

Irony in conversation: salience, role, and context effects

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1. Introduction

Much of what is going on in discourse comprehension and production depends on the very first moments of comprehension. Consider the following example:

Iddo and Omri (aged 7 years and 8 months, native speakers of Hebrew) are playing together. Iddo fetches himself a glass of juice out of the refrigerator.

(1) Omri: I want to drink too.

Mira (Iddo's mother): Iddo, *totci lo et ha-mitz* ('take the juice out [of the refrigerator] for him').

Iddo (laughingly): ha ... ha ... *le-hotci lo et ha-mitz* ('to take/squeeze the juice out of him' – a Hebrew idiom meaning 'drive one crazy by imposing all kinds of hardships on her/him').

What this example illustrates is that speakers and comprehenders make use of what is available to them, regardless of contextual information or speaker's intent (see also Horton and Keysar 1996; Keysar et al. 1998; Keysar, Barr and Horton 1998). Though the idiomatic meaning of Mira's utterance in (1) was not the intended meaning, nor was it compatible with context, it was not ignored; contextual information did not inhibit its activation.

Why should contextually incompatible meanings be activated and infiltrate the ongoing discourse? Why doesn't context block unintended meanings? According to the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003), words' and expressions' salient meanings, i.e. meanings coded in the mental lexicon (whose relative salience is further affected by, e.g., frequency, familiarity, conventionality, or prototypicality) cannot be bypassed. Though prior context may be instrumental in enhancing a word's or an expression's meaning (e.g.

Forster 1989), it can hardly inhibit activation of salient meanings (cf. Tabossi 1988; Titone 1998; but see Martin et al. 1999; and Vu, Kellas and Paul 1998 for a different view). Salient meanings should always be accessed and always initially, regardless of contextual bias.

The question may need rephrasing, then. If contextual information is less able to affect preselection of the appropriate meaning when there are other equally or more salient competitors, why doesn't it suppress irrelevant meanings that surface only because of their availability? This may not be the right question either, because contextually inappropriate information does get suppressed (e.g. Gernsbacher 1990; Onifer and Swinney 1981; Swinney 1979). However, Gernsbacher and Robertson (1995) also showed that skilled and less skilled readers differ in their suppression abilities. While skilled readers did not outperform less skilled readers at the initial, access stage, they did at the later, suppression stage: Less skilled comprehenders were less capable of suppressing contextually irrelevant information (which must, therefore, interfere with their comprehension). But this will not explain the use Iddo made of the irrelevant meaning (in [1]). His laughter suggests that he computed both meanings (noticing their incongruity), deliberately choosing to use the contextually inappropriate meaning for a special purpose: to crack a joke.

Here, then, is an instance of an idiomatic meaning of an utterance, which though inconsistent with contextual information, was neither inhibited nor suppressed. Such behaviour is not explainable by an interactive approach to discourse comprehension, which allows contextual information to affect processing very early on so that only the contextually appropriate meaning of words and sentences becomes available (e.g. the Relevance Theoretic account proposed by Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995; Carston 1999; but see Giora 1998a for an alternative interpretation of this account). Moreover, activating inappropriate meanings after the appropriate meaning has been captured is not motivated by such models. Such behaviour is not explainable by the standard pragmatic model (Grice 1975; Searle 1979) either. According to this model, language comprehension always begins with the literal interpretation. If it is compatible with contextual information it is not revisited, and search is terminated. Upon this view, then, literally intended language is processed only literally. Since Mira's utterance was intended literally, this model cannot account for the involvement of the contextually irrelevant nonliteral meaning in Iddo's comprehension process (see also Gibbs 1980).

