Irony as Cognitive Deviation

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Abstract

This presentation aims..

- to consistently grasp a variety of ironic utterances in view of 'cognitive deviation'

- to present the classification of ironic utterances based on the types of the deviation.

Previous Studies

(Referring to a friend X who betrayed the speaker)
X is a fine friend.   [spontaneous irony]

- [in traditional rhetoric studies] a rhetorical expression which **directly conveys the opposite meaning** of its literal one.

  ➡ a semantic issue

- [for Grice (1989)] one of **the conversational implicatures**, which flouts **the Maxim of Quality** ('Do not say what you believe to be false') and then let its hearer recognize some **implicit meaning** intended by the speaker.

  ➡ a pragmatic issue

Previous Studies (Cont.)

- [In **Relevance Theory**]: Sperber & Wilson (1981) claimed that there exists another type of verbal irony which cannot be adequately accounted in previous framework:

> A: I may not look it, but I was the top model.
>
> B: *(Contemptuously)* The top model!   [echoic irony]

➡ What does B imply?

- **Not** the opposite meaning or the negation as accounted in traditional/pragmatic approach.

- B implies that **he has some negative attitude toward A's opinion by echoing the expressed proposition or its part.**
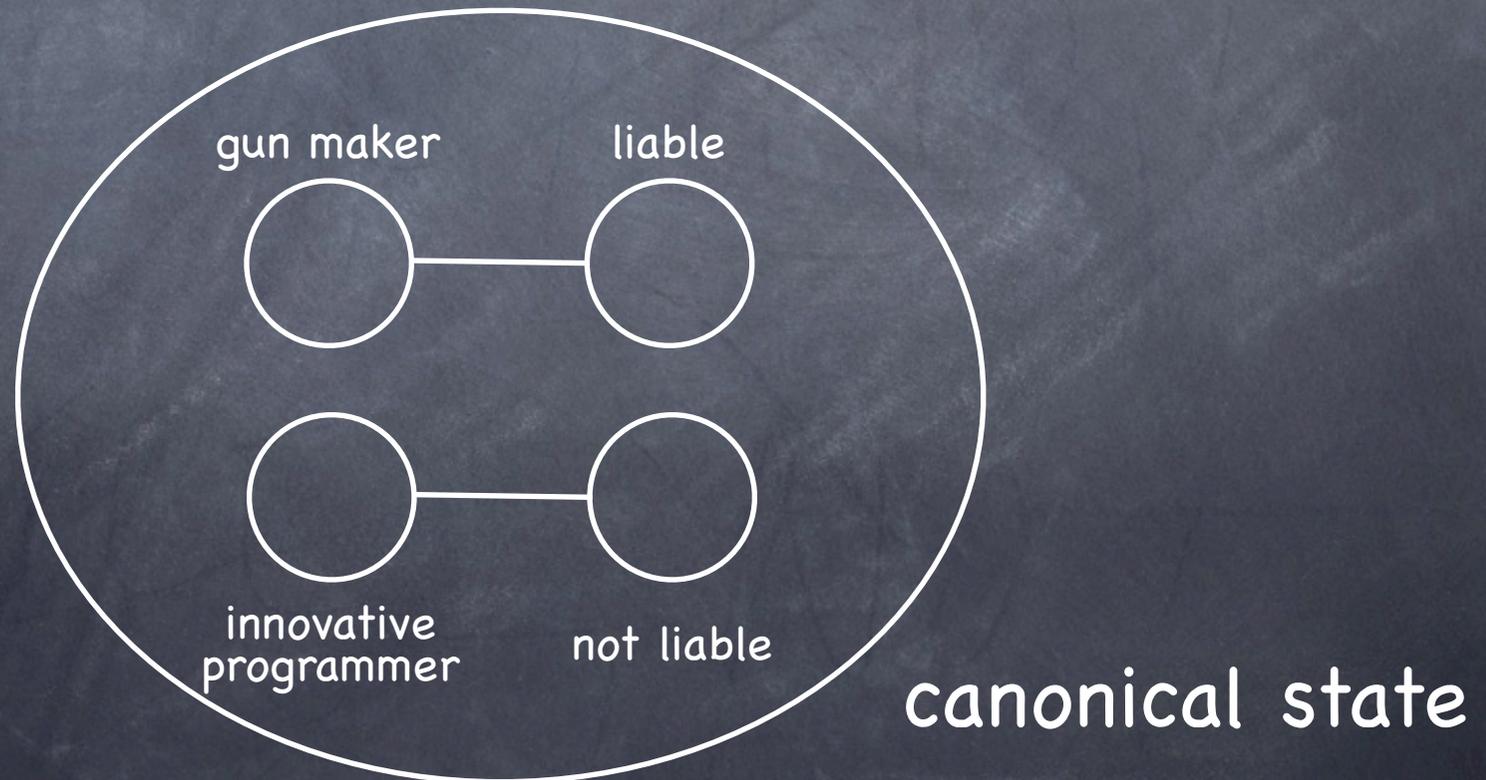
Cognitive Deviation

- How can we recognize irony?

