging patterns which have intensifiers collocating with hedging items. These are demonstrated in the below examples:

119. thank you for working as hard as you have to answer our questions, including, but not exclusively, those questions that you didn't like.(Laughter.) MR. EARNEST: There were **more than a few** of those. (Laughter.)

120. Tragically, there are **not too many** Conservative local authorities I can congratulate in Scotland.

121. However, I would say that after yesterday's debate, and the absolute and comprehensive drubbing that the Chancellor gave the Tory Front Bench, he should be **rather more** worried about the leadership potential on his side of the House.

122. He is the fourth Liberal Democrat leader that I have faced, and I wish him well[Interruption]although not that well. I am simply relieved that it is no longer my party that has this habit of replacing its leader on **quite such a** regular basis.

Within these four patterns, there seems to be three semantic functions. Both example 119 from the WHPB corpus and example 120 from the PMQ corpus are concerned with measuring countable nouns. Examples 121 and 122 from PMQ utilises a pattern to qualify an adjective or noun phrase. These functions could be broadly categorised as *quantitative* and *qualitative* hedging. So, these two semantic functions will be discussed separately in relation to fixedness and their ironic evaluative force.

5.4.3.i Quantitative hedging

In example 119, the phrase *more than a few* frames a light-hearted, ironic understatement and subsequently creates laughter in the audience. There are three more occurrences of the pattern in the PMQ corpus, in which the ironic understatement is used to frame more critical evaluations, such as in this example:

123. The Prime Minister must therefore understand why so many people, including, as we heard in the exchanges yesterday, **more than a few** of his own Back Benchers, see his Government as becoming more authoritarian as every day goes by

In both examples, the phrase *more than a few* implies a significant amount. The phrase is also common in the BNC and enTenTen15 corpora. In the BNC corpus there are 302 occurrences of the phrase (2.69 per million) and in the enTenTen15 there are 34,930 (1.9 per million). An examination of the concordance lines in the BNC reveals that the pattern seems to have both a literal and non-literal function. In literal statements, the pattern is most often used with units of measurement, as the following examples demonstrate:

124. If full airbrakes are needed for **more than a few** seconds, and it looks as though they should be kept on, sideslipping should be used to get rid of the excess height

125. The land was not flat now but undulating, rising no **more than a few** feet in various shades of brown

It is difficult to determine exactly what *more than a few* refers to in these literal statements, but it does not seem to mean significant amounts such as in examples 119 and 123, and therefore it could be viewed as a conventional hedging phrase. However, when the phrase is used with non-literal nouns, the phrase appears to be metaphorical. In these metaphorical examples, the illocutionary meaning is often different, and an incongruent ironic force emerges. The below examples demonstrate:

126. Meade's paper would not on its own have caused **more than a few** small ripples in the higher echelons of the civil service.

127. Abel, for example, is obviously a Democrat, as he slipped **more than a few** anti-Reagan barbs into his presentation.

128. Ron Robinson took charge of this element and the gathering that was achieved might have caused him **more than a few** ulcers,

In contrast with the literal examples of 124 and 125, it seems that the non-literal meaning of this collocational pattern broadly equates with significant and, as such, seems to have an overwhelming evaluative function. This may be the result of the incongruence between literal and metaphorical meanings of the pattern whereby metaphorical meanings are more open to evaluation and irony, but also have a distancing function (Booth 1978; Moon 1998;

Littlemore 2001). Either way, it is worth investigating further common collocates of this particular pattern.

Higher number of occurrences in the enTenTen15 allows for a search of a greater number of collocates within this pattern. Two sets of collocates are presented here. Firstly, an examination of common collocates in the +1 position which are not units of measurement seem to have a metaphorical meaning. Table 5.7 outlines these common collocates, ranked by t-score:

		t-score
more than a few	*words*	17.79
	occasions	15.52
	moments	15.20
	eyebrows	13.60
	tears	9.22
	surprises	8.98
	questions	8.27
	heads	7.94

Table 5.7: Common non-literal noun collocates of *more than a few* (+1 slot) in enTenTen15 corpus

Notably, some of these collocates have a stronger metaphorical meaning than others. Despite this, a significant number of concordance lines for each pattern point to an evaluative force.

Furthermore, an analysis of collocates in the -1 position reveals a number of further hedging and intensifying items. These items are presented in Table 5.8:

		t-score
nothing	*more than a few*	19.38
little		18.81
much		16.68
never		16.14
lot		8.97
rarely		7.19
probably		6.92
maybe		6.51

Table 5.8: Common hedging/intensifying collocates (-1 slot) in the enTenTen15 corpus

Table 5.8 demonstrates that there are both hedging and intensifying items as well as items indicating high or low amounts. Yet, these collocational patterns collectively seem to have an evaluative function or ironic force which may not always be determined by considering the individual items in isolation. The following will outline these functions and forces in more detail.

Generally, patterns with *nothing* or *little*, the most common hedging collocates, have a negative evaluative function and point to an inadequacy or paucity. There does not seem to be any significant semantic difference between *nothing* and *little* and both collocates have a similar number of occurrences. The multiple hedging pattern seems to emphasise this paucity:

129. that section has **nothing more than a few** poorly chosen anecdotal stories and a smattering of random stats from a handful of large cities

130. Real estate salespeople love to talk about the great tax breaks from owning a home, but it often amounts to **little more than a few** hundred dollars in actual tax savings.

As stated, the majority of examples of this pattern express a negative evaluation. Positive evaluative statements often point to success over adversity or with limited means, with the phrase used to express the extent of adversity or limitation:

131. you'll need to learn **nothing more than a few** basic concepts and you are ready to start hosting Audio Unit instruments and effects

132. "It began as **nothing more than a few** Xeroxed pages, but has since changed into a professional journal," said Myrna Marler, faculty advisor for the publication.

So overall, the pattern is used to emphasise paucity. Yet, if we compare examples 129 and 130 with examples 131 and 132, it could be argued that the collocational pattern is more metonymic in meaning: for example, “a few Xeroxed pages” representing humble beginnings. Such metonymic representation is common, particularly as creative negative evaluations. These mirror the metaphoric nouns in Table 5.7 above. The following examples demonstrate such metonymy:

133. Virtually all other institutions are **nothing more than a few** lanky men with laptops, folders and Gmail accounts preying upon the innocent public and unsuspecting donors.

134. True social economists, Nitsch asserts, need **little more than a few** "for instances" to exercise that way of thinking in the conventional economics curriculum

Both examples above are negative evaluations which use metonymic imagery to criticise or dismiss the target of their evaluation. This creative use of metonymy is emphasised by the pattern of multiple hedging and intensifying units. Therefore, it is this creativity that makes the pattern effective as a way of framing irony. I would also argue that there are ironic elements in the above examples.

Another collocational n-gram which seems to possess an ironic force is *maybe more than a few*. However, this pattern seems to create an irony which is far more light-hearted and self-deprecating than the above caustic examples. The examples below show a discoursal function which makes up the majority of the concordance lines:

135. A few years back, well **maybe more than a few** , I volunteered as a wildlife rehabilitator.

136. The mutual experience continued post-event around a fire pit with a few more drinks (or **maybe more than a few**) and great conversation, mostly about the food.

137. I thought I'd write a few words (okay, **maybe more than a few**) on what the last week has meant to me.

This light-hearted self-deprecation utilises the understatement of multiple hedging to emphasise the irony. This demonstrates that these patterns have an ironic priming for both self-deprecating and critical irony. Notably, in the enTenTen15 corpus, patterns with the synonym *probably* do not have the same self-critical function. The concordance lines point to more speculative observations, although there are some examples of (at times light-hearted) critical evaluation in which the phrase *more than a few* seems to equate with a significant number:

138. Putin is the grand master - a professional spy, highly educated with expertise in law, government, finance and **probably more than a few** ways to kill with a cocktail napkin!

139. It is likely chaotic, with pushing and shoving, and **probably more than a few** heated exchanges,

140. As I told my formation, I'm reasonably certain there are a few who don't like serving with African Americans. There are **probably more than a few** who have a problem having a female commanding officer.

In the above examples, we can observe a move from a more metonymic use of the phrase (138) to a more literal one (140). What all these examples share is a negative evaluation, incongruous to the quantitative hedging collocations.

5.4.3.ii Qualitative hedging

The following section examines collocational patterns of intensifiers and hedging items which ostensibly affect the quality of an adjective, rather than the quantity of a noun such as the collocations in the previous section. Similar to the previous section is the illocutionary function of these collocational patterns is often subverted and the rhetoric is strengthened. This analysis takes an example from the PMQ corpus as a starting point and then explores wider collocations across all four corpora.

Example 121 above contains the hedging item *rather.* Within the PMQ corpus, there are 24 occurrences of *rather more*. When we examine the concordance lines, we can observe a number of examples of irony, as the below attest to:

141. I think there is **rather more** confusion in the mind of the right hon. Gentleman than anywhere else.

142. I think that we heard **rather more** waffle today from the Leader of the Opposition than from me

Again, the irony emerges from an incongruity between hedging and politeness language and the strong evaluation: in both 141 and 142, *rather more* is followed by a negative noun. There are also corresponding uses of the hedging term in the WHPB corpus. In this corpus, however, it is worth exploring examples in which *rather* collocates with 'extreme' adjectives or adverbs. Table 5.9 outlines these collocates:

		Frequency
rather	colorful	10
	extraordinary	7
	remarkable	6
	unprecedented	6
	obvious	6
	dynamic	6
	vivid(ly)	6

Table 5.9: Common extreme adjective/adverb collocations of *rather* (+1 position, WHPB)

The incongruous collocation of the hedging item *rather* with an extreme adjective or adverb similarly undermines the politeness of the discourse environment. What is notable when examining the concordance lines is that the evaluation is often negative, even in occurrences when the adjective or adverb has a commonly positive semantic prosody.

143. Now, he offers up this **rather colorful** description despite the fact he doesn't know who the President's nominee is.
144. It is **rather extraordinary** to make a specific request like this for an event that is not ongoing.
145. So the fact that the designated national security advisor, who has his own **rather remarkable** relationship with the Russian government -- the fact that that official was in touch with the Russian ambassador to the United States, I can understand why that was the subject of a column in the newspaper today.

Whilst examples 143-145 seem to match my definition of multiple hedging, it is difficult to argue that they are clear examples of how multiple hedging results in contributing to ironic function. Yet, these examples do point to the possibility of multiple hedging involving a collocation of both hedging and boosting lexical items. However, the examples presented

previously are rather limited in scope, and so it is worth considering further examples taken form a wider range of general corpora.

Table 5.10 outlines the results of a collocational analysis of the BNC corpus. Here, I identified the most frequent intensifying lexical items collocating with *rather.* Most of these intensifying items appear to be other adverbials.

Collocate	Frequency	t-score
more	1658	38.88
all	563	19.82
just	504	20.55
really	230	14.08
actually	213	13.98
lot	155	11.64
always	141	10.53

Table 5.10: Intensifying collocates of *rather* (span -5 to +5, BNC)

It is possible that a detailed examination of these collocations may reveal a number of significant patterns. However, this is beyond the scope of the chapter. The following focuses on just one of these patterns which has a salient ironic force.

A particular collocational 2-gram which seems to have an ironic force is *all rather* (89 examples in the BNC corpus). Similar to examples in Table 5.9, it is often the following adjective that is instrumental in creating an ironic effect. To demonstrate, if we examine the concordance lines of *all rather* in the BNC corpus, it seems that when used to modify a positive adjective, the illocutionary effect is distancing and/or ironic:

146. Newspapers actually seemed to find the gauche, schoolboyish manner, the ubiquitous sloppy sweaters a clothing preference that Branson subtly exploited as a sort of trademark - **all rather charming**.

147. However, this is **all rather analytical and intellectual**; and if we ourselves can only function on this rational level, our communication with horses will be no better than a tourist who needs a phrase book or dictionary in a foreign country.

In these two examples, we can see that the speaker is distancing themselves from the positive evaluation of the phrases in bold. This is clear in example 146 through the use of the hedging

verb *seemed* and the contrasting negative semantic prosody of lexical items such as *ubiquitous*, *sloppy* and *exploited*. In this manner, I would argue that the phrase demonstrates Wilson and Sperber's (2012) theory of irony as echo. A similar effect can be observed in example 147. Despite *analytical* and *intellectual* ostensibly having a positive semantic prosody, the use of the phrase *all rather* has an incongruently dismissive illocutionary force.

Similar examples show a more light-hearted illocutionary effect and have crossovers with situational irony. Example 148 has similarities with the Kuman-Nakamura et al's (1995) idea of irony as an allusion to a failed expectation: in this case, the speaker having "the last laugh". In example 149, we can identify an incongruity between the use of the word *jolly* and the seriousness of the event it describes.

148. He does not mind being the butt of his colleagues' jokes because he always has the last laugh.'They find it **all rather amusing** but it's a different story when they have a go and fall off,' he said

149. He chirruped with animated amusement as she explained it was on suspicion of murder. 'This is **all rather jolly**,' he gasped finally. 'I've seen this done so often in the films but to be arrested myself... It's pure heaven.'

Therefore, while this qualitative hedging phrase seems to demonstrate an ironic potential, it also demonstrates that multiple hedging phrases cannot be identified as such in isolation: the context in which they frame most likely cannot be ignored if we are to confirm the utterances' ironic force. In this case, the semantic prosody of the adjective which the phrase qualifies is important.

The enTenTen15 corpus seems to support these findings. There are 2710 occurrences of *all rather* and the most common positive collocation in the +1 position from the node *rather* is *exciting* with 32 occurrences. From an examination of the concordance lines, we can identify a number of examples in which the phrase has a distancing or ironic effect. Some examples such as those below provide a contrasting feeling or opinion:

150. I thought this was **all rather exciting** haha. There were a few people on our squad that were legitimately concerned thought, I mean we were running from a deadly hemorrhagingyourbrainkillingyouwithin72hours virus

151. I think he boxed bare knuckle in the streets for money every now and again... I thought it **was all rather exciting**... he had the odd cut here and there around the face but he was OK.

Here, the contrasting opinion is also framed with further hedging *I thought*. These examples show that the phrase has an incongruous meaning, allowing the speaker to present an argument or evaluation different from the collective opinion. However, it would be difficult to argue that examples 150-1 are ironic, rather they are simply incongruous. Nevertheless, there are examples which do point to an ironic interpretation. Often, these examples subvert the positive semantic prosody of *exciting*, implying a situation more dangerous or fearful. The examples below demonstrate this:

152. Aaah, back from the Highlands – what the the midges and mosquitos left of me anyway. It was **all rather exciting**. Between sailing briskly up a loch with two children under the age of 3 and getting mysteriously lost on a vertical hillside

153. The drivers are expected to maintain their own vehicles and seat belts are unheard of (and life threatening as Baker takes his inaugural journey in a truck minus decent brakes). It's **all rather exciting**.

I would argue that the incongruity between descriptor (implicatum) and described (dictum) creates an ironically humorous effect in the above examples. It is fair to state that this collocational pattern is not exclusively ironic, yet it certainly has a potential for irony. In this regard, it is similar to the other n-grams and p-frames explored in this chapter.

Section 5.4.3 aimed to present examples of multiple hedging involving collocations of hedging and intensifying lexical items in close proximity, sometimes as n-grams. Despite the presence of an intensifying lexical item rather than two or more hedging items, there seems to be no difference in illocutionary effect between these two collocational patterns.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate a phenomenon in ironic and rhetoric utterances which I define as *multiple hedging*. This is a phenomenon in which multiple hedging items collocate to create an illocutionary force incongruent with the established

meiotic function which these hedging items ostensibly demonstrate at the semantic lexical level. I argue that such incongruity is an important factor in irony creation and that, in the corpus data, a significant number of examples of collocational patterns involving multiple hedging contain irony.

One recognised function of hedging is defined as showing "uncertainty, scepticism, and deference" (Hyland 1998: 350). The majority of the initial examples of multiple hedging in ironic utterances were taken from the PMQ corpus. It is important to note that parliamentary discourse is a specific genre with its own 'rules' of formality and politeness and that members are required to show deference to each other and to the rules of the House. This reason may be why there is a proliferation of such ironic hedging within parliamentary discourse. However, the current study has also demonstrated that such utterances are not unique to the PMQ corpus, and that there are multiple hedging collocational patterns which subvert the pragmatic functions of hedging that Hyland describes. Based on their frequencies within the two reference corpora, it is not unreasonable to argue that multiple hedging is a common feature of general discourse.

There are important points that must be borne in mind. Firstly, the phenomenon of multiple hedging is wide-reaching. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrate that hedging lexical items can be any number of word classes and can occur at various syntactic positions within the clause. Unfortunately, this study is limited and therefore cannot confidently claim that it provides a comprehensive overview of the nature of multiple hedging collocational patterns. Therefore, I have concentrated on two specific aspects of multiple hedging: examples which involve a hedging main verb, and examples in which a hedging and intensifying item collocate. There is certainly scope for a wider investigation to provide a more comprehensive insight into the nature and function of multiple hedging.

Secondly, the methodological focus of this chapter was to investigate collocation of hedging items. Corpus studies into collocation have shifted somewhat from the early days of Sinclair. At times, this chapter has begun outlining phenomena which could be defined as colligation. Furthermore, concordance analysis has revealed examples of p-frames and n-grams which also have elements of multiple hedging. This, I feel, is a natural hazard of collocational study and that it is not always easy to separate these phenomena completely. Nevertheless, in Chapter 6, the study will move on to examine colligation in more detail by

focusing on the hedging force of the progressive tense. Finally, Chapter 7 will focus on meaning above the lexical level by presenting examples of phraseology which have an ironic illocutionary force.

Although this is a limited study, it is clear that hedging items often collocate in unfixed collocation patterns, or are part of fixed and semi-fixed phrases (n-grams and p-frames). I conclude that hedging items rarely 'hedge' when collocated together as such incongruity produces an opposite effect. It seems that they not only have a strong rhetorical force but this rhetoric often manifests itself through understatement and (as a result) ironic humour. As such, prescriptive vocabulary definitions of these items fail to present the full scope of their use within general discourse.

Chapter 6: Collostruction and the Progressive Aspect

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined how incongruous collocations of multiple hedging items often frame ironic utterances. This chapter revisits the idea that irony can emerge through incongruent lexicogrammatical patterns. However, it will rather focus on incongruity through collostruction (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003); specifically, between certain lexical items and the progressive aspect.

This chapter begins with an overview of how the progressive aspect is used in five grammatical tenses in English across four corpora: the two DIY and the two general corpora. The purpose of this is to first establish semantic preferences and to highlight lexical similarities and differences across each tense and corpus. Secondly, the overview helps in evaluating how representative the specific discourses of each DIY corpora are to more general discourse.

The next stage is an identification and analysis of the progressive aspect in the corpora of ironic utterances. In Section 6.2.2, I outline lexicogrammatical commonalities of ironic utterances which use the progressive aspect. From this starting point I return to the DIY corpora to explore the form and function of patterns contained within these utterances. In line with previous corpus-based studies of patterns, they will be explored in terms of their frequency and fixedness to further evaluate their salience. Finally, the wider context in which they are used is examined in order to categorise their illocutionary/rhetorical function. This will further demonstrate how incongruity is also connected to irony.

6.2 Progressive aspect in the corpora

As irony (and rhetoric) must always take an evaluative stance, so this study is concerned with patterns within rhetoric or ironic utterances. Because of this focus, and to narrow the scope of the collostructional patterns, the analysis in this chapter focuses on uses of the progressive aspect with the subject *I*. Initially, a search of the progressive aspect across

five tenses with *I* as the subject was conducted. In order to minimise clouding of results, all search results omit occurrences of the progressive *going.* The reason for this is that the lexical item is predominately used as a modal verb to indicate future intentions. To illustrate, there are 5,683,308 (309 per million) occurrences of *going* in the enTenTen15 corpus. However, a CQL search of *[word="going"][word="to"][tag="V.*"]* reveals 2,535,612 occurrences which make up around 44% of uses of *going*. Therefore, the CQL searches take this into account. This was done utilising five CQL search terms in Table 6.1 below:

Tense	CQL search enquiry
Present continuous	[word="am" | word="'m"] []{0,4} [tag="VVG" & word!="going"| tag="VHG"| tag="VBG"]
Past continuous	[word="I"] [word="was"] [ ]{0,4} [tag="VVG" & word!="going"| tag="VHG"| tag="VBG"]
Future continuous	[word="I"] [word="will" | word="'ll"] [word="be"] []{0,4} [tag="VVG" & word!="going"| tag="VHG"| tag="VBG"]
Present perfect continuous	[word="I"] [word="have" | word="'ve"] [word="been"] []{0,4} [tag="VVG" & word!="going"| tag="VHG"| tag="VBG"]
Past perfect continuous	[word="I"] [word="had" | word="'d"] [word="been"] []{0,4} [tag="VVG" & word!="going"| tag="VHG"| tag="VBG"]

Table 6.1: CQL search terms for each progressive tense

It is worth noting that these occurrences are not comprehensive and corpus data are not always clear-cut. To demonstrate, an examination of the concordance lines reveals examples which are not usages of the continuous tenses in the first person:

1. The Irish, I **am told, are everywhere beginning** to drive out
2. although **I was slightly less successful in winning** Stafford than he was at the last election
3. Abatement 2 of Sched 4, Pt **I will be applicable thus reducing** the fee to one-fifth with a minimum of £40
4. all the time **I've been involved in developing** these schemes
5. Earlier in the day, **I had been close to despair.** </s><s> **Driving** the Felder, I looked back

These examples demonstrate some common problems with corpus searches. The search software cannot distinguish the subject verb agreement, the difference in word class (progressive aspect vs. gerund), or across sentence boundaries. As such, when reflecting on

the data it is more accurate to consider these numbers as estimates than as being exact figures. To some extent, this inaccuracy may be mitigated by a narrower range between the modal verb and the verb in the progressive aspect (the search term allows for a [0,4] span between the BE verb and the verb in the progressive form). However, this study is interested in how hedging items form patterns with the progressive aspect, and so a wide range is maintained. Because of this, these 5 CQL search terms provide the basis for the analysis of collostruction and irony. After an initial investigation into the frequencies of each tense pattern, I outline how these patterns are utilised in irony.

6.2.1 Frequency

The following tables (6.2-6.6) highlight the frequencies for the above search terms taken from Table 6.1, and reveal some significant differences: not only between the tenses but also between the four corpora:

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Frequency	687	2274	5570	1,861,364
Frequency per million words	177.05	519.12	49.58	101.22

Table 6.2: Frequency of present continuous

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Frequency	179	419	14,186	1,456,767
Frequency per million words	46.13	95.65	126.27	79.22

Table 6.3: Frequency of past continuous

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Frequency	108	28	775	244,485
Frequency per million words	27.83	6.39	6.9	13.3

Table 6.4: Frequency of future continuous

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Frequency	83	61	2456	616,360
Frequency per million words	21.39	13.93	21.86	16.2

Table 6.5: Frequency of present perfect continuous

	PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Frequency	-	-	644	70,116
Frequency per million words	-	-	5.73	3.81

Table 6.6: Frequency of past perfect continuous

This overview demonstrates some important aspects of the progressive aspect in real-world discourse. Initially, the frequencies across the five tenses seem to be generally regular in the fact that ranking the tenses by frequency is not overly dissimilar across the four corpora: Table 6.7 demonstrates the most commonly ranked tenses across all four corpora in bold:

PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15
Present continuous	**Present continuous**	Past continuous	**Present continuous**
Past continuous	**Past continuous**	Present continuous	**Past continuous**
Future continuous	**Present perfect continuous**	**Present perfect continuous**	**Present perfect continuous**
Present perfect continuous	**Future continuous**	**Future continuous**	**Future continuous**
-	-	**Past perfect continuous**	**Past perfect continuous**

Table 6.7: Frequency order of the progressive tenses across four corpora

The only two discrepancies are that the past continuous patterns occur more often than the present continuous in the BNC corpus and that the future continuous occurs more often than the present perfect continuous in the PMQ corpus. One can speculate the reason for this being that as a predominantly written corpus, the BNC deals with the reporting of past incidents rather than the descriptions of incidents in real-time. Similarly, Table 6.7 also reveals that the use of the future continuous in the PMQ corpus is more pronounced than in the others. The

examples from PMQ below clearly demonstrate how the future continuous is mostly used to express plans:

6. What **I will be doing** is getting the best deal for Britain

7. That is why on 18 March **I will be holding** a community and jobs fair, bringing together employers and the voluntary sector

This usage of the progressive demonstrated in the above two examples is in line with Mindt's categorisation of "volition/intention" (2000: 249). Therefore, it has a clear chronological context and does not feature evaluative or attitudinal elements, and so these examples are not the focus of this study. Despite these two discrepancies, the four corpora are not overly different and so it could serve to further support the argument for the two DIY corpora as being somewhat representative of general discourse. However, it worth bearing in mind that these frequencies are limited by patterns with *I* as the subject and so do not give a complete picture to how these tenses are used within each corpus.

Furthermore, another significant difference revealed when examining the frequencies per million words in the above tables (6.2-6.6) is that patterns of the present continuous (Table 6.2) occur more frequently in the two DIY corpora than in the general ones. Again, this may be due to the possibility that the progressive aspect is more common in spoken than written discourse. As the discourses in the two DIY corpora take place within a real-time contextual environment and both general corpora are predominantly written discourse, this seems like a reasonable explanation. Additionally, the tense is most significantly used in the White House Press briefings corpus. As this is, like PMQ, a corpus of spoken discourse, it would be reasonable to expect greater use of the first-person pronoun. A greater look at the approximate frequencies[23] of *I* confirms this (Table 6.8):

Corpus	c.Frequency (per million)
WHPB	13,601
PMQ	10,772
BNC	7,769
enTenTen15	4,793

Table 6.8: Frequency of the pronoun *I* in the four corpora, ranked in order of frequency

[23] This search does not discount other semantic uses of *I*, such as Roman numerals.

This table seems to confirm that as they are sourced from transcripts of real spoken interaction, both DIY corpora have a higher frequency of the first-person pronoun. Notably, use of the present continuous with the first-person pronoun is twice as frequent in the enTenTen15 than in the BNC, despite the pronoun *I* being less frequent. This seems to suggest that there may well be a use of the progressive tense predominant in the enTenTen15 corpus and a further investigation of how it is used may be worthwhile. To do this, it is necessary to return to the various functions of the progressive.

6.2.2 Function

The following section will reflect on the uses of the progressive aspect and how they coincide with examples from the corpora of ironic utterances. As previously outlined in Section 3.3.3, Mindt (2000: 248-265) identified nine functions of the progressive aspect, of which the majority utilise the function of describing actions or events that are temporary and/or taking place at the time of utterance. However, due to the nature of the discourses, use of the present and past continuous in the DIY corpora is often concerned with politeness conventions, rather than this descriptive, contextual function. Such politeness functions have been outlined by both Mindt (ibid.) and Römer (2005a; 2005b). Yet in their studies, the frequency was found to be much lower. However in this study, not only is the frequency higher within patterns of the progressive aspect with *I* as the subject, but also it is through manipulation of politeness conventions that irony can be formed. In Chapter 2, I introduced an example, repeated below which demonstrates how this manipulation can occur:

8. **I have just been doing a little research** into the Opposition's policy on university education. The leader of the Conservative party wrote to party members after he was elected leader to say that he was going to scrap all tuition fees.

Example 8 uses the progressive aspect as an ironic inversion of the downtoning function as the speaker uses it to critically evaluate the opposition party. The ironic utterance is also characterised by examples of hedging items (*just*, *a little*), thus having characteristics with the examples of multiple hedging collocates in the previous chapter. What is different here is the collostruction of the progressive aspect. This serves to carry an ironic meaning (Römer

2005b: 128) through an incongruity between the downtoning function of the progressive and the strong evaluation. The irony emerges through an understatement, implying that very little 'research' is needed to uncover this broken promise.

This chapter outlines similar collostructural patterns and demonstrates their potential for irony. The examples of collostructural patterns below demonstrate how the progressive aspect can serve an evaluative function. On the surface, these examples use the progressive for a similar politeness or softening function. Examples 9 and 10 are taken from PMQ, while examples 11 and 12 are from White House Press Briefings:

9. I had hoped that I would be able to welcome the shadow Home Secretary to the Front Bench in time for the vote that is going to take place later tonight. Perhaps Labour Members are **starting to realise** that their only real headache is their leader.

10. I have to say that I am **beginning to admire** his tenacity. He is reminding me of the Black Knight in "Monty Python and the Holy Grail". He has been kicked so many times, but he says, "Keep going, it's only a flesh wound." I admire that.

11. I'm also not in a position to confirm that we won't ever in the future discuss what that response is or what that response may be. There may eventually be a point at which we do discuss what the response is, will be, or has been. **Just trying to** cover all my verb tenses there.

12. Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you. In your view, should the U.S. stay in the Paris climate agreement or withdraw from it?

    SECRETARY ROSS: Well, now **you're really getting** outside my area.

As all the above examples are taken from the corpora of ironic utterances, they all evoke laughter from the audience and they all contain elements of evaluation. Notably, even though these examples all use the progressive aspect, they do not have the common function of incompletion or temporariness identified by Mindt (2000), and so could be considered marked uses of the grammatical form. Similar to how examples of multiple hedging presented in the previous chapter demonstrated how hedging items can incongruently collocate in order to subvert the politeness or softening function (Römer 2005a: 97-99), I argue that the use of the progressive in these examples demonstrate a pragmatic incongruity: that such common functions of the progressive which Mindt and Römer outline are being subverted for rhetorical effect. These examples seem to suggest that the progressive aspect can be used to create, or at least contribute to, an ironic force through such incongruity and subversion. Examples 9 and 10 seem to highlight Römer's (ibid. 96) *gradual*

change/development function, although, notably, both refer to a cognitive function. This may prove significant and is analysed in greater detail in this chapter.

When examining examples 9 to 12 in more detail, it seems there are other lexical items which may influence how the ironic function arises. In these utterances, the progressive aspect is used in conjunction with other lexical features which may aid in creating an ironic force or intention. First, there are examples of signposting in example 10 (*I have to say*) and example 12 (*well*). Secondly, there are hedging adverbs in example 9 (*perhaps*) and example 11 *(just*). Thirdly, examples 9 and 10 (and arguably 12) use an ingress verb in the progressive form (*start* and *begin*) followed by a cognitive state verb. Finally, examples 11 and 12 provide contextual deictic markers: both spatial (*there*) and chronological (*now*). When compared within the general corpora, some of these collostructural patterns may prove to be significant lexicogrammatical constructions of irony. Therefore, in this chapter these patterns will be explored in more detail. However, these examples were taken from the corpora of ironic utterances and are therefore limited in scope. To balance this, the next section will first conduct a bottom-up analysis of the most common collostructions of each tense from all corpora to determine how common such rhetoric or ironic functions are.

6.3 Common collostructions of the progressive aspect

Although occurrences across the four corpora show some similarity in terms of quantitative data, closer examination of the concordance lines allows for a greater understanding of the similarities and differences in terms of collostructions. As a starting point, in order to further examine the use of the progressive aspect within the tenses, I compiled a list of the most common verbs used in the progressive aspect with the first-person singular subject in each of the 4 corpora (Tables 6.9 - 6.13). As with the previous searches, these figures disregard the verb *going* to avoid clouding the data with examples of the *to*-infinitive to express a future action.