According to the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003), however,

so-called irrelevant meanings are activated because they are salient. According to the retention hypothesis (Giora 1995, 2003; Giora and Fein 1999a), such meanings would, indeed, be attenuated or fade if they have no role in constructing the intended meaning. However, if they can be allocated some function in the construction of the discourse interpretation, they would be retained. Such is the case of the literal meaning of ironic utterances (e.g. Giora 1995; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998). According to the graded salience hypothesis, the contextually incompatible literal meaning of (the critical word of nonconventional) irony is activated because it is salient, i.e., stored in the mental lexicon. It is not dispensed with by contextual information, because it has a role in constructing the ironic meaning: it allows the comprehender to compute the difference between what is expected and what is (Giora 1995). For instance, when I say *What a lovely day for a picnic* on a stormy day, the literal meaning of the critical word *lovely* would be retrieved directly from the mental lexicon on account of its salience. Despite its contextual misfit, it would not be suppressed, because it is instrumental in deriving the ironic meaning ('lousy' or 'far from being lovely'). Indeed, in Giora, Fein and Schwartz (1998) we showed that the literal meaning of irony is made available immediately, and remains active even 2000 msec after offset of the target (ironic) sentence. However, after such a long delay, the same literal meaning is no longer active in literally biasing contexts. Having been accessed and integrated with contextual information, the literal meaning (of *lovely*) in the literal context (e.g. when *What a lovely day for a picnic* is said on a sunny day) has no further functions. It, therefore, begins to fade.

Similar findings are reported by Giora and Fein (1999a) regarding contextually inappropriate meanings of salient/conventional metaphors. In Giora and Fein's studies, the salient, literal meaning of utterances embedded in metaphorically biasing contexts was retained in spite of contextual misfit. However, the reverse did not hold: the salient metaphoric meaning of the same utterance embedded in a literally biasing context showed deactivation. For instance, concepts (e.g. 'rise') related to the literal meaning of conventional (Hebrew) metaphors (e.g. *Only now did they wake up*, meaning 'only now did they start doing something') were not suppressed in the metaphorically biasing context, even though they were contextually incompatible in that context. In contrast, the salient metaphoric meaning ('do') of the same conventional metaphor was less active in the literally biasing context, where it had no role in constructing the literal meaning of the utterance.

Such asymmetry has been shown to hold for balanced polysemous words

as well (words having related meanings that are similarly salient). Where a contextually inappropriate meaning of a polysemous word was instrumental in sustaining the contextually appropriate meaning, it was retained. Where it was not, it was deactivated. In Williams (1992), (salient) central meanings (e.g. 'solid') of polysemous words (e.g. *firm*) were activated immediately and retained even after a long delay (of 859 msec) despite contextual misfit (e.g. *The school teacher was criticized for not being firm*). Such meanings are indeed conducive to the interpretation of less central interpretations. (Salient) less central meanings (e.g. 'strict'), however, were not found to be as context-resistant. Having been activated immediately, they were not retained after a long delay, when they were not compatible with contextual information (e.g. *The couple wanted a bed that was firm*). Though 'strict' may be related to *firm*, it is not conducive to the construction of its central meaning ('solid'). Therefore, it was not retained after it had been activated. However, 'solid' is conducive to the 'strict' interpretation of *firm*, and therefore it was not suppressed after being activated. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that contextually incompatible meanings that are instrumental in the interpretation of the intended meaning are not suppressed (Giora 2003; Giora and Fein 1999a).

Salient meanings that have not been deactivated because they have some role in constructing the meanings currently being built, may be easily reused by the discourse participants on account of their availability (e.g. the idiomatic meaning in [1] above). To testify to the availability of the salient, though contextually incompatible, literal meaning of ironic discourse, we examine here the kind of response irony elicits in naturally occurring conversation. If irony is responded to literally, this would be consistent with both the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997) and the indirect negation view of irony (Giora 1995; Giora and Fein 1999b, 1999c) which assume that irony comprehension involves activation and retention of its salient, though contextually inappropriate, literal meaning. Such behaviour, however, is less compatible with the direct access view (e.g. Gibbs 1986) which assumes that in a rich context, irony is processed more or less directly, without having to go through a contextually incompatible interpretive phase. Such behaviour is also less compatible with the standard pragmatic model (Grice 1975; Searle 1979) which posits that the contextually inappropriate literal meaning activated initially should be rejected and replaced by the intended ironic meaning.¹ This suppression hypothesis (see also Gernsbacher, Keysar and Robertson 2001) predicts that immediately after the utterance has been comprehended,

there should be no residue of the contextually inappropriate literal meaning.

