Most accounts of verbal irony agree in considering it a purely pragmatic phenomenon in which the contextual characteristics are a key factor in its interpretation (Kreuz et al., 1989; Gibbs, 1994; Utsumi, 2000; inter alia). For example, Ivanko et al. (2003) showed experimentally that an ironic utterance will be interpreted differently depending on the degree of incongruity between the context and the statement. Concurrently to pragmatic accounts on verbal irony, some research has also focused on its linguistic expression and recognition. Regarding the perception of verbal irony, some studies have shown that listeners use prosodic information when recognizing verbal irony in spontaneous speech. For example, Bryant et al. (2005) demonstrated that, in the absence of contextual cues, the combination of multiple acoustic cues might be sufficient for the detection of ironic intent. Importantly, Woodland et al. (2011) found that both contextual cues and tone of voice influence the perception of a sarcastic utterance. However, as far as we are aware, little is known about: (a) the effect of contextual cues together with prosodic and gestural ones on the perception of verbal irony; and (b) the relative contribution of prosodic and visual cues in the perception of verbal irony.

The goal of this study is twofold and will represent an attempt to answer these two questions.

First, in order to assess the audiovisual cues to verbal irony in Catalan, ten Catalan native speakers participated in a DCT (Blum-Kulka, 1989) in which 5 ironic and 5 non-ironic contexts were presented to them. A total of 100 utterances were obtained, and a part of them were used as stimuli (below called ‘target utterances’) in two perception experiments. The first experiment was aimed at testing how acceptable ironically performed and non-ironically performed utterances are in ironic and non-ironic contexts (see 1a and 1c). Sixty native Catalan speakers were presented with a set of 5 ironic and 5 non-ironic story-frameworks framing an ironically or non-ironically performed utterance. These target utterances were presented in (1) ‘Audio’ or (2) ‘Audiovisual’ modality conditions and in (1) ‘Ironical’ or (2) ‘Non-ironical’ performance conditions. Also, the target utterances were matched with the congruent contextual conditions (ironic context with ironic utterance performance and non-ironic context with non-ironic utterance performance) and with the incongruent conditions. Participants judged the 4 utterances-context pairs in ‘Audio’ and ‘Audiovisual’ modalities on a Likert scale from 1 ‘Adequate’ to 5 ‘Non-adequate’. The second experiment was aimed at testing the relative contribution of prosodic and visual cues in verbal irony perception in a neutral context (neither ironic nor non-ironic context; see 1b in Appendix). Thirty native Catalan speakers were asked to judge how much irony they perceived in a selection of the ironically and non-ironically performed utterances of the production test. These target utterances were presented in a neutral context in (1) ‘Ironic’ and (2) ‘Non-ironic’ performance conditions and in one of these four modality conditions: (1) ‘Audio Only’, (2) ‘Video Only’, (3) ‘Audiovisual congruent’ (prosody and gestures match) or (4) ‘Audiovisual incongruent’. The participants judged the utterances on a Likert scale from 1
‘Non-ironic’ to 5 ‘Ironic’. Results are being analyzed and will be presented at conference.

**Appendix.** Example of a story framework with 3 alternative contextual paths (a,b, & c).

(1) John and Peter live on the same street and they are about the same age. Her sister is friends, but they only know each other by sight. Today they have met by chance at the bus stop. When they have met, they have cordially greeted and now both are waiting for the bus seated side by side.

(a) **Non-ironic context.** We are in July, the sun is shining, the sky is clear and it is a very hot day. John looks at the bright sun, and then tells Peter:

(b) **Neutral context.** Today the weather is neither hot nor cold. John looks at the sky, and then tells Peter:

(c) **Ironic context.** We are in July, but it's raining cats and dogs. John looks at the enormous clouds in the sky and then tells Peter:

– “I feel like going to the beach now!”

**References**