PMQ	WHPB*	BNC*	enTenTen15*
looking	wondering	doing	looking
saying	trying	writing	working
asking	saying	trying	trying
trying	asking	saying	doing
talking	suggesting	thinking	using

Table 6.9: List of most common verbs as the progressive aspect in present continuous structures (*=sample of 2000)

PMQ	WHPB	BNC*	enTenTen15*
saying	wondering	thinking	thinking
talking	trying	doing	looking
trying	saying	trying	doing
pointing	hoping	looking	working
asking	making	saying	wondering

Table 6.10: List of most common verbs as the progressive aspect in past continuous structures (*=sample of 2000)

PMQ	WHPB	BNC*	enTenTen15*
taking	N/A	looking	doing
visiting		seeing	working
doing		doing	posting
discussing		getting	taking
-		waiting	using

Table 6.11: List of most common verbs as the progressive aspect in future continuous structures (*=sample of 2000)

PMQ	WHPB	BNC*	enTenTen15*
trying	saying	thinking	working
doing	talking	trying	using
following	doing	doing	doing
talking	working	working	thinking
-	trying	looking	trying

Table 6.12: List of most common verbs as the progressive aspect in present perfect continuous (*=sample of 2000)

PMQ	WHPB	BNC	enTenTen15*
N/A		doing	working
		working	thinking
		waiting	using
		looking	looking
		trying / thinking	doing

Table 6.13: List of most common verbs as the progressive aspect in past perfect continuous structures (*=sample of 2000)

Initially, this analysis presents an overview of some elements of semantic preference of the progressive aspect (Stubbs 2001, Partington 2004). What is striking is the prevalence of verbs associated with verbal communication within the DIY corpora. *Saying*, *asking*, *suggesting*, *discussing* and *talking* all feature highly in these two corpora. Of the general corpora, only the BNC has one of these verbs (*saying*). If we investigate the concordance lines of the example in the two corpora, it seems that these communication verb collostructions have a strong rhetorical or evaluative function. Examples 13-15 from PMQ demonstrate this:

13. What **I was saying** on Monday and say again today is that I think it is the job of leaders in the western world in particular to prepare for all eventualities

14. All **I am asking** is something very simple: why does not the Prime Minister give us his view?

15. Let me make crystal clear what **I am suggesting**. **I am suggesting** indeed, I have demonstrated that discussions have taken place on money laundering between the DCMS and the biggest casino operators in Las Vegas, and that the Secretary of State denied that in this House on Monday.

In these above examples, the collostruction is used to frame an evaluative or rhetoric point. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that minor functions which Mindt (2000) and Römer (2005a) outlined seem overrepresented within these examples. However, it is worth bearing in mind the nature of discourse in the PMQ and WHPB corpus and the importance of politeness and protocol within these discourse communities. In response to this, the following four sections will examine particular collostructions which contain an ironic force across all four corpora, starting with a deeper investigation into *saying* and the synonym *speaking*.

6.3.1 *saying* and *speaking*

Any ironic collostructions detailed above were identified from the DIY corpora and are therefore from specific discourses. Therefore, it is important to establish whether the use of these particular collostructions are unique to the spoken political corpora. Subsequently, an examination of the concordance lines in the BNC reveal that the majority of occurrences with *saying* point to the 'speaker' making a rhetorical point, and so the use is not so marked. Similarly, although this collocation is not so frequent in the enTenTen15 corpus as other collostructions, a CQL search of "[word="am" | word="'m"] []{0,4} [word="saying"]" still yields a frequency of 3.6 per million.

Although *saying* and *speaking* are synonyms, a corpus based analysis of their semantic differences illustrates how one tends to occur more frequently when framing rhetorical or evaluative statements. Moreover, this tendency is also determined by what tense is used. The difference in meaning can be determined by comparing the following examples from the enTenTen15 corpus:

16. So what **I am saying** here is try to think of and use apps that allow learners to create
17. I realize that **I am saying** some of the same stuff as everyone else who is asking for this opportunity

18. **I am speaking** of issues directly related to poverty like hunger, violence
19. Yes, **I am speaking** from my realization of what I once chose to experience

20. The police finally admitted that what **I was saying** was true and tried to claim incorrect information had been put into the computer
21. But as **I was saying ,** it was like he was in my head and had known me forever.

22. Several weeks ago **I was speaking** on the phone with the man who led me to Christ in the early 1990's
23. A week ago when **I was speaking** to my mom I said well the baby naming is at 6:15PM

These examples (16-23) demonstrate how patterns and lexis in conjunction can "carry a meaning" (Römer 2005b). Such examples feature common patterns of *speaking* and *saying* in the progressive aspect, and these patterns seem to demonstrate a clear pragmatic meaning. Both collostructions in the present continuous are used to frame or signpost a rhetorical statement. Their differences lie in their grammatical construction. *Speaking* is predominantly

succeeded with either *of* or *from* followed by a noun phrase. While still rhetoric in function, the structure is used to provide supporting evidence by pointing to the context or nature of the argument, rather than the argument itself. *Saying* is used more directly, predominantly in a cleft sentence construction. To illustrate, *what* is overwhelmingly the most common collocation in the –1 slot from *I am saying*. This pattern is predominantly used to help signpost an argument or evaluation.

Yet, if we examine the past continuous, the differences between the two words becomes more pronounced. As examples 20-23 demonstrate, *I was saying* has a much stronger rhetorical force when compared with *I was speaking*. Furthermore, common collocations with *I was saying* include *As* (t-score 29.21), *What* (12.90), *So* (12.34), *But* (11.21) and *Like* (9,86) (capitals intended). These collocations all point to rhetoric signposting: mostly as a reiteration of a previous point. On the other hand, *I was speaking* is predominantly using the "temporiness' function identified by Mindt (2000) and, on the whole, does not have a rhetorical force. To reinforce this, the significance of *I was speaking from* and *of* is much lower, as Table 6.14 demonstrates:

	Total	**. . . *from*** **(%)**	**… *of*** **(%)**
I am speaking	5,352	244 (0.05)	1,080 (20.18)
I was speaking	4,711	29 (<0.01)	178 (0.04)

Table 6.14: Pattern variants of the progressive *speaking* (from enTenTen15)

The importance of the prepositions *from* and *of* is unquestionable when using the pattern with rhetorical force. However, the tense choice somewhat limits the functionality of the patterns and cannot be ignored. As such, this demonstrates the role collostruction can play in the relationship between pattern, tense, meaning and illocutionary force.

Although in the above examples of *saying* and *speaking* we have seen how the progressive aspect can create strong evaluation or rhetoric, it would be remiss to argue that these are examples of collostructional irony. These examples do illustrate that the progressive aspect can express incongruent functions. To demonstrate this further, I will focus on other common progressive verbs within the corpora and not only analyse how collostruction is intrinsic to meaning making but also how these meanings can include irony.

6.3.2 *wondering*

Patterns with the collostruction *wondering* demonstrate more clearly the idea of incongruity and meaning making. In the WHPB corpus, there is a clear utilisation of the progressive aspect's function of *politeness*/*downtoning* (Mindt 2000). In the examples of the progressive aspect with *I* as the subject, the majority of the uses in the four corpora have a politeness illocutionary force. Apart from *saying* discussed previously, the most common progressive verbs from Tables 6.9-6.10 demonstrate the prevalence of this role. Evidence from the corpus seems to counter Mindt's (2000) claim concerning the commonality of this function. An examination of the concordance lines shows that *wondering* is a conventional and frequent pattern, predominantly used as politeness signposting. In particular, in the two political corpora, it is used to frame questions politely, and this function is more often employed by journalists in White House press briefings rather than by Members of Parliament. Therefore, I draw the majority of my examples from this corpus.

Within the WHPB corpus it is important to bear in mind that there are similar examples of politeness using the simple present *wonder*. However, the clear majority of examples utilise the progressive aspect: there are 83 examples of *I wonder* in the simple present and 25 examples of *I wondered*, compared with 553 examples of *wondering* with the first person as subject. Therefore, there seems to be a preference for the progressive for framing questions. Examples 24-26 demonstrate the fixedness and common collexemes of this pattern:

24. **What I 'm wondering is**, heading into the summit, what is it in response to?

25. **I 'm just wondering** what your response is because it seems like a growing chorus of Republicans who either disagree with the move or seem -- feel completely caught off guard by it.

26. And **I guess I 'm wondering** what you make of that and what the U.S. is expecting from China

Like the PMQ corpus, the interpersonal nature of the discourse within the WHPB corpus means that utterances are almost always directly conversational and have a clear illocutionary force. Furthermore, the participants in WHPB are seen as spokespersons; conduits through which others (the President and the American people) converse. As such, there is very little personal opinion offered, and so expressions of wonder would be limited. To obtain a more

balanced view, if we compare the examples from WHPB with BNC, we can see examples that are more introspective:

27. I bought Ted Mosse's house, and **now I 'm wondering** what sort of man he was.

28. I didn't bring anything to read, and papers bore me anyway, **so I 'm wondering** if I'm the kind of guy who's cut out for relationships.

29. 'In fact he held me up for so long **I 'm now wondering** if it was a deliberate act on his part.'

However, examples 27-29 are taken solely from the written element of the general corpus. In fact, 43 of the 84 total occurrences of *I'm/I am wondering* are from spoken data, which seems to point to the importance of its interpersonal function. Therefore, concordance lines from the spoken corpus are similar with those from the WHPB corpus in terms of their illocutionary force. Yet here, the illocutionary force is much wider in scope, and we have more examples of requests for help rather than information:

30. So **I 'm wondering** if you could possibly lend a hand.

31. Sir we've only had this for I think for three minutes before the start of the erm of of this erm session, **I 'm just wondering** if we could have ten minutes to read it?

32. **I 'm wondering** if, if it's too acid for a good crop of potatoes without liming.

These examples show the pattern has a clear, albeit polite, illocutionary force. Even example 32, which is ostensibly an expression of wonder, could be interpreted as similar requests for information as examples 24-26 from the WHPB corpus. A wider look at the concordance line confirms this:

33. The other thing that I wonder might have some bearing is that I know parts of Sally Park and Sally Oak and they're very acid, they can grow rhododendrons and azaleas and things very well.

    Yes that's

    I'm wondering if, if it's too acid for a good crop of potatoes without liming.

    Yes it certainly is, I, as you say the streets round Sally Oak are lined with erm gardens with rhododendrons in aren't they?

Here, it is clear that the conversation is between two people and the first speaker indirectly asks a question which the other answers directly.

This indirect question function is more frequently expressed in the past continuous. In the BNC, there are 263 occurrences of the pattern "[word="I"][word="was"] []{0,4} [word="wondering"]" compared with 84 occurrences of the pattern in the present tense. Apart from the fact that the past tense can have a politeness function, it is difficult to conceive of any logical reason why speakers tend to use the past continuous tense for this function but it remains one of the most common verbs in both the present and, particularly, the past continuous tenses. Furthermore, the illocutionary force of the pattern seems to be its prevailing function. Table 6.15 demonstrates this by breaking down the particular functions of the past continuous pattern:

	Polite Request	Question	Expression of wonder	Other
Frequency	76	77	102	8
Percentage	28.9	29.3	38.8	3

Table 6.15: Results of [word="I"][word="was"] []{0,4} [word="wondering"] search in the BNC corpus, organised by function

The progressive *wondering* used in the past tense predominantly has an interpersonal rather than an epistemological function, despite the BNC corpus comprising of 90% written data. As such, it seems reasonable to suggest that tense is an important factor in collostructural relationship. Its use in the progressive points to a softening of this illocutionary force. Overall, the phrase is more often used as an indirect speech act, rather than as an expression of wonder.

However, although its use as an indirect speech act may well be defined as incongruent, it cannot be defined as ironic, as established ironic utterances must be evaluative in meaning. Within parliamentary discourse, it seems that the collostruction is more ironic. If we examine the use of *wondering* in the PMQ corpus, we initially notice that it is not as frequent as in WHPB (69 occurrences in total). Yet, in these examples it is clear that the progressive has an ironic rhetorical force. Examples 34-36 demonstrate this:

34. In fact, **I was wondering why** the Labour Benches were so quiet, and now I realise, of course, that the former shadow Attorney-General, who normally makes so much noise, is presumably not here today

35. **I am still wondering whether** the Prime Minister ever actually answers a question during Question Time,

36. I suspect that the problem for him is that **he has been wondering over** the past few days whether to jump on this particular bandwagon or not, and he has made the wrong choice

In the WHPB corpus, speakers use this progressive verb to frame a question or request politely. In the contrasting acerbic environment of the British Parliament, speakers seem to subvert the superficially softening function of the progressive to frame their criticism, further demonstrating how incongruity can be an effective rhetorical tool. All three examples have a clear negative evaluative function and, I argue, the softening effect of the progressive wraps the negative evaluation in irony. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the collostruction has a potential for irony. However, it has been pointed out that Questions to the Prime Minister sessions are irony-rich environments and that the rules and protocols are often subverted for ironic effect (see Introduction and Chapter 2). Therefore, despite the numerous examples of ironic use within the PMQ corpus, it could be argued that it is an identifiable but not key or common feature of the collostruction.

6.3.3 Patterning and collostruction: *trying*

This section will examine another collostruction which is predominantly used as politeness signposting. However, there are significant differences in usage and function compared with examples from Section 6.3.2. Despite there being a clear difference in how *wondering* is used between the two political corpora, patterns with *trying* seem to be more similar. It is a common lexical item across all four corpora and across the five progressive tenses. Whereas *wondering* has a softening interpersonal effect in WHPB, I will demonstrate that *trying* can often incongruently have a much stronger rhetorical force.

If we initially examine the WHPB corpus, the difference between *trying* and the previous collostruction is clearer. Here, we can see that this difference lies in how the pattern is used between the press secretary and members of the press. There are similarities in illocutionary force between *trying* and *wondering* as both are used by the press to frame questions:

37. But I guess **what I'm trying to understand** is, is there a line?

38. What's the threshold to terrorism, is **what I'm trying to understand**?

39. And **what I'm trying to do** is try to ask this at a level that you can comment on

In all of these examples, the collostruction serves as a politeness strategy for framing a question or request for information. So, they do not differ greatly from examples 24-26 of *wondering*: both in illocutionary force (politeness) and function (framing a question). Yet if we consider how the phrase is used by the press secretary, we see a shift in both force and function. Of course, it is not the role of the press secretary to ask questions to the media, and so this may explain the shift in function. Yet more importantly, the illocutionary force of these patterns goes beyond simple politeness. To elaborate, Table 6.16 highlights the most common collocates with *trying to*:

	Collocate	T-score
I'm trying to …	*get*	5.05
	make	4.53
	figure (out)	3.60
	understand	3.59
	say	2.15

Table 6.16: Common collocates with *I'm trying to* (WHPB) (+1 slot)

The fourth most common collocate, *understand*, as shown in examples 37 and 38, is used in patterns to help frame questions, and *figure (out)* can be viewed as having a similar function. However, the other three collocates are mostly used by the press secretary as a frame for rhetoric or evaluation. As a result, these collocates form longer collostructural patterns (in bold) which incongruently seem to lack the ostensibly softening illocutionary force. Examples below highlight typical patterns of each of these three collocates:

40. What **I'm trying to get at**, Chip, is I'm not going to be able to respond directly to his comments

41. And so **all I'm trying to get at** is that there are various ways to do this funding without just relying on the American taxpayer

42. So, look, the **point I'm trying to make** here is, Republicans have forced Merrick Garland to wait 217 days

43. but **I guess** this is **the point I'm trying to make** -- when the President said that, I didn't see a lot of police officers in that room shaking their head.

44. **I think what I'm trying to say** is that's why I think that while those numbers are an illustration of the threat that ISIL poses outside of

Iraq and in Syria, they're not a good way to measure how dangerous ISIL is.

45. **I think**, John, **what I'm trying to say** is I'm not going the get into the specific details of their conversations.

There seems to be two important observations based on the above examples. Firstly, as the lexicogrammatical features in bold demonstrate, such a progressive verb cannot be examined in isolation. Rather, the illocutionary meaning lies within a wider collostructural pattern. In the above examples, we have longer patterns with singular semantic meanings that cannot be lexically split without losing this meaning. In this regard, *trying* somewhat differs from the examples of collostruction with *wondering*. Secondly, another important similarity between these patterns is that they all point to a rhetoric function: the speaker is using them to frame an argument or opinion. What is particularly notable is that the speaker uses further 'softening' lexical items to frame their argument (e.g., highlighted in bold in examples 43-45) and yet these arguments maintain a strong rhetoric force.

Such incongruity between these patterns has been discussed in previous literature. Römer (2005a: 165) noted that with such an apparent inconsistency in illocutionary effect, "we might wonder how it can be that the same form is used for two opposing purposes, to soften an utterance and put emphasis on it". This dual meaning, I argue allows these phrases to be manipulated for an incongruent ironic effect. Römer identifies four common progressives (*asking, hoping, suggesting* and *telling*) that fit into this group of both softening and emphasising verbs. She suggests one reason for this is that it is often verbs such as *suggesting* in the negative which adopt a more emphatic function. If we compare it with the collostruction here, both *suggest* and *try* could be argued as being verbs which do not have an intrinsic emphatic meaning. There are examples of *not trying* in the WHPB corpus, and these seem to have a similar emphatic function in the negative to Römer's observation:

46. I think -- **I'm not trying to** -- how you sequence them, but I don't think they're mutually exclusive

47. And one last question, just to follow up on the FBI thing. And **I'm not trying to** be overly combative here, but you said now today, and I think you said again yesterday, that you personally have talked to countless FBI officials, employees, since this happened

48. I hate to -- I'm **not trying to** not answer the question, but I think that's the answer.

In each of these examples, the collostructional pattern is used to frame a *but* attitudinal clause, and so the pattern tends to have an emphatic, even defensive function. However, this pattern differs from those identified by Römer as there appears to be no clear difference between the positive and negative examples of *trying* in the WHPB corpus: both have an emphasising attitudinal function.

Despite the prevalence of a rhetorical function, the examples presented are unlikely to be interpreted as ironic in the conventional sense. So, we need to return to the two DIY corpora. If we compare with examples of *trying* from the PMQ corpus, we can see similarities of illocutionary force. However, there is not such a wide range of collocates. The most common verb collocate of *I* [..] *trying to* is *make.* However, there are only 7 occurrences (t-score 2.62) across the whole corpus. There is not a clear concentration of patterns as within the WHPB corpus. Therefore, we need to examine the concordance lines in order to understand the underlying function. What is immediately striking within these concordance lines of *I* […] *trying to* is that they are not softening but rather tend to frame strong attitudinal evaluations. Examples 49-51 demonstrate this evaluative function:

49. Here I am **trying to** be so consensual. I am doing my best. I could mention that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) was out yesterday spinning for Nigel Farage, but I do not want to play that game.

50. I did point out to the Prime Minister **I was trying to** help him that the gentleman concerned is actually a Conservative.

51. Mr Lucas, calm yourself. **I am trying to** offer you, on a weekly basis, therapeutic guidance, but there is a long way to go.

In examples 49 and 50, the speakers are being critical across the political divide. In example 51, we can see another example of the Speaker of the House (light-heartedly) admonishing an MP for his boisterous interjections. All speakers frame their criticisms by supposedly making self-reflective statements. In these examples, there is a clear incongruity between the language used and the message: MPs are playing with the softening function of the progressive for humorous ironic effect. Therefore, and particularly in the PMQ corpus, an important illocutionary function of the progressive aspect seems to be evaluative and this is occasionally ironic in nature. Much of this irony is created through an inversion of the politeness/softening/downtoning function along with a subversion of the discoursal conventions of parliamentary debate.

These examples are more clearly ironic. However, many of these potential collostructions of irony seem to be predominantly taken from a single corpus from a specific discourse environment. To counter this, the following section presents a set of collostructions whose ironic force is prevalent across the general corpora. What is different about this collostruction is that it has two important lexicogrammatical elements: firstly, the use of the verbs *start* and *begin* in the progressive aspect and secondly, common collocates following *starting to* and *beginning to,* especially stative cognitive verbs.

6.3.4 *beginning to* and *starting to*

The collostructional pattern presented in this section appears somewhat incongruent because of the two lexical elements mentioned above. Firstly, the use of *start* and *begin* in the progressive form appears to be a common collostruction within the corpora and, as they are ingress verbs, it is difficult to identify its function. From Römer's taxonomy, the collostruction seems to be most closely connected to the *gradual change / development* function (2005a: 101-2). In fact, she points out that this particular function tends to have a negative semantic prosody (ibid. 102). However, she does not list *starting* or *beginning* as one of the frequently occurring verb forms in this context. Therefore, I argue that it may well be because of this markedness that these collostructions can be considered primed for ironic interpretation.

An important element of this ironic interpretation, and the focus of this investigation, is that these two collostructions contain what Leech (1987: 25) refers to as "verbs of inert cognition'. These cognitive verbs, Leech points out, are usually incompatible with the progressive aspect. However, below is an example of how such a verb colligates with this aspect.

52. **I am beginning to think** the only thing in Downing Street with a spine is his book on courage.

Although it is not the verb of inert cognition which is in the progressive form, its collocation with the verb *begin* creates an important rhetorical force. In the above example, the ostensibly tentative phase *I am beginning to think* is in contrast with the strongly negative

evaluation in which the phrase precedes. As a result, we observe a similar incongruent effect within the examples of this particular collostruction in this section.

There are 61 occurrences of *beginning to* and 27 occurrences of *starting to* in the PMQ corpus. However, a look at the verb collocations in the +1 slot shows that their use with a cognitive verb is somewhat infrequent. For example, with *starting to*, there are only the two examples, which are both presented below:

53. Perhaps Labour leaders are **starting to realise** that their only real headache is their leader

54. Many people in my constituency are **starting to doubt** the wisdom of this war and I wonder whether she could remind the House of precisely what our military objective in Afghanistan is.

These two examples illustrate how irony is created through incongruity but also the importance of politeness in parliamentary discourse. Example 53 is clearly humorous and therefore ironic, whereas example 54 is critical but does not, on the surface, violate the code of conduct and politeness procedures within parliamentary discourse. What makes example 53 clearly ironic is perhaps that the speaker is the one making the evaluation, whereas in example 54, the speaker is also representing the people of their constituency. In this way, example 54 echoes examples of evaluation from the WHPBs corpus: examples of the phrase with a cognitive verb are confined to when discussing the American people as a whole. However, of the 119 examples of *starting to* in this corpus, only one can be considered as using a verb of inert cognition. Furthermore, in this example the speaker is not making a strong evaluation, but rather hedging their generalisation:

55. So it is affecting real Americans out there. I think people are **starting to notice** this.

It could therefore be argued that important differences between the two political discourses may account for the fact that this particular ironic collostruction is more prevalent in the PMQ corpus. Further analysis of the general corpora may provide a much clearer picture of how it is used.

Begin is somewhat similar in meaning to *start* and so can also be analysed as a variant collexeme within this collostruction. Notably, *beginning to* is more frequent than *starting to*

in the PMQs in contrast with the WHPB corpus (*beginning to* = 67 occurrences; *starting to* = 119*).* Of the 61 examples of *beginning to* in the PMQ corpus, seven are preceded with *I'm*/*I am* and feature 5 different cognitive or emotional verbs These seven include example 10 and 52 above and the further five examples are presented below (56-59)*:*

56. **I am beginning to have quite a lot of sympathy with** the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Nadine Dorries) and her experience of all those rats and snakes, even before she went to the jungle.

57. He has issued so many invitations to me to come out on various boats with him in the past few weeks that **I am beginning to get worried** about us.

58. **I am beginning to think** that the hon. Gentleman is better at the jokes than at economics.

59. **I am beginning to think** that the council is trying to go for one bin for every Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament

Although there are not a large number of occurrences, it is clear that all of these examples are humorous and have a strong, critical rhetorical force. Despite the size and the specialisation of the corpus, it can be suggested that this particular incongruent collocation may contribute to the rhetoric and therefore the ironic force of the utterance: a theory which will be explored further. Similar to *starting to*, there is only one example of *beginning to* with a cognitive verb in the WHBs corpus and this does not have a strong rhetorical force.

60. the President inherited this powerful tool that we were just **beginning to understand** and our national security professionals were just **beginning to understand** how powerful it is and what the consequences of its use could be

These examples seem to reaffirm that in regards to this collostruction, there is a clear distinction between the two political discourses. As outlined previously, the nature of White House Press briefings means that personal evaluation is rarely given: both the Press Secretary and the media are speaking on behalf of an individual or social group. Therefore, in order to determine that this pattern is not solely a characteristic of PMQs discourse, it is important to compare these results with concordance lines from a larger general corpus.

In the enTenTen15 corpus, there are 20,950 examples of *starting to* with *I* as the main clause subject. We can filter these results by concentrating on the main verb which collocates

with this pattern. Table 6.17 below shows the common inert cognition verbs which collocate in the +1 to +3 position from the node *I…starting to*.

		Frequency	t-score
I…starting to	think	2125	45.94
	wonder	856	29.23
	believe	434	20.68
	understand	390	19.59
	realize	309	17.54
	suspect	124	11.10
	doubt	118	10.78
	question	97	9.53

Table 6.17: Cognition verb collocations with *I..starting to*, ranked by frequency (enTenTen15)

Based on the frequencies and t-scores, it can be argued that the collostruction of *starting to* with an inert cognitive verb is significant. Furthermore, similar patterns can be viewed with *beginning to*. In fact, there are only 14,240 examples of *I* collocating with *beginning to* in the -3 to -1 position, making it a rather less frequent. However, as Table 6.18 demonstrates, the frequencies of the most common cognitive verb collocations are similar:

		Frequency	t-score
I…beginning to	*think*	2149	46.25
	wonder	1122	33.48
	understand	851	29.10
	believe	361	18.88
	realize	350	18.68
	suspect	268	16.35
	doubt	149	12.16

Table 6.18: Cognitive verb collocations with *I..beginning to*, ranked by frequency (enTenTen15)

This seems to suggest that we can view these two collexemes as part of the same collostruction pattern. Therefore, it is worth examining the concordance lines in greater detail to evaluate the pattern's ironic force. In order to do this, I initially eschew the cognitive verbs which have a negative evaluative force. This is because more neutral verbs are more likely to have incongruence and therefore are more likely to frame irony. In the next section, I will examine the three more common collocations in more detail.

6.3.4.i *think*

In the BNC, there are only 5 occurrences of *starting to think* collocating with the subject *I*. Of these 5, 3 can be considered evaluative in function, with only one which could be considered as humorous.

61. **I'm starting to think** that everything's a turn-off for you, doll.

There are more occurrences of *I [0,3] beginning to think* (74 in total) and, interestingly, similar to the PMQ corpus this pattern seems to have a more ironic force. This manifests in two ways. Firstly, there are numerous examples of the collostruction in the past progressive. Such usage often echoes the irony of 'failed expectations' (Kumon-Nakamura et al 1995; Utsumi 2000) although this expectation can be both positive or negative. Such utterances are often ostensibly self-reflective and yet often hints at an external target of evaluation.

62. 'I'm glad to hear it. **I was beginning to think** it was me who was dense.' But she ignored the joke
63. 'Hello! I've found you at last. **I was beginning to think** you'd given it a miss.'
64. By this time **I was beginning to think** that Eric was either dead or had chosen to forget me

Similar to examples 62-64, most occurrences of the collocation in the present continuous are also evaluative. Furthermore, a significant number of these evaluative utterances are humorous in nature, as the following illustrate:

65. Eeh, **I'm beginning to think** those legs of yours have disappeared, it's so long since I saw them
66. And d'ya know I **I'm beginning to think** you sort of protest so much that maybe you're a leader of a coven or something
67. She flicked a brief smile up at him. **'I'm beginning to think** you really believe in ghosts!'
68. First of all, we desperately need a win. **I'm beginning to think** the fans will soon see me as a bit of a jinx

In examples 65-68, the humour arises through the absurd conjecture and the incongruity of the softening collostruction. The frequency of this particular phrase within the BNC corpus

seems to suggest that it is an established evaluative function. However, examining the much larger enTenTen15 corpus will confirm this.

From both the 2125 occurrences of *starting to think* and the 2149 examples of *beginning to think*, a random sample of 200 was taken using the Sketch Engine. An examination of the concordance lines also suggests that *beginning to* has a much stronger ironic force. In both the present and past continuous, the use of *starting to* is rather more serious and self-reflective; the following examples exemplify this.

69. **I'm starting to** think I can't trust my own thought processes, because idiotic and irrational ideas keep creeping in

70. But Brian and I were fighting because he really wanted to start a family **and I was starting to think** that I didn't want to have kids

The concordance lines of *beginning to* in the enTenTen15 are similar in function to those in the BNC and PMQs corpora. In fact, perhaps due to the acerbic nature of much online discourse, which makes up the enTenTen15 corpus, the evaluations are often much stronger.

71. **I'm beginning to think** Ham is bordering on the mentally insane.

72. **I am beginning to think** there is no end to the stupid willingness of the masses to believe the salvation of the rich is the salvation of the poor.

Again, the understating collostruction provides a contrast with the evaluation it frames. Yet, in examples 71 and 72, this contrast cannot be argued as ironic. Rather, the contrast may well mark the evaluation for the audience. This does not mean that the collostruction does not have an ironic force. As well as such strong evaluative utterances, there are similar humorous exaggerations which have elements of irony.

73. **I'm beginning to think** the White House does this as part of a concerted effort to destroy the computers of the educated in the US by having the owners spew whatever liquid they have in their mouths all over said computers when hearing the latest speech by Bush.

74. **I was beginning to think** my wife had given birth to a demon child, but they found out that she couldn't drink regular milk, so we decided to keep her

In both 73 and 74, I argue that what makes this an effective collostruction for framing irony is its softening or hedging function being in contrast with the exaggeration. We can see that

this irony can be highly critical (as in example 73) or light and self-reflective (example 74) and still contain these lexical elements.

Overall, because of key characteristics it is fair to argue that this particular collostruction has an ironic force. Firstly, it is commonly used to express genuine or pseudo failed expectations which, as discussed, is a commonly accepted function of irony. Secondly, the collostruction is used to frame strong evaluations, as the above examples demonstrate. Finally, the incongruity between the softening force of the collostruction with the strong or exaggerated evaluation create an ironic effect.

6.3.4.ii *wonder*

As with *think*, there is a similar rhetorical effect with *wonder*. In the BNC, there are only two examples of *I* [0,3] *starting to wonder* as opposed to 41 occurrences of *I* [0,3] *beginning to wonder*. One difference lies in the meaning of the cognition verb. In these occurrences, *wonder* is most closely similar to the synonym *doubt:*

75. By Saturday night, I had grown somewhat wary about the ex-Miss Denmark's claims. **I was even starting to wonder** if she really was Europe's top glamour model.

76. **I am beginning to wonder** if I inhabit the same planet.

Because of this, an examination of the phrase in both the BNC and enTenTen15 corpora reveals that it is often used as an evaluative phrase to express disagreement or cynicism. Many of these examples have a strong evaluative force and in this particular collostruction, there appears to be little difference between *starting* and *beginning*, as the following examples from enTenTen15 illustrate:

77. How long will it be, what will it take, for us as Americans to rise above this archaic nonsense? **I'm starting to wonder** and it's pissing me off.

78. I'm spending so many hours bending over to do the weeding and digging, that **I'm beginning to wonder** if I'll ever stand up straight again

79. Having just celebrated another birthday (although **I am beginning to wonder** if celebrate is the right word)

The above examples demonstrate that the target of the evaluation can be both external (77) and internal (78-79), as well as serious or humorous. The choice of cognitive verb suggests

that the important characteristics of incongruity and vagueness add to the collostruction's evaluative force.

Linked to the above point, there are multiple meanings of *wonder* which are exemplified in the various collostructions. We can identify among the concordance lines evaluative phrases in which the cognitive verb is similar in meaning to *think* or *imagine*. These also seem to share a similarly ironic cynicism:

80. Our pizza delivery still hasn't turned up and **I'm starting to wonder** what state my Mexican stuffed crust will be in by the time it arrives.

81. **I am starting to wonder** if Wall Street is a person, he gets blamed for so much

82. **I was beginning to wonder** if you were actually part of the furniture, you've been sitting there so long.

83. Between his lies..err excuses for leaks and this I'm **beginning to wonder** if his father's name was Geppetto?

All of the above examples demonstrate that this collostruction also has a strong evaluative force and the concordance lines reveal a significant number of utterances which can be interpreted as ironic. These utterances demonstrate various aspects of the function of irony. For example, examples 78, 80 and 84 below share characteristics with failed expectations:

84. It's been cloudy and windy so long, **I'm starting to wonder** what sunlight looks like.

Furthermore, a number of examples express an ironic mock-incredulity or exaggerated surprise, similar to 73 and 74:

85. But here we are still repeating ourselves, we cannot forgive and forget like what the Bible says. **I am starting to wonder** what Christianity is for.

86. In the light of the recent horrible events in Copenhagen , **I'm starting to wonder** whether terrorist attacks are becoming Europe's version of America's high-school massacres.

This function appears to be particularly common in the enTenTen15 corpus: the mock-incredulity can be serious as in these examples but can also be humorous as the following demonstrate:

87. **I'm starting to wonder** if this is part of some Tory masterplan for the local elections in May: making sure that nobody except the landed gentry can afford that extra journey to the polling station.