We have chosen to focus on spontaneous speech because such discourse is less amenable to control and revision than written discourse. The assumption, then, that information available to interlocutors may play a major role in discourse comprehension and production must be particularly applicable to such discourse. It is not the case, of course, that spontaneous talk is not monitored (see, e.g., Zaidel 1987), or does not involve error correction. However, given the time constraints imposed on face-to-face interaction, spontaneous speech must be more "error" prone than written discourse, which is self-paced and can be revisited any time. If one wants to examine the extent to which contextually incompatible meanings are activated and manipulated in the course of discourse construction, spontaneous talk seems the natural environment to explore.

2. Irony and spontaneous discourse

So far, most of the research into the processes involved in comprehension was conducted in the laboratory. Findings showed that lexical access is hardly affected by contextual information (but see Martin et al. 1999; Vu, Kellas and Paul 1998). Ample evidence has been adduced supporting the view that lexical access is modular: lexical processes are autonomous and impervious to context effects (see Fodor 1983; Forster 1979). Upon one version of the modular view, lexical access is exhaustive; *all* the word's coded meanings are accessed initially upon its processing, regardless of contextual bias (e.g. Cairns 1984; Conrad 1974; Lucas 1987; Onifer and Swinney 1981; Picoult and Johnson 1992; Seidenberg, Tanenhaus, Leiman and Bienkowski 1982; Swinney 1979; Tanenhaus, Carlson and Seidenberg 1985; Tanenhaus, Leiman and Seidenberg 1979; Till, Mross and Kintsch 1988; West and Stanovich 1988 and references therein). Upon another (ordered) version, lexical access is exhaustive but frequency-sensitive: the more frequent meaning is accessed first, and a search for the intended meaning continues only in case the more frequent meaning is incompatible with the context (Bradley and Forster 1987; Duffy, Morris and Rayner 1988; Rayner and Frazier 1989; Rayner and Morris 1991; Sereno, Pacht and Rayner 1992; Simpson 1981; Simpson and Burgess 1985; Simpson and Foster 1986; Simpson and Krueger 1991; Swinney and Prather 1989; Tabossi 1988; for a review, see Gorfein 1989; Rayner, Pacht and Duffy 1994; Simpson 1994; Small, Cottrell and Tanenhaus 1988). Con-

textual information has only post-access effects, suppressing contextually inappropriate meanings and selecting the appropriate meanings (Swinney 1979).

The modular view of lexical access has been challenged by an interactive direct access hypothesis, according to which lexical access is selective. Contextual information directs access completely, so that only the appropriate meaning is made available for comprehension (e.g. Glucksberg, Kreuz and Rho 1986, Jones 1991; Martin et al. 1999; Schvaneveldt, Meyer and Becker 1976; Simpson 1981, Vu, Kellas and Paul 1998; but see Giora 2003 for a critique).

Evidence from research into figurative language comprehension accumulated in the laboratory seems consistent with the direct access view. Literal and figurative utterances have been shown to involve equivalent processes when embedded in supportive contexts (see Gibbs 1994 for a review). They were shown to be processed equally automatically (e.g. Gildea and Glucksberg 1983; Glucksberg, Gildea and Bookin 1982; Keysar 1989), to involve the same categorization procedures (see Glucksberg and Keysar 1990; Shen 1997), and to take equally long to read (Inhoff, Lima and Carroll 1984; Kemper 1981; Ortony et al. 1978). Irony was no exception: it was shown to take no longer to read than non-ironic discourse (see Gibbs 1986, 1994).

More recent findings, however, question the direct access hypothesis (and see Giora 1997, 1998b, 2003, for a critical review). For instance, utterances embedded in ironically biasing contexts took longer to read than when embedded in literally biasing contexts (Dews and Winner 1997; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998; Pexman, Ferretti and Katz 2000; Schwoebel, Dews, Winner and Srinivas 2000). They were also found to be processed literally first, and ironically later (Giora and Fein 1999c; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998). Even conventional ironies were found to be processed literally initially, in parallel to the ironic meaning (Giora and Fein 1999c). Further, reanalysis of Gibbs' findings (Giora 1995) is consistent with the view that irony comprehension involves a contextually incompatible (literal) phase (but see Gibbs 2002 for a different view). Would spontaneous speech support a modular based view which allows meanings to be activated regardless of context?