  ➡ To find some **discrepancy** between the utterance and the fact, the proposition expressed and the actual event, or the speaker's attitude and the desirable one.

  ➡ Not just discrepancy but **deviation** from the norm is important!

- We thus formulate the cognitive processes of the deviations that have been so far mentioned in previous studies, and try to analyze the pattern of those **cognitive deviations** in the actual data of ironic utterances.

Ironical Situation

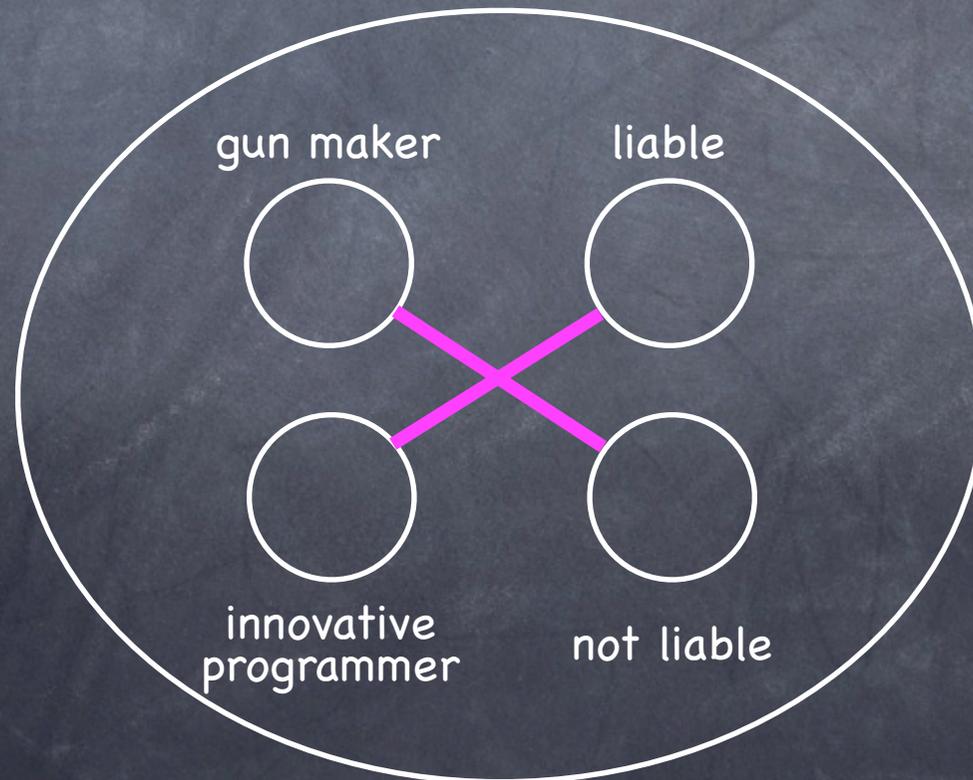Stanford University law professor Lawrence Lessig said:

"You can make a gun that kills people, and you aren't liable, but you can innovate on security technology and you can be sent to jail for 25 years."
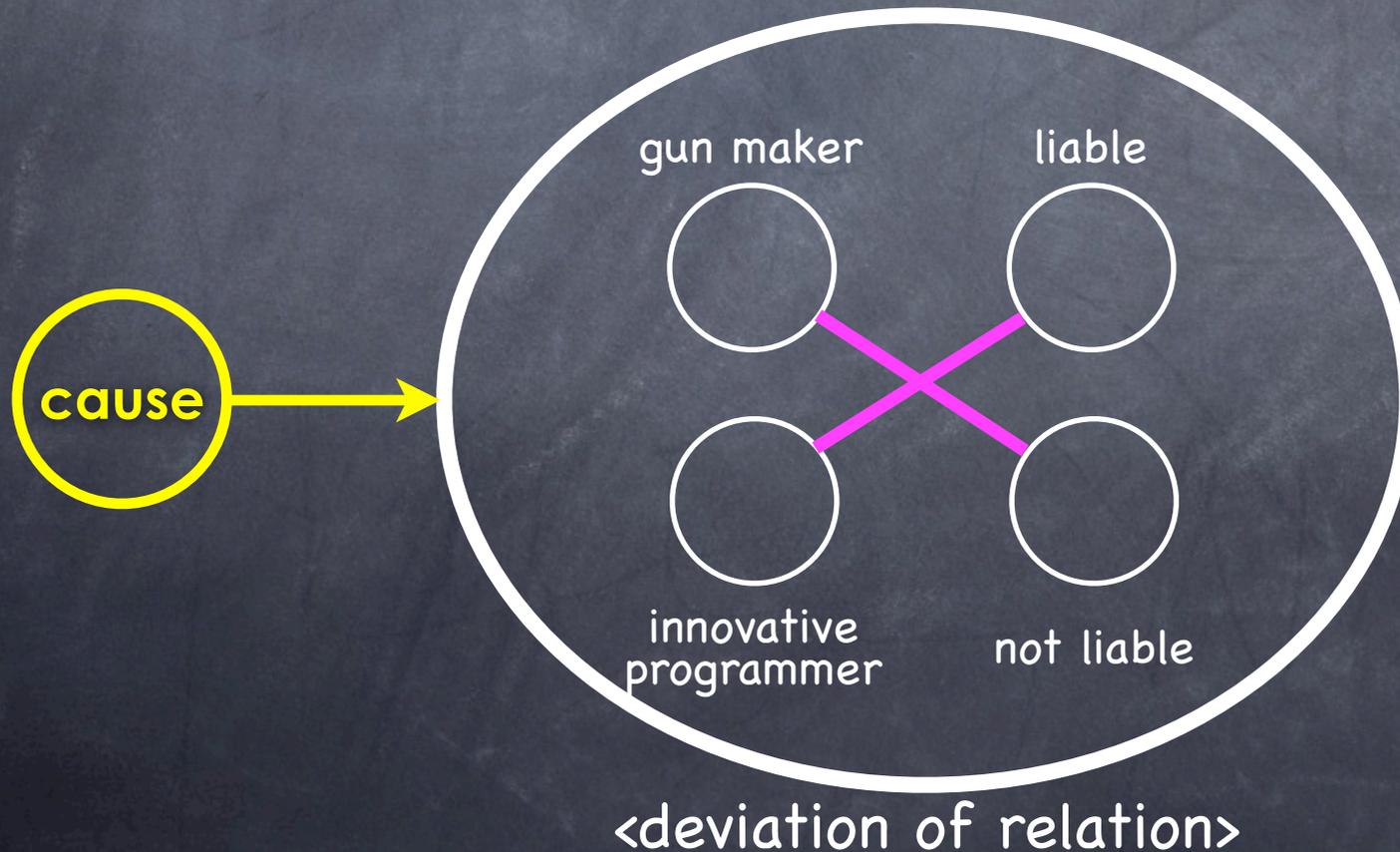
gun maker   liable

innovative
programmer   not liable

canonical state

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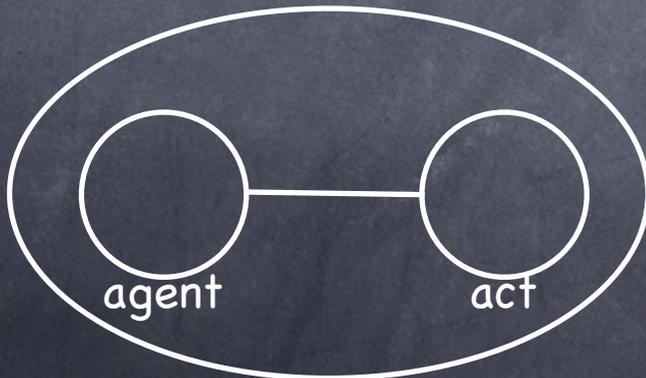
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cause →

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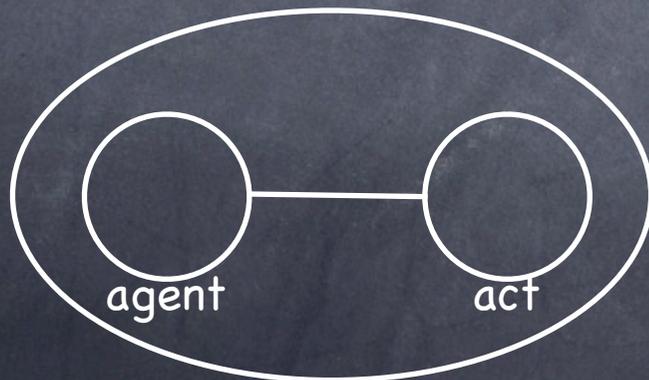
Deviation-referring Irony

* That teacher teaches his students only to make them fools!