88. Just look at this miserable Met Office forecast for my wee corner of Fife. As you can see, it's going to be a tad wet between now and.....well....forever apparently. **I'm starting to wonder** whether the Mayan prophecy of doom might be onto something

89. **I'm also beginning to wonder** if he's currently living in a submarine somewhere, afraid to come to the surface.

90. I'm also **beginning to wonder** if I'll end up falling asleep at 3:00 or 4:00 AM on Christmas day causing a major delay in opening gifts

The above examples demonstrate that the cognitive verb seems to be a contributing part of the ironic force. Particularly when it evokes the negative semantic meaning (similar to *argue* or *doubt*). Both *wonder* and *think* trigger this ironic force when collocated within this particular pattern. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that collostruction is a contributing aspect of lexicogrammatical irony. The idea that all elements of the collostruction play a significant part in meaning making seems to be confirmed in the following collostruction.

6.3.4.iii *understand*

In collostructions such as those presented above, an ironic force may well be possible if a negative semantic meaning of the cognitive verb can be evoked. In contrast, the collostruction presented in this section does not seem to be overly evaluative or ironic. In the BNC corpus, the majority of concordance lines point to self-reflective utterances:

91. **I was beginning to understand** a lot I'd never known about before

92. Now **I was beginning to understand** how difficult and dangerous political life can be

To understand why there is a lack of ironic salience in this construction, we may need to analyse the meaning of this particular cognitive verb. Unlike *wonder* or *think*, there is a semantic element to *understand* which implies a cognitive change. In the examples from the corpus, it can be viewed as a synonym of *realise* or to reach a deeper understanding. In the ironic examples with *think* and *wonder*, this change is part of the irony: the speaker is often expressing a well-established evaluation. This particular meaning is also prevalent in the majority of concordance lines in the enTenTen15 corpus. Further irony can be observed in examples of verbs with clearer negative semantic prosody.

6.3.4.iv *suspect*

The verb ‘suspect’ has a negative prosody in the sense that what one suspects is usually negative or problematic. While adhering to this negative prosody, there are examples from the concordance lines in enTenTen15 in which the collostruction serves a genuine hedging function:

93. As this random hard freeze would happen more, **I was beginning to suspect** that the 2 unknown drivers in the device manager had something to do with it

94. Perhaps I am wrong, but **I am beginning to suspect** that something is missing that cannot be replaced by merely increasing our numbers

In both of these examples, the speakers are drawing attention to something negative: an emerging problem or malfunction. However, it is clear there is no irony expressed here and that the speakers are not fully certain at the stage of speaking.

Yet there are many examples which manipulate the uncertainty of the phrase for ironic effect. These examples often express strong negative evaluation or a sardonic statement:

95. **I'm beginning to suspect** that a few laughs is all I can realistically expect nowadays from one film.

96. The clinic personnel have grown so familiar with this unhealthy situation that **I'm beginning to suspect** they have lost their humanity

97. Why is this why is the New Zealand internetter so passive. Well, **I'm beginning to suspect** that this is because the New Zealander is a natural born lurker

98. **I'm beginning to suspect** that Facebook contains more fantasies than real life-not everyone is a successful hedge fund trader, after all

The examples presented above are clearly ironic and it seems that the choice of verb helps to make the irony clearer in contrast to the examples with *understand*. This also means that the phrase is also effective in expressing self-deprecating and more humorous exaggerative irony:

99. And then cleaning it up was so disgusting I nearly puked myself. (I'm sure you're all glad to know that.) **I'm beginning to suspect** that this cat doesn't like me.

100. Man, this is the second time a Star Wars reference has been used in conversation today... **I'm beginning to suspect** that me and my friends might all be NERDS!

101. With all the talk of smells in your reviews **I'm beginning to suspect** your're part bloodhound.

102. **I'm beginning to suspect** that, much like flowers, birds, and commemorative quarter backs, each state has it's own official-but-secret Bestiality Target.

What these examples demonstrate is that Stefanowitsch and Gries' (2003) observations regarding collocation are pertinent. Such phrases presented here seem to have an ironic force when we consider how both lexical and grammatical meanings combine in a construction to create new meanings. In this regard, such collostructions move away from simple collocation in the previous chapter and point to a greater importance of phraseology, which is the focus of Chapter 7.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how collostruction can also play an important role in lexicogrammatical features of irony. Similar to the previous chapter, the collostructions presented here often share elements of hedging. Thus, irony occurs when there is incongruity between these hedging lexicogrammatical items and the strong evaluation in which they frame. Additionally, in this chapter, I further demonstrate how both lexis and grammar can contribute to irony: the important lexical items presented are *wonder*, *try* and *begin*/*start* all colligating with the progressive aspect. Marked use of these particular verbs in constructions with the progressive create an incongruous clash of meaning, paralleling the pragmatic incongruity in the marked use of hedging items to frame strong evaluation. In this regard, these examples support the theories of Construction Grammar in that collostructions can have meanings separate to the meanings of their parts. Furthermore, this chapter outlines examples which demonstrate a similarity with the collocations of multiple hedging in the previous chapter, reinforcing the idea that meiosis and understatement are important aspects of irony.

One important difference, however, is how the examples here tend to have less lexicogrammatical flexibility than the examples of multiple hedging. Because of this, and because of the nature of constructions/collostructions, it is more difficult to identify such ironic markers by examining utterances solely at the lexical level. This will become more relevant in Chapter 8 which examines how this study can help support machine identification of irony. Furthermore, examining lexicogrammatical features of irony which have greater fixedness at the lexical level means that these features can be more easily defined as p-frames and n-grams. The following chapter will present similar p-frames and n-grams which can be considered as having an ironic force.

Another greater consideration in this chapter compared with the last is the notion of frequency. When evaluating the importance of collostructions, it is important to consider their frequencies within any particular corpus. A high frequency would likely point to these phrases being considered established within the corpus' common lexicon and will therefore also have recognisable illocutionary functions. In the case of the collostructions presented in this chapter, it could reasonably be argued that they demonstrate an ironic illocutionary force and so could be determined as effective signposts for irony. The aspect of frequency will be taken up in the next chapter's investigation into particular multi-word items which, I argue, have a more clearly defined ironic *priming*, and are often utilised to not only signpost ironic utterances but also carry an ironic meaning.

Chapter 7: Irony and Phraseology

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine ironic utterances in relation to phraseology. As such, this chapter differs in respect to corpus methodology from both collocation in Chapter 5 and colligation in Chapter 6. The reason for this is the ironic examples discussed in this chapter are multi-word items of n-grams and p-frames which have a singular meaning, often pragmatic in nature. So the previous bottom-up corpus methodological process of trawling through corpora is ineffective, as the selection process here requires significantly more subjective judgements. However, it is worth emphasising that corpus-informed data regarding frequency will still prove to be a useful guide. Nevertheless, like the previous two chapters, ironic examples taken from the two DIY corpora provided a starting point. As Section 3.4.1 demonstrated, irony at the phraseological level often entails incongruity of meaning: either semantic or pragmatic incongruity. Therefore, this chapter will introduce a number of phrases containing such elements of incongruity, and demonstrate how this incongruity determines their ironic force.

There are two distinct types of phrases presented. These two types roughly correspond to Attardo's (2000) classification of *irony markers* and *irony factors* (see Section 3.4). The first section (7.2) will examine phrases which are similar with Attardo's concept of irony markers in that they may be regularly used to signpost irony. The second section (7.3) will explore phrases in which an ironic meaning (or irony factor) is intrinsic. Examples will be taken from all four corpora to demonstrate the characteristics of frequency and fixedness.

In line with the previous two chapters, there are two important characteristics of such utterances which are intrinsic in determining their ironic force: incongruity and evaluation. As with the ironic framework in Section 2.5, all ironic utterances presented here will be shown to have both elements of evaluation and incongruity. Of equal importance in this chapter, I posit that phrases have the potential to become ironically *primed*: a term taken from Hoey (2005). This priming causes an incongruity of illocutionary force or function and will be demonstrated in the examples in Section 7.3 in particular.

7.2 Markers of irony

Within the two political corpora, irony often has a strong evaluative function. Moreover, both political discourses are stylised with their own rules of interaction and politeness (see Chapter 2). Linked to this, the previous chapters have demonstrated that within these discourses, ironic utterances often have phrases which seem to signpost the evaluation and irony. I will argue that many of these phrases can be interpreted as examples of Attardo's (2000: 7) irony markers: the "meta-communicative clues" which "alert" the audience that an utterance may be interpreted as ironic. As discussed previously, Attardo views such markers as predominantly paralinguistic in nature. Yet, this chapter presents examples in which such clues can be identified at the phraseological level. Certainly, the phrases presented here are not explicitly referential such as "I ironically inform you that ..." because, as Haverkate (1990) argues, such explicit statements would undermine the ironic force. Rather, influenced by observations made by Muecke (1978: 371-2) and Burgers et al (2013) regarding co-textual elements of ironic utterances which they determined as ironic markers, the following section focuses on phrases which signpost the irony, rather than containing elements of irony within the phrase.

The different focus of this final results chapter means that it will be adopting a slightly different methodology. This approach is predominantly more qualitative than quantitative as it focuses on interpreting the illocutionary force of such phrases. Furthermore, it takes a more top-down approach by examining n-grams and p-frames using the selected ironic examples from both DIY corpora (see Appendix 1A and 1B) as a starting point. Below is a table of four of these n-grams selected from these examples, along with their original source corpus. These four n-grams provide a starting point for a deeper examination in this chapter.

for what it's worth	WHPB
at least I know	WHPB
anything to do with the fact	PMQ
I thought for a moment	PMQ

Table 7.1 Possible phrases to signpost irony (Taken from the two political corpora)

Whether these phrases can be determined as signposting irony requires an examination across all four corpora. Attention will be paid firstly to frequency and then a qualitative evaluation of the concordance lines to examine their semantic and/or pragmatic function. In particular, attention will be paid to the concordance lines to determine whether the phrases frequently signpost ironic utterances.

7.2.1 *for what it's worth*

The first phrase does not occur in the PMQ corpus, although it does occur in the other three corpora. Table 7.2 below outlines the frequency across the four corpora.

	WHPB	PMQ	BNC	enTenTen15
for what it 's worth	3 (0.68)	-	28 (0.25)	5814 (0.38)

Table 7.2 Occurrences of signposting phrase *for what it's worth* across four corpora (per million tokens)

This 5-gram occurs only three times in the WHPB corpus, and of the three, only one could be considered ironic. It is also used with relatively similar frequency, if a little less, across the two general corpora. A cursory look at the concordance lines of a random sample of 200 from the enTenTen15 corpus reveal that the phrase is multifunctional and that some of these functions are intrinsic to its potential to signpost irony. Below outlines four such functions.

In this study, a significant function of the lexicogrammatical patterns of irony is evaluation, and here is no exception. Often "for what it's worth" signposts an opinion which is overwhelmingly negative and, at times, strong. Three examples from BNC (1) and enTenTen15 (2-3) demonstrate this:

1. But nonetheless - and **for what it's worth** - this obsession with number seems to me sad, reductive and weird
2. **For what it's worth,** here is my two bob's worth about countering violent extremism: Carefully monitor mosques and Islamic schools and shut down those found to be preaching extremism
3. **For what it's worth,** if you wanna see several old timers absolutely destroy a blues number, watch this Lil' Buck Sinegal video from KRVS

The reason why this phrase is an effective intensifying signpost may be due to its multi-functionality and incongruity between the hedging force of the phrase and the storng opinion it signposts. As outlined in the previous two chapters, for irony to occur, a contrasting literal meaning is needed. Therefore, multi-word items with multiple illocutionary functions have a higher tendency to be incongruous and, therefore, have an ironic force. To demonstrate, we can see that from the sample of 200 concordance lines on enTenTen15, the phrase also has both politeness and face-saving functions. These functions often occur when providing recommendations or information:

4. **For what it's worth** my own advice would be that we I erm as you remember, increased the rental

5. and **for what it's worth** , here's my review of the different dorms, apartments, and houses I've occupied during the school year.

Examples 4 and 5 seem to have a softer illocutionary force than examples 1-3, seemingly confirming the incongruent function of the phrase when signposting strong evaluation. The incongruity between both its intensifying and softening function, similar to incongruencies outlined in the previous two chapters, help create a humorous or ironic function. Rather significantly, in example 2, we can identify multiple signposting phrases (namely, "my two bob's worth"), echoing examples of multiple hedging in Chapter 5.

A third function can be observed with examples in which the phrase signposts a contrasting argument: whether an argument that contrasts with others, or one in which the argument is ironically in contrast with the speaker's:

6. **For what it's worth** , I think I am shy, introverted, a bit of a pushover, and fearful of everything. And yet every day people tell me I am friendly

7. **For what it's worth** , I know one Iranian girl in the US and she's one of the nicest, most affable people I know

8. **For what it's worth** , Rep. Smith says it was all sweetness and light when he addressed the caucus about his bill. Sure it was.

These examples demonstrate a function in which the speaker is distancing themselves from previous arguments or opinions. In this manner, it is similar in function to that of Hutcheon's (1994: 47) recognised functions of irony as aggregative and distancing. While these characteristics suggest that this phrase can be construed having elements of irony, examples

6-8 can only be determined as being mildly ironic. It is the evaluative function in which irony most clearly emerges.

In terms of evaluation, a significant number of examples have a dismissive force which is often humorous or ironic. Additionally, the phase here often signposts an ironic self-deprecation which contrasts with the face-saving function of the above examples. Therefore, it is this fourth function that has the strongest potential for ironic interpretation. The following examples from enTenTen15 demonstrate this:

9. Yet another annual international gala event comes by, **for what it's worth**

10. Reddit grumped, in an official message–and was, **for what it's worth** , cheered on by the exact same right-wing sites outraged by the Sony hack and the suppression of The Interview .

11. **For what it's worth** , I'm not so full of myself as to estimate what I'm about to say will have anything but the most negligible concussion on The Great Unwashed.

Although this phrase does not always signify irony, it does have the potential. Firstly, it is predominantly used to signpost evaluation and is, occasionally, strongly critical. The incongruity between examples such as examples 9-10 compared with examples 6-8 demonstrate this potentiality. If we accept that n-grams and p-frames have the potential to elicit irony, phrases which have multiple functions, such as *for what it's worth* should be considered. The following will outline other phrases which are similarly multi-functional.

7.2.2 *at least I know*

The second n-gram this study will examine is *at least I know*. The frequencies across the four corpora are outlined in Table 7.3 below.

	WHPB	PMQ	BNC	enTenTen15
at least I know	1 (0.23)	-	28 (0.25)	1694 (0.11)

Table 7.3 Occurrences of signposting phrase *at least I know* (frequency per million)

This phrase also has a similar incongruity of function. In fact, the majority of the utterances which utilise this phrase can be divided into two general functions: a mostly positive, literal meaning, in which the user is expressing reassurance or concession; and a non-literal

meaning which is highly critical and/or humorous, and which has an ironic self-deprecation similar to the previous phrase. In both general corpora, occurrences of the evaluative or humorous function are more frequent than the literal function. For this reason, I would argue that the phrase also shows a high tendency for ironic priming.

What may make this phrase particularly effective in framing irony is that its non-literal function has a somewhat positive semantic prosody. Furthermore, from the corpus we can see occurrences of this positive evaluation often made in response to an overly negative circumstance. As such, the phrase tends to have a reassuring or concessionary nature. The below examples taken from BNC illustrate:

12. It's another question as to whether I can do it on stage, but at least it happened, **at least I know** I can get there if I really try hard enough.
13. I doubt that I've ever really been far away from Silas - **at least I know** I've always been in his thoughts

In both of these examples, the use of the phrase implies a negative set of circumstances from which the speaker is expressing reassurance. Other uses of the expression express a more negative semantic prosody. One common critical function is through comparison, as the below examples demonstrate:

14. I said **at least I knew** where I was with them. I could trust the men I drank with.
15. Oh it's horrible. I like making me own coffee, **at least I know** I can drink it.

Here, the phrase presents an incongruent comparison between two contrasting phenomena. There are parallels here with Kumon-Nakamura et al's (1995) and Utsumi's (2000) theory of irony as expressing 'failed expectations', as the examples are criticising a current situation by comparing it with a less undesired other. Therefore, when the speaker uses this phrase to frame their irony, they are subverting its positive evaluative function of concession or reassurance. We can consider the following examples from enTenTen15:

16. I went home for lunch today and Chie peed on the denim duffel bag on the couch! **At least I know** Chie is not shy of going to the bathroom anymore.
17. I prefer the jealous type, **at least I know** you care

Both of these humorous examples gently express a failed expectation and the phrase is effective at signposting this incongruity. There are other examples which are less humorous but rather maintain a biting irony:

18. Here's one patriotic American who laps up the government garbage like no other. I may be third world but **at least I know** better than to trust politicians.

19. I will punish them with my vote for McCain. **At least I know** he isn't a shyster cheater and liar like the Presumptuous presumptive BS or BHO.

Overall, this phrase further demonstrates how incongruity can manifest within certain phrases. This strengthens the argument that certain linguistic theories concerned with irony at the pragmatic level, such as failed expectations and self-deprecation, can be observed at the phraseological level, as these phrases are capable of fulfilling such ironic and incongruent functions.

7.2.3 (*anything) to do with the fact*

The following phrase differs from the previous two with regard to its flexibility. As such, it can be considered a p-frame with one open slot, albeit with limited lexical choice. Table 7.4 outlines the frequencies of two lexical variations.

	WHPB	PMQ	BNC	enTenTen15
anything to do with the fact	1 (0.23)	6 (1.55)	3 (0.03)	210 (0.01)
something to do with the fact	2 (0.46)	-	24 (0.21)	1095 (0.07)

Table 7.4 Occurrences of signposting phrase (*anything/something) to do with the fact* across four corpora

Not only is there lexical variation with this phrase, but there is also syntactic variation as it can be expressed as both a statement and a question. As discussed, the nature of discourse within Questions to the Prime Minister sessions means that evaluative phrases are often framed as questions and, as a result, there are elements of ostensible politeness and face-saving. This may explain why across the four corpora, the frequency per million tokens of *anything to do with the fact* is much higher in PMQ (1.55). We can see that in all the occurrences, the question is, in fact, ironic and that the phrase is used to signpost a negative evaluation. Below are two such examples:

20. Does the Prime Minister think that the A and E crisis has **anything to do with the fact** that he has cut the number of nurses by more than 5,000 since the general election

21. Why has the Prime Minister suddenly discovered an interest in changing the electoral system? Does it have **anything to do with the fact** that his party got 15 per cent. of the vote last week?

Examples 20 and 21 demonstrate how the phrase is ostensibly used to speculate on a cause, and yet these causes are veiled ironic attacks on the opposition. In contrast, examples from the WHPB corpus are neither critical nor ironic, but rather have a polite, hedging function, used when probing the Press Secretary:

22. do the Prime Minister's comments about Donald Trump and him being anti-Trump, as you've read, have **anything to do with the fact** that he is visiting the White House at this time?

Despite example 22 demonstrating a more literal face-saving function, the previous chapters have highlighted how elements of hedging can be manipulated for ironic effect. This example echoes such irony, and the phrase, as Table 7.4 illustrates, can be considered semi-fixed.

In fact, the frequency statistics across the four corpora suggest that *something to do with the fact* is a more common form. In the 24 examples from BNC, only 3 use the phrase as a question and in a random sample of 200 from enTenTen15, only 5 are framed as a question. A cursory glance at the concordance lines reveals that the phrase is often preceded by further hedging items. Table 7.5 outline these, ranked by frequency:

		Occurrences
may	something to do with the fact	36
might		32
probably		19
think		15
perhaps		14
could		11

Table 7.5: Most common hedging collocations with *something to do with the fact* (-5 : -1) (enTenTen15 corpus random sample 200)

This phrase is predominantly used to frame a negative evaluation, similar to examples 20 and 21 from PMQ. The following examples demonstrate how the elements of hedging in Table 7.5 collocate with the phrase:

23. The entire day, he's complaining and generic form of cialis complaining about how this trip 'hasn't turned out the way he wanted it to.' **I can only guess** that it has **something to do with the fact** that I didn't go out with him the first two nights of our trip, and that I was already asleep both times when he finally made it back to our hotel room at 6am.

24. When marches that size occur and repeated opinion polls show that the majority of Irish people are...emm...utterly, completely, totally opposed to the war, then I think that has to be accepted. The passivity **probably** has **something to do with the fact** that Irish people aren't dying in Iraq.

25. Well, don't you **suppose** it **might possibly** have **something to do with the fact** that in a world one part Deism to two parts pacificism, evil-doers feel free to commit atrocities with utter impunity?

26. Even with the election is over, conservatives cannot let go of their caricature of Obama as a radical leftist who refuses to compromise. This **may** have **something to do with the fact** that many of them are radical rightists who refuse to compromise.

In these examples, irony emerges through an incongruity between the speculative hedging items and the certainty of the negative evaluation. As such, the hedging collocates, along with the 6-gram, echo the examples of multiple hedging outlined in Chapter 5. However, the concordance lines reveal that this is not the only ironic force. As well as these strong negative evaluative utterances, there are also examples of more playful irony. Often, these playful ironic utterances are self-deprecating in illocutionary function. Examples 23 and 26 above have hints of this function, but below are three clearer examples:

27. I did enjoy reading Winter's Passage, although I thought it was a bit short (**probably** got **something to do with the fact** it's an ebook novella :P)

28. They seemed to have remembered the parts about ethical investment particularly well, which **I think** had **something to do with the fact** that my 'super-banking-hero' costume consisted of wearing a pair of bright pink knickers on the outside of my leggings!

29. it's funny how the regular 'lounge users' just know that you're not supposed to be in there, glaring with contempt over the top of their Fin Rev. **Of course**, it **might** have **something to do with the fact** that it's now 7:57am and the third bottle of beer has just entered the urinary tract.

These examples demonstrate that the phrase can be used to frame the various “double-edged” functions of irony outlined by Hutcheon (1994): not only strong evaluation but also self-deprecating inclusiveness. Such variety of functions, including various ironic functions, within this phrase further adds strength to the argument that such phrases can be considered as being ironically primed.

7.2.4 *I thought for a moment*

The final phrase presented here has similarities with the collostructions in Chapter 6, as both include a cognitive verb and emphasise a temporary state. However, this phrase does not have any lexicogrammatical variety. Table 7.6 below outlines the frequency of the n-gram *I thought for a moment* across all four corpora.

	WHPB	PMQ	BNC	enTenTen15
I thought for a moment	-	5 (1.29)	20 (0.18)	349 (0.02)

Table 7.6: Occurrences of signposting phrase *I thought for a moment* across four corpora

Another similarity with the collostructions in Chapter 6 is that the *thought* expressed here is incongruous and often points to ironic evaluation. For example, in the PMQ corpus, all five occurrences have an ironic force. Two examples are presented below.

30. **I thought for a moment** that it was a question about antisocial behaviour orders. I was about to suggest that they might be applied to the Conservative party.

31. **I thought for a moment** the Prime Minister was going to say "Brexit means Brexit" again

The humour arises, perhaps, from the incongruity between the implied temporariness of *for a moment* and the scathing criticism, and so is related to the collostructions of irony in Chapter 6. Also, in example 31, there are further echoes of Kumon-Nakamura et al's (1995) and Utsumi's (2000) failed expectations. Yet irony is not the only function of this phrase. An examination of the 20 concordance lines from the BNC demonstrate its various functions. There are a number of occurrences in which the phrase is independent and does not signpost an evaluative statement such as example 32:

32. **I thought for a moment** and came up with a suggestion

Apart from this, another non-ironic meaning is when it is used to explain a real-time reaction to an event. This has a more descriptive than evaluative pragmatic function. In the BNC, the majority of concordance lines demonstrate this function.

33. He produced a pocket-book and **I thought for a moment** he was going to tip me.

34. **I thought for a moment** that I had come second; I hadn't seen Ben at all. Then I watched the re-run on the screen and saw that I had come third.

The final function which is pertinent to this study mirrors that of the examples from PMQ. When the phrase precedes an evaluative statement, it is most likely ironic in nature. Similar to examples 30 and 31, these evaluations are often strongly negative. Coincidentally, example 36 is a reference from Hansard: the official transcript of parliamentary discourse, and which makes up part of the spoken element of the BNC:

35. I NOTE that Tory candidate Michael Bates has pledged to support a clampdown on drug dealers if he wins the Langbaurgh seat (Echo March 21). **I thought for a moment** he meant the tobacco industry, but realised that when big business and jobs are involved the 100,000 deaths per year counts for nothing.

36. It seems odd that the Prime Minister should use the same words as us. **I thought for a moment** that she had been re-reading" Das Kapital" in her spare time, but I suspect that it was all a charade.

The ironic examples of this phrase seem to be all concerned with political discourse. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the enTenTen15 corpus for similar uses of the phrase.

Within the 349 occurrences from the enTenTen15, we have both political and non-political examples of irony, which still maintain a negative evaluative function (37-40).

37. "That man gives me the creeps. **I thought for a moment** I'd have to dig him out of your cleavage."

38. **I thought for a moment** that when King George II retired from office and Obama got elected, things might go back to the way they once were – when justice didn't mean an automatic bullet to the head

39. **I thought for a moment** I'd entered a time warp reading this article on hydroelectricity! I was also surprised that someone from CEEW would write such an article.

40. No scientific evidence..... it is time for a paradigm shift..... gosh, **I thought for a moment** that they were talking about the creaking mess of neo-darwinism?

The above examples show similar negative evaluation as examples 30-31 from PMQ and 35-36 from BNC. The irony is created through an incongruity of the literal meaning of the

phrase and the strong evaluation of what follows. Non-ironic examples can help to demonstrate the contrast:

41. **I thought for a moment that** the long cat6 between wrt and pc is the cause, but since my upload is still way higher than contract speed that probably ismt true.

In example 41, the phrase is used to express an abandoned thought or idea, and so is in contrast with the ironic examples presented. Therefore, the root of the irony may lie at this incongruity. As such, it is difficult to determine if this particular phrase can be considered an example of an irony factor or an irony marker. Yet this is not typical of the most common uses of this phrase.

In fact, despite the four phrases presented in this chapter being labelled as *markers*, it could be argued that they contain important lexical features which point to *factors* of irony. Although the distinction may not be absolute, the next section will present and examine phrases which clearly demonstrate irony at the lexicogrammatical level.

7.3 Phraseology and ironic priming

This section reconsiders Attardo's idea of irony factors. What distinguishes this section from the previous is that the examples of irony factors here seem to have more identifiable elements of what I refer to as ironic *priming* (taken from Hoey's 2005 broader concept): an idea outlined previously in Section 3.4.3. As mentioned in this section, ironic priming occurs through a number of re-encounters of the phrase within a discourse community and so the irony becomes canonical. I will argue that by examining the frequency of these phrases within the four corpora will not only demonstrate this canonicity but also how they are primed for irony. As above, this will involve an examination of context within the concordance lines.

Priming is an umbrella concept which covers a variety of lexical features. However, it is mostly concerned with how meanings are both formed and reformed. Hoey argued that meanings of words and phrases are in flux. It is through contextual use and reuse of these words and phrases within discourse communities that established meanings can shift and new meanings can develop. Through likely multiple exposure to and reuse within a discourse

community, the phrases presented in this section may be viewed as having developed this ironic priming.

For the theory of priming to have any credence, it means that these examples of irony must not be marked: significant use and reuse of a particular lexicogrammatical item within a discourse community is needed for priming to occur. As outlined in Section 3.2.1, Louw (1993) explored irony using corpus methodology. However, the examples he chose do not have this canonical potential; the novelty of their incongruity remains an important element of their ironic force. Previous chapters have demonstrated that similar patterns of incongruity have significant frequencies within the corpora and so tend to have elements that become somewhat canonical. This idea will continue in the following section in which I make the connection between canonicity and the process of priming.

As priming involves a process of use and reuse within a discourse community, the idea of canonicity is central to the argument that phrases can become ironically primed. The advantage of a corpus study is that the frequency of phrases can be measured. This plays an important part in determining whether these phrases are canonical or not. Along with frequency, another important element of canonicity to be considered is fixedness. Like the example of *something*/*anything to do with the fact*, the ironically primed phrases presented in the following section also show elements of lexical variability, but, on the whole, are reasonably fixed. Therefore, to fully understand these phrases, an understanding of the fixedness is necessary. Once canonicity is established, concordance lines determine the phrases' ironic primings. The following sections outline this process.

7.3.1 *the last time I looked*

The first phrase examined in this section, which is taken from an exchange in the PMQ corpus, clearly demonstrates this idea of canonisation and priming.

42. The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would like to take the opportunity to do what he refused to do two or three weeks ago in this Chamber, which is to stand up and rule out a second referendum.

    Jeremy Corbyn: **The last time I looked** at the Order Paper, it said "Prime Minister's Question Time".

This example shares some similarities with examples of phrasal irony as outlined by Partington (2011; see Section 3.4.1). Firstly, this is an example of negative evaluation: Corbyn is criticising the Prime Minister for asking rather than answering questions. Secondly, at the surface level, this statement is also incongruous and is therefore a phrase which can be exploited ironically: Corbyn may well have not looked at the Order Paper nor is there a need for him to do so. The irony arises not from a clash of positive and negative evaluation but from a clash between a clear and obvious fact (the interchange is taking place during Prime Minister's Question Time) and the supposed 'uncertainty' and hedging by the speaker. Finally, I argue that this phrase has become, in Partington's words (ibid. 1790), a "well-worn canonical" ironic item. This particular phrase is not only imbibed with ironic meaning but the statement itself is also not marked or novel. Within the PMQ corpus, there are 11 occurrences of *the last time I* and 5 of these (including example 42) are followed by the verb *looked*. More importantly, the irony does not emerge because of its uniqueness or markedness: the other occurrences seem to have a similar ironic force, as two examples below illustrate:

43. **The last time I looked**, Cardiff was actually in Wales, the hon. Gentleman says we are taking offices out of Wales and putting them in Cardiff.

44. I asked him whether he was personally in favour of compulsory identity cards. I am opposed to that; he says that it is a matter for Parliament. Well, **the last time I looked** he was a Member of Parliament. Will he be voting for them: yes or no?

These two examples have similarities with both the ironic and negative evaluation of example 42. These negative evaluations are directed towards a clear target and all frame their criticism through an ironic non-evaluative and obvious statement of fact. Not only does the irony seem to be intrinsic to the phrase *the last time I looked*, but this irony appears, within this political discourse environment at least, to be canonical. Furthermore, the irony seems to be contained within the phrase and does not rely on contextual information to be understood. However, these examples are taken from a single corpus, so I will examine occurrences of the phrase within the three other corpora and illustrate whether they are also ironically primed.

The canonicity of the ironic phrase can be determined by comparing it within the other corpora. Initially, the WHPB corpus presents examples which show the non-ironic use

of this phrase. Within the WHPB corpus, there are 5 examples of *the last time I*. Only two occurrences have a similar semantic meaning to the above examples. These two occurrences are taken from one utterance and so are presented together in example 45:

45. they're doing it because they're following the orders of the Republican Leader in Washington, D.C. That's not really a recipe for success, because **the last time I checked** -- and, again, I'm no political expert here -- **but the last time I checked**, the public's view of the Republican leadership in Washington, D.C. is not particularly high. It is not particularly favorable, even among Republicans.

In the above example, there is a similar negative evaluation towards a clear target (the Republican leadership). However, what is different is that the statement of 'fact' following the phrase may be contended or, at the very least, the statement is not as clearly as objective as the occurrences from PMQs. The popularity of a political party is more open to subjective interpretation than, say, the geographical location of a Welsh town in example 43.

However, there are two important points to make which may help to determine when this phrase demonstrates an ironic force. Firstly, what differentiates example 45 from the previous examples is that the phrase *the last time I checked* precedes an evaluative statement. In examples 42-44, *the last time I looked* precedes objective statements of fact. It may be that the ironic meaning is only confidently identified in this way. From the concordance lines, it cannot be ascertained with confidence whether example 45 is ironic or not. Certainly. there are multiple examples of hedging within the utterance. Indeed, the phrase under consideration may be considered itself as an example of hedging. Furthermore, there are qualifiers such as *not really* and *not particularly*, as well as statements such as *I'm no political expert*. This may be a press secretary trying to avoid implicating the president in a political argument. Yet, as argued previously, this overt hedging may also be a signal of irony. Similarly, I would argue that it is fair to say that the press secretary for the Obama administration may be considered a 'political expert' and so this may be a tongue-in-cheek claim. As such, it is not entirely clear whether this utterance is ironic without a clearer context of the environment in which it was uttered. In fact, there is no recorded laughter in the transcripts. Nevertheless, these possible caveats can be further explored in more general corpora, along with variations on fixedness.