To test this we examined naturally occurring conversations. In particular, we looked at how irony affects text progression. Would it avail both the literal and ironic meaning for further discussion and elaboration, as predicted by the graded salience and retention hypotheses (Giora 1995, 1997, 2003)? Would it make available only the appropriate ironic meaning as predicted by

the direct access view, the modular view, and standard pragmatic model?

To illustrate the way the contextually incompatible literal meaning of irony may avail itself for further elaboration, consider the following example (taken from Drew 1987) cited in Clark (1996: 374), in which the ironic/teasing turn is responded to literally (both in bold). In this example, Gerald has just bought a brand-new sports car, and is late for a meeting. He could respond to Lee's ironic reprimand by addressing the ironic meaning (the reprimand), saying, e.g., "I am sorry" or coming up with a real explanation. Instead, he proceeds along the lines proposed by Lee, thereby elaborating on the tease or irony (in bold), i.e., on the literal meaning of the ironic utterance (in bold):

- (2) Gerald: Hi how are you.
 Martha: Well, you are late as usual.
 Gerald: Eheh eheh eheh eheh.
 Lee: What's the matter **couldn't you get your car started?**
 Gerald: **Hehh. That's right. I had to get it pushed, eheh eheh eheh eheh.**

In our data, we looked for such responses to irony. Responses to the literal meaning of irony are predicted by the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003) and the retention hypothesis underlying the indirect negation view (Giora 1995). On the assumption that the literal meaning of (nonconventional) irony is the only one coded in the mental lexicon, it should be accessed once the irony is encountered. It should not be suppressed even when the ironic interpretation is derived, because it facilitates the computation of the difference between the expected and the derided situation.

2.1. *Method*

Participants: The participants were five Israeli friends (two women, three men) who spent a Friday evening together. They were 29–33 years old, native speakers of Hebrew, living in Tel Aviv.

Materials: Our data come from one-hour tape-recorded conversations among the participants. The conversations took place in Tel Aviv, in October 1997. They comprise 9,380 words. For illustration, consider an English translation of a Hebrew extract of the conversation (example [3] below, ironic utterances underlined), containing about 300 words, which partly revolves

around Sara and Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu (the then Israeli Prime Minister and his wife), who, in a newspaper interview, complained about the press harassing them. The literal responses are in bold.²

- (3) 1. A: You don't understand one thing. You think they initiate these things? This is maybe the first article they [wrote].
2. B: [They] stay home and after them the paparazzi come ... and they are simply [miserable].
3. A: [(They) **ruin**] **their lives**, what do you want?
4. B: I want to cite the last sentence of the article, yes, out of the potency's (the word used in Hebrew is *heroism*) mouth (meaning 'out of God's mouth', equivalent to the English idiom 'out of the horse's mouth') [as they say].
5. A: [Out of the baby's mouth].
6. B: **Out of the hero's mouth**. In fact, it's not in this article, it's in the, it's in the article that appeared in *Ma'ariv* (an Israeli daily), but x Sara says that maybe following the tragedy of Princess Diana they will begin to understand ... she and Diana on the same level!
7. C: So, the last photograph, they chose the picture of Bibi and Sara and their two kids on the beach in Caesaria and <xx> ya'eni (a marker for irony) a spontaneous picture, but it's obvious that this picture is carefully arranged: the big boy with the father – the small one with the mother, and all this.
8. A: (0.1 second later) It's as if I take a picture of you (C) now, say, you are sitting next to D (C's wife), because ... really, come on!
9. C: One thing is certain, then ... the paparazzi photographers will not catch them at the speed of 160 kph.
10. Everybody: @ (2 seconds).
11. D: So she cannot compare herself to Diana.
12. B: <xx> She is really miserable because they do her injustice.
13. A: Diana, my ass, this entire story, believe me, I feel like retching.
14. D: Yes.
15. A: Big deal! [<xx>]
16. C: [I don't feel] like retching at all, I feel like sharing the profits.

17. D: [@@@@@]
18. C: [I feel like] sharing the profits. Throw me some bone
(equivalent to the English idiom 'throw me a scrap').
19. D: Open a florist shop.

