The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains

EDITED BY

Marta Dynel

John Benjamins Publishing Company

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Volume 210

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The pragmatics of humour across discourse domains / edited by Marta Dynel.
p. cm. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series, ISSN 0922-842X ; v. 210)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Humor. 2. Language and languages. 3. Pragmatics. I. Dynel, Marta.
P53.43.D98 2011
808.7--dc22 2011016545
ISBN 978 90 272 5614 0 (Hb ; alk. paper)
ISBN 978 90 272 8522 5 (Eb)

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

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Pragmatics and linguistic research into humour

Marta Dynel*

"Only a humorist could take humour apart, and he has too much humour to do it"
(Robert Benchley)

1. Pragmatics as the backdrop for humour research

This volume contributes to the new bourgeoning area of scholarly investigation: the pragmatics of humour[1]. Over the past few decades, the importance of pragmatics has gained headway both as a field of research on the whole and in humour scholarship.

Generally speaking, pragmatics as a discipline conflates various aspects of language in reference to its users, i.e. speakers or writers and hearers or readers (Levinson 1983). Additionally, it explores the "inter-relation of language structure and principles of language use" (Levinson 1983: 9). The first part of the definition accords with Morris's 1938 view of pragmatics, which he proposed as a branch of semiotics besides syntax/syntactics and semantics. He defined pragmatics as the study of the relationship between signs and their users alongside psychological, sociological and biological factors germane to the functioning of these signs. While many of

* I would like to thank those scholars who reviewed the individual papers, as well as Julia Stelter, John Crust and Sarah Seewoester, who proofread some of the chapters. I am also grateful to Neal R. Norrick and Andreas Jucker for their encouragement. Last but not least, I owe special thanks to Anita Fetzer and Isja Conen for their invaluable help throughout the publication process.

1. Notwithstanding the fact that terms such as "funniness", "amusement" and "laughter" reverberate in the whole volume, it is individual language users that make personal judgements on what is funny, amusing or laughable, whilst the concept of *humour* is recognised as being a category independent of idiosyncratic evaluations (cf. Carrell 1997). Incidentally, when considered in academic terms, humorous phenomena tend to lose their potential to induce amusement and laughter (the prototypical signal of humour appreciation, albeit sometimes also independent of it, for instance if indicative of anxiety). This is obviously not because researchers lack sense of humour (cf. Robert Bentley's witticism), but because, preoccupied with the nature of humorous concepts, analysts only aim to recognise and dissect data and are usually not in the right frame of mind to enjoy them.

these factors are nowadays subsumed under other linguistic disciplines, such as psycholinguistics or neurolinguistics (Levinson 1983), they are still relevant, if not central, to pragmatic investigation.

Indeed, many a handbook (e.g. Green 1989, Mey 1993, Cummings 2005, Verschueren 2009) places emphasis on the multidisciplinary nature of pragmatics, which is informed by other disciplines, not only linguistic ones. However, despite its heterogeneous nature, pragmatics constitutes a distinct realm of linguistic study, contributing postulates and proposals (e.g. deixis, presupposition, the Gricean model and implicitness, or speech acts) which can benefit other fields. Besides these basic notions which pervade pragmatic literature, innumerable topics pertinent to communication are explored under the label "pragmatics" (e.g. politeness and impoliteness, interactional framework, intentionality, gendered discourse, metaphor, or humour), which can be appreciated on the basis of extensive tables of contents in international pragmatic journals. Methodologically and thematically diversified studies merge into abundant scholarly output on communication, specifically written and oral text production and reception in numerous discourse domains and genres.

Overall, pragmatics is a field addressing communicative processes (or language as deployed by its users) and its relation to language form, coupled with the cognitive and socio-cultural study of language use. In other words, pragmatics presents a wide interdisciplinary spectrum of topics capitalising on the interactions of cognitive, social, and cultural phenomena and processes (cf. Verschueren 2009). This also presents itself in the emergence of subdisciplines, notably sociopragmatics and cognitive pragmatics.

The field's intrinsic diversity is also manifest in pragmatic humour studies. On the whole, the past few decades have witnessed intensive development in research into humour within a number of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and even medicine. Linguistic humour research is particularly prolific and can hardly be exhaustively summarised (see overviews in Attardo 1994, Dynel 2009a and Norrick 2010), insofar as it displays innumerable topics and approaches, frequently borrowed from ample literature on "non-humorous" language. Regardless of their methodologies and specific objectives, linguists with interests in pragmatics aim to describe chosen types, functions and mechanisms of humour as a communicative phenomenon.

The current interest in *verbal humour*, i.e. humour conveyed by language rather than non-verbal stimuli (Raskin 1985, Attardo 1994, Alexander 1997, Norrick 2004, Dynel 2009a), is largely credited to Victor Raskin. His 1985 publication marked a watershed in linguistic research into humour by launching the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour*, which further developed into the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (e.g. Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 2001). Both are anchored in semantic, cognitive and pragmatic theory, thereby delineating the multidisciplinary orientation of humour research. The Semantic Script Theory of Humour is hinged on the presentation of a joke as a text, at least partly, compatible with two opposing semantic scripts. Those were originally understood as chunks of semantic information evoked by chosen words, such as the prototypical "doctor" and "lover" scripts, which Raskin (1985) and followers claim to underlie this joke[2]: "'Is the doctor at home?' the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. 'No,' the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. 'Come right in.'". Built also on the notion of script overlap and opposition, the General Theory of Verbal Humour centres on six hierarchically organised *knowledge resources* (besides script opposition, these are: language, logical mechanism, situation, target and narrative strategy), according to which canned jokes and humorous short stories can be analysed and compared. The two theories are still hotly debated, being either endorsed and expanded upon by other authors (e.g. Ermida 2008) or criticised for their methodological shortcomings (e.g. Ritchie 2004, Dynel 2009b).

In this volume, Nadine Thielemann deploys Raskin and Attardo's model in her original research into Russian gendered jokes, indicating that it fails to capture certain dissimilarities in new jokes which subvert stereotypes underlying traditionally gendered jokes. On the other hand, Carmen Popescu uses Raskin's notion of a script in her unprecedented study of ethnic scripts in Romanian jokes. The concept of script opposition/overlap also reverberates in Isabel Ermida's contribution on comic failure in Woody Allen's prose, combined with the incongruity-resolution model (which is succinctly introduced below). Interestingly, Raskin and Attardo are divided on the issue of whether their approach is compatible with the incongruity-resolution framework, with the former author unequivocally dissociating himself from it, and the latter being supportive of it (for a discussion, see Dynel 2009b).

Needless to say, the analysis of jokes and humorous short stories is not restricted to the theoretical framework put forward by Raskin and Attardo, but may, for instance, be devoted to qualitative and/or quantitative studies of jokes' topics, yet not conceived as scripts. In this volume, Anna T. Litovkina conducts a sociopragmatic inquiry into the topic of sexuality and its subordinate categories in antiproverbs (short jokes based on allusions to proverbs) of Anglo-American origin.

Moreover, research into jokes frequently concentrates on their on-line development (e.g. Ritchie 2004, Dynel 2009b). Regarding pragma-cognitive incremental processes underpinning jokes (and all humour in general), most researchers concur that the main prerequisite is *incongruity* (see e.g. Attardo 1994; Forabosco 1992, 2008; Martin 2007; Dynel 2009b) understood in psychology as a deviation from the cognitive model of reference, or, from a linguistic viewpoint, a mismatch or contrast between two meanings. A query arises as to how humorous incongruity can be differentiated from its non-humorous counterpart. In this volume, Venour, Ritchie and Mellish formulate an innovative hypothesis bringing us closer to finding an answer to this intriguing question.