The BNC has very few examples of the n-gram. There are only 219 occurrences of *the last time*, with only one occurrence of *the last time I checked* as an adverbial phrase. However, the example is clearly ironic in the same vein as previous examples:

46. 'Are you one of the scientists?' asked Endill, cautiously returning to where he had dropped his ironing-board. 'I was **the last time I checked**,' nodded the man.

Although this example seems to reflect the canonically ironic force of the phrase, it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions with the paucity of the data. There are more significant results in the larger general corpora.

In the enTenTen15, there are 20,145 occurrences of *the last time I*. Furthermore, *checked* is the 4th most common collocation with a t-score of 32.24, and *looked* is the 7th most common (t-score 21.52) in the +1 slot. These frequencies and t-scores both seem to suggest that these phrases are somewhat well-used and therefore canonical. A closer inspection of the concordance lines determines whether the function of these utterances is comparable to the above ironic examples.

A 200-concordance line sample of *the last time I checked* was taken and examined in more detail. It is fair to argue that a significant number do have a similar ironic meaning. However, it is important to note that this is not the only function of the phrase: there seems to be three clear functions which will be outlined individually. Firstly, the phrase has a non-ironic function in which the phrase refers to an actual event in the past:

47. It ought to be possible to do so, but **the last time I checked**, the account removal link was invalid.

48. it will not break the bank because **the last time I checked** on eBay I could get a new one for $58 USD.

This first group does not appear to have any meaning above the semantic word level and the phrase has no non-literal illocutionary function. The second group is also non-ironic, yet differ in the fact that they have a rhetorical force. The phrase is used to frame facts or

evidence, yet the force is more closely linked to hedging rather than ironic rhetoric. Examples 49-50 demonstrate this second illocutionary function:

49. we are threatening to start World War III because Russia is trying to control the chaos in a failed state on its border -- a state that our own government spooks provoked into failure? **The last time I checked**, there was a list of countries that the USA had sent troops, armed ships, and aircraft into recently, and for reasons similar

50. the idea that Johnson, Nixon, Ford, David Rockefeller-supporter Carter (still a member of the Bretton Woods Committee **the last time I checked** [BWC is the lobbyist group for the international super-rich[), Reagan, the Bush boys, the Clintons, etc., were somehow the people of choice is truly stupefying

These two examples are examples of a rhetorical point and yet the phrase in question does not directly frame this point but rather provides supporting evidence. Therefore, the phrase serves as a qualifying function to its evidence. The third group differ from the second in that it is the phrase itself which frames the rhetorical point. Two examples are presented below:

51. Yes, Gore's science is a travesty, but **the last time I checked** how many earths we have I still came up with only one.

52. The constitution validates my rights to bear arms for protection. **The last time I checked**, this was still OUR country and not the government's.

What these examples have in common is that both are pointing out an undeniable fact rather than providing supporting evidence. Also, these undeniable facts are central to a rhetoric argument and, as a result, the pattern *the last time I checked* uses irony to produce an illocutionary force to this rhetoric. It seems that irony emerges through a subversion of the hedging function of the second group demonstrated by examples 51 and 52. Again, similar to Chapter 5, hedging proves to be a potent source of irony. What is different here is that it is not a syntactic construction of multiple hedging but a set phrase which seems to be manipulated for ironic purposes. Admittedly, this phrase is not completely fixed: there are a number of closely related variations. Utilising the enTenTen15 corpus, the following section

will subsequently outline the variability of this phrase and demonstrate that ironic priming occurs in all variants.

Initially, the synonymous phrase *the last time I looked* has 466 occurrences in the enTenTen15 corpus, but these can also be divided into three clear meaning groups as per the above phrase. From the 466 concordance lines, there are identifiable examples of the phrase being used literally, such as the below example:

53. As the priest put the blanket over Meggy's face, **the last time I looked** at my daughter's face and her physical body, she looked so beautiful.

However, this literal function is uncommon. The majority of concordance lines demonstrate that the phrase has an illocutionary function related to hedging. There are examples in which the hedging function is literal, such as:

54. as you know, the administration has been hostile to increasing production of fossil fuels which, **the last time I looked**, we were importing sixty percent of our needs.

55. There's an option to buy an unlimited access license, but, **the last time I looked**, this was prohibitively expensive even at charity pricing.

Yet importantly, there are further examples of the phrase used for an ironic and rhetorical function. Again, these examples often express similar political viewpoints:

56. Re growth,no matter how it is measured – **The last time I looked** we live on a finite planet.

57. America is a country under God and New York is in America **the last time I looked** at a map.

58. And **the last time I looked**, there is nothing in a democracy that said its citizens cannot "focus" on an issue of relatively lower importance.

Based on the data from the corpora, it is fair to argue that *the last time I checked/looked* has an intrinsic ironic function at the phraseological level and that this ironic meaning is often used to frame evaluative utterances. Certainly, this ironic function is not the only function of this phrase: as discussed, an ironic utterance can only be ironic through an incongruity with a

surface meaning. Nevertheless, within the enTenTen15 corpus ironic uses of the phrase are frequent and this may point to the phrase having an ironic priming.

This ironic priming means that the phrase can be syntactically manipulated but still maintain an ironic force. To demonstrate this, there are a number of occurrences of *the last time I looked* which seem to have an evaluative force but a slightly different function to the examples above. Examples 59 to 63 demonstrate such an evaluative force, but with subtle differences:

59. I am very mired in the digital world, and to be honest I often forget that the print world exists. I don't **remember the last time I looked** at a physical newspaper

60. Now I often struggle to **remember the last time I looked** at a tree. I mean looked at a tree. Properly.

61. I miss that feeling of being excited to hear a favourite band and I can't **remember the last time I looked** up a gig guide to see who was playing – I wouldn't even know any of the names these days anyway.

62. It is also difficult to imagine life being more complicated than either being on watch or off watch. I cannot **remember the last time I looked** at my phone, set an alarm or wore shoes – bliss!

63. This study is much needed at this exact time. God never fails to astound me with his timing. I'm trying to **remember the last time I looked** forward to homework this much?????

An important difference with the examples presented above and previous examples 56-58 is that the evaluation here is rather more self-reflective. All examples point to explaining a life change or a shift in situation or perspective. There is also variety in the evaluation: examples 59 to 61 are negative evaluations whereas 62 and 63 are positive. None of these have the biting ironic criticism of the examples presented previously, yet they do have a somewhat playful exaggerated irony and have similarities with Kumon-Nakamura et al's (1995) and Utsumi's (2000) idea of failed expectations. However, an examination of the concordance lines reveals greater possibilities of variation. Syntactically, all of these examples have the

collocate *remember* in the -1 position, so a greater analysis of this longer phrase was conducted.

There are 1579 occurrences of the 5-gram *remember the last time I* in the enTenTen15 corpus. There does not seem to be any standout collocates in the +1 slot, unlike for example the collocates *checked* and *looked* above. This seems to suggest that this phrase is used in a wide variety of situations and these situations have similarities to the variations presented previously. Similar with the other phrases presented, this is also used literally, such as the example below:

64. I can't **remember the last time I** had been to a zoo. After the zoo we went to check in at the second hostel in Vejle

Yet there are also numerous examples of the phrase used to frame an evaluative utterance. These evaluations can be both positive and negative but this phrase is used to ironically exaggerate these evaluations. Examples 65-68 illustrate the range of prosody of this particular phrase:

65. I **can't remember the last time I** ran a project that didn't come with some associated bad news attached to it. One where I never had to deliver some negative news to my customer or senior management. Oh wait, yes I can... NEVER!

66. just because an alien race might be descended from a feline progenitor doesn't mean that they all have to behave like some form of Earth cat: we're descended from monkeys, but I honestly **can't remember the last time I** threw my faeces at anybody

67. I drink an overpriced smoothie, which I bought because it boasted more than ten vegetables and I **can't remember the last time I** ate anything green

68. The publishers of Woolyhoodwinks vs. The Dark Patch sent me a review copy a few weeks ago, and y'all. I **cannot remember the last time I** fell so hard for a work of children's literature!

In all these examples, there is an evaluative element and of the four, only example 68 can be considered wholly positive. Yet, in contrast with most examples of ironic understatement

presented in this chapter, all have in common a sense of playful exaggeration which contributes to the evaluative force. Although this function differences from the examples presented above, the data suggest that the core of the phrase *the last time I* contains an ironic priming as it is commonly utilised within the enTenTen15 corpus.

The above examples demonstrate how ironic priming can affect a particular phrase and its variations. However, this priming is not a singular occurrence as this is not the only phrase from the DIY corpora which exhibits an ironic priming. To demonstrate, the following two sub-sections present examples that can be seen as ironically primed. Firstly, I present a pair of utterances which appear to be opposite in meaning but seem to have the same rhetorical function. The second section (7.3.3) outlines a group of self-checking questions which are often used rhetorically or humorously in evaluative utterances. What these two sections show is that ironic priming can occur with a variety of illocutionary functions.

7.3.2 *SAY a lot about / for*

As mentioned, irony is often an important element of evaluation and prosody: most ironic phrases have a positive or negative prosodic element. One such phrase is within the PMQ corpus. A search of *SAY a lot* in the PMQ corpus reveals 5 concordance lines. A further examination of the concordance lines identifies two examples of positive prosody and two examples of negative prosody. One example of each is presented below:

69. That is not something that everyone expected, but **it says a lot about** our country and our people, and is great for the Paralympics.

70. The fact that he and his party oppose the measures **says a lot more about** them than it does about us, when we are trying to help people who are fed up with hooligans

As there is an equal number of examples of both positive and negative evaluations, it is fair to argue that this utterance has an evaluative, if overall neutral prosodic force within this discourse environment. The same search yields 119 occurrences in the BNC general corpus, allowing for not only a greater examination of the fixedness of the phrase but also its semantic prosody. To narrow the search, I looked at concordance lines of *SAY a lot* with the

collocates *about* (BNC 29 occurrences, t-score: 5.35) and *for* (20 occurrences, t-score: 4.28) in the +1 position. Table 7.7 outlines the semantic prosody of the two extended phrases:

	SAY a lot about	*SAY a lot for*
Positive	4	12
Negative	12	7
Neutral / Unknown	13	1

Table 7.7: Semantic prosodies of two phrases in the BNC corpus

There are initial observations of the two phrases which may influence their potential for irony. Firstly, this table reveals two distinctions between the phrases. Firstly, a significant number (45%) of concordance lines of *say a lot about* have no clear prosodic meaning. This does not seem to be the case for *say a lot for*. Secondly, there seems to be a divergence in the prosody between the two phrases. *SAY a lot about* is used more commonly in negative evaluative statements, whereas, although the degree of difference is less significant, *SAY a lot for* is more common in positive statements. Despite a limited number of examples, this may help to understand the semantic prosody of these two phrases. Similarly, it also illustrates how semantic prosody can be identified at the phrasal level. There are also numerous examples of irony which play with the semantic prosody of the phrase. These are divided into three groups, each discussed below.

The first group is connected with Louw's (1993) argument that incongruity of collocation between positive and negative semantic prosodic lexical items can cause irony. Similar incongruencies with phrases can be seen in the example below:

71. **It says a lot for** the quality of the football when Vinnie Jones, inevitably booked against his old club for backchat after 29 minutes, looks the best player on view.

Based in the concordance lines in the BNC, it could be argued that a positive semantic prosody is perhaps more prevalent in *says a lot for* as the phrase more often continues with a positive quality: examples of positive attributes such as *prowess, stamina and efficiency* are more frequent than negative ones. Furthermore, in example 71, we can see an exploitation of

this positive prosody. It is when the phrase signposts a negative evaluation, that its ironic force emerges. Example 71 is not unique: below is a similar ironic utterance:

72. **It says a lot about** the quality of US diplomatic thinking that the Americans were flattered to be put on the same level as the Soviet rulers.

Similar observations were made by Partington, Duguid and Taylor (2013: 119) who found contrasts of prosody between the positive phrase *[much / a lot / a great deal] to be said for* and the negative noun phrase which it signposted. This contrast of prosody also created an ironic force. However, despite the ironic examples presented above, it is difficult to argue that this phrase itself has a clear ironic priming. The majority of examples of *says a lot about* are followed by a neutral noun: examples include *Spurs, cricket, relations* and *a country*. Therefore, irony is only formed from a positive noun phrase such as *quality of US diplomatic thinking.* Although the irony is not an intrinsic part of the phrase such as with *the last time I looked*, it can effectively signpost irony when used in this manner. Therefore, it is the priming of the phrase as a positive prosody which lends itself to ironic utterances. This also goes some way to explaining the second group of ironic utterances which use this phrase.

The second group can be illustrated in the below examples. The first is from BNC and the second is from enTenTen15:

73. It took me all of 18 months to figure out what was going on, **which says a lot about** me.

74. I remember as being very early in the morning, but after looking back in my diary I see was actually at 2:30 (**which says a lot about** my relationship with the morning)

In both of these examples, the phrase forms a relative clause which functions as an evaluative adjunct. The form of this relative clause creates an offhand evaluative comment which adds to the pragmatic ironic force of the utterance. There is no clear prosodic quality that features in examples 71 and 72, so I argue that the grammatical construction of the utterance adds to the ironic force. Furthermore, examples 73 and 74 have a negative semantic prosody but are self-directed. This adds to the humour by creating a self-effacing ironic utterance. So overall, irony is created through a number of factors: including structural and contextual.

The final group which may have a significant ironic force is concerned with the phrase in the negative form. Similar to the examples above, in the BNC there is a self-directed ironic utterance which uses the phrase in the negative:

75. I know perfectly well Croxford is a crummy school, but it suits me and I suit it, which **doesn't say a lot** for either of us.

It is in the negative form of this phrase in which the ironic force more clearly emerges. Notably, the meaning of the phrase in the negative is not pragmatically opposite of the phrase in the positive. It still maintains that evaluative force and yet is wholly negative. To demonstrate further, example 76 is from the WHPB corpus.

76. I've been in this town 25 years, probably watched State of the Unions for 30 -- which **doesn't say a lot** -- (laughter) -- for my viewing habits

There are important similarities between examples 75 and 76 which demonstrate the ironic force of the utterance. In example 76, the phrase creates laughter in the audience (the members of the press' paralinguistic response is recorded in the transcripts) and, notably, this laughter occurs before the speaker completes the utterance. This seems to suggest that the ironic force is contained within the phrase itself and the external context *for my viewing habits* is not needed to trigger a laughter response. Certainly, these are individual examples, so it is important to compare with wider general corpora to gauge if the ironic priming is consistent.

Using the enTenTen15 corpus, two phrases which are similar in meaning, were examined. There are 13,768 occurrences of *SAY much* and 12,847 occurrences of *SAY a lot.* Two collocational searches were made to identify the pertinent phrases. As with many phrases, there is some flexibility in their make-up and so it is difficult to use corpus software to directly pinpoint examples. As such, a CQL search was conducted with Table 7.8 outlining the CQL searches along with their frequencies.

[lemma="which"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="lot"]	38
[lemma="which"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="much"]	338
[lemma="it"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="lot"]	45
[lemma="it"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="much"]	690
[lemma="that"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="lot"]	100
[lemma="that"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2} [lemma="much"]	1130

Table 7.8: Frequencies of CQL searches (enTenTen15)

The CQL searches reveal there is some variety in the phrase, while still keeping the evaluative force. This variety covers both tense choice and syntactic structure. Examples 77 and 78 demonstrate variations of tense:

77. Find out what your choice of type actually says about you. Okay, maybe **it doesn't say a whole lot about** you

78. If it is passed, I will never vote in a future election for anyone who signs it. **That's not saying a whole lot** admittedly, because most (if not all) of the people who will sign it will be Democrats.

Despite the difference in tense, these two examples have the same illocutionary force. The irony emerges from an incongruity between a supposed self-correction (indicated by the use of *okay, maybe* and *admittedly*) and the continuation of the evaluative function.

Also, these two examples demonstrate two key syntactic structures of the phrase. In example 77, the phrase has an introductory function in which the object of the sentence is the target of evaluation. This is similar to the examples presented above. These patterns are usually preceded by *for* or *about*. Example 78 demonstrates how a relative clause can also be used as a comment. This relative clause is non-defining and is often presented as a complete and separate sentence. In these examples, the phrase is mostly preceded with *that* or *which*, as Table 7.8 demonstrates. As a result, the target of the evaluative phrase is in the preceding utterance.

These two differences tend to be connected. If we look at the 338 examples of the CQL [lemma="which"] []{0,4} [lemma="not"] []{0,2} [lemma="say"] []{0,2}

[lemma="much"], it is evident that the majority of occurrences of the pattern are in the continuous tense, similar to the below example:

79. Believe it or not, the much-hyped collaboration with T-Pain on Graduation is honestly one of the weaker songs on the album, although it's arguably the best T-Pain collaboration, **which really isn't saying much**

This demonstrates that this pattern tends to have two clear discoursal functions: as both an introductory phrase for an evaluative statement and a relative clause which is also used to evaluate. In both structures, however, numerous examples from the corpora (such as 77-78) demonstrate that the ironic priming remains.

The next section explores other possible examples of ironic priming. However, these differ in the fact that they are ironically primed questions. The irony priming means that such questions are often rhetorical in function.

7.3.3 Questions and ironic priming

As outlined earlier, there are illocutionary differences between the two political corpora and these differences often elicit variations in irony use. Questions to the Prime Minister sessions are predominantly combative and so the irony tends to also be combative and exclusionary. In White House Press Briefings, the atmosphere is often tense but polite, and irony is a useful tool to break this tension. This section will demonstrate how this plays out with self-checking questions. It will then go on to highlight examples of how such questions become ironically primed by exploring them within the two general corpora.

In PMQ there are 37 occurrences of the 2-gram *am I*, compared with 31 in WHPB. Looking at the concordance lines reveals that this is often used as a self-checking question (see examples below). Although similar in frequency, there is an overall discrepancy in the illocutionary function between the two corpora. This discrepancy is related to the differences in linguistic environment previously mentioned. Example 80 from WHPB and example 81 from PMQ are representative of this discrepancy:

80. But **am I wrong** in reading that as a little bit of a push?

81. What contribution did the right hon. Gentleman make to tougher sentencing the other day? He has now said that he rules out a mandatory life sentence for murder. **Am I right, or am I wrong?**

Example 80 demonstrates the softening or hedging function of the question. This face-saving strategy is important to maintain cooperation. In Questions to the Prime Minister sessions, such cooperation is eschewed. Therefore, self-checking questions have a clear ironic force, and are frequently used to emphasise an attack on the opposition. In examples 82 and 83, also taken from PMQ, this incongruity is clear:

82. That is why we introduced specialist schools and excellence in cities. The city academies that the right hon. Gentleman now appears to be opposing [Interruption.] **Am I right in that?** So the right hon. Gentleman is not opposed to specialist schools, he is not opposed to city academies and he does not want to return to selection. I think that he should cross the Floor.

83. if we are trading inconsistencies on Europe, I think he is the man who voted for the Maastricht treaty, is he not? And I think he actually voted against a referendum on the Maastricht treaty, **am I right?** Something about glasshouses and stones comes to mind.

Both of these examples are clearly ironic. In example 82, there is an incongruity of mock-surprise and in example 83, there are echoes of multiple hedging and incongruity between vagueness and certainty. However, in these cases, the context creates the irony and there is little about these self-checking questions which can be considered examples of ironic priming. Therefore, in order to uncover possible examples of ironically primed self-checking questions, the two wider general corpora were utilised.

7.3.3.i *am I right or am I right?*

In the enTenTen15 corpus, there are 115 occurrences of *am I right or*. Of these, 32 occurrences (28%) are the ironic 7-gram *am I right or am I right*. This humorously incongruous phrase (notably the repetition of *am I right*) may be an example of what Hoey (2005: 169-70) refers to as "language that surprises" through a *priming conflict*, although the

frequency of the phrase suggests that it has become somewhat canonical in a discourse community: in fact, it is referenced in a number of online dictionaries[24]. Although one can only speculate on this process without a diachronic corpus data set, it is fair to argue that Hoey's concept of lexical priming is a reasonable explanation. An examination of the concordance lines reveals that the phrase seems to have a variety of functions.

84. Don't be a tree-hugger Ed: be the tough guy with a better plan than Osborne but FFS steer clear of ever getting bogged down in what the plan is. I mean, **am I right or am I right ?**

85. Layers of clothing are being shed, revealing the scaly, dry, ondol-induced skin conditions of winter. (**Am I right or am I right ?** Ugh!)

86. Halfway through the war, the Chinese government engaged the Japanese forces in a dialogue, in which both sides lied their pants - or should I say kimonos, **am I right or am I right ?** har har - off.

In example 84, there is a strong evaluative force. This is clearly negative yet in the 115 examples, there are a number of positive evaluative utterances which also echo the illocutionary force. Often, these phrases have an inclusionary nature, attempting to create *amiable communities* (Booth 1974: 28, Hutcheon 1994: 54-55). This is in contrast with examples 81-83 from PMQ. In examples 84-86, the target of the evaluation and the audience to which the phrase is addressed are different. As Hutcheon (ibid) notes, this irony can create a colluding effect of an "amiable community" between the speaker and audience. This is most clearly expressed in Example 85 in which the speaker is directly inviting the audience to share in the evaluation. Example 86 points to a rather different illocutionary force: to draw attention to a(n ironically?) bad joke. Overall, it is fair to argue that this particularly incongruous 7-gram serves a number of illocutionary functions related to irony, and can be viewed as a clear example of ironic priming.

7.3.3.ii *am I the only (one)?*

The final ironically primed 4-gram presented is similar to the above in that it is framed as a question. Furthermore, not only is the question rhetorical but there is also an

[24] https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/am+I+right+or+am+I+right

incongruity in illocutionary functions: from serious to playful. There are no examples of this question in the two political corpora, yet the similar characteristics it shares with the above question are justification for its inclusion. Table 7.9 outlines the frequencies in the two general corpora:

	BNC	enTenTen15
am I the only	11 (0.1 per million)	3397 (0.22 per million)

Table 7.9: Frequency of *am I the only* across two general corpora

Across the two corpora there are a significant number of occurrences of this 4-gram. Indeed, the frequency of the pattern in the enTenTen15 corpus is twice as high as the BNC. As discussed, this may be due to the differences in discourse environments between the two corpora. Although both are general, the enTenTen15 corpus is comprised of data from the Internet. As a result, there are a great number of blog writings and often these blogs are opinion based. Tables 7.10 and 7.11 demonstrate the most common noun object collocates of the above phrase across the two corpora.

		Occurrences
am I the only	one	5
	person	5
	guy	1

Table 7.10: Noun object collocates of *am I the only* in BNC corpus (+1 : +3 range)

		Occurrences
am I the only	one	2694
	person	328
	guy	16
	fan	8
	girl	8
	idiot	7
	reader	7
	man	7
	human	6
	mother	5
	American	5

Table 7.11: Noun object collocates of *am I the only* in enTenTen15 corpus (+1 - +3 range)

The collocates reveal a consistency across the two corpora. The majority of examples of this pattern use *one* or *person*. The sheer number of occurrences in the enTenTen15 reveal other collocates but these are not hugely significant for this study and will only be mentioned in passing in the following analysis.

As with most of these phrases, there is a duality of meaning. In the example here, there is a duality between a genuine question or enquiry and a rhetorical statement. As mentioned, the duality is important if the utterance is to have an ironic force. If we look at the eleven examples from the BNC, the division between genuine enquiry and rhetorical or comedic statements is almost even. The breakdown is in Table 7.12:

Non-rhetoric	Rhetoric	Humorous
5	4	2

Table 7.12: Illocutionary functions of the occurrences of *am I the only* in BNC

Although this categorisation is subjective, examining the wider context of the concordance lines makes it possible to determine the illocutionary effect with a reasonable degree of confidence. To demonstrate this, examples 87 and 88 highlight the difference in patterns between the non-rhetoric and rhetoric illocutionary force:

87. Now, am **am I the only person** to whom a lot of this is news?

88. **am I the only person** that thinks Sharpe is the most over-rated piece of crap ever to have pulled on a red shirt

In both examples, the pattern signposts a defining relative clause. However, in the rhetoric example 88, the defining relative clause contains a cognitive verb. Similar examples include *feels* and *finds*. In this illocutionary purpose, the use of the *am I the only* pattern seems to emphasise the rhetorical force contained within the relative clause.

However, these are only generalisations and there are exceptions which do not reflect these patterns. In Table 7.12, two examples were identified as ‘humorous’. These are both presented below:

89. Poor old Fairclough!! **Am I the only one** who still thinks hes alright ; -)

90. I was playing Frankie Goes to Hollywood (**am I the only one** who bought their second LP?) very loudly on Armstrong's in-cab sound system.

In example 89 there is a use of a cognitive verb. We can recognise the humour with the use of the emoji (;-)), implying that the speaker's positive appraisal of Fairclough (in this context, a poorly performing footballer) is not completely genuine. In example 90, there is no cognitive verb. Yet there is a self-deprecating humour in that the speaker is implying that they were among the very few people who bought this second LP. These two humorous and ironic examples demonstrate the two patterns mentioned above, showing that no hard or fast rule can be applied to determine if the utterance is ironic or not.

These findings are echoed in the enTenTen15 corpus, in which a 200-line random sample of *am I the only one* was examined. However, with a wider range of occurrences, a number of further functions appear. The first is closely related to example 90 above. The phrase is used to frame a humorously self-deprecating statement rather than a genuine enquiry. Two examples are presented.

91. Back on line after a dodgy day of thunder and lightning that has, in the past, played havoc with my barbed-wire connection. Still dial-up, { **am I the only one?**}

92. **Am I the only one** who can never remember how to spell quiche? Whenever I am looking online to look up a new recipe, it always takes me a few tries before Google figures out what I'm asking for.

This particular function is echoed in the 7 occurrences of the phrase used with the collocate *idiot* and 6 with the collocate *human*. Of course, through these particular collocates, the self-deprecating function becomes clearer, as these two examples demonstrate:

93. So, anyone out there going to a midnight sale of the newest Harry Potter book, or **am I the only idiot** out here in the blogosphere?

94. I'm continually in love with the crap camera in my cheap Nokia cell phone. (**am I the only human being** left on the planet without a smart phone?)

The collocates mark the self-deprecation of the utterances: it reinforces the 'idiocy' or solitude of the speakers' positions. Therefore, the majority of these examples seem to have a humorous illocutionary effect. Although, as with many examples, determining illocutionary effects can be difficult as forces may blend and categories are not clearly determined. For example, in 94 (as well as examples 87 and 88 from the BNC), it could be argued that the self-deprecation is ironic and that the speaker is, in fact, reaffirming their position and self-aggrandising. The examples below echo this:

95. There is no resistance. No apparent challenge or backlash. **Am I the only one** who is bothered by this?

96. " **Am I the only one** who does not feel offended by the new Spotify privacy policy?" asked Kostas Livieratos. "It just serves a better experience, wtf people?"

This is another illocutionary function which emerges from the larger enTenTen15 corpus: distinguishing the speaker from others. The irony emerges as the question is rhetoric.

The final function which can be identified in the enTenTen15 corpus is signposting unusual or unique observations. As such, there is no ironic illocutionary force in these utterances but rather the phrase marks the unusuality of such observations. There are two examples presented:

97. Beautiful, but **am I the only one** who hears Princess Zelda's theme in that?

98. **am I the only one** to find hinduist elements in his/her speech?

This function is not as common as the others. Table 7.13 is a summary of the occurrences of each illocutionary effect in the random sample of 200 in the enTenTen15 corpus and demonstrates that the numbers are far less:

Rhetoric/evaluation negative	60
Enquiry	32
Observation	33
Self-aggrandising / gloating	27
Self-deprecation	21
Rhetoric/evaluation positive	13
Unknown	14

Table 7.13: Identified illocutionary functions of the phrase *am I the only one* (enTenTen15 corpus random sample = 200)

As demonstrated with example 94, it is important to note that the distinctions between each of the groupings is often fuzzy. If we take the examples of self-aggrandising and gloating, often there is an evaluative force (both positive and negative) to the self-aggrandisement. For example:

99. Why **am I the only one** who seems to care that someone is dead?

100. Sorry guys, but **am I the only one** who finds this thread .... amusing? There is literally three or four guys stressing over the issue that is so small...

In the above examples, we can also see a split in terms of the seriousness of ironic force and evaluation. Example 99 is clearly an ironic rhetorical question, with a strong negative evaluation. Yet there is little or no humour in this irony. Example 100 is also ironic but rather more light-hearted. There is still a negative evaluation, despite the positive adjective *amusing*: echoing the examples of multiple hedging in Chapter 5. These examples tell us two important things. Firstly, identifying connections between phrases and their illocutionary force can be challenging as these forces can often blend. Secondly, it is also worth emphasising that evaluation is certainly an important force of this question and so its ironic priming can also be viewed as significant.

The importance of evaluation as an illocutionary force of this n-gram can be seen in other examples. As only 32.5% of the uses of the phrase frame an enquiry or observation, this table seems to demonstrate that the phrase has a more significant rhetoric illocutionary force. Furthermore, many of these observations are humorous and are therefore not literal observations. For example:

101. **Am I the only one** to spot yet that Jean Todt's sweater has finally removed itself from him, and found a new host body in Schmui?

102. **am I the only one** who sees the humor in Karl Rove going "dove" hunting?

Therefore, the evaluative illocutionary force can be determined as more significant than the literal meaning. This may also be due to priming within the language community. This makes the particular phrase similar to the others presented in this chapter.

Finally, the examples classified as unknown fall into two categories. One group are examples that are difficult to decipher. The majority of these resemble computer programming language. For example:

103. An cell in to the problem first-person strain franchise, Size of Good Battery. **Am I the only one** . unearth C Alexander system32

Secondly, there are a number of examples which could be classified as miscellaneous and do not fit neatly into any of the above categories of function. Example 63 is one of these.

104. And while I'm here - **am I the ONLY one** to notice that, mere DAYS after I discussed my plan for A Million Ukeleles, Mr Tony Blair was seen clutching THAT VERY SAME INSTRUMENT? Coincidence? I THINK NOT.

This seems to have an amusing illocutionary force and so could be argued as being ironic. However, there are elements of observation, enquiry and negative evaluation which make it difficult to classify with confidence, Also, without a more robust context, it is difficult to specifically determine such concordance lines. Examples like this, however, are rather in the minority.

The examples of ironically primed questions in Section 7.3.3 seem to point to the relationship between irony and rhetorical questions. The phrases presented here often frame rhetorical questions which have an evaluative illocutionary force. When these questions are evaluative, it seems that they also have a high tendency to be ironic. This fits into the type of irony emerging from incongruity of pragmatic force, illustrated in Table 4.2 and Appendix 3A and 3B. Of course, it could be argued that all rhetorical questions are ironic, as all demonstrate pragmatic incongruity. However, like many of the examples presented in the three results chapters, the patterns presented here occur more frequently in ironic rhetorical

questions rather than genuine enquiries. This further demonstrates not only the connection between phraseology and pragmatics, but also incongruity and irony.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented examples of fixed and semi-fixed phrases which often carry an ironic force. These phrases have been divided into those which can be considered as ironic markers, namely phrases which point to or frame irony, and ironic factors, those phrases which contain irony intrinsically. This categorisation is taken from Attardo (2000). Both factors and markers can arguably be viewed as possible examples of how ironic priming can affect the pragmatic force of some n-grams and p-frames. Using Hoey's theory as a foundation, this chapter makes the claim for priming of irony to also occur through use and re-use of certain phrases within a discourse community. Because of their strong evaluative function and incongruity, the patterns presented in this chapter demonstrate a high degree of such priming. This concept of lexical priming can also most likely be applied to both examples of multiple hedging and the colligational phrases in the previous two chapters.