[canonical act] : to make students wise

[deviated act] : **to make students fools**

[the cause] : **that teacher**

<canonical event>   <deviation of act>

Deviation-referring Irony

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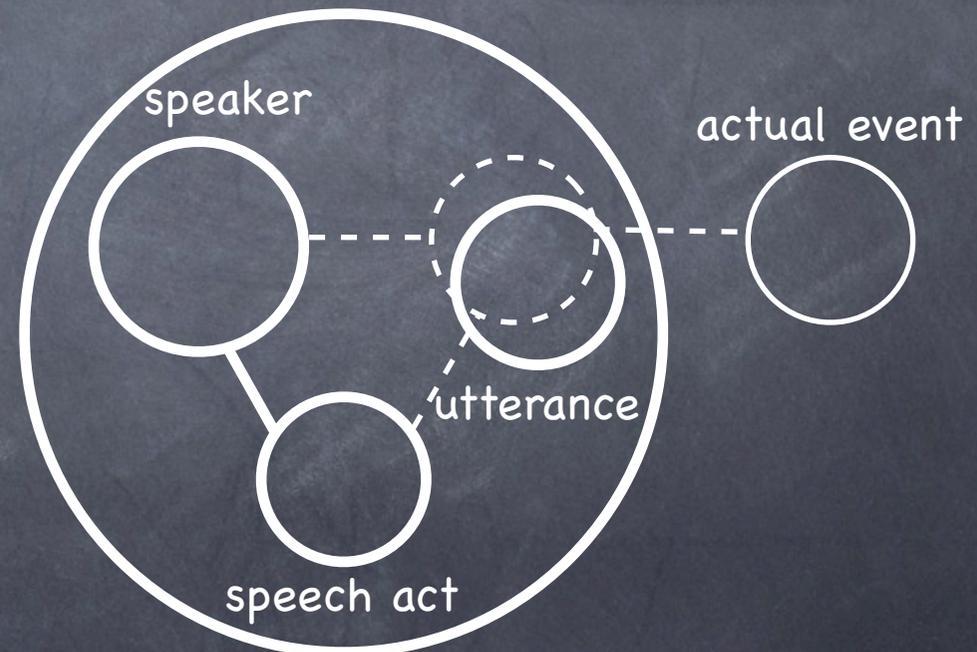
Deviation-referring Irony (Cont.)

- **Deviation-referring irony** is understood as follows:

  1. The speaker perceives some **deviation** in **an actual event.**

  2. He attributes **the cause** of the deviation to someone.

  3. The hearer recognizes the deviation and its cause in the actual event **referred to** by the speaker.

Deviation-creating Irony
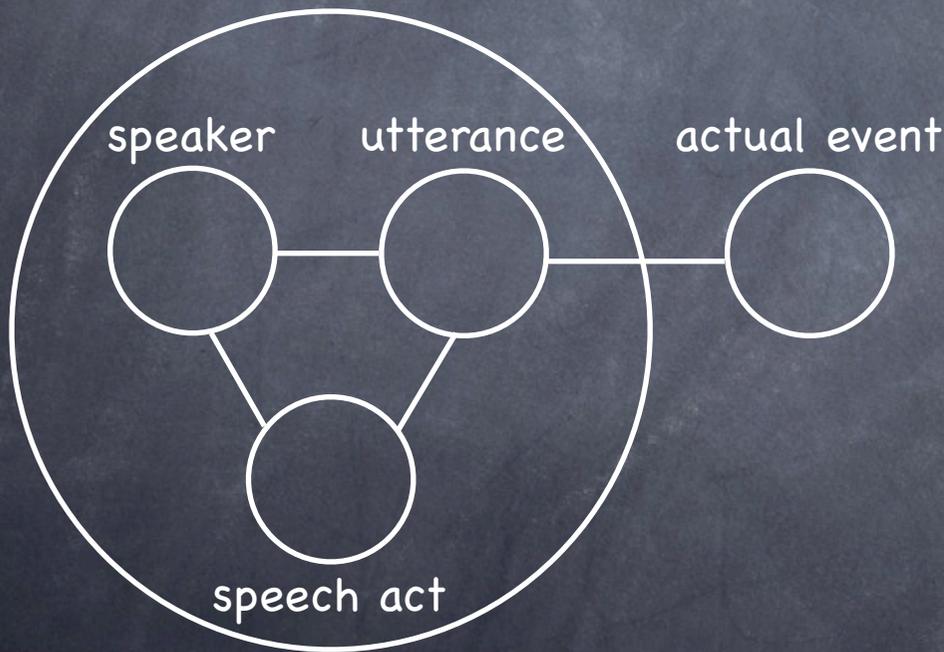
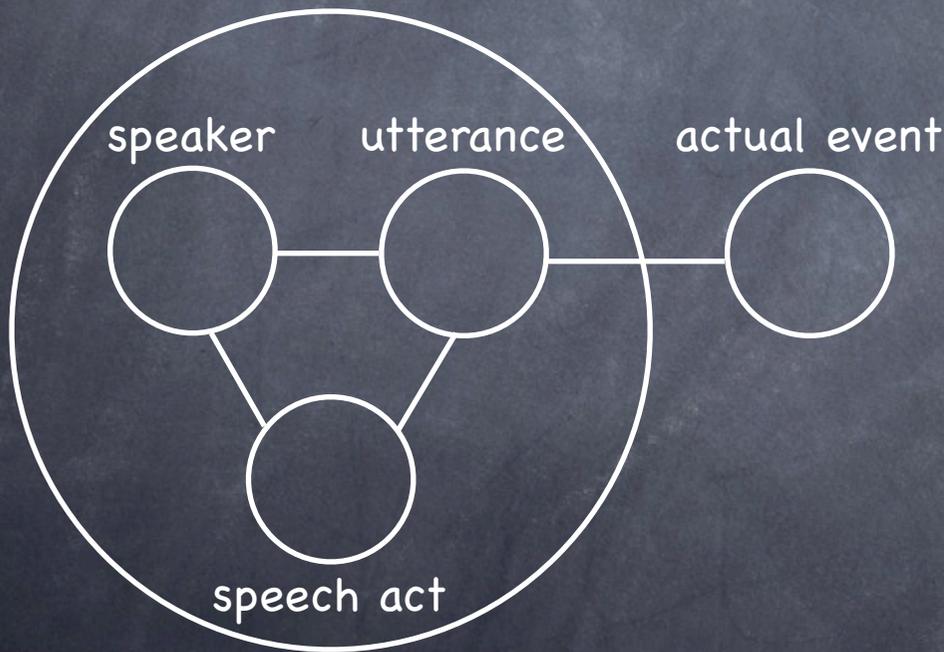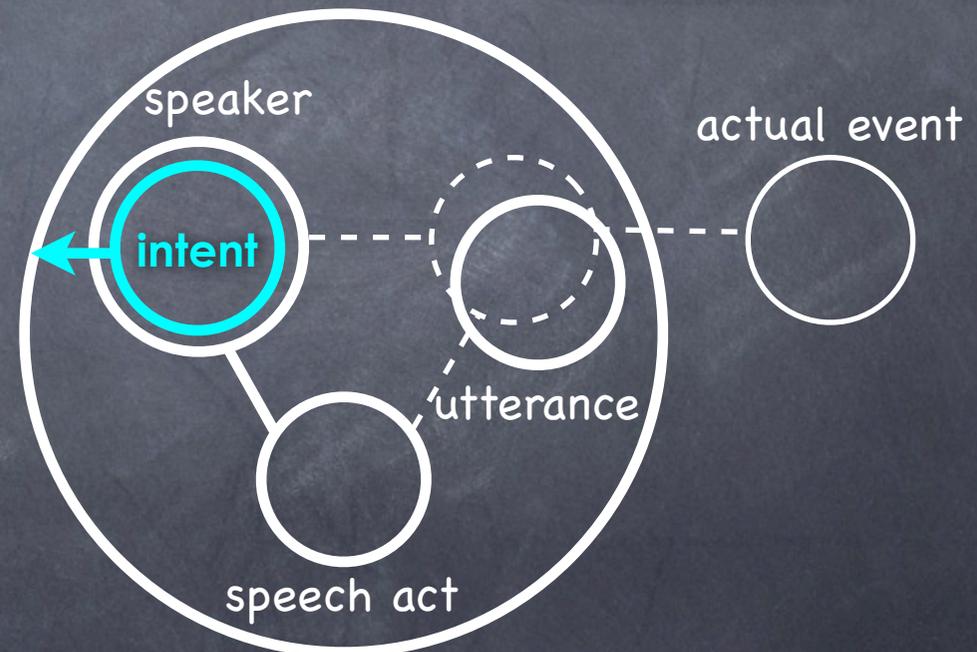* *(Referring to a friend X who betrayed the speaker) X is a fine friend.*