What is more, the prevailing view is that, notwithstanding its strength, incongruity is humorous only if followed by *resolution*. Broadly speaking, the *incongruity-resolution* model, initially championed by Suls (1972, 1983) and Shultz (1972), assumes that

2. It can be argued, however, that the joke relies on "patient" and "lover" scripts (see Dynel 2009b).

incongruity is first observed and later resolved, i.e. made congruous according to a chosen cognitive rule. This general pattern exhibits an array of sub-mechanisms typical of particular forms of humour (e.g. Forabosco 1992, Attardo 1994, Ritchie 2004, Martin 2007, Dynel 2009b). In this volume, Maciej Kaczorowski develops a novel pragma-cognitive model for understanding and appreciating parody, exemplified by sketches of Monty Python's Flying Circus. Incidentally, *parody* (together with *satire*) is a literary genre which deserves more pragmatic investigation (e.g. Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997, Simpson 2003).

Pragma-cognitive phenomena underlying humorous communication are sometimes approached also from other angles, such as *cognitive construal operations* (e.g. Coulson 2005, Brône et al. 2006, Veale et al. 2006). The exploration of humour also benefits from studies on "serious" discourse, which proves that humorous and non-humorous discursive phenomena utilise similar processes, but humour does have its distinctive features (Giora 2003, Brône et al. 2006). In this volume, Rachel Giora adduces experimental evidence positively verifying her approach to irony as a trope carrying literal and non-literal meanings which are sequentially activated by the hearer/reader according to their salience, irrespective of the context.

Substantial pragmatic research has also been conducted with regard to the mechanisms and roles of *humour in interaction* (e.g. Norrick and Chiaro 2010, Norrick 2010), which is essentially synonymous with *conversational humour*[3] (e.g. Coates 2007, Dynel 2009a, cf. Norrick and Chiaro 2010) and is defined as humour relevantly interwoven into conversations, both spoken and written, whether private, institutional or mediated. It may be restricted to single utterances or developed across interlocutors' turns, thereby constituting *conjoint humour* (Holmes 2006). Conversational humour encompasses various subtypes, most frequently analysed in isolation, the epitome of which is *teasing* (e.g. Hay 2000, Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006, Haugh 2010, Geyer 2010, Pullin in this volume, Chovanec in this volume, Dynel's "Joker in the pack" in this volume). One of the papers by Marta Dynel tackles the thorny issue of merging humorous and non-humorous modes/frames/keys, which evince a few forms of interrelation. While this paper is illustrated with humour from peculiar e-mail conversations, Jan Chovanec expands on the specificity of conversational humour in live text commentary, another genre of computer-mediated conversation.

A panoply of topics are pursued within discourse analysis, giving insight into conversational humour's functions in interpersonal communication. Specifically, previous research has explored *solidarity*, *persuasion* or *conflict management* in different settings, whether private or formal, such as in the workplace (e.g. Kotthoff 2000, Hay 2000, Crawford 2003, Holmes and Marra 2002, Norrick and Spitz 2008). In this

3. Some authors (e.g. Pullin in this volume) use the term "conversational humour" in reference to private talk, but introduce the term "interactional humour" as regards more formal contexts.

volume, Patricia Pullin examines the roles of humour in the process of integrating new staff members, a topic so far neglected.

Both jokes and units of conversational humour may capitalise on semantic categories and rhetorical figures regarded as distinct humorous forms in their own right. Devices commonly utilised in humour include primarily *irony* (e.g. Giora 2003; Jorgensen 1996; Kotthoff 2003; Partington 2006, 2007) and *puns* (e.g. Attardo 1994, Norrick 1993), with the latter being the most salient form of *wordplay*, i.e. play with language forms[4] (see Nash 1985; Attardo 1994; Alexander 1997; Dynel 2009a, 2009b), which also can manifest itself in non-punning figures, such as *rhyming*, *alliteration* and *register clash* (see Venour et al.'s paper in this volume). These humour types are also commonplace in human communication other than written or spoken conversations, for instance literature, advertising discourse or journalese. Humorous figures can, therefore, be discussed from the whole gamut of pragmatically-orientated perspectives concerning their forms, underlying production and interpretation mechanisms and functions, as contributions to the present volume also bear out. While Magdalena Adamczyk addresses the sociopragmatic nature of puns in fictional conversations quoted from Shakespeare's plays, Sarah Seewoester undertakes a meticulous study of sub-word ambiguity mechanisms in puns coming from a variety of sources and accounts for the discrepancies in other authors' results. In addition to Rachel Giora's chapter mentioned previously, two more papers in this collection shed new light on the interdisciplinary workings of irony. While little attention has so far been paid to the essence of irony's humorousness, Eleni Kapogianni propounds the notion of surrealist irony vis-à-vis meaning reversal irony types on the strength of existing theoretical approaches, illustrating her paper with rich corpora based on diverse texts. In contrast to this micro-analytic approach, Paul Simpson's sociopragmatic account presents irony as a multifold humorous phenomenon ubiquitous in many discourse domains.

On the whole, miscellaneous humour types, not only those listed so far, are prevalent in many domains of discourse, for instance advertising (Forabosco in this volume), films, series and serials (Kaczorowski in this volume, Dynel's "I'll be there for you" in this volume), literature (Ermida in this volume, Adamczyk in this volume), and other cultural artefacts, on which authors assume numerous theoretical perspectives converging in pragmatics. Nonetheless, some humorous phenomena have scarcely been addressed in pragmatic research. One of such is the peculiar nature of sitcom humour, which is the focal area of investigation in Marta Dynel's second paper, whose bedrock is formed by a new model of participation holding for fictional media discourse. On the other hand, Giovannantonio Forabosco contributes to the heated discussion on humour as a rhetorical tool in advertising and court discourse, venturing a

4. Humour which revolves around the surface structure form, viz. wordplay, tends to be referred to as *linguistic humour* (Raskin 1987, Alexander 1997). This is not to be mistaken for *verbal humour*, i.e. humour materialised by language rather than non-verbal stimuli (Raskin 1985, Attardo 1994, Alexander 1997, Norrick 2004, for a discussion, see Dynel 2009b).

number of palatable statements which reconcile the dissimilarities between theoretical theses and empirical observations regarding the persuasive potential of humour.

Last but not least, preoccupied with different humour types, researchers examine language users' culture-based humour competence, cross-cultural differences and translation problems, which affect the intercultural pragmatics of humour generation and construal (e.g. Davies 2003, Davies 2005, Rogerson-Revell 2007, Chiaro 2005). In the present volume, Delia Chiaro creatively compiles a list of puzzling issues germane to the (un)translatability of humour in public genres, which carry repercussions for the pragmatics of humour across languages and cultures.

Overall, the pragmatics of humour encompasses a full spectrum of studies on the forms, workings and functions of humour, regarded as a form of language use, both at the production end and at the reception end. This field recruits findings from adjacent linguistic disciplines, combining cognition, social factors and culture, and hence having an inherently interdisciplinary nature. Accordingly, pragmatic literature on humour captures diverse analyses of its functions and manifestations in various types of interactions as well as its semantic, stylistic and cognitive mechanisms, translation problems, and sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic phenomena. All of these topics and strands of research generate the intricate picture of the pragmatics of humour. Utmost care has been taken to guarantee that representatives of all of them can be found in the present collection of articles.

