

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Psycholinguistics  
edited by  
Paul Warren  
*Victoria University of Wellington*

## VERBAL IRONY PROCESSING

Stephen Skalicky  
*Victoria University of Wellington*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-23454-2 – Verbal Irony Processing  
Stephen Skalicky  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009234542](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009234542)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009234566

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First published 2023

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-23454-2 Paperback

ISSN 2753-9768 (online)

ISSN 2753-975X (print)

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DOI: 10.1017/9781009234566  
First published online: January 2023

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Stephen Skalicky  
*Victoria University of Wellington*

**Author for correspondence:** Stephen Skalicky, [stephen.skalicky@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:stephen.skalicky@vuw.ac.nz)

**Abstract:** Ironic language is a salient reminder that speakers of all languages do not always mean what they say. While ironic language has captured the attention of theorists and scholars for centuries, it is only since the 1980s that psycholinguistic methods have been employed to investigate how readers and hearers detect, process, and comprehend ironic language. This Element reviews the foundational definitions, theories, and psycholinguistic models of ironic language, covering key questions such as the distinction between literal and ironic meaning, the role of contextual information during irony processing, and the cognitive mechanisms involved. These key questions continue to motivate new studies and methodological innovations, providing ample opportunity for future researchers who wish to continue exploring how ironic language is processed and understood.

**Keywords:** verbal irony, sarcasm, pragmatics, figurative language, psycholinguistics

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ISBNs: 9781009234542 (PB), 9781009234566 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2753-9768 (online), 2753-975X (print)

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