<canonical speech event>

<deviation of utterance>

Deviation-creating Irony

***** *(Referring to a friend X who betrayed the speaker) X is a fine friend.*

speaker　　utterance　　　actual event

speech act

<canonical speech event>

speaker　　　　　　　　　actual event

intent

utterance

speech act

<deviation of utterance>

Deviation-creating Irony (Cont.)

- **Deviation-creating irony** is understood as follows:

  1. The speaker intentionally **creates** some **deviation** in **his speech event**.

  2. The hearer recognizes the deviation and the speaker's **intent**.

Deviation-implying Irony
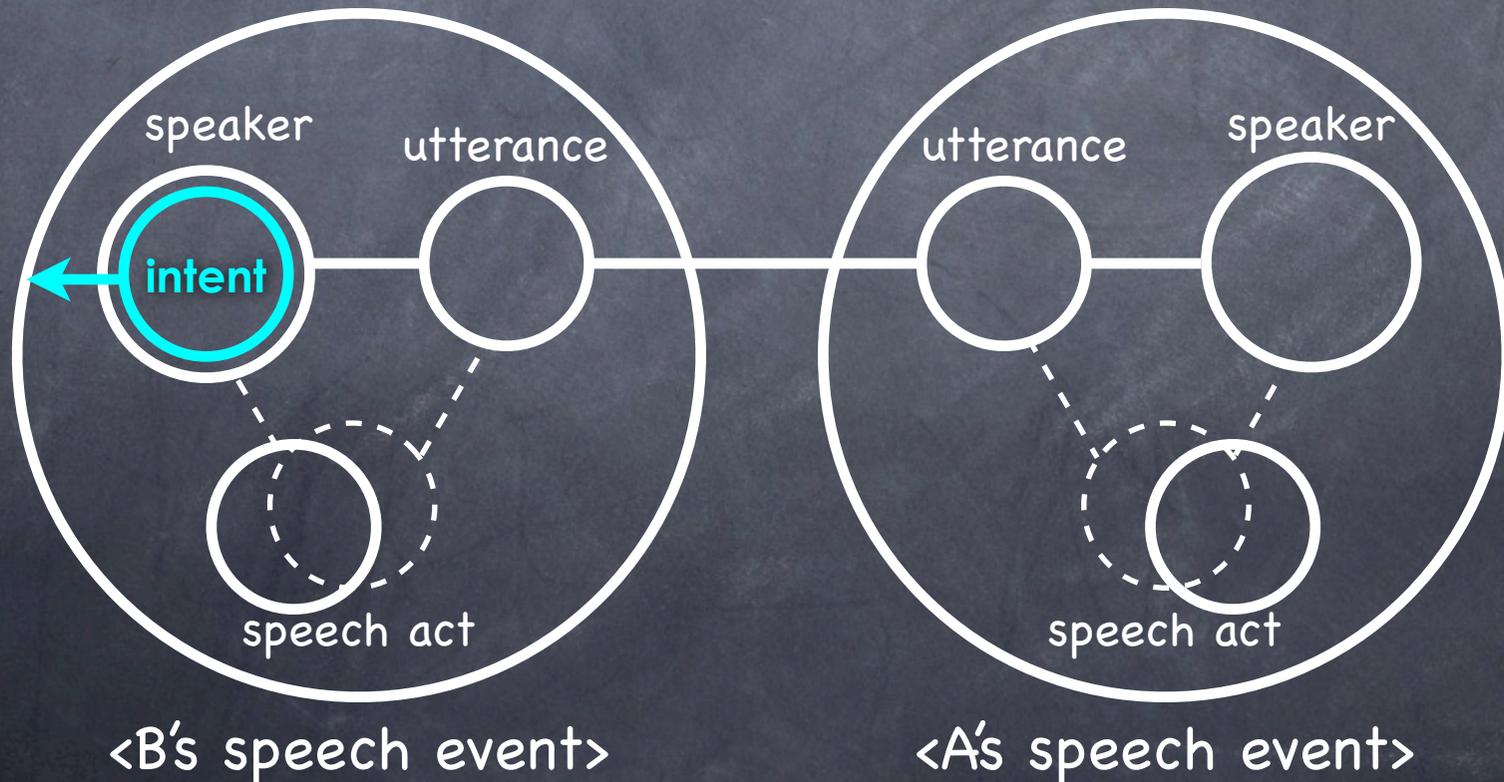
* A: I may not look it, but I was the top model.