2. The content of this volume

This volume brings together a wide range of papers on several types of humour and their workings in different discourse domains, as viewed by linguists with interests in pragmatic studies, but supportive of multifarious approaches and theories. The seventeen chapters show that humour is a complex and diversified communicative phenomenon, whose types are recurrent both in everyday interactions and in media discourse, whether spoken or written, and whether institutional or interpersonal. Despite their theoretical and methodological differences testifying to the heterogeneousness of the field, the chapters contribute to the scholarship on humour understood as a phenomenon central to language use and form, as well as communication, which is why they are naturally subsumed under pragmatic research.

Rather than favour one theoretical vantage point or humour type, this publication gives a state-of-the-art and diversified picture of current directions in linguistic humour studies which are done within pragmatics on the strength of assorted linguistic tenets. Consequently, whilst this volume displays a pragmatic orientation, contributions show the interdependence between this and other disciplines of linguistics, notably cognitivism, semantics and sociolinguistics. Several chapters also draw on morphology and phonology, speech ethnography, classical rhetoric, translation research, stylistics, linguistic media studies, and linguistic gender research, all of which contribute to, and capitalise on, a strictly pragmatic outlook on humour.

The volume consists of seventeen chapters organised into three parts, according to the humour types/forms/categories under investigation. Given the complexity and diversity of humorous phenomena, each part is assigned a general category corresponding to one of the three independent criteria (stylistic figures, (non)interactive/(non) interactional forms, and forms of humour in public discourse). Thus, the types of humour listed in the section headings ought not to be perceived as a coherent taxonomy, for they may overlap in discourse (e.g. canned jokes may be couched in puns, irony may occur in public discourse, etc.). In addition, a few of the chapters could, technically, belong to more than one section, while the present division is guided by the authors' primary foci of interest.

The first part of the book covers stylistic figures, also known as rhetorical figures, giving rise to humorous effects, namely irony (but see Simpson's view of the concept) and puns, together with non-punning wordplay represented by register humour. The second part pertains to canned jokes and conversational humour perceived as non-interactive and interactive discursive categories of humour, respectively. While both jokes and conversational humour are obviously communicative categories, the former are most frequently discussed as clearly delineated and isolated textual units (even if production/reception processes are described), while the latter is explored as an interactive phenomenon entailing two (or more) interactants. The third part of the volume focuses on humour in the public domain, which offers fertile ground for several genres of humour, such as parody, sitcom humour, and literary humour, and which best exhibits certain characteristics of humour, notably its (lack of) persuasive function and (un)translatability.

It must be stressed that irony, puns, jokes and conversational humour, to which four sections of the book are devoted, are, admittedly, the most salient categories of humour, and thus they recur the most frequently in the existing literature on the (pragma)linguistics of humour. This volume reflects this fact with the eleven chapters, each of them shedding new light on the underlying mechanisms and manifestations of the focal humour types, the instances of which are taken from many discourse domains. However, some room is left for a few types rarely discussed in linguistic humour studies (Part 3), albeit equally worthy of investigation, viz. register humour, sitcom humour, parody and literary humour, some of which are typical of (even if not restricted to) public discourse. Finally, the last two chapters present the nature of persuasive humour and translated humour in public discourse with regard to distinct discourse domains, namely the persuasive function of humour in advertising and court discourse, as well as issues germane to humour translation in cultural artefacts and on the Internet.

All contributions offer original research findings, advocating novel theoretical conceptualisations of humorous phenomena or presenting empirical qualitative and/or quantitative data analyses. In either case, the papers constitute inspiring research, drawing on the wealth of existing scholarship. Illustrated with examples, most frequently culled from real-life discourse, both private and public, the majority of articles present new hypotheses or interpretative models concerning chosen types of humour. While displaying sound theoretical bases, the remainder can be classified as case studies of humorous data, yielding novel research findings rather than new theoretical proposals.

The first three articles in Part 1 ("Stylistic figures as forms of humour") address the notion of irony (see also Ermida's paper), explaining its characteristics from three different, albeit complementary, angles and at different levels of generalisation. Given the mismatch between the intended implied meaning and what seems to be conveyed literally, irony is a frequent topic in pragmatic studies and a well-recognised manifestation of humour, as already indicated. It must be remembered, however, that irony as a trope does not have to be associated with humour, for it may also appear in non-humorous utterances. While the first study in the section is pertinent to both humorous and non-humorous types of irony, the third article puts forward a distinct subtype of humorous irony. Sandwiched between the two is a paper also concentrating on the humorous side of irony, yet creatively extending its scope beyond the trope.

Specifically, providing a negative answer to the question "Will anticipating irony facilitate it immediately?", Rachel Giora provides further psycholinguistic evidence in support of her well-grounded theory of salient meanings in view of eight experiments. The central hypothesis, already corroborated with substantial laboratory research, is that predictive context cannot inhibit the emergence of salient meanings, which manifests itself, among others, in the stages of irony processing (whether humorous or non-humorous). It is shown that strong contexts anticipating ironic utterances cannot promote these ironic interpretations immediately, compared to salience-based non-ironic interpretations. These results carry serious consequences for the speed and success of the communication of ironic utterances.

In "'That's not ironic, that's just stupid': Towards an eclectic account of the discourse of irony", Paul Simpson gives a new account of irony, conceptualising it as a very broad and dynamic phenomenon in its cultural context. Rather than present irony merely as a trope, the author collates its various manifestations and characteristic features in the light of rich semantic and pragmatic scholarship and pertinent real-life examples. To this end, ordinary language users' understanding of irony is also taken into account. A list of irony types is thus compiled, embracing conferred irony, situational irony and dramatic irony, among others.

Thirdly, in her contribution entitled "Irony via surrealism", Eleni Kapogianni conflates semantic, pragmatic and cognitive theories in order to propound the new concept of surrealist irony, which is distinguished by five criteria. The author convincingly argues that in surrealist irony there is no specific logical relation (negation or scalar reversal) between the expressed and the intended meaning. Additionally, in contrast to meaning reversal irony types, surrealist irony is less context-dependent, and thus more difficult to cancel. Finally, it is less likely to be misunderstood and it is inherently conducive to overt (absurd/surreal) humour.

The second section of Part 1 embraces three papers on wordplay, defined as the exploitation of surface structure forms, epitomised by puns and register humour. The first two chapters are devoted to puns, i.e. humorous units couched in the purposeful ambiguity of textual chunks therein. As already signalled, puns frequently coincide with one-line jokes practically independent of the adjacent discourse or occur in fully-fledged canned jokes, but they may also be deployed in interactions (real-life or fictional), whether emerging spontaneously or being pre-planned (grounded in the speaker's idiolect or purposefully devised by a writer or a scriptwriter). The first paper is richly illustrated with the former type, while the second one concerns the latter type, specifically puns in dramatic discourse.

Based on an empirical observation concerning the high frequency of puns hinged on sub-word level elements, in "The role of syllables and morphemes as mechanisms in humorous pun formation", Sarah Seewoester investigates the role of syllables and morphemes as mechanisms in pun formation, which appear to have been marginalised in topical literature thus far. Against the background of semantics, morphology and phonology, the author carefully dissects earlier quantitative studies on puns and accounts for the discrepancies in other researchers' findings, paying heed to pragmatic factors, such as the source of data. To better capture the nature of puns, she proposes a five-tier matrix for categorising them, including those reliant on sub-word level components, while still adhering to the traditional framework of phonological, lexical and syntactic ambiguities.