Consequently, the area of irony explored here differs from the previous two chapters. The examples presented in this chapter were first identified in the two DIY corpora and then investigated in the two general corpora. Identification of such ironically primed n-grams is rather subjective and it is difficult to apply automated corpus methodology to obtain further examples. There are important implications of this in terms of irony detection and NLP. These implications will be discussed in the following chapter, along with further wider discussion of the results in Chapters 5 to 7.

Chapter 8: Implications and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 to 7 each focused on a different aspect of corpus linguistic methodology to explore ironic utterances at the lexicogrammatical level: the use of multiple hedging, collostructions which frame irony, and the ironic priming of certain set phrases. In this chapter, I will reflect on the results from these three chapters and outline some important linguistic implications. Much of this importance is concerned with linguistic investigation into using machine detection for irony. The findings of the previous three chapters may be able to contribute to the success of such machine detection. In order to explain such possibilities, this chapter will first provide an overview of the literature concerning machine detection of irony, and then evaluate how the findings of this study may fit into this area of research. I will argue that despite the advances in Natural Language Processing (NLP), it is rather difficult to automate the process of irony identification at this stage. As outlined in this study, a particular problem for identifying irony is its complex and amorphous nature and function.

Despite this, I also argue that the results from these three chapters could prove fruitful in developing automatic irony detection within certain contexts. The reason for this is that there is a common element which runs through the analysis in Chapters 5-7 and is reflected in many pragmatic interpretations of irony. Lexicogrammatical features of irony reveal themselves through marked incidents of incongruity. As incongruity of over- or understatement regarding a hedging illocutionary force is often the key to the irony, this is particularly relevant for examples of multiple hedging in Chapter 5, and collostructions in Chapter 6. Therefore, at its core, this demonstration will focus on how lexicogrammatical incongruity is a key for exploitation of corpora to aid machine detection of irony. However, the findings in Chapters 5-7 do not equally lend themselves to machine detection: the phenomenon of multiple hedging would likely be the most straightforward to apply to machine detection, whereas ironically primed utterances may well prove the most difficult.

The final part of this chapter will suggest ways in which these findings can be incorporated into NLP detection of irony. This will involve a re-examination of the ironic framework in light of the findings from the three previous chapters.

8.2 Machine detection of irony

The purpose of this section is to outline the established literature on machine detection of irony in order to suggest how this study may be able to contribute. As Chapter 2 highlighted, the majority of linguistic studies into irony have focused on its pragmatic features and illocutionary effects. It therefore may appear fruitless to develop machine detection of irony at the textual level. Indeed, there has been a lack of focus on irony at the lexicogrammatical level, with studies often making little more than observational asides to a particular lexicogrammatical pattern which seems to have ironic characteristics. Because of this, utilising machine detection into irony proves challenging and therefore such attempts are few. One rare example which is similar to this investigation would be Moon's (2008) observation that the pattern *about as* ADJ *as* often signals an ironic intent. This example is encouraging for the incorporation of lexicogrammatical features presented here.

In Moon's pattern, lexicogrammatical incongruity occurs through the collostruction of the hedging lexical item *about* with the comparative construction *as ADJ as*, and between the adjective and the noun which follows the construction. There are clear parallels with Duguid's (2009: 290) observations regarding the 3-gram hedging phrase *a sort of*, which is used to signpost evaluative statements. The lexicogrammatical phenomena presented here is also, ostensibly, a hedging item and yet it also has an intensifying illocutionary force when used in this pattern. Moon's observation was investigated through corpus methods by Hao and Veale (2010) who noted that the pattern still requires some creative exploitation by the ironist: the utterance in which this pattern frames needs to have an evaluative function. Hao and Veale (ibid. 642ff.) applied the ironic p-frame to an experiment in machine detection of irony with significant success: they found that 76% of observed occurrences of *about as x as* had an ironic force. The results from this study echo this as I have demonstrated the complexity of both form and function of irony. Rather, Hao and Veale advocate, computation linguists should investigate forms that are "susceptible to computational analysis" (ibid.). This seems to be a reasonable approach to a linguistic approach to irony, and I have argued that forms of irony identified in this study can be considered worthy of such analysis. This

belief is carefully tempered by Hao and Veale's wise observation that it is "unrealistic to seek a computational silver bullet for irony" (ibid. 638) and so such forms can only point to a certain kind of ironic utterance.

Hao and Veale are not the only linguists who have investigated the possibility of using NLP and computational methods in order to develop automatic irony detection. Nor are they the only linguists who have highlighted the difficulty of such an endeavour. In fact, the majority of research into automatic irony detection has attempted to consolidate a number of linguistic features in their algorithm to increase the probability of successful detection. Much of this corpus-based research has used Twitter as a source of ironic and non-ironic utterances (including but not limited to Reyes et al 2012; Reyes et al 2013; Barbieri and Saggion 2014; de Freitas et al 2014; Farias et al 2016; Van Hee et al 2018; Sykora et al 2020). There are parallels with this study in regard to the reasoning behind the choice of corpus. Similar to how laughter as a common response to irony in both the PMQ and WHPB corpora points to an objective interpretation of the utterance as ironic, such studies use the linguistic feature of self-tagging to identify irony within tweets. For example, both Farias et al (2016) and Van Hee et al (2018) compiled corpora of irony using irony related hashtags such as *#irony*, *#sarcasm* and *#not*. However, this raises a number of questions regarding the validity of such corpora. Firstly, such hashtags rely on self-identification of irony by the tweeter, which is somewhat in contrast with Haverkate's (1990) notion that ironists have no referential expressions to signpost their irony (see Chapter 2). In fact, a cursory search of the hashtag '#irony' within Twitter reveals that it often outlines examples of situational, not verbal irony, for example:

> #irony It happens only in India! Three wise men without Mask teaching a young boy how to wear a mask correctly...reminds me of the movie 3idiots
>
> News article expressing RBI concern on crypto buried under crypto Ads! #Irony

Therefore, apart from the "three wise men" comment in the first, the above two examples would not be relevant if exploring machine detection of verbal irony. Sykora et al (2020) found similar shortcomings in their more qualitative analysis of the nature and function of irony on Twitter. However, it is important to recognise that similar criticism can be made against my corpus of ironic utterances; the presence of laughter does not necessarily equate with an ironic utterance. Because of this, I attempted a balance by employing a framework of

irony to determine the validity of such utterances. Many of these studies attempt to automate this process, with varying degrees of success.

Another important limitation of such studies is their application within a specific discourse community. Although the Twitterverse can be considered an environment primed for irony: as comments are often evaluative and are required to be succinct, the irony must be specific to a digital landscape. Gal et al (2020: 1) highlight that social media has a lack of pragmatic features such as, "tone of voice, facial expressions and immediate contextual information". This has led researchers to include signatures in their search algorithms such as laughter expressions, emoticons and emojis, and punctuation (c.f. Carvalho et al 2009; Reyes et al 2013). I feel that the approach of this research is more robust as the patterns of irony apply to both written and spoken discourse, and are not unique to a specific discourse such as Twitter.

There is another key difference between this study and previous attempts of machine identification which may lead to an alternative focus for automated detection of irony. The studies outlined above all utilise a corpus of irony along with non-ironic corpora to provide one or several controls. The lexicogrammatical features I have highlighted have been applied to general corpora and so I have not separated ironic from non-ironic utterances. Although there is no pattern presented below that points to an ironic utterance with certainty, the highlighted examples demonstrate a greater potential of ironic interpretation, and so can help strengthen such detection. In fact, in Reyes and Rosso's own study into the difficulties of machine detection of irony, they state that, "no single textual feature captures the essence of irony" (2014: 597). With this in mind, I outline three lexical features, taken from the three research chapters, which I feel would be particularly useful in improving machine detection.

8.3 Potential lexicogrammatical features for irony detection

Despite finding a significant number (76%) of occurrences of Moon's (2008) pattern as ironic, Hao and Veale (2010) seem to somewhat downplay these findings. They conclude that we cannot view such phrases as more than "heuristic clues" which help with irony detection. Whilst I do not disagree with this evaluation, I feel it somewhat downplays the function and prevalence of such signposting phrases. Therefore, the following sections will

highlight examples from the results chapters, outline how such features fit into previous studies in machine detection, as well as providing some important considerations.

8.3.1 Multiple hedging

Perhaps the most straightforward lexicogrammatical pattern to exploit for machine detection is the pattern concerning multiple hedging. Chapter 5 illustrated how ironic utterances can often be signposted using multiple hedging items. The examples presented in the chapter focused on hedging main verbs such as *think*, *find*, *wonder* and *suppose*; hedging of quantities incorporating adverbs of degree and also collocations of hedging and intensifying items. These three collocational patterns were sourced from real-world examples of irony within the two political corpora and are therefore not considered exhaustive with regards to the possibilities of multiple hedging to signpost irony. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge that such collocations do not provide a failsafe signpost to ironic utterances. Much like Hao and Veale (2010) found with Moon's (2008) pattern, an ironic illocutionary force is not always identifiable.

However, through the collocational searches in Chapter 5, it appears that when hedging items collocate within a single utterance, a wide variety of ironic forces are observable. These range from the often strong rhetorical or evaluative function to the more playful aspects of irony. Within these two sides of irony, there is the same lexicogrammatical trope of incongruity. To demonstrate, I return to two separate examples from that chapter:

1. I **find** it **interesting** that Obama is selling his plan as a middle class tax cut that aids small businessmen when in fact it is a lower-income tax increase that has no beneficial consequences to the economy.

2. The neighbors at the end of the road across from us had put up their lights. I don't **think** I was **quite** ready for lights before Thanksgiving.

In both these examples, there are multiple hedging items (in bold), including a hedging main verb. However, by examining the utterance we can see that example 1 is a strongly negative evaluative statement, whereas example 2 is a more playful and humorous dig. Of course, the context of the utterance is necessary to make that conclusion. Yet, there are certain elements these two examples have in common which make it pertinent for further investigation into

automatic irony detection. Most importantly, there is a clear incongruity between the ostensible illocutionary function of hedging items and the negative evaluation of the utterance. Due to the differences in illocutionary function, the incongruity is also slightly different: in example 1, there is an incongruity in intensity between the softening hedging items and the negative evaluation; in example 2, the incongruity is between the hedging items and the humour of the utterance. Yet importantly, the incongruity serves to emphasise the irony. Consequently, this irony intensifies the force of both the negative evaluation in example 1 and the humour in example 2.

One of the strengths of this study is that it finds parallels at the lexicogrammatical level with recognized pragmatic features of irony. Previous studies into machine detection of irony have also recognised the importance of incongruity and unexpectedness. For example, Barbieri and Saggion (2014) identified seven sets of lexical features based on 'unexpectedness'. However, they only explored this at the lexical level, with the consideration of unexpectedness based on general features such as a contrast in lexical frequency, formality or intensity. Similarly, Reyes, Rosso and Veale (2012) and Reyes and Rosso (2014) identified certain linguistic "signatures" which they argued were related to unexpectedness. These signatures were textual markers such as punctuation and emojis mentioned above, but also adverbs which marked "counter-factuality", such as *yet*, *nevertheless* or "temporal compression" denoting sudden changes, for example *suddenly* or *unexpectedly*. I feel that these approaches may be unsuccessful for a number of reasons.

Firstly, studies such as Barbieri and Saggion's seem to eschew the pragmatic functions of irony by focusing on semantic incongruity. If we consider lexical aspects such as frequency or formality, it is difficult to identify clear illocutionary functions, and therefore such incongruity may be more a question of stylistics than pragmatics. Furthermore, Reyes, Rosso and Veale (2012) and Reyes and Rosso (2014) focus on specific lexical markers which attempt to recognise examples of unexpectedness and incongruity. However, such foci may overlook the evaluative aspect of irony and also fail to take into account its subtlety. As mentioned, Haverkate (1990) observed that irony does not have explicit markers and so exploring general lexical markers such as those above may well overlook this subtlety.

This study is not an attempt to conduct automatic detection of irony. However, I argue that results from this study may help to improve such attempts. The phenomenon of multiple

hedging suggests an identifiable lexicogrammatical feature which also seems to have a clear illocutionary function. The characteristics and function of multiple hedging are similar to those of irony and therefore may prove to be a fruitful focus for machine detection. It is clear that machine detection is more accurate in identifying lexicogrammatical incongruity than more pragmatic features. However, by focusing on multiple hedging, I argue that machine detection may be able to identify specific incongruous features which, according to the results presented in this study, have been used to facilitate or signpost irony. Therefore, Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 (also presented below), may well serve as an effective starting point for such an analysis.

As this phenomenon is concerned with lexical items, it would not be difficult to create an algorithm to capture common patterns of multiple hedging. Once common patterns are detected they can then be examined for a). evaluative and b). ironic function. This was done semi-automatically in Chapter 5, yet this study focused on collocational patterns concerning the hedging main verb. I feel a more automated process may reveal common patterns of multiple hedging which have an ironic force.

Aspect of syntax	Example items	Example sentence
Hedging main verb	(I) suspect, find, wonder (it) seems, appears	I **suspect** that many Members on the Opposition Benches might be familiar with an unscrupulous boss For what it's worth, today **happens** to be National Leave Work Early Day.
Modal verb	may, might, could	He **may** even find that are some of the things that I`m gonna say that he **might** agree with That's quite a negotiation. We **may** need you
Adverb of degree	rather, a bit, too	Mr Speaker, where did it **all** go wrong? Yeah, elaborate **a little** more than "yes"?
Adverb of certainty	definitely, probably, certainly	Yes, let me just, because he **obviously** wasn`t listening earlier, let me remind him I think her first birthday wish would **probably** be that you guys are incredibly nice.
Adverb of frequency	sometimes, occasionally	there is a price for intervention, there is also **sometimes** a price from non-intervention There are secrets that I think that even journalists **occasionally** would acknowledge should be kept secret in order to protect the American people.
Indefinite pronoun	something, anywhere, nobody	We have seen **something** of a renaissance in manufacturing, particularly in the automotive sector, the private sector hasn't done **anywhere** near as much as the government has to safeguard
Discourse marker	for the most part, generally, in a manner of speaking	**I have to say**, no wonder they want to change the exam system, the Chancellor can`t get the maths right **I mean**, don't make me make the podium move.

Table 5.1: Possible syntactical positions of hedging lexical items

However, it is worth pointing out that the results from Chapter 5 seem to suggest that even though it is a good starting point, collocation alone is not adequate to determine whether patterns of multiple hedging have an ironic potential. In a number of examples, how these hedging items collocate is crucial to how effective they are at framing irony. For example, below are two similar collocates which have a varying illocutionary force:

3. Goodness me, are you both so young that you can't even share any thing? I **would** have **thought** you both grown out of those things any way.

4. I **think** it **would** help to acknowledge that some of the early objectives were slightly lofty, slightly vague and the co-ordination was not there

In examples 3 and 4, we have the same hedging items but they are collocating in different grammatical patterns or constructions. Notably, it seems that the different pattern determines whether the multiple hedging tends to signpost an ironic utterance. In the general corpora, *I would have/'ve thought* has a higher tendency to have an ironic interpretation than *I think (it) would* which tends to have a more straightforward tempering or hedging illocutionary force. This provides an important challenge to automatic detection of irony if it were to undertake a simple collocational analysis of hedging items, without considering their syntactic patterning. For this reason, the following section may provide useful guidance in framing the exploration more accurately.

8.3.2 Collostructional analysis

In Chapter 6, I examined the role of the progressive aspect in contributing to certain ironic utterances, and this lexicogrammatical feature may also be applicable to machine detection of irony, albeit with some caveats. There are similarities with the previous chapter on multiple hedging in the fact that it is the hedging or downtoning function of the progressive aspect which lends itself most easily to incongruently framing ironic utterances (c.f. Mindt 2000 for functions of the progressive). However, and more so than with the examples in Chapter 5, such framing only seems to emerge through specific collostructional patterns, and so any machine detection algorithm would have to take this into account.

This particular analysis was influenced by the theory of collostructional analysis (CA), developed by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003), who synthesised corpus linguistic ideas concerning collocation with Construction Grammar theory (Goldberg, 1995, 2006). For Stefanowitsch and Gries, CA identifies how certain lexical items tend to 'collocate' with particular patterns or *constructions*. I argue that this development of collocation theory builds upon initial ideas concerning collocation (such as Halliday's (1966) observations regarding the synonyms *strong* and *powerful*) into a more lexicogrammatical theory of the phenomenon. As discussed in the previous chapter, a simple collocational analysis of multiple hedging items does not fully capture how these items help to signpost ironic

utterances; it is only in specific patterns that such ironic meanings emerge. Therefore, for machine detection to be effective, it needs to consider such patterns. In Chapter 6, certain collostructions were uncovered which often signposted rhetorical or evaluative statements, and, as established, evaluative valence is an intrinsic part of verbal irony. Therefore, and similar to multiple hedging, irony is created through an incongruity between the collostruction and the statement it precedes.

This is most clearly demonstrated in two collostructions which emerged in the analysis in Chapter 6. Both of these collostructions illustrate the relationship between lexis and grammar and how collostructions can evoke a number of pragmatic meanings. They can be roughly outlined as the following two patterns:

Pattern I. *I ((*PROG)*begin / start)*$_1$ *to* (COGNITIVE VERB)$_2$

Pattern II. *I* ((PROG) VERB-to attempt)$_1$ to (VERB)$_2$

Within both collostructions, there are two separate slots (labelled 1 and 2) which can be filled with various collocates. The first slot in each collostruction has a rather more limited number of collocates. In collostruction 1, the first semantic group are ingress verbs containing *start* and *begin.* In collostruction 2, slot 1 can be filled with verbs with the semantic meaning of *attempt*: in my analysis, *try* is overwhelmingly the most common. Slot 2 in the first construction can be filled with a cognitive verb such as *understand*, *realise* or *wonder*. In contrast, slot 2 in the second collostruction is open, yet in the ironic examples there are two main semantic groups identified. These can be broadly defined as *cognitive* (including *understand* and *figure out*) and *rhetorical* (*say, get at* and *make (a point)*). What makes these collostructions different to the patterns of multiple hedging in the previous section is that there is an element of irony contained within them. In this way, they are more similar to Attardo's (2000a) concept of irony *factors* than irony *markers*. How these two collostructions point to or help to contribute to irony will be discussed separately.

The first collostruction appears to have a stronger ironic force than the second. The majority of examples of this collostruction from the four corpora precede either a strong evaluative statement or humorous comment (or both). The two examples illustrate:

5. **I am beginning to think** the only thing in Downing Street with a spine is his book on courage
6. Having just celebrated another birthday (although **I am beginning to wonder** if celebrate is the right word)

Both examples here have a humorous force and if we remove the collostruction, the irony remains. However, the mock-tentative force of the collostruction complements and even adds to the irony. In this way, the collostruction has a similar illocutionary function as the previous examples of multiple hedging. However, Chapter 6 also presented a number of examples whereby the collostruction is vital to the irony. Some examples below:

7. How long will it be, what will it take, for us as Americans to rise above this archaic nonsense? **I'm starting to wonder** and it's pissing me off.
8. 'I'm glad to hear it. **I was beginning to think** it was me who was dense.' But she ignored the joke

Much of the irony in examples such as 7 and 8 is similar to Kumon-Nakamura et al's (1995) and Utsumi's (2000) concept of failed expectations. The collostruction is framing a statement of mock-incredulity or surprise and the construction helps to express this. In many examples of this construction, the speaker is playing with the hedging and temporary function of the ingress verb to express a strong evaluation. Therefore, the irony is also contained within the use of the collostruction.

The second collostruction is similar in that it not only has a politeness and hedging function, but it also often frames a rhetorical statement. As mentioned above, there are two significant collexeme groups which collocate with the construction in slot 2: cognitive and rhetorical verbs. Yet it has also been demonstrated that these two semantic groups often point to the same illocutionary function. Often, the cognitive verb collostructions frame a rhetorical point:

9. **'I keep trying to remember** that the Government policy on broadcasting is 'quality, competition, choice'

10. (According to some accounts, a journalist told Eddington in the early 1920s that he had heard there were only three people in the world who understood general relativity. Eddington paused, then replied," **I am trying to think** who the third person is.")

In both example 9 and 10, the use of the collostruction is ironic. They are both performative: in example 9, the speaker is being critical of government policy by feigning ignorance; in example 10, Eddington[25] is expressing a kind of mock-superiority. Both of these examples can be seen as humorous. When the construction collocates with a rhetoric verb, there is often incongruity between the softening function of the construction and the strong evaluation that it precedes:

11. **'The point I was trying to make,'** she persisted hotly, 'was that my off-duty time is surely my own.'

12. **What I am trying to say is** that merely paying attention to sex difference - affirming that women exist and are different from men - is not in and of itself a feminist gesture.

These examples are important because although they both contain incongruity and are both rhetoric, most observers (myself included) would not view them as ironic in the conventional sense. Therefore, such collostructions, although useful in perhaps guiding automatic detection of irony, cannot be considered foolproof. What is perhaps missing in the above examples is an explicit negative evaluation: something that can be gleaned from, say examples 9 and 10 above. Such pragmatic features cannot be ignored in irony detection: Sykora et al (2020) identified that much research into machine detection of irony neglects contextual knowledge. Therefore, when considering collostruction in relation to irony, further analysis of illocutionary function is, unfortunately, necessary.

A greater consideration of pragmatic functions lends itself to the theories of Construction Grammar. Furthermore, I would argue that the theory of collostruction is a significant development in corpus linguistics. Stefanowitsch and Gries' (2003) theory demonstrates a greater understanding of the role lexicogrammar can play in shaping both semantic and pragmatic meaning. The findings in this study reflect this theory and I feel there is potential in exploring how collostruction can help speakers to frame and shape supposed pragmatic features of language such as irony.

[25] Eddington was an astronomer and physicist in the early Twentieth Century who popularised Einstein's theory.

8.3.3 Phraseology and ironic priming

The theory of ironic priming is perhaps the least conducive of the three phenomena to be applied to machine learning methodology. The reason for this is that ironically primed utterances do not have any lexicogrammatical commonalities, and often require a pragmatic interpretation. At this stage, it would be difficult to conceive of any algorithm which could conduct such a pragmatic interpretation. However, as the findings found in Chapter 7 do point to certain phrases having an ironic force and are therefore repeatedly used to frame ironic utterances, the phenomenon is still worth investigating. The results from any research involving automated detection of irony can be re-examined to determine whether similarly ironic primed phrases also occur. Therefore, this section will review the concept of ironic priming while also restating its importance to linguistic studies of irony.

The concept of ironic priming is similar to the adoption of collostruction in the previous section: both demonstrate how an established linguistic theory can be applied to the trope of irony. In this regard, I present similarities between Hoey's (2005) concept of priming and certain ironic utterances by arguing that such phrases contain an ironic force. Hoey argues that over time, certain linguistic items become imbibed or *primed* with particular meanings. This theory has received much attention since its inception and based on examples taken from the corpora, I argue that the concept can be applied to illocutionary forces of certain utterances, and more specifically, that certain phrases can be identified as developing an ironic priming.

The concept is particularly pertinent as the influence of ironic priming can be observed in the previous two sections; the examples of multiple hedging in Section 8.3.1 and collostructions in Section 8.3.2 demonstrate a kind of ironic priming. Specifically, those examples can be viewed as evidence of the priming process in flux. Such collocations and constructions hint at and can point to an ironic interpretation and are useful in framing irony, but still occur in non-ironic utterances. The duality of such phrases is the main obstacle for accurate machine detection and, to re-emphasise what was mentioned above, a greater consideration of the illocutionary function of such utterances seems to be necessary in all automotive attempts. Yet the concept of ironic priming can be regularly applied to the utterances presented in this study. For example, the more common lexicogrammatical patterns of multiple hedging and collostructions, I argue, contain an established or developing

ironic function primed within. Additionally, these examples serve as similar potential foci of study such as emojis/emoticons, hashtag markers and marked punctuation, prevalent in the numerous studies into machine detection of irony previously mentioned. In fact, I would argue that such discoursal features have also undergone a similar ironic priming process. As a result, measuring the ironic priming of linguistic items may also prove to be a fruitful approach within machine detection. Similarly, a search for commonalities within a corpus of irony may uncover other ironically primed items.

However, it is important to acknowledge that Chapter 7 does not illustrate examples of priming in flux but rather presents what I consider established priming. Therefore, there are two notable differences between the phrases identified in Chapter 7 and the previously recognised linguistic signatures of irony used in many of the previous studies. Firstly, there is a high level of fixedness within these primed utterances. This may be due to the fact that priming solidifies the phrases as ironic within a discourse community, and therefore, like idiomatic expressions, the phrases become somewhat fixed. Partington et al (2013: 122) outline how a similar process occurs within a specific discourse environment of UK broadsheet newspapers, yet the examples presented in Chapter 7 are rather more fixed. In this way, the process is very similar to how dead metaphors are formed.

Secondly and more significantly, the phrases often contain a clear pragmatic or semantic function. Below are some of the key examples previously presented (with the ironically primed phrases in bold):

13. **Am I the only human being** left on the planet without a smart phone?

14. If it is passed, I will never vote in a future election for anyone who signs it. **That's not saying a whole lot** admittedly, because most (if not all) of the people who will sign it will be Democrats.

15. **the last time I checked** how many earths we have I still came up with only one.

All three of the above phrases not only have an ironic priming but also an identifiable pragmatic function. They are all used to frame evaluative statements and they are also somewhat performative: in particular, examples 13 and 15 are rarely literal. Therefore, a search of these phrases (and their variants) often reveals a significant number of ironic

examples. This is, I argue, a result of the process of ironic priming, as speakers recognise and reuse such phrases in ironic utterances and contexts. In this way, such phrases ostensibly contradict Haverkate's (1990) observation that there are no explicit markers of irony. Yet ironically primed utterances are not *explicitly* ironic. A search of these phrases within a general corpus will reveal non-ironic examples, despite being in the minority. Rather they are almost cliched examples of irony: often used by speakers and easily detectable for audiences.

Despite the popularity of Hoey's concept of priming, to the best of the author's knowledge, it has not been applied to the concept of irony at the lexicogrammatical level. However, De Freitas et al (2014) identified some Portuguese expressions which have parallels with the concept of ironic priming. One example is *tao* + ADJ, which can be roughly translated as *so-called*. A possibly similar example in English from the BNC:

16. The **so-called** 'fantastic fans, at the theatre of dreams' are currently going on the rampage in Istanbul.

Here, the speaker is referencing an accepted positive evaluation of a specific group of football fans to contrast with their observed poor behaviour. In this way, the use of *so-called* preceding a prosodic phrase in quotation marks points to an explicit example of irony not dissimilar to Wilson and Sperber's (1992) concept of ironic echo. We can envisage that these particular fans have previously been praised as 'fantastic'. As such, the use of the lexical item *so-called* could also be considered an example of ironic priming and may be studied in a similar way. Similarly, in her corpus analysis of British newspaper discourse, Dugaid (2010: 130-131) identified a number of ironically 'loaded' adjectives such as *edgy* and *vibrant*: which the terminology used in this study has clear parallels with.

There are, however, two significant problems with using corpus-based methods to examine ironic priming. As mentioned, these primed utterances tend to have high levels of fixedness and so, unlike the examples in Chapters 5 and 6, ironically primed phrases follow no set lexicogrammatical pattern. The examples explored in Chapter 7 emerged from an examination of previously identified examples of irony taken from the PMQ and WHPB corpora. There is very little possibility of conducting an automated, systematic exploration of a corpus to find similar examples of ironic priming. Therefore, identification of ironically

primed phrases requires the researcher's intuition and fundamental understanding of the discourse community.

Linked to this, it is also challenging to systematically categorise such ironic primings. Examining a corpus from an irony-rich environment revealed several examples which were presented in Chapter 7. However, these examples were uncovered manually. Therefore, expanding on this list, unless through chance encounters with other examples, seems a difficult process to undertake. Unlike multiple hedging and ironic collostructions, providing a taxonomy of ironic priming seems beyond the capabilities of traditional corpus methodology.

However, there is one possible method of machine detection that may be utilised to uncover other possible ironically primed phrases. This would require constructing a corpus of real-world irony or evaluation. If the corpus was of a suitable size, a simple n-gram search (Hunston 2010: 162-3; Greaves and Warren 2010: 213-5) could be conducted as most of these ironic primings seem to be multi-word items. However, such a search would have to be manually analysed as to whether the n-grams are ironically primed or not. Despite requiring human detection and therefore difficult for a search to be automated, the theory of ironic priming still remains pertinent to whether irony can be identified at the lexical level.

As mentioned above, one of the more difficult challenges for automatic irony detection is that it is hard to envisage a system which captures irony in all its forms. This study focuses on irony at the lexicogrammatical level but also acknowledges that such a focus can only deal with one aspect of irony. Yet, at its core, I argue that incongruity could be a significant consideration in attempting to identify irony. With this in mind, the next section focuses on the process of further developing a framework of irony to aid in automatic detection.

8.4 A framework for irony revisited

This study began with two initial irony frameworks to help identify examples of irony from the two DIY political corpora (Appendices 2-3). These frameworks were designed to create a sub-corpus of ironic utterances which could be analysed for notable lexicogrammatical features. These features were then examined within both the DIY corpora and general corpora. The frameworks were initially used simply to gather real world

examples rather than be an attempt to produce a comprehensive algorithm to aid automated or manual irony detection. Additionally, these frameworks were constructed from previous studies into the nature of irony. Because of this, the second of these frameworks primarily focused on irony's pragmatic functions, such as identifying laughter in both DIY corpora as a possible marker of irony, whereas ironic utterances presented in the results chapters do not always have a humorous illocutionary force. This is one reason why findings from this corpus study are not reflected in such a framework. Therefore, this section will reflect on the discussion in Section 8.3 and attempt to contribute to a working lexicogrammatical framework which may help to identify examples of irony at the lexicogrammatical level within both written and spoken texts. Similar to pragmatic theories concerning irony, incongruity is a central factor in all such lexicogrammatical features.

8.4.1 Formulating an irony framework

Previous attempts to formulate frameworks for irony suffer with similar problems that meet all investigations into the linguistic phenomenon, namely that it is difficult to encompass all forms within a single framework. Burgers and Steen (2017) address this problem by delineating irony into three dimensions: *language*, *thought* and *communication*. They argue that making this distinction helps facilitate investigation, as no singular linguistic study can either investigate all aspects of irony or produce an overarching, (in the words of Hao and Veale (2010)) "silver bullet" definition. Burgers and Steen's categorisation does allow for some flexibility in what linguist studies can focus on without dealing with accusations of a lack of comprehensiveness. For example, it provides an alternative perspective on Hutcheon's (1994: 45 (Figure 2.1 in this study)) framework as one which outlines incongruity within irony's *communication* characteristics, whereas Burgers et al's (2012: 195 (Figure 2.2 in this study)) Verbal Irony Procedural Framework can be viewed as one which does include limited elements of language but primarily focuses on *communication* and *thought*: emphasising the "evaluative valence" (Burgers and Steen 2017: 94) at the clausal level, and identifying points of incongruity between this valence and the external co-text and context. In contrast, the findings from this study can help to provide a framework which focuses on incongruity within the *language* dimension of irony.

Yet perhaps even the language dimension is too extensive to be reflected in a single framework. Burgers and van Mulken (2017) further divided this dimension into three

linguistic elements: *typography*, *morphology* and *syntax*. In the research papers on automatic irony detection presented earlier in this chapter, typography featured heavily as an initial marker of irony: such as studies which focused on hashtags and emojis. In contrast, despite Burgers and van Mulken's assertion that syntactic elements of utterances may contribute to their ironic implicature, this area remains undeveloped. It is the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 which have greater utility in helping to construct a framework for uncovering irony at the syntactic level.

8.4.2 A framework of lexicogrammatical incongruity

This section demonstrates how a framework of irony may help in identifying examples of irony at the lexicogrammatical level. In both the examples of multiple hedging in Chapter 5 and the collostructional use of the progressive aspect in Chapter 6, there are lexicogrammatical features which can be exploited for the detection of irony. Firstly, it has been shown that multiple examples of hedging items collocating in a single clause may lead to an effective framing of irony. This ironic implicature emerges through both an overuse of hedging items, and an incongruity between such hedging items and the evaluative valence of the utterance – in line with the first stage in Burgers et al's (2012) VIP framework which correctly points out that one cannot ignore the importance of ironic utterances having an evaluative force. However, it may well be possible that identifying hedging items would prove difficult if using Burger et al's VIP framework. Apart from the problems with the VIP framework outlined in Chapter 2 concerning the difficulty in recognising ironic echoes, it is also limited in its scope in relation to the findings of this study. This is due to its reliance on irony emerging in a clash between positive and negative domains. The framework states two important steps in automatic irony detection (Burgers et al 2012: 9):

- The scale of evaluation should have two important characteristics: (1) the scale should include a subdivision between a positive and a negative 'domain' and (2) the literal evaluation has to be placed in the negative or the positive domain.