  B: *(Contemptuously)* The top model!

speaker   utterance   utterance   speaker

speech act   speech act

<B's speech event>   <A's speech event>
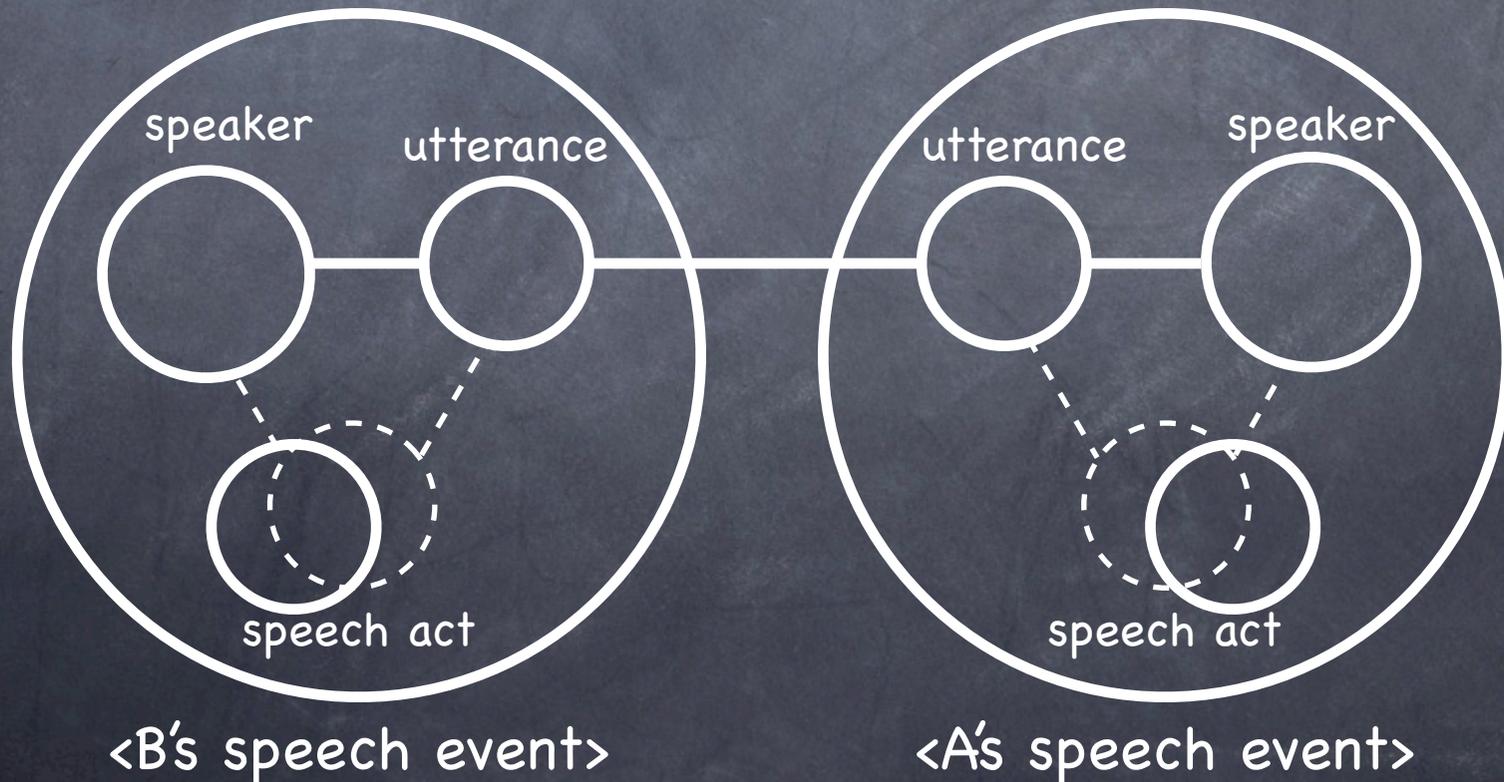
Deviation-implying Irony