The next chapter, "Context-sensitive aspects of Shakespeare's use of puns in comedies: An enquiry into clowns' and pages' punning practices", takes a sociopragmatic stance on literary studies. Its author, Magdalena Adamczyk, expounds on Shakespeare's use of puns, with special focus on punning clowns and pages in "Love's Labour's Lost" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona". The fundamental assumption is that punsters' social roles will have a bearing on the pragmatic peculiarities of their punning, such as the choice of an interlocutor, the topic, or the number of puns produced. It is also argued that while both pages and clowns have a propensity for puns, their punning practices are markedly different, being witty and primitive, respectively.

The third article concerns humour based on a peculiar type of non-punning wordplay, i.e. register clash. In "Dimensions of incongruity in register humour", Chris Venour, Graeme Ritchie and Chris Mellish make a groundbreaking methodological attempt at measuring incongruity, the sine qua non for humour emergence, on the basis of register-based humour, i.e. humour stemming from a mismatch between registers. While a few examples the authors use to illustrate this form of humour come from a variety of cultural artefacts, the corpora around which the study revolves are built on the basis of literature and articles. Based on several corpora showing differences in register, the authors compute frequencies of chosen words in order to plot the words' positions in a multidimensional space. Evidence is adduced for the hypothesis that incongruity between words should correspond to a relatively large distance between those words within the space.

The common denominator for the first three chapters constituting Section 1 of Part 2, "(Non)interactive forms of humour", is the concept of a canned joke, admittedly the type of humour which is the most salient to language users unfamiliar with humour theory. In the three contributions written from a sociopragmatic perspective, jokes are shown to be dependent on sociocultural schemata (or scripts, according to the Raskinian approach) which are recurrent joke topics, namely: gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Two contributions explore jokes available on the Internet, the modern forum for exchanging these humorous texts, whereas the third one concerns their distinct subtype, namely anti-proverbs, garnered mainly from published collections of humorous texts. While anti-proverbs do not present the prototypical joke format (the set-up followed by the punchline), they can be regarded as intertextual jokes, inasmuch as they are also coherent humorous units which tend to be circulated via different channels and repeated verbatim.

Nadine Thielemann's "Displays of 'new' gender arrangements in Russian jokes" offers a sociopragmatic study of contemporary gender representations in Russian jokes found primarily on the Internet, with reference to the widely recognised General Theory of Verbal Humour, with a view to verifying its applicability. In tune with linguistic gender studies, several new tendencies subverting gender stereotypes are observed, admittedly an outcome of western feminist influences. The author also stresses the need for extending the GTVH by a module capturing perspective or point of view, which is crucial in the case of gendered jokes.

The notion of ethnic scripts in Romanian jokes is the topic of the second sociopragmatic chapter entitled "Understanding ethnic humour in Romanian jokes" and authored by Carmen Popescu. Ethnic scripts in two-nation jokes are the focus of this study, as well as jokes about Roma and Hungarians, the two leading minorities in Romania. The author pays special attention to stupidity jokes based on language distortions. From her qualitative and quantitative analyses, Popescu extrapolates a number of sociolinguistic trends related to the nature of canned jokes.

In her paper entitled "Sexuality in Anglo-American anti-proverbs", Anna T. Litovkina conducts a novel sociopragmatic and ethnographic survey of sexuality and its subtypes present in humorously distorted proverbs in English. The author quotes numerous examples and analyses the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. She also suggests an explanation of why the topic of sexuality is prevalent in the public sphere.

The second section of Part 2 subscribes to the newly fledged field of the pragmatics of interaction and is comprised of three chapters appertaining to conversational humour (or humour in interaction). Placing emphasis on distinct types of conversations in diversified settings (written or spoken, and real-life or fictional), the three papers tackle the humorous vs. non-humorous mode distinction, humour forms in a new conversational genre, and the function of humour in the workplace, respectively.

The first paper in this section is entitled "Joker in the pack. Determining the status of humorous framing in conversations". In her theoretical reflections on the pragmatic status of humour in conversations, Marta Dynel critically revisits several concepts (primarily framing, keying and carnival) used in literature in reference to the special communicative mode within which humour is enclosed. Secondly, and more importantly, the vexing issue of humorous framing vs. non-humorous framing is elucidated, with special attention being paid to their interdependence. It is shown how conversationalists can consciously play with the two frames, attaining multifarious communicative goals. The postulates are illustrated with excerpts from a dyadic e-mail exchange, which constitutes a type of written asynchronous conversation via the Internet.

Similarly, in "Humour in quasi-conversations: Constructing fun in online sports journalism", Jan Chovanec explores a new topic of humour in the novel genre of quasi-conversations represented by live text commentary in online sports journalism. Quasi-conversations are defined as authentic textual segments dialogically sequenced by one interlocutor in a scripted manner. The chapter expands on quasi-conversations vis-à-vis other types of conversations (natural and fictional ones, whether written or spoken) and discusses the nature of conversational humour, notably its collaboratively constructed forms (retorts, teasing and banter) in this peculiar form of interaction.

The third paper on humour in interaction, "Humour and the integration of new staff in the workplace: An interactional study", ascribes to the conversational discourse analytic approach, concentrating on one crucial function of humour in interpersonal communication. Patricia Pullin conducts a qualitative study of humour facilitating integration of new staff in the workplace, thereby indicating a role of humour which has received very little attention so far. In particular, the author researches humour geared towards building solidarity and defining boundaries with respect to new responsibilities and tasks. Drawing on the concepts of relational work and facework, the author probes the ways in which superiors seek a balance between solidarity and power, and how subordinates use humour subversively to challenge the former.

Part 3, "Forms of humour in public discourse", is an assortment of articles on humour in public discourse. The first three chapters present the underlying mechanisms of distinct humour types prevalent in the public discourse: parody in a comedy series, sitcom humour, and the literary humour of short stories. These categories are still in need of linguistic investigation, and the three studies take steps to fill in the lacuna in the existing research from different theoretical angles. The last two chapters present the functions and characteristics of humour in the public domain in general. They are illustrated with a number of humorous examples, a few of which typify categories described in earlier sections. The two discursive essays abound in apt reflections on humour as a pragmatic tool of persuasion, as well as intercultural pragmatic aspects of humour translation.

Taking the incongruity-resolution framework as a departure point, "Parody in the light of the incongruity-resolution model: The case of political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus" presents a new model for analysing parody. Maciej Kaczorowski argues that incongruity appears and is resolved on the conceptual level between the original script (understood as a sociocognitive knowledge structure) and another script serving as its humorous manifestation. The proposal is duly illustrated with instances of parody in political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus taken from the famous series, both televised and released on DVD. The parodic sketches operate on distortions (leading to incongruities) of various verbal and non-verbal elements within scripts inherent in standard political events.

In her second paper, viz. "'I'll be there for you!' On participation-based sitcom humour", which is grounded in the pragmatics of interaction, Marta Dynel inquires into the workings of sitcom humour which capitalises on participation strategies. She elaborates a participation framework holding in the case of film discourse, which inherently operates on two communicative levels (i.e. characters' and viewers' levels). Thus, conceptualising the viewer as a privileged ratified hearer, the author compiles a list of humorous mechanisms emerging from participation phenomena at the inter-character level, which are designed by the collective sender for the sake of recipients' amusement.