- If a plausible reading can be found in which the intended (ironic) evaluation (negative or positive) is in the other domain than the literal evaluation (positive or negative), the 275 utterance is considered ironic.

If this is the case, then ironic utterances involving multiple hedging and collostructions of the progressive aspect would not be identified as such. Furthermore, ironically primed examples such as Examples 13-15 above do not have a contrast in domains between the literal and ironic interpretations. This study suggests that a framework to detect irony needs to take into account the concept of incongruity rather than contrariness. Irony may also occur when there is:

- An incongruity in prosodic force between stated and intended evaluation. This includes both under- and over-statements.

- An incongruity between stated and intended illocutionary function. The intended function is evaluative. However, this evaluation may be framed as a question, request or observation.

These two factors not only emphasise the importance of evaluation for irony but also recognize that it is not solely created through direct contrast. For machine detection of irony to develop, the process needs a sophisticated awareness of such incongruity in irony revealed in this study. Such considerations would create a more robust framework in which ironic utterances involving incongruity at various linguistic levels may be better identified.

Therefore, this study proposes an alternative framework of irony which starts with creating a sub-corpus focused on irony at the lexicogrammatical level. This would involve beginning with a wordlist of hedging items. Table 5.1 could provide a basis for this wordlist, although the investigation into multiple hedging in Chapter 5 raises the possibility of uncovering other multi-word semi-fixed hedging items. Secondly, a consideration of collostruction phrases involving *starting* and *beginning* could be linked to this hedging wordlist to identify further examples of irony. This wordlist can then be used to trawl for examples of possible irony in wider corpora. Such a trawl would involve identifying multiple hedging items within a close collocation window. However, how we define ‘close’ needs to be examined. In their research, Nippold et al (2013: 201) found that when discussing a complex task, adults tended to use around 13 words per utterance and each utterance contained over 2 clauses. Because of this, it is worth searching for long-span collocations (Vetchtomova et al, 2003) of hedging items, within this window of 13 words. This would involve using a wider search window than the standard (-5 , +5) span on most corpus software such as the Sketch Engine. This type of collocational search will unlikely catch all

examples of multiple hedging, but may well provide a wider corpus of possible irony to allow for further interrogation.

From this sub-corpus, I argue that using a framework similar to Burgers et al's (2012) but taking into account the above considerations regarding the importance of both evaluation and incongruity would likely produce a more successful rate of irony detection. Furthermore, it would confirm the findings from Chapters 5-7 on a wider scale. By applying such a framework to the sub-corpus of multiple hedging, we would be able to determine with greater confidence the ironic force of such lexicogrammatical features.

8.5 Conclusion

Machine detection of irony has received a great deal of attention from linguists in recent years and yet still proves challenging. One of the most significant difficulties has been identified by both Hao and Veale (2010) and Reyes, Rosso and Veale (2013: 240): that is, irony is a far-reaching linguistic trope with many forms. Therefore, both linguistic theories of irony and attempts to create algorithms for automatic detection tend to suffer from being selective or singular in their scope. As such, we are perhaps far from automating this process effectively.

Any robust algorithm would need to consider these varying facets in order to capture real world examples. Consequently, linguists interested in machine detection of irony would need to develop an understanding of such facets. The difficulty with previous linguistic studies into the phenomenon is rarely because they are contradictory with each other, but rather because they are often incomplete in that they cannot effectively consider all of irony's characteristics. However, this is perhaps not an interminable weakness; there may well be potential value in combining studies to produce more robust algorithms for irony detection.

Despite these difficulties, it is perhaps also the role of linguists interested in irony to continue to uncover how wide-ranging the trope is. For example, the linguistic features of irony investigated in this study and the development of a framework of irony may help to develop this understanding further and to also contribute to developing more comprehensive algorithms for machine detection. One important consistent feature of much of irony is incongruity at various linguistic levels. The present study has explored this, making an

important connection between incongruity at the pragmatic and semantic level, and incongruity at the lexicogrammatical level. The lexicogrammatical features presented in Chapters 5 to 7 should be considered if linguists wish to create more comprehensive automated algorithms.

Furthermore, these three aspects of potential lexicogrammatical features of irony each incorporate a different focus of corpus linguistics methodology. I have hoped to demonstrate the possibilities that the discipline has in continuing to develop in the future, as researchers seek to use its methods to investigate wider reaching aspects of language. Irony remains primarily a pragmatic function of language and yet in this study, corpus methodology has been exploited in order to identify significant lexicogrammatical features of ironic utterances. Such methodology is a step forward in how corpus linguistics can be utilised. This is possible in part to theories of Construction Grammar such as Goldberg (1995, 2006) and Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003). Much like the early work of Sinclair and others who revealed the mutual dependence between lexis and grammar (Römer 2009: 141; Biber and Conrad 2010:4), Construction Grammar reveals the connection between lexicogrammar and illocutionary function. Construction grammarians have also turned to corpus linguistic methodology to support their own research (see Gries 2013: 106-7 for an overview). I would argue that the research conducted here further demonstrates how these two linguistic disciplines can cooperate.

Therefore, based on the observations made in Chapters 5-7, there may be value in attempting to utilise a framework of irony which starts at the lexicogrammatical level. Identifying and isolating examples of multiple hedging would likely be a foundation for automating irony detection. The main advantage of this foundation is that it eschews subjectivity: something which is rather more unavoidable in the subsequent stages of identifying evaluation and incongruity. As pointed out previously, the subjective nature of identifying irony is the immediate challenge that machine detection of irony needs to address.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The final chapter will summarise the key points from this three-part corpus investigation into the lexicogrammatical nature of irony. By first returning to the original research questions and revisiting the debate surrounding whether irony is present at the lexicogrammatical level, this summary will focus on positioning the study within the current linguistic discourse into the nature and function of irony. Secondly, it will review the implications for any future corpus-based studies into irony. This will be done through highlighting notable strengths as well as outlining important limitations and considerations. Finally, I will posit some possible follow-up investigations. In particular, I will refer back to observations regarding the nature of irony within the two political discourse environments. Overall, this study is a demonstration of how and to what degree corpus methodology can be applied to linguistic phenomena above the concordance line.

9.1 Main findings: irony at the lexicogrammatical level

Initially, this study contended the commonly held idea that irony can only be identified above the sentence and that it is purely a pragmatic phenomenon. Much of the reasoning behind this idea is based on the nature of irony: as noted, the majority of linguistic research stems from Grice's influential observation regarding conversational implicature, and therefore focuses on its pragmatic features. Chapter 2 outlined the range of such studies and, as argued, much investigation into the nature of irony emphasises its humorous or evaluative functions. As such, this study can be viewed in some regards as a counterpoint, but not a contradiction, to Haverkate's (1990: 39) assertion that ironists do not explicitly signpost their ironic intention. This study has aimed to demonstrate that there are identifiable lexicogrammatical features of irony which can be considered as signposting irony or intrinsic to the irony itself: parallel to Attardo's (2000a) coining of irony *markers* and *factors.* However, it is fair to argue that these features are not as directly explicit as Haverkate illustrates.

This study identified three types of lexicogrammatical features: multiple hedging, collostructions with the progressive aspect, and phrases which could be deemed examples of ironic priming. Chapters 5-7 explored these three features consecutively and presented

examples from not only two DIY political corpora but also two extensive general corpora. These presented examples demonstrated that the three lexicogrammatical features commonly (but not always) appeared in identifiably ironic examples. Their prevalence in both sets of corpora seem to suggest that they can be classified as potential identifiers of irony.

Of the three lexicogrammatical features of irony, the phenomenon of multiple hedging is perhaps the most salient. Through utilising corpus methodology related to collocation, this is also the most straightforward lexicogrammatical feature to identify within corpora. As most hedging collocates are singular lexical items, they can therefore be categorised and searched for within a corpus. Chapter 5 presented an initial outline of such phrases which was used as a basis for a search of multiple hedging across all four corpora. This feature is also potentially straightforward to apply to machine detection of irony. Multiple hedging tends to show ironic characteristics because the hedging illocutionary function is incongruent to the strong evaluation that such hedging often frames. I argue that *multiple* hedging is a particularly effective rhetorical trope as the co-occurrence of more than one hedging item further marks the incongruity. However, it is also worth noting that the examination in Chapter 5 revealed that ironic utterances which utilise multiple hedging are fequently fixed or semi-fixed p-frames and n-grams, and so a simple collocational analysis envisaged by Firth and Halliday is somewhat incomplete.

Such phraseological tendencies provide a link to the second key lexicogrammatical feature: the notion of collostruction. This notion was coined by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003), who applied the ideas of Construction Grammar to the notion of colligation. Construction grammarians view language in terms of constructions: that is, patterns which have an intrinsic meaning and can influence any lexical item included within the pattern. Chapter 6 showed how certain constructions can develop an ironic meaning when collocating with certain lexical items or *collexemes*. The examples presented in this study refer to the progressive aspect colligating with *start* and *begin*, and verbs of cognition. Like phrases of multiple hedging, these collostructions often frame strong evaluations and, also like multiple hedging, subsequently create an incongruence. The co-occurrence of multiple hedging items is also prevalent here: both the progressive aspect and verbs of cognition have been shown to have a softening force and so contrast with verbs of ingress such as *start* and *begin*. In both phenomena of multiple hedging and ironic collostructions, irony emerges not from a traditional definition of irony as an intended meaning being in opposite to that which is

stated, but rather an incongruity between the strong evaluation and the ironic understatement. What is different between ironic collostructions and multiple hedging is that the examples in Chapter 6 are a little more difficult, although not impossible, to use as a basis for machine detection of irony. Creating search algorithms to find other similar ironic collostructions would require rather more complex programming and research, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this particular study.

It is the final phenomenon explored in Chapter 7 which is not only the most phraseological in nature but also the most difficult to categorise and be applied to previous studies into machine detection of irony. The phrases presented here have no lexicogrammatical similarities apart from frequently having an ironic illocutionary force. Furthermore, ironic priming is most relevant to phrases which are *factors*, not *markers* of irony (Attardo 2000a). Whereas multiple hedging and ironic collostructions are ironically incongruent with the evaluations they frame, ironically primed phrases tend to be more innately ironic. The examples presented in Chapter 7 may well be the most significant challenge to the idea that irony is a purely pragmatic manifestation. Not only do they consistently occur across the corpora, but they also consistently have an ironic illocutionary force. For this reason, Hoey's (2005) concept of *priming* can be applied to these phrases. Through a similar priming process that Hoey suggests, the examples of irony presented here have become somewhat cliched, and may well have developed an ironic force within a particular discourse community. This universal recognition means that such phrases can be utilised as a short-form ironic utterance: unlikely to be misconstrued by the audience but not as unwieldly as the explicit irony markers imagined by Haverkate (1990). This idea will be picked up in Section 9.7 below.

However, as mentioned, examples of ironic priming are difficult to explore using corpus methodology. The reason for this is there does not seem to be any underlying lexicogrammatical patterns which can be isolated and searched for within a corpus. Similarly, it is difficult to envisage how machine detection of irony could incorporate ironically primed phrases. In contrast, the possibilities for machine detection of multiple hedging and ironic collostructions are greater. It is therefore somewhat ironic that the phenomenon which most strongly provides a counterpoint to the argument that irony is pragmatic is the most difficult to explore using corpus methodology.

To summarise the above points, Table 9.1 outlines the key findings of this study.

Lexicogrammatical phenomenon	Description	Example (from PMQ corpus)	NLP Significance
Multiple hedging	More than one hedging lexical item collocating within an evaluative utterance.	I have to say, I **thought** the hon. Gentleman **might** have taken a different tack today, because if you read the newspapers, you can get quite nostalgic.	Highest potential for machine identification. Lowest percentage of ironic utterances
Ironic collostruction	Collostructional patterns of *start* and *begin* in the progressive aspect along with verbs of cognition. Again, within an evaluative utterance.	**I am beginning to think** the only thing in Downing Street with a spine is his book on courage	High potential for machine identification
Ironic priming	The theory that certain utterances can be ironically primed similar to Hoey's theory.	**The last time I looked** at the Order Paper, it said "Prime Minister's Question Time"	Limited potential for machine identification Highest percentage of ironic utterances.

Table 9.1: Summary of lexicogrammatical features of irony

At this point, with reference to this table, it is worth returning to the research questions.

9.2 Research questions

The following section will examine each research question to help consolidate the main findings and implications of the study.

9.2.1 Using corpus methodology, can irony be detected at a lexicogrammatical level?

In Chapters 5-7, this study presented lexicogrammatical patterns which can arguably encourage an ironic interpretation: including multiple hedging, collostructions involving the progressive aspect and cognition verbs, and multi-word n-grams and p-frames which can be

defined as being lexically primed. These are outlined in Table 9.1 above. Certainly, these three aspects do not always lead to irony and it would be fair to say that it is unlikely that linguists will be able to develop a fool-proof method for detecting irony. So, it would perhaps be more accurate to argue that we may be able to detect lexicogrammatical patterns which have a high tendency to frame irony. Section 9.3 below will examine this argument more deeply.

9.2.2 If so, what are the significant/most frequent lexicogrammatical features of ironic utterances from the corpus data?

Table 9.1 proposes three significant aspects of lexicogrammar which tend to produce an ironic effect. A common characteristic that these aspects share is the importance of incongruity, which I would argue is an overarching feature of irony as a whole. In fact, it is only through incongruity that irony can emerge. If this position is tenable, then it is reasonable to suggest that there may be a connection between incongruity at the pragmatic level and incongruity at the lexicogrammatical level.

Another similarity across many of the ironic utterances is how incongruity of politeness and understatement creates a common ironic effect. Lexicogrammatical features such as hedging and use of the progressive have such an illocutionary effect and so many of the ironic utterances presented here do not fit into the superficial definition of irony as the dictum and implicatum being opposite in meaning. Yet any conclusions regarding this phenomenon must take into consideration the nature of the two DIY corpora. Both are discourse environments in which politeness and protocol are central to the discourse. This will be explored more in Section 9.6.

9.2.3 How do such lexicogrammatical features fit into corpus linguistics?

Upon initial examination of the ironic utterances taken from both DIY corpora, parallels between their lexicogrammatical features and aspects of corpus linguistic methodology seemed to emerge. More specifically, multiple hedging is informed by the corpus-based theory of collocation, collostruction is the marriage of Construction Grammar and colligation, and ironic priming is influenced by Hoey's (2005) theory which also utilised corpus linguistic methodology, including both collocation and colligation. These parallels

were encouraging for my study and some of the benefits are outlined in Section 9.3. Furthermore, the implications of this research question are dealt with in Section 9.5.

9.2.4 How can corpus analysis help with automated irony detection?

Chapter 8 is primarily an exploration of this research question. It is worth highlighting at this point that this study is corpus-based and that NLP research is beyond the scope of the research and beyond the capabilities of the researcher. What is notable, however, is that the patterns presented in the three results chapters present tangible features of irony which may be able to be incorporated into future algorithms to help produce more robust findings. Therefore, the implications presented regarding automated irony detection are rather suggestions for possible research. This idea will be picked up again in Section 9.8.

9.3 Strengths

Using corpus linguistic methodology in an attempt to uncover lexicogrammatical features of irony has some important advantages. Firstly, there are few studies which incorporate corpus linguistics into investigations of the nature and function of irony. Louw (1993) and Partington (2006; 2007) have been shown to be rare exceptions to this case. It is true that some studies such as Reyes et al (2013) and Farias et al (2016) who attempt to explore machine detection of irony use corpora of irony mostly taken from Twitter. However, some limitations of such corpora were laid out in Chapter 8: most importantly that these corpora were compiled through manual self-selection by the tweeter. In contrast, the ironic examples in this study were initially identified as such through external locutionary responses (laughter) to evaluative utterances. Furthermore, findings in the present study were compiled using established corpus methodology: conclusions were drawn from a bottom-up process in which commonalities of patterning were first noted, and then explored wider within the corpora. These commonalities reflected three significant foci of corpus linguistic research: collocation, colligation and phraseology. Subsequently, results were categorised and presented with regard to these three aspects. As a result, all findings can be argued as firmly rooted in this discipline.

Linked to this, a significant benefit of using corpus methodology is that this study was able to draw conclusions based on real-world examples of irony. The strengths of the data

used in this study are in the fact that the ironic utterances are spoken, naturally occurring, but also have real-time audience responses. In this regard, it differs from the majority of linguistic studies of irony which often refer to laboratory created examples as evidence, and as a result, such studies can be accused of being top-down in their conclusions. The three categorisations of irony presented in this study emerged from corpus-based descriptive methodology, through observations of real-world examples. Chapter 8 discusses research studies into machine detection which have utilised corpora of real-world tweets. However, the problems with such corpora have also been highlighted: they often rely on self-identification of irony by the tweeter, which often points to situational rather than verbal irony. As such, the corpora used here can be viewed as a credible source of naturally occurring irony.

Similar to above, this study also builds upon previous theories related to corpus linguistics and phraseology. The research into multiple hedging in Chapter 5 is informed by the corpus-based theory of collocation, Construction Grammar theories concerning collostruction are exemplified in the chapter on the progressive aspect, and the theory of ironic priming is directly influenced by Hoey's (2005) theory. In this manner, the present study is a continuation of previous corpus research. Through consideration of the idea of a construction, this study is an attempt to illustrate how lexicogrammatical features have an intrinsic relationship with illocutionary force or function. Due to this, I feel that corpus methodology may be able to inform linguistic features above the lexical or syntactic level. Similarly, as corpus interrogative software develops, there may well be an opportunity to explore more paralinguistic aspects of language using corpus methodology. I view this study as an example of exploring the possibilities of corpus linguistic methodology, and Section 9.5 below will explore this possibility in more detail.

9.4 Limitations and considerations

There are a number of limitations of this study which need to be taken into account. Firstly, previously pointed out limitations of past studies may also be relevant to this study. This is down to the wide-ranging nature and function of irony: no one study can encapsulate all of these. In particular, it is difficult to eschew the pragmatic function of irony. In searching for lexicogrammatical features of irony, it is impossible to ignore the pragmatic function above the concordance lines. Furthermore, the patterns presented in the three results

chapters are rarely ironic in themselves, but rather signpost or frame irony. Whilst not wishing to ignore this criticism, there are two important caveats to make. Firstly, although not being intrinsically ironic, these patterns often collocate with ironic utterances to a degree that their connection is not insignificant. Secondly. what I have tried to demonstrate is that the lexicogrammatical incongruencies within the three patterns of study have parallels with pragmatic incongruencies of irony's functions and so should not be considered as opposing the idea that irony does have important pragmatic characteristics. After investigation, this initial opposition seems naïve and rather the relationship between nature and function of irony is more complex.

Perhaps due to this complexity, it remains difficult to categorise utterances as ironic without considering the wider context around the concordance lines. This is clear from the contextual footnotes used in this study. Contextual information is not something that can be effectively considered when using machine detection or corpus-driven methodology. Whilst the patterns presented here may filter possibilities of irony, it still required some degree of human interpretation of concordance lines to determine which examples were ironic or not. Studies which have attempted to utilise machine detection have had similar difficulties. A solution to this is acknowledging that irony is a far-reaching trope and the job of the linguist is to explore its boundaries (see Chapter 8). As with other studies, there is no "computational silver bullet" (Hao and Veale 2010: 638) for irony detection provided here. It is unlikely that flawless autonomous irony detection will happen anytime soon. However, it is likely that more research into lexicogrammatical patterns of ironic utterances will lead to more sophisticated algorithms to help improve the accuracy of such efforts.

The final limitation to consider is the nature of the source corpora. Initial examples of ironic utterances were taken from two DIY corpora comprised of transcripts of Questions to the Prime Minister sessions and White House Press Briefings. These corpora were chosen based on their convenience. Both were readily available as transcripts and audio/video recordings but also because they were both irony-rich environments – particularly the PMQ sessions – and also recorded perlocutionary reactions of an audience such as laughter and jeering. This allowed me to gather a significant number of real-world ironic utterances not based solely on subjective interpretation. Although this subjectivity cannot be ignored (outlined above), it is important to acknowledge that the two corpora are from highly specific discourse communities. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the initial examples of

irony may have characteristics specific to these communities. I have attempted to mitigate this by comparing these examples across two general corpora, which has also revealed further lexicogrammatical patterns. However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that both political discourse environments are heavily stylised with both written and unwritten protocols (see Chapter 2). In fact, manipulation of such protocols is often at the root of irony for many of those initial examples. There are significant points to be made regarding these discourse environments (Section 9.5 below) but it may be worthwhile to further cross-reference these patterns across other general corpora to test whether they do indeed have an innate ironic force in other contexts.

Whilst these limitations should not be ignored, the present study does raise potential opportunities for future studies in this area. Therefore, the following sections will outline possible foci for subsequent research based on the implications of this study.

9.5 Implications for corpus linguistics

The above section acknowledged that there were certain limitations of using corpus linguistic methodology in this study. However, I feel that this study demonstrates the expanding scope of what corpus linguistics can explore: namely, more pragmatic aspects of language. This may be possible through a development in what is considered the function of a construction.

Construction Grammar has sought to connect form and function (Goldberg and Casenhiser 2006). Construction grammarians have observed constructions which identify pragmatic features such as evaluation (Jackendoff 1997) and emotional responses such as incredulity (Lambrecht 1994). I contend that irony may well be another pragmatic function which is embedded within a construction. This is a reasonable suggestion if we consider how these patterns are learnt and used. The evidence from usage-based theories of language seems to suggest that patterns are stored as complete or semi-complete items within a speaker's mental lexicon (Barlow and Kemmer 2000; Tomasello 2003), so it is reasonable to suggest that the function of a construction is also stored and readily available. It is this point which intersects with the theory of ironic priming. Hoey argues that similar pragmatic functions are created through use and reuse of particular patterns within a discourse community. In this way, priming could be considered a reasonable explanation to how form and function

becomes interconnected. In this way, I feel there is scope for development in understanding the nature and function of constructions and of understanding what pragmatic phenomenon can be identified at the lexicogrammatical level.

However, an important point to consider is if it is possible for NLP to identify such constructions. Section 8.3 suggested how machine identification of irony can develop by incorporating findings from this study. Therefore, there are two possible areas of exploration for any further studies. Firstly, construction grammarians can explore what pragmatic functions constructions can demonstrate. Secondly, investigating whether such constructions can be identified through NLP could prove fruitful. These two areas may lead to developments in machine identification of linguistic tropes such as irony.

9.6 Irony in political discourse

The purpose and limitations of using two political corpora as a basis for research has been outlined in Section 9.4. The corpora were not compiled with any concerns regarding discourse analysis. However, it is worth highlighting some observations made during this study concerning both the nature and function of irony within these two specialised discourse environments. Partington (2006) has previously used such press briefings to make observations concerning irony, so there is much potential scope for development in this area. A potential focus for future studies is why irony is so prevalent in political discourse. Ironic utterances can often intentionally make a situation more ambiguous and 'cloud' the meaning, and yet it remains a common rhetorical device in two political environments in which opinions and arguments are recorded for posterity, and ambiguity and misinterpretation can be dangerous. The lexicogrammatical features of irony presented in this study could be a factor in how speakers mitigate this danger of ambiguity. This may be explored in more detail.

Furthermore, the differences in irony between the two political discourses are significantly influenced by the natures of the two distinct political environments: British Parliamentary debate is often explicitly combative whereas White House press briefings are, superficially at least, more cooperative. This means that the two ironic environments can ostensibly be seen as on opposing sides of Hutcheon's framework (Figure 2.1, presented

below), more specifically, in regard to the aggregative function which has largest affective charge.

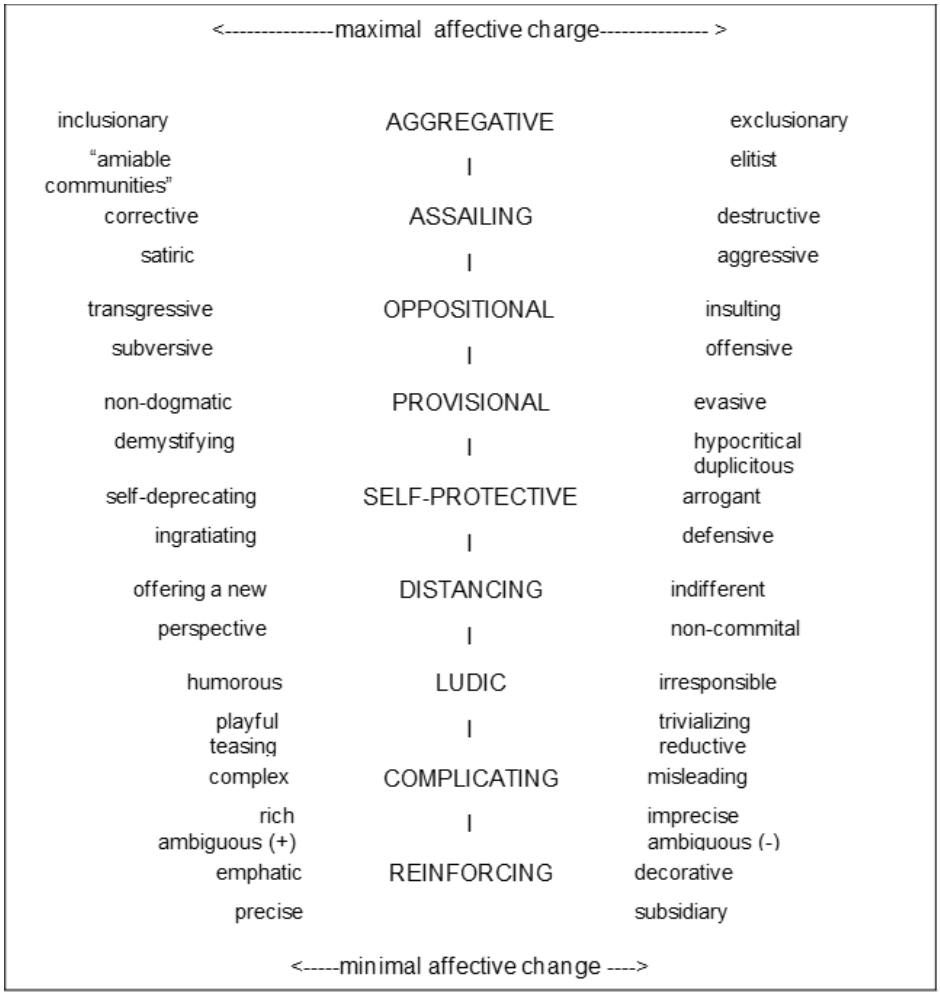


Figure 2.1 - Functions of Irony. Taken from Hutcheon (1994: 45)

In contrast, there is a growing movement among the British electorate which is critical of the format of PMQs (Murphy 2014; Bevan and John 2016; Shephard and Braby 2020; Convery et al 2020). The use of irony may well be a contributing factor to this. As Hutcheon argues that irony can cause exclusionary and elitist groups, so others have noted that the nature of PMQs can be alienating to the electorate (Allen et al 2013). In fact, it may well be worth exploring if the irony used in PMQs has a positive or negative affective charge for the watching electorate. Indeed, Allen et al's (ibid) study found that a considerable 67% of British citizens interviewed agreed with the point that 'there is too much party political point-scoring instead of answering the question' in PMQs. Although it is not the focus of this study to categorise illocutionary function and locutionary effects of ironic utterances within PMQs, it is certainly an area of study which may prove fruitful in re-examining the function of PMQs as a whole.

Despite these negatives, this study has highlighted examples in which irony has served an inclusionary function within British parliamentary discourse, so it is fair to argue that the use of irony is not one-dimensional in either discourse environments. Moreover, the irony used in White House press briefings is particularly notable as it does not seem to comfortably fit into any of Hutcheon's categorisations.

The relationship between the press and the press secretary is usually frictional; a relationship which deteriorated to a low point during the Trump administration. Yet, the irony used here is often curious. If we look at the two following examples from Sean Spicer, Trump's first Press Secretary, we can see this type of irony:

1. Good afternoon. I want to thank Sarah for standing in for me on Friday. She did a great job. I missed you all tremendously. (Laughter.) Now that I realize that we can do that a little more I'll spend a little more time at the Pentagon.

2. With that, be glad to take your questions. April.

   Q: Why thank you, Sean. (Laughter.)
   MR. SPICER: How are you today?
   Q: I'm fine. And how are you?
   MR. SPICER: Fantastic. (Laughter.)
   Q: Great. Well, Sean, going back to some issues that are in the news

In both examples, the irony emerges from a self-awareness and acknowledgement of the thorny relationship, through a somewhat incongruous use of pleasantries. In his own corpus of White House press briefings, Partington (2006: 205) notes similar examples. He identifies this as a skilful piece of rhetoric in which the speaker can imply both the dictum and the implicatum, and yet by evoking both, the speaker can avoid criticism by denying either. This works as a rather cynical but effective face-saving strategy. This technique seems suitable in political discourse and yet, in these examples, the irony is not aggressive nor insulting; rather the response by the press is laughter in example 1 and a continuation of the irony in example 2. Because of this, the irony demonstrated here has elements of a negative affective charge as it acknowledges the friction between the two groups and adds an air of ingenuousness to the pleasantries, and yet it is also incongruently positive as by acknowledging this friction, it

somehow diffuses the tension. It may well be a face-saving strategy, but I would argue somewhat different to the examples presented by Partington.

The above points seem to suggest that the use of irony within these two stylised discourse environments may well have unique characteristics which warrant further study. Hutcheon's framework (Figure 2.1) is certainly comprehensive, and the division of affective charge has proved to be an effective division of illocutionary meanings of irony. However, a number of examples of these ironic utterances seem to bridge this affective charge.

9.7 Implications for language teaching

Although not a central focus of this study, the findings present some considerations for language teaching: not only for the teaching of irony itself, but also for the teaching of patterns and the progressive aspect. These two aspects will be discussed briefly in turn.

9.7.1 Teaching irony

There has been very little research in the identification of irony in an L2 and even less research in the teaching of it (Bromberek-Dyzman and Rataj 2016; Ellis et al 2021). Few language learning syllabi focus on teaching irony and yet it can be considered an important aspect of language (particularly pragmatic) competence (Ellis et al 2021). Similarly, the CEFR framework[26] does not explicitly mention irony, although a proficient learner (C Band) must identify and understand "implicit meaning". As a result of this lack of focus, language teachers, often with various constraints, do not devote much class time on the explicit teaching of irony.

The majority of relevant research focuses on identification of irony for L2 learners (for example: Shively et al 2008; Taguchi 2008; Kim 2014). However, Puhacheuskaya and Järvikivi (2022) also found that speakers with a foreign accent were less successful in conveying irony. Many of these studies emphasise that contextual clues are the most significant, or at least identifiable, for irony comprehension. Notably, these studies provide

[26] https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

few practical solutions for language learning. In contrast, the present study has suggested possible patterns which can be utilised to help both identification and conveyance. Perhaps this is a more significant implication of this study for language learning.