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Deviation-implying Irony
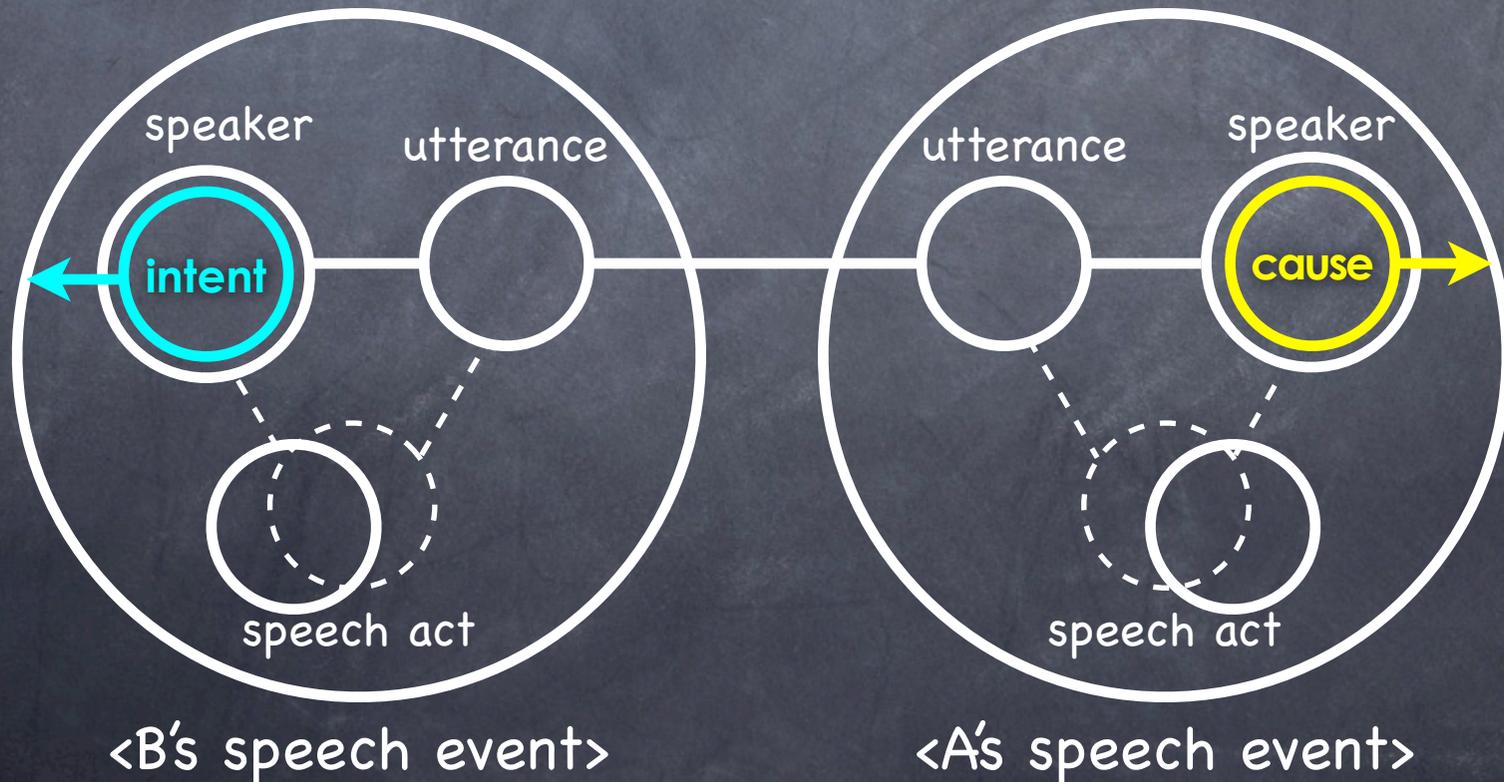
A: I may not look it, but I was the top model.

B: *(Contemptuously)* The top model!

Deviation-implying Irony (Cont.)

- **Deviation-implying irony** is understood as follows:

  1. The speaker intentionally **deviates** from a canonical speech event by **imitating** the target's utterance or speech act like **a mirror image**.

  2. The hearer recognizes an **implication** that the target owes the **cause** of the deviation.

➡ Therefore, mimicry and other imitating acts of others' behaviors often get ironical.

Conclusion

Irony is a coherent cognitive category which consists of three types according to its deviation type:

- **Deviation-referring irony**

- **Deviation-creating irony**

- **Deviation-implying irony**

Irony comprehension is an interaction between a speaker's cognition and a hearer's cognition.

Thank you for your attention.