In "'Losers, poltroons and nudniks' in Woody Allen's *Mere Anarchy*: A linguistic approach to comic failure", Isabel Ermida takes a bottom-up approach by examining a few of the stylistic means by which Woody Allen humorously depicts failure and tragic events in his collection of short stories entitled "Mere Anarchy". The paper is premised on the notion of opposing but overlapping scripts, together with the incongruity-resolution approach. The author carries out a qualitative textual analysis of script oppositions in three rhetorical devices, i.e. simile, understatement and irony, in order to explain how they promote humour while concurrently describing non-humorous events.

In the penultimate chapter, "Notes on humour and persuasion in advertising and legal discourse", Giovannantonio Forabosco approaches the interdependence between humour and persuasion, notably in advertising and in court discourse. He makes a number of insightful observations concerning humour deployed as a rhetorical tool. The essay also highlights a number of factors which help explain contradictory hypotheses and research findings, as well as lay people's perspectives on this thorny issue.

In the last chapter, which bears the title "Comic takeover or comic makeover?: Notes on humour-translating, translation and (un)translatability", Delia Chiaro compiles a list of pragmatic problems which loom large in the translation of not only jokes but also other humorous texts appearing in books and films. The author sheds light on linguistic and cultural barriers which sometimes impede humour translation and champions the notion of diverse "senses of humour" possibly reflected in the lexis of different languages. Finally, some thought is given to translation itself as a vehicle for humour.

Overall, the contributions collected in the volume shed new light on particular mechanisms, functions, forms and manifestations of different humorous types across discourse domains, testifying to the interdisciplinary nature of pragmatic humour research. Thanks to the new models and postulates, the chapters will certainly help shape future developments in this realm of study.

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PART 1

Stylistic figures as forms of humour

1.1 Irony

Will anticipating irony facilitate it immediately?

Rachel Giora

This research paper reports findings of eight studies looking into the processes involved in making sense of context-based (ironic) versus salience-based (nonironic) interpretations, the latter relying on the lexicalised and cognitively prominent meanings of the utterances' constituents. The aim of these studies was to test the claim that rich contextual information, supportive of the contextually appropriate (ironic) interpretation, can affect that interpretation immediately, without having to go through the inappropriate, salience-based interpretation first (Gibbs 1994, 2002). Results demonstrate that strong contexts, inducing anticipation for an ironic utterance, did not facilitate ironic interpretations immediately compared to salience-based nonironic interpretations. They show that ironic interpretations were neither faster than nor as fast to derive as nonironic interpretations, which were always first to be processed. For comprehenders, then, irony was slow to make sense of; slower than deriving the inappropriate but salience-based interpretation, regardless of whether the context was conversational or narrative. Overall, comprehenders' processing of salient meanings has a bearing on communicative processes, affecting the ease and the speed of language users' gleaning ironic import.

1. Introduction

According to the view of Irony as Indirect Negation (Giora 1995), irony resides in the gap between what is said and the situating described; the larger the gap, the more apt the ironic remark (Giora et al. 2005). For an illustration, consider the following example, in which the gap between what is said ("the *splendid* job of our *fine* pilots) and the situation described ("hundreds of funerals in Gaza") is spelt out:

> Hooray to the Israeli Airforce pilots doing a splendid job" effused Brigadier General Avi Benayahu, the IDF spokesperson, talking to Yonit Levy – white turtleneck against a background of tanks, vis à vis hundreds of funerals in Gaza – a token of the *splendid* job of our *fine* pilots. (Levy 2008; emphasis added)

Will such a large gap between what is said and what is referred to facilitate irony processing? On Irony as Indirect Negation view and the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1995, 1997, 2003), processing an utterance whose interpretation is removed from the salient meanings of its components should be more effort-consuming than deriving an interpretation based on the coded, salient meanings of its constituents. Would rich and supportive contextual information make a difference? For instance, would a context predictive of an ironic utterance facilitate its processing immediately?

According to Lucas (1965: 127) it might: "A too constant irony defeats itself, by ceasing to surprise." This statement ties in well with the assumption that building up expectancy for an ironic utterance by preceding ironic sequences allows its interpretation to be captured directly and immediately, without having to go through its salience-based nonironic interpretation first. Bypassing the nonironic interpretation thus saves comprehenders the surprise of encountering a contextually incompatible interpretation, which might complicate comprehension processes (*the expectation hypothesis*).

But is it really the case that building up anticipation for an ironic utterance allows frictionless interpretation processes? Can strong contextual information, allowing an ironic utterance to be anticipated, indeed facilitate that interpretation immediately and exclusively? Or is it the case that even such a strong context cannot preempt salience-based, nonironic interpretations? This is as yet an unresolved issue within psycholinguistics.

According to *the graded salience hypothesis* (Giora 1997, Giora 2003; Giora et al. 2007), salient meanings, meanings coded and foremost on our mind due to, for instance, exposure or prototypicality, cannot be blocked. Consequently, utterance interpretation relies on the salient meanings of its components. Such "salience-based" interpretations, interpretations based on the salient meanings of the utterance components, are activated immediately, regardless of contextual information or (non)literality. According to the graded salience hypothesis, then, even a highly supportive context, predictive of an oncoming utterance whose interpretation is nonsalient (i.e. non-coded or novel), cannot preempt its salience-based albeit inappropriate interpretation. Such an inappropriate interpretation should, therefore, be activated initially and catch comprehenders by surprise, incurring further interpretation processes.

Note, however, that despite its inappropriateness, this salience-based interpretation need not be suppressed, since it need not interfere with the final, contextually compatible interpretation (*the retention/suppression hypothesis*) (Giora 2003, Giora and Fein 1999). The result is often the involvement of such inappropriate interpretations (e.g. the literal interpretation of metaphors and ironies or the metaphoric interpretation of ironies) in the final output of utterance interpretation (as shown by e.g. Brisard et al. 2001; Giora and Fein 1999; Giora et al. 2007; Pexman et al. 2000, Tartter et al. 2002; see also Giora 1997, 1999, 2003).

According to *the direct access view*, however, strong contextual support inducing an expectation for a nonsalient interpretation (e.g. irony) should allow comprehenders to activate that contextually compatible interpretation immediately and exclusively, without involving contextually incompatible interpretations first (*the expectation hypothesis*) (Gibbs 1979, 1986, 1994, 2002; Ivanko and Pexman 2003; Ortony et al. 1978).

The direct access view argues against *the standard pragmatic model* (Grice 1975) according to which it is the literal interpretation of an utterance that is always activated first, regardless of contextual information. When incompatible, this interpretation is later suppressed and replaced by a compatible alternative. Like the graded salience hypothesis, the standard pragmatic model allows inappropriate interpretations to be involved in the comprehension processes initially; unlike the retention/suppression hypothesis, both the direct access view and the standard pragmatic model admit no inappropriate interpretations in the final output of the interpretation process.

2. Testing the expectation hypothesis: initial and late processes

As mentioned above, the various theories differ in their predictions regarding the involvement of inappropriate interpretations in initial comprehension processes. According to the direct access view, when context is highly predictive of a nonsalient (ironic) interpretation, initial processes should not involve contextually incompatible (literal/nonliteral) interpretations. According to the standard pragmatic model, even when context is highly predictive of a nonsalient (ironic) interpretation, initial processes should always involve the literal, contextually incompatible interpretation first. According to the graded salience hypothesis, initial processes should involve salience-based (literal/nonliteral) interpretations even when contextually incompatible, e.g. the metaphoric interpretation of "This one's really sharp", when said of an idiot (Colston and Gibbs 2002).