9.7.2 Phraseology and language teaching

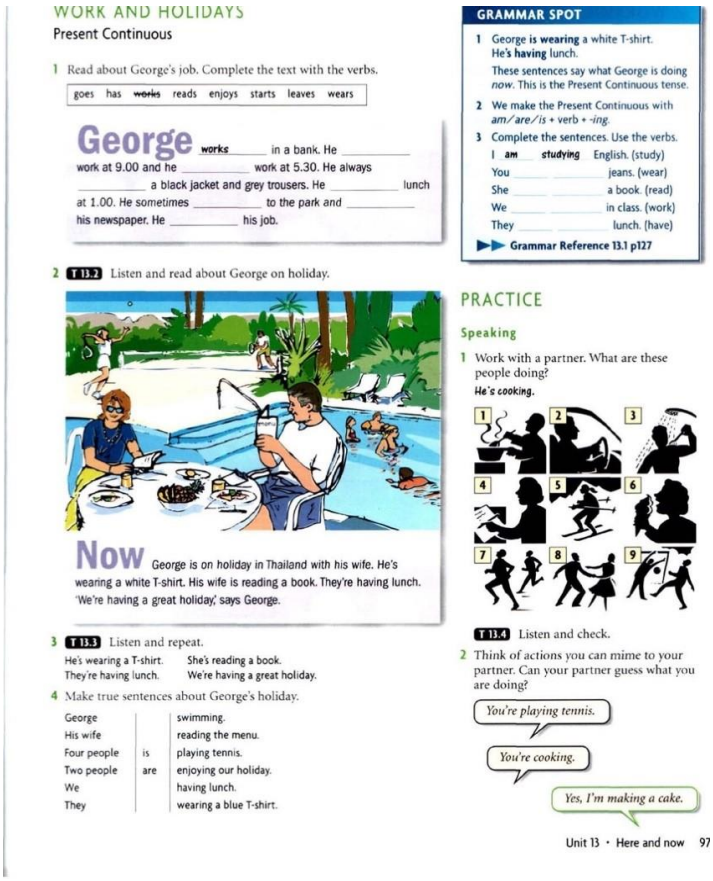
As discussed above, this study supports the argument of a greater need to focus on phraseology. Various areas of linguistic study have emphasised that the separation of lexis and grammar is not clear (Construction Grammar and Pattern Grammar are two such areas). However, this emphasis has yet to be fully embraced by language teaching. Pedagogically focussed studies into phraseology such as Nattinger and DeCarrico's (1992) and Pawley and Syder's (1983) were undoubtedly influential in teaching methodology, yet textbooks such as that in Figure 9.2 tend to have only a cursory nod to phraseology. Furthermore, developments in Construction Grammar mean that the connection between lexical phrases and meaning have become entrenched more deeply. We can see echoes of this in Pawley and Syder's earlier observations:

> In the store of familiar collocations there are expressions for a wide range of familiar concepts *and speech acts*, and the speaker is able to retrieve these as wholes or as automatic chains from the long-term memory; by doing this he minimizes the amount of clause-internal encoding work to be done and frees himself to attend to other tasks in talk-exchange, including the planning of larger units of discourse. (Pawley & Syder, 1983, p. 192 my italics)

Such phrases not only have semantic meanings but also pragmatic meanings. Therefore, the examples of phrases presented in Chapter 7 can be taught to demonstrate such pragmatic meanings. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for students to study constructions as well as simple lexical and grammatical rules. Indeed, Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) argue that the prevalence of generative grammar theory may be the result of corpus linguistic methodology avoiding investigation of grammar, maintaining its distinction from lexis.

A specific focus which has emerged from this study is a potential need for re-examination of the progressive aspect regarding collostructions. The progressive aspect is one of the first grammatical structures to be introduced in many English language textbooks. However, one of its main pedagogical purposes at this early stage is to build learners' lexical

knowledge of verbs using *slot and filler* activities utilising an aspect which has very little irregularity (e.g., the doubling of consonants in, say, *running*) (see Fig. 9.2). Most activities concentrate on its use in present continuous structures to describe a scene or state which is taking place and, possibly, in flux as the speakers are talking. Even at this stage, teachers may run in to difficulties when students opt for items which are more difficult to utilise, such as state verbs or transitive verbs. Other examples may be unnatural colligations. Early in my teaching career, I had a student announce about the couple in a photograph that "they were living": a difficult sentence for me to critique at the time.



WORK AND HOLIDAYS

Present Continuous

1 Read about George's job. Complete the text with the verbs.

goes has ~~works~~ reads enjoys starts leaves wears

George works in a bank. He _____ work at 9.00 and he _____ work at 5.30. He always _____ a black jacket and grey trousers. He _____ lunch at 1.00. He sometimes _____ to the park and _____ his newspaper. He _____ his job.

2 T 13.2 Listen and read about George on holiday.

Now George is on holiday in Thailand with his wife. He's wearing a white T-shirt. His wife is reading a book. They're having lunch. 'We're having a great holiday,' says George.

3 T 13.3 Listen and repeat.

He's wearing a T-shirt. She's reading a book.
They're having lunch. We're having a great holiday.

4 Make true sentences about George's holiday.

George		swimming.
His wife		reading the menu.
Four people	is	playing tennis.
Two people	are	enjoying our holiday.
We		having lunch.
They		wearing a blue T-shirt.

GRAMMAR SPOT

1 George **is wearing** a white T-shirt.
He's **having** lunch.
These sentences say what George is doing *now*. This is the Present Continuous tense.

2 We make the Present Continuous with *am/are/is* + verb + *-ing*.

3 Complete the sentences. Use the verbs.

I **am** **studying** English. (study)
You _____ _____ jeans. (wear)
She _____ _____ a book. (read)
We _____ _____ in class. (work)
They _____ _____ lunch. (have)

Grammar Reference 13.1 p127

PRACTICE

Speaking

1 Work with a partner. What are these people doing?

He's cooking.

T 13.4 Listen and check.

2 Think of actions you can mime to your partner. Can your partner guess what you are doing?

You're playing tennis.

You're cooking.

Yes, I'm making a cake.

Unit 13 • Here and now 97

Figure 9.2: Present continuous exercise from New Headway Beginner: Student Book (Soars and Soars: 2013)

Furthermore, if we adopt the broad teaching goals of the communicative approach, it is pedagogically problematic to start with this function and purpose of the progressive as it is not the most common usage. Additionally, Römer's (2005b) corpus-based study, demonstrates that the progressive aspect has a number of lexical and grammatical restrictions which are not considered in the majority of EFL textbooks. Her study seems to demonstrate

that more consideration of the progressive aspect using corpus-based methods would be beneficial. Linked to the above point concerning patterns and constructions, it is reasonable to suggest that there needs to be a greater connection made between the teaching of lexicogrammatical form and linguistic/pragmatic function to address students' communicative and accuracy needs. This study has attempted to demonstrate the importance of this connection, and so similar studies can be used to inform construction-based and phraseological-based language teaching.

9.8 Future research

Initially, there are areas of this study which were limited. In particular, as this study focused on ironic utterances, both patterns of multiple hedging and the progressive collostructions were incomplete in scope. Certainly, these two aspects of lexicogrammar could be explored more comprehensively. Not only could such studies help to realise the range and flexibility of such patterns, but may also uncover alternative illocutionary functions.

Regarding wider areas of research, Sections 9.5 to 9.7 point to areas in which findings from this study could be applied. These can be categorised into three key areas. Most significantly, I believe there is greater scope to explore how corpus-based methodology could investigate elements of language above the clause by reflecting on the relationship between lexicogrammar and pragmatics. This corpus-based study is rather unique in that its primary focus of study is a pragmatic phenomenon. Yet it is theories such as those under the umbrella of Construction Grammar which demonstrate the interconnection between the micro and macro scales of language. As corpus linguistic methodology develops, there may well be greater opportunity for an increase in the range of what aspects of language which can be examined.

Secondly, the lexicogrammatical findings in the three results chapters can be utilised in NLP studies into automatic detection of irony. As stated, NLP methodology and practice is beyond the scope of this research. However, collaboration between corpus-based descriptive research into language and practical neural network applications may prove to be useful. Hovy and Lavid (2010) have outlined how this collaboration has previously proved

beneficial. Also, examples such as those presented in Chapter 8 demonstrate that there are clear practical possibilities for specific studies focused on irony.

Finally, the nature of the DIY corpora and the examples of irony produced begs the question of a possibility of further discourse analysis of the specific use of irony in politics. As mentioned, Partington (2006: 182ff) examined the use of irony within a political corpus to evaluate its nature and function. Section 9.6 outlined marked or unusual uses of irony which may be unique to the political discourse environments and so may be worth studying in more detail. As mentioned, this may be particularly relevant to political discourse in general which in recent years has suffered from lowering levels of trust in politicians and active involvement in the political system by the electorate. Studies have used corpus linguistic methodology to examine similar paralinguistic features of language related to politics such as fake news (Marquardt 2020; Lugea 2021) and sincerity and credibility in politicians in a world of cynical irony (Milburn 2019; Weaver 2019; Valgarðsson et al 2021). Such studies may help to shape future policy in terms of political discourse.

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Appendix 1A: Irony examples from Prime Minister Questions (106)

1. TM - "I was obviously getting carried away with the football fever that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam introduced into the Chamber."

2. JC - "I wonder if this has anything to do with the fact that the Chancellor and the Health Secretary both represent Surrey constituencies."

3. JC - "I have been reading a bit of John le Carré and apparently "R" means "referendum"—it is very subtle, all this."

4. TM - "I find that a rather curious question from the hon. Gentleman."

5. Ronnie Campbell (Lab) - "I'm looking pretty slim as well, Mr Speaker!"

6. Karl McCartney (Con) "Finally, does my right hon. Friend share my surprise that certain Opposition Front Benchers have not learned that disagreeing with their current party leader can cause headaches?"

7. TM - "I had hoped that I would be able to welcome the shadow Home Secretary to the Front Bench in time for the vote that is going to take place later tonight. Perhaps Labour Members are starting to realise that their only real headache is their leader."

8. TM - "As usual with Labour, the right hand is not talking to the far-left."

9. Speaker - "The right hon. Gentleman never knew he was quite that popular"

10. Ed Milliband (Lab) - "In case it is helpful, can she offer the services of UK scientists to convince the President that climate change is not a hoax invented by the Chinese?"

11. JC - "it is not so much the Iron Lady as the Irony Lady"

12. JC - " Does she now disagree with herself?"

13. TM - "I consider the issue, I set out my plan and I stick to it. It is called leadership; he should try it sometime."

14. Chris Bryant (Lab) - "That is not quite an answer to whether she will visit the Rhondda. I hope she will; I am happy to accommodate her—I can do bacon and eggs. More importantly, I could take her to see the best brass band in the world, the Cory band, or, for that matter, I could take her to the local food bank, based in the closed-down Conservative club."

15. TM - "The last time I looked, Cardiff was actually in Wales"

16. TM - "As a former Wimbledon councillor, I am not sure that I quite share the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend for the defeat of AFC Wimbledon"

17. JC - "But does she agree with him that the best way to solve the crisis of the four-hour wait is to fiddle the figures so that people are not seen to be waiting so long on trolleys in NHS hospitals?"

18. JC - "she seems to be in some degree of denial about this"

19. TM - "He may find it difficult to believe that somebody will say the same thing that they said a few weeks ago"

20. JC - "Earlier this week, the Prime Minister said that she wanted to create a “shared society”. Well, we certainly have that: more people sharing hospital corridors on trolleys; more people sharing waiting areas in A&E departments; and more people sharing in the anxiety created by this Government."

21. MR SPEAKER " if she were behaving like this in another public place she would probably be subject to an antisocial behaviour order"

22. Peter Dowd (Lab) "In the light of the Foreign Secretary’s display of chronic “foot in mouth” disease[laughter], when deciding on Cabinet positions, does the Prime Minister now regret that pencilling “FO” against his name should have been an instruction, not a job offer?

23. TM - " I will of course have an opportunity to do that again on Monday, when I am sure the House will be as full for the statement on the European Council meeting. Funny, that seemed to come from this side, yes, but not from the Labour side

24. Emily Thornberry (Lab) - "The question is: does he still agree with himself?"

25. David Lidington (Con) - "I thought it had not escaped even the hon. Lady's attention that there has been a rather significant referendum since February"

26. Andrew Bridgen (Con) - " I urge him to take no advice from the Labour party; it has only one card to play—and it is always the joker."

27. Steve Baker (Con) - " I expect my right hon. Friend will be astonished, if not aghast, to learn that a succession of journalists from the BBC have contacted me seeking to create—to manufacture—stories of Back-Bench rebellion on the issue of the EU"

28. DL - "I am sure that my hon. Friend is shocked at the thought that anybody should look to him as a source of information about rebellions against the Government.

29. Caroline Lucas (Green) - "Can I suggest to the Prime Minister that "having your cake and eating it" is not a serious strategy for Brexit and that Britain deserves better than having to rely on leaked documents to know the Government's plans?"

30. JC - "The right hon. Lady quotes the IFS, but she is being a little selective"

31. TM - "I have to say, Given that the right hon. Gentleman cannot differentiate between the IMF and the IFS, it is probably a good job that he is sitting there and I am standing here"

32. JC - "I am not entirely sure where the Government's credibility lies on borrowing, since they are borrowing even more, the deficit is increasing and people are suffering."

33. JC - "It is very strange that the Prime Minister should say that, because the Select Committee on Health, chaired by her hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr

Wollaston), says that the figure is actually £4.5 billion, not £10 billion; there is quite a big difference there."

34. John Stevenson (Con) "During the past six years we have had three major referendums, all eliciting varying degrees of excitement. Does the Prime Minister agree that one can have too much excitement, and will she therefore rule out any further referendums in this Parliament?"

35. Tim Farron (LD) - "As millions of public sector workers face another year of suppressed pay, after another week of shambolic Brexit negotiations, and with the national health service facing a winter crisis and crying out for cash, does the Prime Minister worry that her Government are only just about managing?

36. JC - "Well, the word [about Brexit plan] does not seem to have travelled very far"

37. JC - "Talking of worst results, the Foreign Secretary has been very helpful this week, because he informed the world that “Brexit means Brexit”—we did not know that before—and beyond that “we are going to make a titanic success of it.””

38. JC - "Well, Mr Speaker—*[Interruption.]* That was exciting, wasn’t it? "

39. JC - "I do not wish to promote any further division on their Benches, Mr Speaker."

40. Richard Bacon "Following the election of Mr Trump, and given the very welcome progress made in our society by women and those from ethnic minorities, what message of reassurance does the Prime Minister have for fat, middle-aged white men, who may feel that we have been left behind?"

41. TM - "That is a very interesting point. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to come up and see me some time."

42. JC - "While she is doing so, perhaps she could take the Work and Pensions Secretary with her, because he described the film as “monstrously unfair” and then went on to admit that he had never seen it, so he has obviously got a very fair sense of judgment on this"

43. JC - "I thought for a moment the Prime Minister was going to say “Brexit means Brexit” again. *[laughter]* I am sure she will tell us one day what it actually means."

44. JC - "I have been thinking about this for a couple of days, and—*[Interruption.]* I think when we are searching for the real meaning and the importance of the Prime Minister’s statement, we should consult the great philosophers. *[Interruption.]* The only one I could come up with—*[Interruption.]*

    Mr Speaker - Mr Cleverly, calm yourself. You are imperilling your own health, man, which is a source of great concern to me.

    JC- "The only one I could come up with was Baldrick, who said that his “cunning plan” was to have no plan."

45. JC - "I am most grateful to the over 300,000 people that voted for me to become the leader of my party, which is rather more than voted for the Prime Minister to become the leader of her party"

46. JC - "I want to congratulate the Prime Minister. She has brought about unity between Ofsted and the teaching unions. She has united former Education Secretaries on both sides of the House. She has truly brought about a new era of unity in education thinking. I wonder if it is possible for her this morning, within the quiet confines of this House, to name any education experts who back her proposals on new grammar schools and more selection.

47. TM - "I gently remind the right hon. Gentleman that he went to a grammar school and I went to a grammar school, and it is what got us to where we are today—but my side might be rather happier about that than his."

48. TM - "I recognise that this may very well be the last time that the right hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to face me across the Dispatch Box—certainly if his MPs have anything to do with it. I accept that he and I do not agree on everything—well, we probably do not agree on anything—but I must say that he has made his mark. Let us think of some of the things he has introduced. He wants coal mines without mining them, submarines without sailing them, and he wants to be Labour leader without leading them. One thing we know is that whoever is Labour leader after the leadership election, it will be the country that loses."

49. TM - "On all of those questions, whether it is on the referendum for leaving the European Union, the referendum on independence in Scotland, or those in this House,

he seems to think that if he asks the question all the time, he will get a different answer."

50. TM - "I did notice that the right hon. Gentleman had asked all his Twitter followers what questions he should ask me this week, so I thought I would look to see what sort of responses he had received. I have to say that the first one was quite good. In fact, he might want to ensure that he stays sitting down for this"

51. TM - "The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to quite understand what the vote on 23 June was about."

52. Tom Brake (LD) - "I wish to put to the Prime Minister a request that I know she will think is reasonable. St Helier hospital, which is a high-performing local hospital that delivers excellent care, was built in the 1930s and is in need of very substantial investment. Will she agree to earmark the first two weeks of the £350 million that will be available each week post-Brexit to spend on the reconstruction of my hospital?"

53. TM - "I notice the timeline that the right hon. Gentleman referred to. He might have forgotten that during that period we had 13 years of a Labour Government"

54. TM - "I suspect that many Members on the Opposition Benches might be familiar with an unscrupulous boss—a boss who does not listen to his workers, a boss who requires some of his workers to double their workload and maybe even a boss who exploits the rules to further his own career. Remind him of anybody?"

55. JC - "I know this is very funny for all the Conservative Members, but I do not suppose there are too many Conservative MPs who have to go to a food bank to supplement the food on their family's table every week. We should reflect on that."

56. TM - "but I find it a little confusing, given that only two years ago in the Scottish referendum, the Scottish National party was campaigning for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, which would have meant leaving the European Union"

57. Jamie Reed (Lab) - "I wish her well in healing the country in the months and years to come—after all, it is she and her colleagues who so bitterly divided it. I also thank her for her wholehearted support for and endorsement of official Labour party policy on Trident. It is such a refreshing change to hear that from the Dispatch Box."

58. TM - "The hon. Gentleman refers to divisions on the Conservative Benches. I have to say: which party was it that took three weeks to decide who its unity candidate should be?

59. Stuart Andrew (Con) - "Growing up on a council estate, I found it tough coming out—as a Conservative."

60. Philip Davies - "I apologise for the fact that my phone was obviously turned off when she was calling me to invite me to join her Government."

61. Tim Farron - "You are all very, very kind."(after jeers) (35'57") "There are reports today that the new Brexit unit will be hiring lawyers at a cost of £5,000 per head per day. May I ask whether the Prime Minister will be using the mythical £350 million to pay the legal fees, or is that still pencilled in for the NHS, as promised by her Cabinet colleagues who campaigned for Leave?"

62. TM - "Little did the voters of North West Durham know that the two unsuccessful candidates in that election would become leaders of two of the country's political parties, although I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that my party is a little bit bigger than his."

63. DC - "When it comes to women Prime Ministers, I am very pleased to be able to say that pretty soon it is going to be 2:0, and not a pink bus in sight."

64. DC - "If I am accused of sloth in delivery by the right hon. Gentleman, let us take the past week. We have both been having leadership elections. We got on with it. We have had resignation, nomination, competition and coronation. The Opposition have not even decided what the rules are yet. If they ever got into power, it would take them about a year to work out who would sit where.

65. JC - "Democracy is an exciting and splendid thing, and I am enjoying every moment of it."

66. DC - "Talking of the economy, the Home Secretary said that many people

    "find themselves exploited by unscrupulous bosses"—

    I cannot imagine who she was referring to."

67. DC - "I have done a bit of research, Mr Speaker. I have addressed 5,500 questions from this Dispatch Box; I will leave it for others to work out how many I have answered"

68. Kenneth Clarke (Con) - "Although, no doubt, he will have plans for a slightly more enjoyable and relaxed Wednesday morning and lunchtime in the future, may I ask that he will nevertheless still be an active participant in this House as it faces a large number of problems over the next few years?"

69. DC - "He is not always the easiest person to get hold of—Tory modernisation has never quite got as far as getting Ken Clarke to carry a mobile phone."

70. DC - "The only area where I think the right hon. Gentleman has made a massive contribution is in recent weeks coming up with the biggest job-creation scheme that I have ever seen in my life. Almost everyone on the Benches behind him has had an opportunity to serve on the Opposition Front Bench. Rather like those old job-creation schemes, however, it has been a bit of a revolving door. They get a job—sometimes for only a few hours—and then they go back to the Back Benches, but it is a job-creation scheme none the less and we should thank him for that."

71. DC - "The right hon. Gentleman says that he put his back into it [referendum campaign]; all I say is that I would hate to see him when he is not trying."

72. DC - "When standing at this Dispatch Box, I am sure that we all try to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, although that is not always possible in the circumstances that we face."

73. DC - "Here I am trying to be so consensual. I am doing my best. I could mention that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) was out yesterday spinning for Nigel Farage, but I do not want to play that game."

74. DC - "I want to be clear about this: the words "world war three" have never passed my lips, let me reassure everyone of that—*[Interruption.]* Of course, they have now; well spotted."

75. Peter Bone (Con) - "may I say to the Prime Minister that a group of global-looking leave campaigners will be descending on Witney at lunch time this Sunday? I will be there. Will the Prime Minister be able to join us? Given what he has just said, will he confirm that if the country votes to leave, he will be able to stay on as Prime Minister and negotiate the exit?"

76. DC - "First, I am very sorry that I will not be able to meet my hon. Friend—I am making an appearance on the “Andrew Marr” programme on Sunday—but I would recommend that he goes to The Fleece pub in Witney and spends as much time and as much money as he can there, rather than on anything else."

77. DC - " I am sure that this is one occasion when the whole House will want all the home nations to stay in Europe for as long as possible."

78. AE - "Obviously, the Chancellor has done a bit more research this time. I regard that as a compliment"

79. AE - " I notice there is no “outer” here: all the Brexiteers have been banished from the Government Front Bench. It is nice to see the Justice Secretary here. I think the Chancellor has put the rest of his Brexit colleagues in detention"

80. GO - "When we said we were creating job opportunities we did not mean job opportunities for the whole shadow Cabinet"

81. GO - "In their own report published this week, “Labour’s Future”—surprisingly long—they say they are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the working people of Britain."

82. Richard Drax (Con) - "What a privilege it is to be called by you, Mr Speaker. If the remain team have their day on 24 June, I shall have to apply by email to Herr Juncker to ask a question.”

83. Stephen Pound (Lab) - "In the spirit of consensus, may I say that few things unite the House more than a concentration on the periodic reviews of the Boundary Commission, which are studied with fierce intensity and result in covetous eyes occasionally being cast on neighbouring constituencies? "

84. GO - "I can confirm that we have hired Lord Sugar to advise on enterprise. He will bring his knowledge and expertise to that task. Apparently, Lord Sugar has told the Labour party, “You’re fired.”

85. Mike Kane (Lab) - "Even “fantastically corrupt” Nigeria is asking Britain to clean up its act and introduce beneficial ownership registers in the overseas territories. Will the Prime Minister achieve that tomorrow at the anti-corruption summit?

86. DC - "First, I had better check that the microphone is on before speaking. It is probably a good idea."

87. DC - " I will try to identify a question in that lot and answer it as positively as I can."

88. DC - "If he wants to swap voting records of Labour MEPs and Tory MEPs, let us have a whole session on it. I have plenty of material here."

89. JC - "That was a very long answer—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister could simply have said whether or not he supports the proposals and whether his Conservative MEPs are going to vote for them."

90. DC - "It is a great way to end the Session—getting a lesson in clean campaigning from the Liberal Democrats."

91. JC - "I join the Prime Minister in congratulating Leicester City on their amazing achievement. I hope that what he has said is not an indication that he is going to support another football team, rather than sticking with the two that he has already."

92. JC - "The Prime Minister used to say, “We are all in it together.” What happened to that?"

93. David Amess (Con) - "She now wishes to know whether she needs to set a world record for longevity before the Chilcot report is published."

94. The Speaker - "Calm yourself, Mr Campbell. You are supposed to be a senior statesman in the House. Calm down. Take up yoga, as I have told you before."

95. DC - " I have been watching everything Gary Lineker has said since, and he is not quite answering the question—something that, of course, no one ever gets away with in this House."

96. DC - "As I said last week—this is good; I like repeats on television, and I am very happy to have them in the House as well"

97. DC - "The other pattern that I have noticed, standing at this Dispatch Box, is that I am on my fifth Labour leader—and if he carries on like this, I will soon be on my sixth."

98. DC - " If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) wants to be Speaker, he had better stop interrupting everybody, as it is not going to get him any votes—a little tip for you there."

99. DC - "It is always good to get a lecture on diktats from someone whose press secretary is an avowed Stalinist, but I will pass over that."

100. DC - "When I read that the Labour party was going to ban McDonnell from its party conference, I thought that was the first sensible decision it had made, but it turns out that it was not the job destroyer that the Labour party wanted to keep away from its conference; it was one of Britain's biggest employers. No wonder Labour MPs are in despair. Frankly, I'm lovin' it."

101. Matt Warman (Con) - "It is a truth universally acknowledged that fish and chips taste best on the beaches of Skegness, and that is why 4 million people visit those beaches every year."

102. Charlotte Leslie (Con) - "Is he concerned that currently Chancellor Merkel seems to be outstripping everyone in making the case for Brexit?"

103. Huw Irranca-Davies (Lab) - "On the bus to the Commons today, I foolishly revealed to a fellow passenger that I was a member of Parliament. After some light hearted and customary abuse, our conversation turned to life, the universe and commuting. So can the prime minister tell me and the man on the Peckham omnibus if that journey cost me 90 pence under Ken, how much did that same journey cost me today under Boris?"

104. Ian Lucas (Lab) - "On the question of a European referendum, is it the policy of the prime minister to be indecisive? Or is he not sure?

105. DC - "May I personally praise him for that magnificent growth on his top lip? I have noticed the number of my colleagues, and others on these Benches, suddenly resembling banditos. It is not something that I am fully capable of myself, so I am jealous of that."

106. EM - "Mr Speaker, at this last question time before the recess, can I remind the prime minister what he said before the election when he was asked why he wanted to be prime minister? He paused, and with characteristic humility, he said, he said, "because I think I`d be good at it." Mr Speaker, where did it all go wrong?

Key to Abbreviations

As Prime Minister:

TM - Theresa May

DC - David Cameron

As Leader of the opposition:

JC – Jeremy Corbyn

EM – Ed Miliband

As Chancellor:

GO – George Osborne

As Shadow Chancellor:

AE - Angela Eagle

Appendix 1B: Irony examples from White House Press Briefings (105)

1. For what it's worth, today happens to be National Leave Work Early Day. (Laughter.) I hope you all get a chance to participate and maybe you can go home -- if you participated in National Donut Day -- you can go home early. (Laughter.)

   With that, I hope you guys take advantage of that day. Have a great weekend. Thank you.

   Q: Are you going home early? (Laughter.)

2. MS. SANDERS - In addition to all of the big news happening at the White House today, it is also my daughter, Scarlet's fifth birthday. And since I'm here and you guys are, I get to wish Scarlet a happy birthday. And with that, I think her first birthday wish would probably be that you guys are incredibly nice. (Laughter.) And now I will take your questions.

3. Q: Can we expect more firings from the Justice Department?

   MS. SANDERS: Not that I'm aware of today. (Laughter.)

4. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon. I want to thank Sarah for standing in for me on Friday. She did a great job. I missed you all tremendously. (Laughter.) Now that I realize that we can do that a little more I'll spend a little more time at the Pentagon.

5. John. Two Johns --

   Q: Let me go first, John Gizzi. All right, sound good?

   MR. SPICER: That's quite a negotiation. (Laughter.) We may need you.

   Q: From "The Art of the Deal."

   Q: Thank you, Sean.

6. John Gizzi.

   Q: Thank you, Sean. Thank you, John. (Laughter.)

   Q: And thank you, John.

7. Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you. In your view, should the U.S. stay in the Paris climate agreement or withdraw from it?

   SECRETARY ROSS: Well, now you're really getting outside my area. (Laughter.)

   Q: You're a participant in those discussions.

   SECRETARY ROSS: It's really outside my area. I'm having enough difficulty dealing with the trade issues rather than poaching on other people's territory.

8. Q: And do you think softwood lumber might get Michael Flynn's name off the front pages?

   SECRETARY ROSS: Is Michael Flynn now a trade issue? I wasn't aware that he was. (Laughter.)

   MR. SPICER: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

9. Q: You're always welcome, Mr. Secretary.

   MR. SPICER: He is always welcome.

   Q: It was a pleasure.

   SECRETARY ROSS: I'm glad you're out of questions because I'm out of answers. (Laughter.)

   MR. SPICER: Now that the Secretary has exhausted you all. (Laughter.)

10. MR. STARLING: Thank you. Good evening and -- or afternoon, rather, and thank you for not leaving and for being interested in the event that we're doing tomorrow. My name is Ray Starling. I am the Special assistant to the President for Agriculture, Trade and Food Assistance. And as you can guess, I was not raised north of Washington, D.C., so if we have any translation issues, we'll let Kelly step in for those. (Laughter.)

11. Q: Thanks so much, Sean. As you know, the first go-around at replacing Obamacare was not successful. Since then, are you any closer to getting 218 votes in the House to pass or replace the Affordable Care Act?

    MR. SPICER: Yes. (Laughter.)

    Q: Got a number?

    Q: Yeah, elaborate a little more than "yes"?

12. Why do this 100-day push if it's a ridiculous amount of time?

MR. SPICER: I think we've gotten a fairly decent amount of inquiries from you and your colleagues. And so in order to answer those inquiries --

Q: So you're doing something for us?

MR. SPICER: Yeah, well, you know, we're givers. (Laughter.)

13. Q: Has he filed his taxes today, Sarah?

MS. SANDERS: Honestly, I haven't had a conversation with him about that but I'll ask.

Q: Can you check on that?

MS. SANDERS: I'll ask. Did you guys all file your taxes today?

Q: Of course.

MS. SANDERS: Of course. We've only got one, come on. (Laughter.) All right. Thanks, guys.

14. Q: First one, coming up on Tax Day, when does the White House plan on releasing President Trump's 2016 returns? And are there any concerns about possible conflicts of interest reflecting on the tax debate that could be cleared up with this release?

Second, how many people are you expecting at the Easter Egg Roll? And will you practicing your previous role as the bunny?

MR. SPICER: Those are two tough ones. (Laughter.)

15. With respect to the Easter Egg Roll, it's a huge topic. I appreciate that. (Laughter.) I think we're going to have an egg-cellent time. (Laughter.) Oh, come on. You can't ask the question and not get the answer. (Laughter.)

16. Jeff.

Q: Sean, during the campaign --

MR. SPICER: Sorry, it's --

Q: Sorry. You can go next. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Be careful with that. (Laughter.)

17. MR. SPICER: Two and two in the Rose Garden.

With that, let me turn it over to Marc Short, Director of Legislative Affairs, to talk a little about the Congressional Review Act and everything else.

Q: Everything else? (Laughter.)

Q: First Syria. (Laughter.)

18. *Q: I wasn't expecting to tap quite such a deep well with that question. (Laughter.)

    MR. SPICER: It's Friday.

19. Q: Thanks, Sean. Given that it's financial disclosure day, why will the White House not be releasing --

    MR. SPICER: -- proclamation on that. (Laughter.)

20. Q: No, you're the one telling us to -- from you right now.

    MR. SPICER: No, you haven't. So she -- no, no, but she's been on television talking about what she's done, and you seem to have made no --

    Q: I don't believe everything I see on TV. (Laughter.)

21. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon. Matt, you had a phenomenal story today. (Laughter.) Get that joke? If you didn't, look it up. A little delayed reaction to that. (Laughter.)

22. Q: Thanks, Sean. Two questions, if you don't mind.

    MR. SPICER: I want phenomenal questions from you.

    Q: That's what I'll give you. (Laughter.) First, we know now --

    MR. SPICER: You get it?

    Q: No, I got it. (Laughter.)

23. MR. SPICER: I will convey your request to him. I know that as I've said before, we'll see. I'm sure that at some point -- he enjoyed the last one so much --

    Q: Tomorrow?

    MR. SPICER: Is that what you'd like, tomorrow?

    Q: That works.

    MR. SPICER: Does that work for you? (Laughter.) Okay, well, let me see what I can come up with.

24. You don't ever tell me who your sources were, who --

Q: Because you're --

MR. SPICER: Glenn, I'm actually asking Cecilia's question -- if you could be as polite as not to interrupt her.

Q: I'm sorry.

MR. SPICER: Thank you.

Do you accept his apology?

Q: One hundred percent. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: That's very --

Q: In fact, I will cede the floor to Glenn.

MR. SPICER: Thank you. That's not how it works, though.

25. *With that, be glad to take your questions.

April.

Q: Why thank you, Sean. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: How are you today?