2.2. A sample analysis

Speaker A (in [3.1]) sympathizes with the Netanyahus, while speaker B (in [3.2]) is critical of them. Speaker B describes them ironically as "miserable" – the literal sense – echoing their complaint and indicating that they are far from being miserable, and that they must be happy – the ironic meaning – about being so popular in the press. However, B (in [3.3]) elaborates on their "misery" – the literal sense of the irony – by retorting that their life is "ruined". Whether this response can be viewed as resonating with the literal meaning is dubious: it could be a repetition of that person's belief rather than a response to the previous utterance.

In (3.4), the reference to Bibi as God ("potency"/"heroism") is ironic. Both the following responses referring to him as either "baby" (sort of opposite) or "hero" in (3.6) are echoes of the literal meaning of the irony. The irony at the end of (3.6) remains uncommented on at this stage. D is going to refer to it later (in [3.11]), but it is hard to tell whether this is a response to the literal or ironic meaning of the irony here.

The ironical meaning 'spontaneous' in (3.7) is responded to by A in (3.8). A disagrees with C, i.e. with the ironical meaning, and attempts to defend the genuine spontaneity of the photograph of the Netanyahus (appearing in the press to affect "spontaneity" in order to support their claim that they are haunted by the press).

The irony in (3.9), which suggests the couple will never really run away from the paparazzo photographers, was responded to by a 2-second laughter.

The irony in (3.12) is a repetition of the topic of this conversation. It is a repetition of the literal meaning of the previous ironies, particularly those generated by the same speaker himself.

The irony in (3.16) is responded to by laughter in (3.17).

In (3.18), C echoes the literal meaning of his own irony, and in (3.19) the literal meaning of his irony is elaborated on by D.

2.3. *Results and discussion*

Fifty-six ironic utterances were selected, on which there was 100% agreement (as to their ironiness, reached at times after a discussion) between two native speakers of Hebrew who listened to the recording. One judge was a participant in the conversations. Of these 56 ironic utterances, 42 (75%) were responded to by reference to their literal meaning. The responses were judged as literal by the two judges as above. Only those on which there was 100% agreement that they were indeed responses to the literal meaning of the irony were counted.

These results suggest that the literal meaning of irony is accessed and retained by both speakers and addressees. The occurrence of irony in the conversations made its literal meaning available for further discussion and elaboration, as predicted by the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003) and indirect negation view (Giora 1995). However, they are partly inconsistent with the standard pragmatic model (Grice 1975; Searle 1979) and modular view (Onifer and Swinney 1981; Picoult and Johnson 1992; Seidenberg et al. 1982; Swinney 1979), attesting that the literal meaning was not suppressed as irrelevant. Further, they are incompatible with the direct access view, demonstrating that irony did not avail the ironic meaning exclusively.

It could be argued, of course, that tapping processes involved in understanding and producing naturally occurring conversations is not comparable to testing comprehension on-line. While the direct access view may be challenged on the basis of evidence about processes, evidence accumulated from conversational discourse may be telling only about products. While the challenge is valid, it is still important to note that these products are better explained by a graded salience view of comprehension rather than by a direct access view, which does not allow for any contextually incompatible interpretation to be activated initially. Recall, further, that these findings do not stand in isolation, but are consistent with previous findings attesting to processes attained by on-line measures such as reading times (Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998; Pexman, Ferretti and Katz 2000; Schwoebel, Dews, Winner and Srinivas 2000) and lexical decision tasks (Giora and Fein 1999c; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998), showing that irony is not accessed ironically first.

Our findings can also be viewed as an instantiation of a more general phenomenon of "dialogic syntax" (Du Bois 1998). Dialogic syntax occurs when a speaker constructs an utterance based on an immediately co-present

utterance. Du Bois discloses the ubiquity of dialogic syntax, showing that a vast array of linguistic elements such as syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, lexical, and even phonetic patterns in one speaker's discourse can be traced back to an immediately co-present utterance. This suggests that activation of any linguistic element makes it available for the same or next speaker to elaborate on, the literal meaning of irony included. Our findings indeed confirm that ironies avail their literal meaning, thereby allowing recurrence of the salient/literal meaning in the next discourse segment. Evidence of similar effects of a given utterance on adjacent ones (cf. Du Bois 1998) suggests that salience of meanings is a major factor in discourse comprehension and production.