To test the different predictions of the various models, eight new experiments (in Hebrew) were run (Giora et al. 2010). These more recent experiments build on previous studies (Giora et al. 2007), while further strengthening the expectation for an ironic utterance established in those studies. Materials included contrived dialogues and narratives, strengthened by multiple supportive cues (cf. Katz 2009), biased towards either the context-based (ironic) interpretation or salience-based (nonironic) interpretation of the target. Measures varied between reading times (of target utterances and the next few words) and lexical decisions (to probe-words following these targets). Participants were presented texts, promoting either targets' context-based (ironic) interpretations or salience-based (nonironic) interpretations.

Given that expectancy may be built up by preceding stimulus sequences (Jentzsch and Werner 2002; Kirby 1976; Laming 1968, 1969; Soetens et al. 1985), in Giora et al.'s (2007) first experiment, expectancy was affected by introducing an ironic utterance in dialogue mid-position (see 1–2 below; ironies, in italics, for convenience). In Experiments 3–4, expectation was induced by the experimental design which presented participants either with items, all of which ending in an ironic utterance (+Expectation condition), or with items equally divided between literal and ironic endings

(–Expectation condition). Whereas the +Expectation condition allows participants to acquire anticipation with experience, the –Expectation condition does not.

Results of Giora et al.'s (2007) first experiment showed that despite a demonstrated anticipation of an ironic target (controlled by 2 pretests), participants took longer to read the same target ("Sounds like you are going to have a really interesting evening") in an ironically (1) than in a literally biasing context (2).

(1) Barak: I finish work early today.
Sagit: So, do you want to go to the movies?
Barak: I don't really feel like seeing a movie.
Sagit: So maybe we could go dancing?
Barak: No, at the end of the night my feet will hurt and I'll be tired.
Sagit: *You're a really active guy ...*
Barak: Sorry, but I had a rough week.
Sagit: So what are you going to do tonight?
Barak: I think I'll stay home, read a magazine, and go to bed early.
Sagit: *Sounds like you are going to have a really interesting evening.*
Barak: So we'll talk sometime this week.

(2) Barak: I was invited to a film and a lecture by Amos Gitai.
Sagit: That's fun. He is my favourite director.
Barak: I know, I thought we'll go together.
Sagit: Great. When is it on?
Barak: Tomorrow. We'll have to be in Metulla[1] in the afternoon.
Sagit: *I see they found a place that is really close to the centre.*
Barak: I want to leave early in the morning. Do you want to come?
Sagit: I can't, I'm studying in the morning.
Barak: Well, I'm going anyway.
Sagit: *Sounds like you are going to have a really interesting evening.*
Barak: So we'll talk sometime this week.

In Giora et al.'s (2007) third and fourth experiments, the expectation hypothesis was tested by means of measuring response times to probes related either to the appropriate, nonsalient (ironic) interpretation or to the inappropriate, salience-based (nonironic) interpretation. Four pretests controlled for (a) the salience of the probes (which provided for base-line means); (b) their similar relatedness to the interpretation (rather than to the lexical meanings) of their respective targets, either the ironic or the nonironic utterances; and for (c) their reliance on the interpretation of the target sentence in its context (rather than on the context alone). All in all, findings showed no differences between the +Expectation and -Expectation conditions, whether at the shorter (750 ms) or the longer (1000ms) interstimulus intervals (ISIs). In both the +Expectation and in the -Expectation conditions, only salience-based nonironic

1. Metulla is the most northern town in Israel.

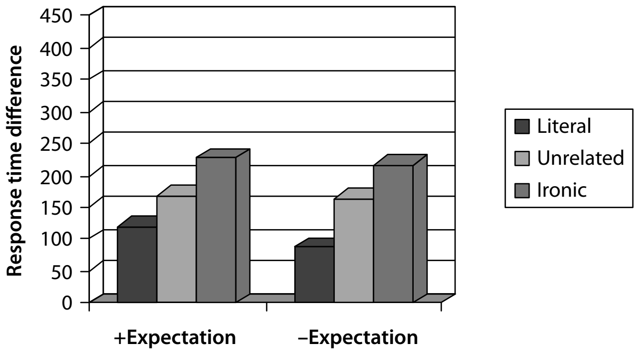

Figure 1. Mean response times at 750 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means, Experiment 3)

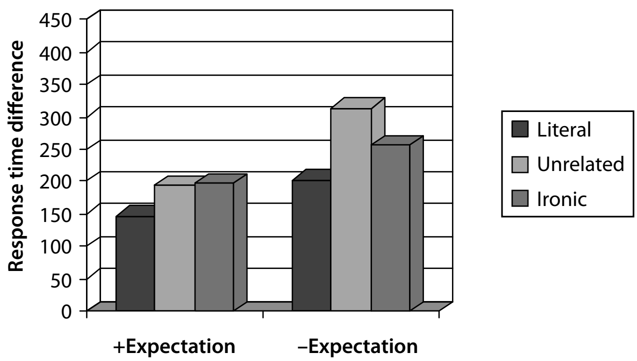

Figure 2. Mean response times at 1000 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means, Experiment 4)

probes were facilitated, whereas nonsalient ironically related probes were not, irrespective of length of ISI (Figures 1–2):

Evidence in Giora et al. (2007) then suggests that strong contexts, such that allow comprehenders to anticipate an ironic utterance, do not facilitate nonsalient ironic interpretations immediately. Would multiplying constraints supportive of an ironic interpretation avert the trend and facilitate an ironic interpretation immediately and exclusively as predicted by the expectation hypothesis?

In Giora et al. (2010), we aimed to test the expectation hypothesis under stricter conditions. To do that, we added additional constraints to those operating in Giora et al. (2007), using, however, the same (or very similar) items and tasks.

In the first three experiments in Giora et al. (2010), involving 24 participants each, the dialogues used were based on those in Giora et al.'s (2007) first experiment.

However, they were slightly revised but also enriched with additional biasing cues. To strengthen the ironic bias of the ironically biasing dialogues, which included ironic statements in dialogue mid-position, information about the ironic intention of the speaker was indicated explicitly, immediately before she uttered an ironic statement. In addition, to render salience-based contexts similarly biasing, these dialogues included no irony in dialogue mid-position and a salience-based utterance in final position. In addition, at times, speakers' straightforward intention was indicated immediately before they spoke up, including the target, salience-based statement. Thus, whereas the ironically biasing contexts featured an ironic turn in dialogue mid-position and an ironic target sentence, both marked as such by an explicit adverb (in italics for convenience, see 3), the salience-based dialogues involved only straightforward statements, some of which marked as such, including the target utterance (in italics for convenience, see 4):