Q: I'm fine. And how are you?

MR. SPICER: Fantastic. (Laughter.)

Q: Great. Well, Sean, going back to some issues that are in the news --

26. April.

Q: Sean, several topics. One --

MR. SPICER: Shocker. (Laughter.)

Q: Don't be.

27. Q: Just to be clear, I mean, if this fails today, is the President done with healthcare?

MR. SPICER: So negative. (Laughter.)

28. Q: That's what we're hearing.

MR. SPICER: That's what you're hearing? Well, I haven't heard that yet, so why don't we continue with a very positive, optimistic Friday. The sun is coming out. (Laughter.) I feel really good.

29. Q: If the bill doesn't pass --

MR. SPICER: There's somebody that's going to ask when it passes, and you can --

Q: Okay, well, do you want to have a briefing right after the vote?

MR. SPICER: No.

Q: Okay. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: All right, score one for you. (Laughter.)

30. Q: Thanks. Without prejudging the outcome of the vote --

MR. SPICER: Thank you. (Laughter.)

Q: -- does the President in any way regret pursuing healthcare first, given how complicated it has been?

31. MR. SPICER: Look, Eamon, I've discussed this earlier. I'm not going to start getting a "lessons learned" while we're in the middle of debate of a current bill. We'll have plenty of time -- if you want to stop by over the weekend, we can talk about -- (laughter) -- to sit down with you on that.

32. Q: Is the President going to just simply wash his hands of this today if this doesn't go his way?

MR. SPICER: Look, we're not -- the President is going to wash his hands several times, but I don't know -- (laughter).

Q: The central campaign promise of the President of the United States --

MR. SPICER: I understand that, and so what -- I get it. So slow down. Let's turn on C-SPAN and all watch this together, and then we can discuss what happened.

33. Jeff Mason.

Q: Sean --

Q: This is a Patriot question. (Laughter.)

Q: No, it's not. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Do you know anything about Tom Brady's jersey? Is this --

Q: I've got nothing on that. But I have a healthcare question for you. First, do you expect there to be a vote tonight?

34. Q: There are some former White House lawyers who served in the prior administration who say that by tweeting from his official POTUS account this morning a video that was put out on official social media channels, that the President and the White House have violated the anti-lobbying law because they're using money that was appropriated by Congress. Is that a concern you guys appreciate? Is that something that's been talked about here?

    MR. SPICER: It is not. The President -- that is not applicable to the President, no. So there is no -- I believe you're referring to 18 U.S. Code 1913, if I'm correct. (Laughter.) I think we're pretty good on it.

35. Also today, over on the Hill, Judge Gorsuch [is] in his second day of questioning by the Senate Judiciary Committee. During his nearly 12 hours of questioning yesterday -- now at least I know how someone else feels -- (laughter) -- the judge continued to prove himself an enormously qualified jurist that Americans will all be proud to see on the Supreme Court.

36. Q: What was that again?

    Q: -- that word?

    MR. SPICER: Ramspecking? Oh, Google it.

    Q: I remember -- I remember when --

    Q: How do you spell it?

    MR. SPICER: You ever seen my spelling? Come on. (Laughter.) Ramspecking. It was named after -- we're going to go through a history lesson here, guys.

37. So that seems like you're treating both of those pieces of news very differently.

    MR. SPICER: Well, first, I think your headlines are bad. I'm glad to rewrite --

    Q: I don't think that.

    MR. SPICER: I'd be glad to if you guys are looking for some help. (Laughter.)

    Q: Are you looking for a job?

    MR. SPICER: Our services are at the New York Times' disposal if it comes to writing headlines, and we could probably do a couple things on stories too, if you're willing to go there.

38. Apparently, is there a -- where's my New York Times guy? Matt Flegenheimer and Alan Rappeport -- okay, are in big trouble. I'll give you the first question but you have to deliver this message to them. They printed this morning that I am the father of 17-year-old triplet girls. My 17-year-old daughter really wishes that were happy -- really wishes that had happened, but my two 17-year-old sons are upset. (Laughter.) So if you could clarify that, that would be great. And I'll give you the first questions, if you've got one.

    So go ahead.

    Q: We're not great at math, obviously, at the New York Times.

    DIRECTOR MULVANEY: The math is right, it's actually the gender that was wrong. (Laughter.)

39. Q: May I follow up on that?

    DIRECTOR MULVANEY: No, because I'm going to -- how Sean does this every day for an hour and a half, I have no idea. (Laughter.) But I'm going to --

    MR. SPICER: No, keep going. (Laughter.)

    DIRECTOR MULVANEY: Yeah, exactly. (Laughter.)

40. Q: I haven't been read in by the FBI Director, but the House and Senate Intelligence Committees have been.

    MR. SPICER: Well, no, you're coming to some serious conclusions for a guy that has zero intelligence -- (laughter) --

    Q: Give me some credit, Sean.

    MR. SPICER: I'll give you some --

    Q: A little intelligence maybe. But no, what I'm saying is that --

41. Q: Can I just ask, what exactly are we going to see tomorrow? Are we going to see agency-level funding? Will there be any fiscal year '17 numbers? And will there be a supplemental for this?

    DIRECTOR MULVANEY: So three questions is one question.

    Q: Yes. (Laughter.)

    DIRECTOR MULVANEY: That's okay.

42. Q: The broad question was, there was a piece in the paper this week that suggested that we're in for the largest reduction of proposed reduction of the federal workforce

since World War II. Can you speak to the concerns in this area about the impact on property values and the Washington reception?

DIRECTOR MULVANEY: I work for the President of the United States. The President of the United States, he represents the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Southern Maryland, but he also represents the rest of the country. And I can assure you that we did not write this budget with an eye towards what it would do to the value of your condo. (Laughter.)

43. MR. SPICER: The President's intention right now is to donate his salary at the end of the year, and he has kindly asked that you all help determine where that goes. The way that we can avoid scrutiny is to let the press corps determine where it should go. (Laughter.)

44. MR. SPICER: Okay, Peter, let me answer the question.

Q: I'm listening.

MR. SPICER: You're not. Let me answer it. The bottom line is, the percentage of people who are unemployed varies widely by who you're asking and the way you do the analysis of who is actually in the workforce. The number of people who are working and receiving a paycheck is a number that we can look at.

Secondly, when you're asking about the validity of the CBO report, again, I would refer you to the CBO itself. The number that they issued that would be insured in 2016 was 26 million people. The actual number is 10 -- excuse me, 24 million. The actual number is 10.4. That's not a question of our credibility. It's a question of theirs.

Do you have anything more? (Laughter.)

45. Q: Sean, thank you. Ronica Cleary from Fox 5, thank you. I have two questions. The first, I think especially in light of what has happened in the room here today, the President tweeted this morning that much of the media is being rude and that we should be nice. So my question is, is it our job to be nice? And do you think we're nice? (Laughter.)

46. MR. SPICER: Happy Friday. Good to see you all. Good afternoon. Two more days until the work week is over -- (laughter) -- full attribution to Rahm Emanuel for that one.

47. And with that, I'd be glad to take your questions. John Roberts.

Q: I was going to say, your pin is upside down.

MR. SPICER: John Roberts always helping with the fashion tips. (Laughter.)

Q: It's still upside down.

Q: You wanted -- is that a distress call, Sean? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Appreciate that.

Q: House of Cards promo.

MR. SPICER: Thank you, no. There's no promo. (Laughter.) John, now on to your questions. (Laughter.) But thank you.

48. MR. SPICER: What I understand is that that rule was instituted to deal with market fluctuations. I could be wrong, but I believe that's why it was instituted. I think tweeting out "Great way to start a Friday," here are the actual numbers that you all have reported, is a bit -- I mean, don't make me make the podium move. (Laughter.) I mean, honest to god, like, every reporter here reported out that we had 235,000 jobs, 4.7 -- there isn't a TV station that didn't go live to it.

49. Q: I have a healthcare question for you.

MR. SPICER: Oh, good. (Laughter.)

Q: Aren't you relieved.

MR. SPICER: That's the appeal about it.

50. Q: And one more question --

MR. SPICER: Well, it's one-question Friday. (Laughter.)

Q: It's very much attached to this.

MR. SPICER: All right.

51. MR. SPICER: Good morning, everyone.

Q: Afternoon.

MR. SPICER: Thank you. Appreciate the -- John Roberts fact-checking from the seat. (Laughter.) Good morning -- good afternoon. (Laughter.) It's not my fault, it's on the paper.

52. Q: Thank you. I have two questions, but a really quick follow-up to Zeke's.

MR. SPICER: So that's three.

Q: Two and a half. (Laughter.)

53. Are there any concerns that come up in the discussion of the wall, namely the impact on Mexican politics?

MR. SPICER: No. (Laughter.) That was pretty good.

54. is it possible that we could see the President for a more general multi-question news conference? He's been a little press-shy this week. And from North Korea to healthcare selling to CIA leaks, we'd love to talk to him. Could we see him for a news conference?

MR. SPICER: I will ask, Alexis. (Laughter.)

Q: Would you ask him that? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Is there anyone else? I would be glad to ask -- show of hands. (Laughter.) Okay, thank you, I appreciate it.

55. He said it's going to be the biggest since Ronald Reagan, maybe even bigger. He said, "I know exactly what we're looking at, most of us know exactly the plan." So my first question is really easy. Tell us about the plan.

MR. SPICER: What the plan is?

Q: The tax cut plan.

MR. SPICER: Well, again, I'm going to wait until -- thank you, I appreciate the layup, Dave. (Laughter.)

56. Q: I have an unrelated question, but I also want to follow up on something --

MR. SPICER: Unrelated questions are my favorite. (Laughter.)

57. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon, everybody. Another quiet weekend. (Laughter.)

Q: You sure you don't want to do this on camera? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: The President signed a new executive order this morning that continues to protect the nation from terrorists entering into the United States, and a related presidential memorandum.

58. I think someone had told me earlier today that there were something like 20 visits to the Russian ambassador in the last, you know, 10, maybe, years. I don't -- huh?

Q: Twenty-two.

MR. SPICER: Twenty-two. Thank you for helping fact check me. (Laughter.)

Q: -- is not here, so somebody's got to do it. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Thank you. Where's Knoller?

59. John Gizzi.

Q: Thank you, Sean. One brief question.

MR. SPICER: Wow. (Laughter.)

60. Q: It will not surprise you that I have two questions. The first one is quick.

MR. SPICER: I think for Lent everyone needs to give up two questions. (Laughter.) Or maybe I could at least give up answering two questions. (Laughter.)

61. And I think -- I've been in this town 25 years, probably watched State of the Unions for 30 -- which doesn't say a lot -- (laughter) -- for my viewing habits -- but I've never seen a sustained applause like that.

62. *Q: Thanks, Sean. There were some quotes floating around last night from anonymous administration officials saying --

MR. SPICER: What? (Laughter.)

Q: What a surprise, right? (Laughter.)

63. Q: Sean, this is a follow-up on the -- from the heart. Was the President's softening of his immigration stand one from the heart or one from the political handbook? Let's put it that way. And did you get ashes this morning?

MR. SPICER: Well, as soon as -- I mean, not that I'm a big fan of sharing, but I will be going to get my ashes later in a little bit. So --

Q: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPICER: I appreciate that. I will (inaudible) in mass, and I'll let my mom know that you appreciate that, and my parish priest. (Laughter.)

Q: -- might be able to see you --

MR. SPICER: I try to keep a little bit of the church and state out of this.

Q: Do you have a confession?

MR. SPICER: Huh?

Q: Do you a have a confession while you're up there? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: There's three parts to Lent: alms giving, penance, and prayer. And I will make sure that I spend all 40 --

Q: Can you answer the first part of the question?

MR. SPICER: No, I'm good with -- I'm sorry I got lost in my faith. (Laughter.)

64. I'd need to get Michael to get back with you on that. I owe you that, and my apologies. I'll add it to my confession. (Laughter.)

65. Q: One more question, Sean.

MR. SPICER: Okay. Starting early. (Laughter.)

66. MR. SPICER: Right, but I think -- but in the same manner that we're presenting the budget. So we're talking about adding $54 million -- $54 trillion, rather -- a billion dollars to -- thank you. Appreciate the help here. (Laughter.)

67. And what's the purpose of doing that as opposed to simply rescinding it and then rendering that case moot?

MR. SPICER: Well, I haven't been able to read my phone while this has happened. So I --

Q: That's why I read --

MR. SPICER: (Laughter.) Thank you, I appreciate it.

68. Q: One more question just about the idea that it seems as though you're playing favorites with media outlets by excluding some from this conversation.

MR. SPICER: You're my favorite. (Laughter.)

Q: No, that's not what I'm asking. But do you have a response to that

69. What are the administration's plans to increase security on the Canadian border? And does the administration have any plans to build a wall there? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: Well, we're obviously concerned -- thank you -- at all sorts of immigration in this country

70. Margaret.

Q: Thank you. Oh, which Margaret?

MR. SPICER: Oh, lucky me. (Laughter.)

Q: Two Margarets. I'm going to take mine -- I've got a Bloomberg-y question for you. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER: I've got a Sean-y answer for you. (Laughter.)

71. If there's a Meryl Streep kind of moment, how do you think he'll react? And why -- if this has happened at other awards ceremonies, why do you think this happens?

MR. SPICER: Why do I think what happens? (Laughter.)

Q: Actresses and actors like Meryl Streep.

72. MR. SPICER: Hey, good afternoon, everyone. It's been a little while. Hope you missed me. (Laughter.)

Q: You missed us?

MR. SPICER: Absolutely.

73. MR. SPICER: We'll have a readout of that.

Q: And just --

MR. SPICER: Okay, of course everyone gets two. (Laughter.)

74. Q: Thank you very much. Two questions please. One, it's been one month on the job for you and for the President, and you are already talk of the town around the globe. (Laughter.) My two questions are, one --

MR. SPICER: My wife would disagree with you. (Laughter.) It's not always positive, too.

75. MS. SANDERS: Seems very formal here. (Laughter.) I'll keep it pretty short today.

76. MR. SPICER: Good afternoon. Happy Valentine's Day. I can sense the love in the room. (Laughter.)

77. Q: Thank you, Sean. One question today.

MR. SPICER: Wow.

Q: (Laughter.)

78. MR. SPICER: That's number one?

Q: No, the second part of a two-part.

MR. SPICER: Oh. (Laughter.)

Q: Given where --

MR. SPICER: I'm not calling on you anymore.

79. Q: Sean, I have a series of questions.

MR. SPICER: Look what you started, Hallie Jackson. (Laughter.)

Q: Don't blame it on Hallie, okay?

80. One of the posts you guys announced is an ambassadorial nominee to the Republic of Congo. I can't imagine you think that is going to get confirmed. What's the rationale behind that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Olivier, I think it's a couple of things. The first is, you never know. Second is -- so you're saying there's a chance? (Laughter.) That's a fun movie. I probably should have spent more time quoting from "Dumb and Dumber." (Laughter.)

81. First, I just want to say thank you, Josh, for being accessible during your time here as Press Secretary and Deputy Press Secretary, and thank you for working as hard as you have to answer our questions, including, but not exclusively, those questions that you didn't like. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: There were more than a few of those. (Laughter.) Thank you for your kind words, Jon. I appreciate it.

82. Q: And for the record, she was sentenced to 35 years. Does the White House believe that that was a just sentence?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't heard the President weigh in on that either, again for the same kind of chain-of-command reasons that I just cited.

Q: But he may tomorrow?

MR. EARNEST: Well, if he chooses to -- you and Jordan will be among the first to know. (Laughter.)

Q: Fair enough. Jordan, I got first dibs. (Laughter.)

83. Q: And just a last thing -- can you give us any indication of what the President is really doing and focused on these last number of days? I know you were asked about staffing and all that, but --

MR. EARNEST: Other than saying really nice things about me -- (laughter) -- which I deeply appreciate, by the way?.

84. Q: Thank you, Josh. Have there ever been days when you've dreaded coming out here? (Laughter.) Or let me put it another way -- have there been days when you didn't dread coming out here? (Laughter.)

85. Would you ever consider relocating to your home state, the "Show Me" state of Missouri, where they do need some fresh Democrats -- I don't think you'll argue about it -- (laughter) -- and run for office yourself?

86. Q: Thanks, Josh. Speaking of outrage, House Democrats --

MR. EARNEST: Yeah. (Laughter.)

Q: -- after meeting with James Comey, and they expressed all kinds of emotions -- anger, concern, lost confidence, yes, outrage --

MR. EARNEST: I think Washington psychiatrists are going to be doing a brisk business in the years ahead. (Laughter.)

87. MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, let me compliment you for doing much more than any Republican on Capitol Hill has done. (Laughter.) You've actually put forward an idea.

88. Q: In that answer you failed to mention -- that long answer -- you failed to mention --

MR. EARNEST: I'm happy to go on. (Laughter.) So I will.

Q: Please do.

89. many members of the Indian-American community will miss him, and of course, some of us will miss you. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Wow. Goyal is getting all sentimental here. It's not even my last day. Mark chooses not to associate himself with your remarks. (Laughter.) That's very kind of you, Goyal. Thank you.

90. Q: It isn't your last day, but it is your last week. I'd love to hear your own self-criticism, what you think you could have done better on the job; what you think we could have done better. And finally, Chiefs and Steelers -- what's your --

MR. EARNEST: I thought you would never ask. (Laughter.) With regard to -- we'll get to that.

91. MR. EARNEST: Tuesday I will do a briefing and it will be, as you could tell from the schedule, my final briefing at the White House as well.

Q: It better be great.

MR. EARNEST: Bring your hankies. (Laughter.)

Q: No, you need to bring your hanky. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: I will not brief on Thursday. On Thursday, I anticipate that will be a quiet day of packing. (Laughter.)

Q: Are you going to miss this?

MR. EARNEST: Absolutely. Can't you tell? (Laughter.)

92. And as I've mentioned before, the philosophy that I brought to this job is not to insist that all of you write stories or broadcast packages that make the President look good. If that were my charge I would have gotten fired a long time ago because I failed miserably. (Laughter.)

93. Q: You also said the President will take the First Lady someplace warm after they leave office next Friday. I was just looking ahead on the 10-day forecast and some of the hot spots that the President has gone to lately -- or frequently, actually. (Laughter.) And in Honolulu, it's going to be in the mid-70s, but chance of rain --

MR. EARNEST: Yeah.

Q: -- probably not ideal, right? (Laughter.) Palm Springs, kind of in the low 60s -- it's 65 degrees here today. So weather can be unpredictable. (Laughter.) Do you have any more to say about where the President might go when he leaves office?

MR. EARNEST: I don't at this point. I admire your investigative journalism, though. (Laughter.) That was excellent work.

94. Q: One last question. We saw reports that Sasha wasn't there last night because she had an exam today. Any news on how that exam went or what class it was in? (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: I don't have a readout of the youngest Obama's performance in her exam today, but I suspect her parents concluded that her performance on the test would not have been enhanced by returning to the White House at 2:15 in the morning.

95. Q: Just using my common sense, as you've suggested, it would seem logical, then, that the President has talked to him about this, and yet the President-elect has still expressed publicly so much skepticism about the intelligence findings.

MR. EARNEST: Well, they obviously disagree on a lot of things.

Q: And just on this whole matter of tweeting --

MR. EARNEST: Maybe that's the understatement of the day, huh? (Laughter.)

96. MR. EARNEST: As I mentioned earlier, the President and First Lady are hosting a party here at the White House tonight. It will be an opportunity for them to spend some time with their friends, and I suspect it will be the last opportunity for them to be able to host such an event before they leave the White House.

Q: Any names on the guest list?

MR. EARNEST: No names that I have to release from here.

Q: Hundreds of people? Millions of people?

MR. EARNEST: It will not be millions of people. (Laughter.) It will be smaller than that.

97. MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. Don't all answer at once. (Laughter.)

Q: Good afternoon.

98. You just said that the President doesn't intend to formally or publicly endorse anyone, but has he privately endorsed anyone? (Laughter.) And has he --- no --

MR. EARNEST: Well, it wouldn't be private if I said it here. (Laughter.)

Q: No, no, no, no, no, no. I'm just saying, has he privately endorsed anyone, and has he potentially encouraged anyone to join the race?

99. Q: So why, if you take yourself away from this for a minute -- not too far away but -- (laughter) --

MR. EARNEST: Sometimes I would like to. (Laughter.)

Q: You will soon.

100. And so this breezy, 594-page report -- (laughter) -- that the Chairman is holding is based on facts and data

101. And as you sit here in the future, in the seats that you assign yourselves -- (laughter) -- we urge you draw your conclusions based on data and facts, like the one in this year's Economic Report.

102. MR. FURMAN: I think once people have read the chapter in here on health care, which is 105 pages, they'll all fully appreciate this set of points.

Q: Nighttime reading.

MR. FURMAN: All night long. (Laughter.)

103. MR. EARNEST: Gardiner, what we have indicated is the President believes that based on what we know about what Russia did, that it merits a proportional response. From here, I'm not in a position to confirm whether or not that response has been initiated or not. I'm also not in a position to confirm that we won't ever in the future discuss what that response is or what that response may be. There may eventually be a point at which we do discuss what the response is, will be, or has been.

Just trying to cover all my verb tenses there. (Laughter.)

104. Q: Thanks, Josh. Just three quick questions before the sun starts setting here. (Laughter.)

Q: Three?

105. MR. EARNEST: Well, as I mentioned yesterday, I was just trying to get you guys to laugh. And again, if the joke requires explanation, it probably was not particularly successful. (Laughter.)

Appendix 2A: Incongruity Framework (PMQ ironic examples)

	Type of incongruity					
	Pointed contrast	**Quantity**	**Pragmatic force**	**Formality / politeness**	**External 'echo'**	**Discursive environment**
1		✓				
2		✓	✓			
3		✓		✓		
4		✓		✓		
5	✓					✓
6			✓		✓	
7		✓				✓
8						✓
9		✓		✓		
10		✓	✓			
11	✓					
12	✓		✓			
13			✓			
14	✓			✓		
15	✓					
16		✓		✓		
17	✓			✓		
18		✓				
19		✓				
20	✓					✓
21	✓				✓	
22	✓		✓			✓

23	✓	✓				
24	✓		✓			
25		✓		✓		
26	✓			✓		
27	✓	✓				
28	✓	✓				
29				✓		✓
30		✓				
31	✓	✓				
32	✓	✓				
33		✓		✓		✓
34		✓		✓		
35	✓					✓
36		✓				
37	✓					✓
38	✓	✓				
39	✓					
40		✓			✓	
41		✓	✓		✓	
42	✓					✓
43		✓				✓
44		✓			✓	
45		✓				
46	✓		✓	✓		
47		✓			✓	

48	✓	✓				
49	✓	✓				
50		✓	✓	✓		
51		✓				
52			✓	✓		
53		✓		✓		
54	✓		✓			
55		✓		✓		
56	✓	✓				
57						
58	✓		✓			
59	✓				✓	
60	✓					
61	✓		✓	✓	✓	
62		✓		✓		
63						✓
64		✓				
65	✓					
66			✓			
67	✓	✓				
68		✓		✓		
69		✓				✓
70	✓		✓	✓		
71		✓				✓
72		✓			✓	
73			✓			

74	✓					✓
75		✓	✓			
76		✓	✓			
77		✓	✓	✓		
78		✓	✓			
79			✓			✓
80	✓					✓
81	✓	✓				
82	✓	✓				
83		✓				✓
84					✓	
85			✓			✓
86		✓				
87				✓		
88			✓			
89		✓				
90	✓					
91			✓			✓
92			✓			✓
93		✓				
94			✓	✓		
95	✓					
96		✓	✓			
97	✓					
98		✓	✓	✓		
99	✓					

100					✓	
101		✓			✓	
102	✓					
103	✓		✓			
104	✓		✓			
105				✓		
106	✓					✓

Appendix 2B: Incongruity Framework (WHPB ironic examples)

	Type of incongruity					
	Pointed contrast	**Quantity**	**Pragmatic force**	**Formality / politeness**	**External 'echo'**	**Discursive environment**
1					✓	
2				✓	✓	
3		✓				
4			✓	✓		
5		✓			✓	
6			✓	✓		
7		✓				
8			✓			
9		✓		✓		
10	✓					
11		✓	✓			
12	✓					
13		✓		✓		
14	✓			✓		
15	✓					
16				✓		
17		✓			✓	
18		✓				
19					✓	
20	✓				✓	
21						✓

22				✓		✓
23				✓	✓	
24		✓		✓		
25				✓	✓	
26	✓					
27	✓					
28				✓	✓	
29		✓	✓			
30	✓		✓			
31			✓		✓	
32			✓			
33			✓		✓	
34			✓	✓		
35	✓				✓	
36	✓		✓			
37			✓	✓		
38		✓				
39	✓				✓	
40			✓			
41		✓	✓			
42	✓	✓		✓		
43	✓			✓		
44			✓	✓		
45	✓		✓	✓		
46	✓					✓

47			✓	✓	✓	
48	✓				✓	
49	✓	✓		✓		
50	✓			✓	✓	
51			✓	✓		
52		✓				
53		✓	✓			
54		✓	✓			
55		✓	✓	✓		
56		✓				✓
57		✓				
58			✓	✓		
59	✓		✓			
60	✓				✓	
61	✓	✓				
62			✓	✓		
63				✓	✓	
64			✓		✓	
65	✓					
66			✓	✓		
67			✓	✓		
68			✓	✓		
69	✓		✓		✓	
70	✓					✓
71		✓	✓			

72	✓		✓	✓	✓	
73			✓			
74		✓		✓		
75		✓				
76			✓		✓	
77	✓					
78	✓		✓	✓		
79	✓		✓			
80		✓			✓	
81		✓	✓			
82				✓	✓	
83		✓	✓			
84		✓				
85	✓	✓				
86	✓	✓		✓	✓	
87	✓		✓	✓		
88	✓			✓		
89	✓	✓		✓		
90			✓	✓	✓	
91	✓				✓	
92	✓	✓				
93		✓	✓		✓	
94		✓	✓	✓		
95		✓	✓			
96		✓				

97	✓		✓		✓	
98	✓		✓			
99	✓				✓	
100	✓	✓				
101	✓					
102	✓	✓				
103		✓	✓			
104		✓				
105	✓	✓				

Appendix 3A: Illocutionary Function Framework (PMQ)

	Type of illocutionary function				
	Laughter	**Evaluation**	**Distancing**	**Inclusionary**	**Exclusionary**
1	✓	✓		✓	
2	✓	✓	✓		
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	✓	✓	✓		
5	✓	✓		✓	
6	✓	✓	✓		✓
7	✓	✓			✓
8	✓	✓	✓		✓
9	✓	✓		✓	
10	✓	✓		✓	
11	✓	✓			✓
12	✓	✓			✓
13	✓	✓			✓
14	✓	✓	✓		✓
15	✓	✓	✓		
16	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	✓	✓	✓		
18	✓	✓	✓		✓
19	✓	✓	✓		✓
20	✓	✓	✓		
21	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	✓	✓	✓		✓
23	✓	✓		✓	✓

24	✓	✓	✓		
25	✓	✓			
26	✓	✓			✓
27	✓	✓		✓	
28	✓	✓		✓	
29	✓	✓	✓		
30	✓	✓	✓		
31	✓	✓	✓		✓
32	✓	✓	✓		
33	✓	✓			
34	✓	✓	✓	✓	
35	✓	✓		✓	✓
36	✓	✓	✓		
37	✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	✓	✓	✓	✓	
39	✓	✓	✓		✓
40	✓	✓		✓	
41	✓	✓		✓	
42	✓	✓			✓
43	✓	✓	✓		✓
44	✓	✓			
45	✓	✓		✓	
46	✓	✓	✓		
47	✓	✓	✓		
48	✓	✓	✓		✓

49	✓	✓	✓		
50	✓	✓		✓	
51	✓	✓	✓		
52	✓	✓		✓	
53	✓	✓			✓
54	✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	✓	✓	✓		
56	✓	✓	✓		
57	✓	✓	✓		✓
58	✓	✓		✓	
59	✓	✓		✓	
60	✓	✓			
61	✓	✓	✓		
62	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	✓	✓		✓	
64	✓	✓		✓	✓
65	✓	✓			
66	✓	✓		✓	
67	✓	✓	✓		
68	✓	✓		✓	
69	✓	✓		✓	
70	✓	✓	✓		✓
71	✓	✓	✓		✓
72	✓	✓			
73	✓	✓	✓		✓

74	✓	✓		✓	
75	✓	✓		✓	
76	✓	✓		✓	
77	✓	✓		✓	
78	✓	✓			✓
79	✓	✓			✓
80	✓	✓			✓
81	✓	✓		✓	
82	✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	✓	✓		✓	
84	✓	✓		✓	✓
85	✓	✓	✓		
86	✓	✓		✓	
87	✓	✓	✓		
88	✓	✓			✓
89	✓	✓	✓		
90	✓	✓			✓
91	✓	✓		✓	✓
92	✓	✓	✓	✓	
93	✓	✓	✓		
94	✓	✓		✓	
95	✓	✓		✓	
96	✓	✓	✓		
97	✓	✓		✓	
98	✓	✓	✓		✓

99	✓	✓			✓
100	✓	✓	✓		✓
101	✓	✓			
102	✓	✓		✓	
103	✓	✓		✓	
104	✓	✓	✓		✓
105	✓	✓		✓	
106	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Appendix 3B: Illocutionary Function Framework (WHPB)

	Type of illocutionary function				
	Laughter	**Evaluation**	**Distancing**	**Inclusionary**	**Exclusionary**
1	✓	✓		✓	
2	✓	✓	✓		
3	✓	✓	✓		
4	✓	✓		✓	
5	✓	✓	✓		
6	✓	✓			
7	✓	✓	✓		
8	✓	✓	✓		
9	✓	✓		✓	
10	✓	✓			✓
11	✓	✓			✓
12	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	✓	✓		✓	
14	✓	✓			
15	✓	✓			
16	✓	✓	✓		
17	✓	✓			
18	✓	✓	✓		
19	✓	✓	✓		
20	✓	✓	✓		
21	✓	✓		✓	
22	✓	✓		✓	
23	✓	✓		✓	

24	✓	✓		✓	
25	✓	✓		✓	
26	✓	✓	✓		
27	✓	✓			
28	✓	✓			
29	✓	✓			
30	✓	✓		✓	
31	✓	✓		✓	
32	✓	✓	✓		
33	✓	✓		✓	✓
34	✓	✓			
35	✓	✓			✓
36	✓	✓		✓	
37	✓	✓		✓	
38	✓	✓			✓
39	✓	✓		✓	
40	✓	✓			
41	✓	✓			✓
42	✓	✓			✓
43	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	✓	✓			
45	✓	✓		✓	
46	✓	✓		✓	
47	✓	✓			
48	✓	✓	✓	✓	

49	✓	✓			
50	✓	✓			
51	✓	✓		✓	
52	✓	✓	✓		
53	✓	✓			
54	✓	✓		✓	
55	✓	✓	✓		
56	✓	✓			
57	✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	✓	✓			
59	✓	✓	✓		✓
60	✓	✓	✓		✓
61	✓	✓			
62	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	✓	✓		✓	
64	✓	✓		✓	
65	✓	✓	✓		✓
66	✓	✓			
67	✓	✓			
68	✓	✓		✓	
69	✓	✓	✓		✓
70	✓	✓		✓	
71	✓	✓			
72	✓	✓		✓	
73	✓	✓			

74	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	✓	✓	✓		
76	✓	✓		✓	
77	✓	✓	✓		
78	✓	✓	✓		✓
79	✓	✓			✓
80	✓	✓			
81	✓	✓	✓	✓	
82	✓	✓			✓
83	✓	✓			
84	✓	✓	✓		
85	✓	✓		✓	
86	✓	✓	✓	✓	
87	✓	✓		✓	✓
88	✓	✓			
89	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	✓	✓		✓	
91	✓	✓		✓	
92	✓	✓	✓		
93	✓	✓	✓		
94	✓	✓	✓		
95	✓	✓		✓	
96	✓	✓	✓		
97	✓	✓	✓		✓
98	✓	✓			✓

99	✓	✓	✓	✓	
100	✓	✓	✓		
101	✓	✓			✓
102	✓	✓		✓	
103	✓	✓	✓		
104	✓	✓	✓		✓
105	✓	✓	✓		