3. Summary

According to the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003), salient meanings should always be activated initially, even when they are incompatible with contextual information. A meaning of a word or an expression is salient if it is coded in the mental lexicon (e.g. the literal meaning of less familiar irony but not its intended, nonliteral meaning made available by context). Factors contributing to degrees of salience are, e.g., conventionality, frequency, familiarity and prototypicality. Prior context may be instrumental as well, though its role is limited. It may be predictive and facilitate activation of a word's meaning(s), but it is less efficient in inhibiting activation of salient meanings. In this respect, the graded salience hypothesis is consistent with the modular model of lexical access (e.g. Rayner, Pacht and Duffy 1994; Swinney 1979), particularly with an ordered-access version of it that is frequency-sensitive (e.g. Hogaboam and Perfetti 1975; Simpson and Burgess 1985; Swinney and Prather 1989). It predicts that even rich and supportive contexts biased in favour of less salient meanings should not inhibit activation of salient meanings.

Indeed, previous research by Giora and her colleagues has demonstrated that nonsalient ironies activate their salient literal meaning initially (Giora 1999, 2003; Giora and Fein 1999c; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998): ironic utterances were shown to facilitate literally related concepts 150 msec after their offset, regardless of contextual bias. Similarly, salient ironies availed their salient ironic meaning initially, in parallel to their salient literal meaning. In contrast, nonsalient ironies facilitated ironically related concepts later –

1000–2000 msec after their offset. These findings support the graded salience hypothesis, but are inconsistent with the view that context affects comprehension significantly (e.g. Glucksberg, Kreuz and Rho 1986; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, but see Burgess, Tanenhaus and Seidenberg 1989 for a critique).

Previous research (Giora and Fein 1999c; Giora, Fein, and Schwartz 1998) has also demonstrated that, contra the standard pragmatic model (Grice 1975; see also Searle 1979) and the modular view (Swinney 1979), the contextually incompatible meaning of irony is not suppressed by contextually biased information. Both salient and nonsalient ironies retained their contextually incompatible literal meaning in spite of the availability of the ironic meaning (that emerged at a different temporal stage for the two types of irony). These findings support the indirect negation view (Giora 1995) which maintains that the contextually incompatible literal meaning of irony should be retained because it has a role in irony interpretation – it provides a reference point relative to which the ironized situation is evaluated. Making the expected explicit allows for the computation of the difference between what is and what is looked for.

Spontaneous face-to-face talk can lend support to the retention hypothesis (Giora 1995, 2003; Giora and Fein 1999a) if it is found to abound in ironic utterances that get responded to literally. Indeed, having investigated irony reception in a spontaneous environment, we found that more often than not, irony is responded to by resonating with its salient, literal interpretation. These findings corroborate those of Kotthoff (1998), who shows that in friendly conversations, listeners very often respond to the literal meaning of the ironic utterance while at the same time making it clear that they have also understood the implicated meaning. Responding to the literal meaning demonstrates that this contextually incompatible meaning has neither been inhibited nor suppressed by contextual information.

Empirical research supporting the graded salience hypothesis (e.g. Giora 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2003; Giora and Fein 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998; Pexman, Ferretti and Katz 2000; Schwoebel, Dews, Winner and Srinivas 2000) and indirect negation view (Giora 1995; Giora, Fein and Schwartz 1998) has so far focused on the processes involved in comprehension of written, often contrived discourses tested in the laboratory. In this study, we provide evidence in favour of the claim that salient meanings are involved in spontaneous discourse. In particular, we demonstrate that salient meanings are involved in text comprehension and production even when they are incompatible with the context or the intended meaning.

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Notes

1. Even though Grice (1975) is not explicit about it, the processing model that follows from his assumptions is taken to be a replacement or substitution account (see, e.g., Levinson 1983: 157).
2. Legend (following Du Bois et al. 1993):

...	half a second break
..	a shorter break
[]	overlap
x	unclear word
<xx>	unclear utterance
@	laughter
()	for words not appearing in the Hebrew text
<u>underlining</u>	ironic utterances
bold	responses to the literal meaning

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