(3)	Sagi:	Yesterday I started working as a security guard at Ayalon shopping mall.
	Yafit:	Irit indeed told me she had seen you there.
	Sagi (desperate):	It turned out it's quite a tough job, being on your feet all day.
	Yafit:	I hope that at least the pay is worth the effort.
	Sagi:	At the moment I get 18 shekels per hour.
	Yafit *(mocking):*	*Great salary you're getting.*
	Sagi:	I know that's not enough but they promised a raise soon.
	Yafit:	And how much will you actually get after the raise?
	Sagi:	In two weeks from now I'll get 20 shekels per hour.
	Yafit *(still mocking):*	*Wow, a highly significant raise.*
(4)	Sagi:	Yesterday I started working as security guard at Ayalon shopping mall.
	Yafit:	Irit indeed told me she had seen you there.
	Sagi (desperate):	It turned out it's quite a tough job, being on your feet all day.
	Yafit:	I hope that at least the pay is worth the effort.
	Sagi:	At the moment I get 18 shekels per hour.
	Yafit *(sadly):*	*A very low salary.*
	Sagi:	I know that's not enough, but they promised a raise soon.
	Yafit:	And how much will you actually get after the raise?
	Sagi:	In two weeks from now I'll get 30 shekels per hour.
	Yafit *(happily):*	*Wow, a highly significant raise.*
	Probes:	salience-based – large, ironic – small, unrelated – young

Materials included 22 dialogue-pairs. Tasks included self-paced reading of the dialogues, lexical decisions to probes (ironically related, salience-based related, unrelated, and nonword probes), and answering yes/no questions. Reading times of literal and ironic (dialogue final) target statements and response times to probes at three ISIs (750, 1500, and 2000 ms) were measured.

Three pretests controlled for (a) the similar salience status of the 3 types of probe words, which were measured online in terms of responses times, following neutral contexts; for (b) the ironic bias of the ironically biased dialogues, which induced a significantly stronger expectation for an ironic utterance compared to the nonironic dialogues; and for (c) the equivalent relatedness of the related probes to the interpretation of their relevant target utterances in their respective contexts, and the unrelatedness of the unrelated probes.

Results demonstrate that strong contexts, predictive of an ironic utterance, failed to facilitate that utterance initially. Instead, they manifest faster reading times of nonironic, salience-based targets compared to nonsalient, ironic targets (though this difference did not reach significance in Experiment 3). They further demonstrate that ironically related probes were not facilitated in either type of context of ISI. Instead, they were always longer than salience-based, nonironic probes, although the difference did not reach significance.

Results in Giora et al.'s (2010) first three experiments then replicate those adduced in Giora et al.'s (2007) first experiment. They support the graded salience hypothesis and argue against the direct access view and the expectation hypothesis. They show that even when contextual information was strongly biased in favour of nonsalient interpretations, these interpretations were not facilitated immediately. Instead, salience-based interpretations were activated initially, despite their incompatibility and unpredictability.[2]

In order to replicate the results of Giora et al.'s (2007) third and fourth experiments under more constrained conditions, another five experiments were run. Recall that in Giora et al.'s (2007) third and fourth experiments, we presented participants with items that were either biased toward the ironic interpretation (5) (+Expectation condition) or equally divided between ironically and salience-based biasing contexts (6) (–Expectation condition):

(5) Sarit worked as a waitress in a small restaurant in central Naharia. The evening was slow, and even the few customers she did wait on left negligible tips. She didn't think that the elderly man who walked in alone and ordered just a couple of small sandwiches would be any different. Indeed, after making her run back and forth throughout the meal, he left, and she collected his pay for the meal from off his table and found 2.5 NIS tip! When she showed her friends how much she got, Orna commented: *"That was real noble of him!"*

2. See, however, Regel et al. (2010), who show that pragmatic knowledge about speakers' ironic style can affect language comprehension 200 ms after the onset of a critical word, as well as neurocognitive processes underlying the later stages of comprehension (500–900 ms post-onset).

(6) Sarit worked as a waitress in a small restaurant in central Naharia. The evening was slow, and even the few customers she did wait on left negligible tips. She didn't think that the elderly man who walked in alone and ordered just a couple of small sandwiches would be any different. But when he had left, and she collected his pay for the meal from off his table, she found no less than 60 NIS tip! When she showed her friends how much she got, Orna commented: *"That was real noble of him!"*

Probes: salience-based related – generous, ironically related – stingy, unrelated – sleepy

Giora et al.'s (2007) third and fourth experiments involved 72 participants each. Participants read short passages and made lexical decisions to ironically related, salience-based related, unrelated, and nonword probes at 750 (Experiment 3) and 1000 ms (Experiment 4) ISI. Four pretests, involving another four groups of participants, controlled for (a) the similar salience status of the three types of probe words, measured online by means of response times following a neutral context; for (b) the probes' similar relatedness to the interpretation of the target utterance and for the unrelatedness of the unrelated probes; for (c) the similar relatedness of the related probes to the interpretation of their relevant target utterances in their respective contexts, and of the unrelatedness of the unrelated probes to these targets; and (d) for the ironic and salience-based interpretation of the target utterances in their respective contexts (see Giora et al.'s (2007) second experiment).

Giora et al.'s (2010) Experiments 4–8, involving 72 participants each, used the materials and the design of the original items of Giora et al.'s (2007) third and fourth experiments. This time, however, another constraint was added to the +Expectation condition: our participants were told that we were after irony interpretation. In Experiment 4, we attempted at replicating Giora et al.'s (2007) results of third experiment which allowed participants 750 ms processing time before they made a lexical decision task (see Figure 1). In Experiment 5, we attempted at replicating Giora et al.'s (2007) results of fourth experiment which allowed participants 1000 ms processing time before they made a lexical decision task (see Figure 2).

Results of Giora et al.'s (2010) Experiments 4–5, however, show that the additional constraint introduced in these experiments, disclosing the aim of our experiments, did not affect the results. As in Giora et al. (2007), it was only the salience-based interpretation that was facilitated in both types of context (salience-based/ironically biased contexts), in both conditions (+/- Expectation), and in both ISIs (Figures 3–4):

In Experiments 6–8, involving 72 participants each, we attempted to replicate the results of Experiments 4–5 while allowing participants longer processing time. In all these experiments, the additional constraint, i.e. disclosing the aim of our studies, was introduced in the +Expectation condition. The various experiments differed from each other only in terms of length of ISIs: in Experiment 6, the ISI was 1500 ms; in Experiment 7 it was 2000 ms; and in Experiment 8 it was 3000 ms. Results of

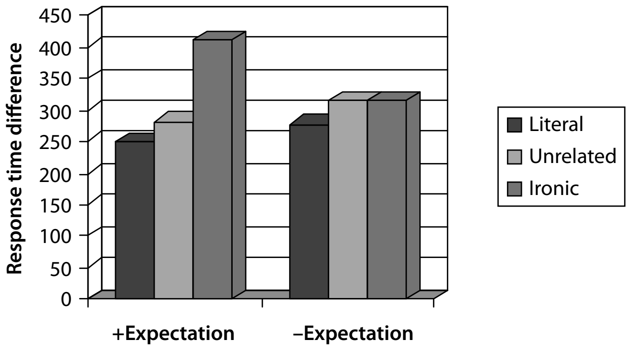

Figure 3. Mean response times at 750 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means) + disclosure of aim (Experiment 4)

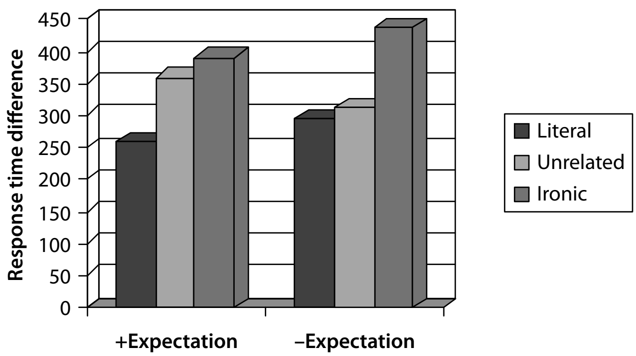

Figure 4. Mean response times at 1000 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means) + disclosure of aim (Experiment 5)

Experiments 6–7 replicated those of 4–5. Despite the longer processing time allowed, only the probes related to the salience-based interpretation of the targets were facilitated, regardless of type of context bias (salience-based vs. nonsalient/ironic), condition (–Expectation vs. +Expectation) or ISI (1500, vs. 2000; see Figures 5–6).

Results of Experiment 8 show that even at this late stage, 3000 ms following the reading of the target statement, irony is not facilitated. However, at this stage, its literal interpretation already begins to decay. Although the literally related probes are still more accessible than the ironically related probes, they are no longer more accessible that the unrelated ones.

Evidence so far failed to demonstrate that strong contexts, anticipating an ironic utterance, can facilitate ironic interpretations immediately compared to salience-based nonironic interpretations. Both multiple constraints and extra processing time did not make a difference either (see also Filik and Moxey 2010).

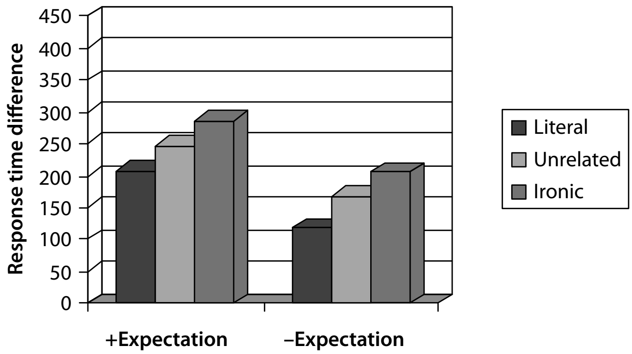

Figure 5. Mean response times at 1500 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means) + disclosure of aim (Experiment 6)

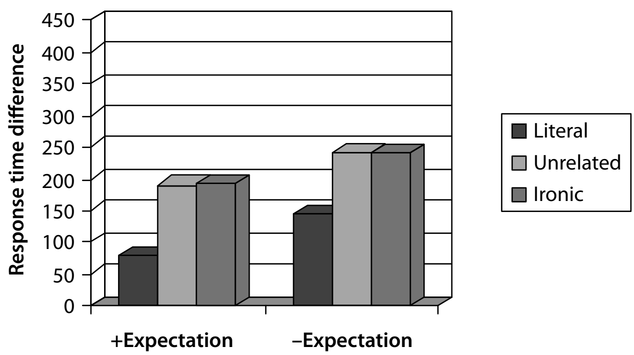

Figure 6. Mean response times at 2000 ms ISI (after subtraction of baseline means) + disclosure of aim (Experiment 7)

3. General discussion

Can strong contextual information, rich in supportive constraints, govern appropriate interpretation processes immediately even if nonsalient? More specifically, can a strong context, predictive of a nonsalient ironic interpretation, override the primacy of salient meanings and hence salience-based nonironic interpretations so that the ironic interpretation is tapped directly without having to go through inappropriate salience-based interpretations first (as proposed by e.g. Gibbs 2002, Katz 2009, Pexman et al. 2000)? For example, would the presence of an ironic speaker in a discourse situation which allows comprehenders to anticipate another ironic turn on the part of that speaker facilitate that ironic turn immediately and exclusively? Or, would exposure to repetitive uses of irony in an environment rich in ironic utterances save comprehenders the effort of engaging in complex multi-stage interpretation processes, assumed by Giora (1977, 2003) and Grice (1975) among others?

The various theories in the field of psycholinguistics have different predictions with regard to the effects of a strongly predictive context on the processes involved in interpreting anticipated utterances. According to the direct access view (Gibbs 1994, 2002), a context predictive of an oncoming ironic utterance should facilitate its compatible ironic interpretation directly without having to go through its incompatible literal interpretation first (the expectation hypothesis). According to the standard pragmatic model (e.g. Grice 1975), comprehension processes always involve the literal interpretation of the utterance first, regardless of strength of contextual information to the contrary. According to the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2003), strong contextual information, predictive of an oncoming utterance, cannot block salient (coded and prominent) meanings and hence salience-based utterance-level interpretations (constructed on the basis of these meanings) even when incompatible. As a result, incompatible salience-based interpretations, whether literal or nonliteral, should be involved in the interpretation of compatible nonsalient interpretations initially, regardless of whether they are literal or nonliteral.

In Giora et al. (2007), three experiments tested the expectation hypothesis. Results showed that, even when contexts exposed participants to an environment rich in ironic utterances, only salience-based interpretations were activated immediately and remained active also later (at 750 and 1000 ms ISIs). In Giora et al. (2010), another eight experiments further tested the expectation hypothesis under more constraining conditions. Using Giora et al.'s (2007) items which were predictive of either an oncoming ironic or a salience-based utterance, Giora et al. (2010) strengthened the expectation for an ironic utterance by adding more biasing constraints and cues. In Experiments 1–3, the contexts raising an expectation for an ironic utterance made explicit the ironic intent of the speaker, who also uttered an ironic statement in context mid-position; the context raising an expectation for a nonironic utterance did not contain any ironic utterance and cued comprehenders to nonironic interpretations. In Experiments 4–8, participants were either told they were participating in an experiment on irony and were exclusively exposed to items which ended in an ironic utterance (+Expectation condition), or were ignorant of the experiment's aim and exposed to items either ending in an ironic utterance or in a nonironic utterance (–Expectation condition).

The results of eight experiments, allowing various durations of processing time, showed that irony interpretation is not a smooth process. Even in a strong context, prompting anticipation for an ironic utterance, the ironic interpretation is not facilitated immediately or exclusively. Instead, incompatible salience-based utterance level interpretations are made available immediately and retained for as long as 2000 ms ISI. Only at 3000 ms ISI does it begin to decay, suggesting that in irony interpretation the salience-based interpretation is retained rather than suppressed. Evidence so far has failed to support the view that strong contexts, inducing an expectation for an ironic utterance, can facilitate ironic interpretations immediately compared to salience-based nonironic interpretations, as shown Giora et al.'s (2007) and Giora et al.'s (2009).

All these results then contest the expectation hypothesis and the direct access view. However, they support the graded salience hypothesis and, partly so, the standard pragmatic model.

Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by a grant to the author by THE ISRAEL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (grant No. 652/07).

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“That’s not ironic, that’s just stupid”

Towards an eclectic account of the discourse of irony

Paul Simpson

This article draws on a range of models from language studies, particularly from linguistic pragmatics, in order to elucidate patterns in the production and reception of irony in its social and cultural context. An expanded view of the concept of irony, it is suggested, allows for better modelling of the creative mechanisms which underpin it, and in doing so can open the way for a fuller understanding of humour production and reception. A consequence of this broader (five-fold) typology of irony is that it can help shed light on the cultural dynamic of irony. The article uses a range of examples from different media and the lay definitions and interpretations that ordinary (non-academic) users of the language use in the comprehension of irony. Insofar as it seeks to develop an overarching model of irony, this paper draws on a variety of textual examples from a variety of sources, ranging from corpus evidence, through a stand-up comedy routine, to political wall murals and their discursive re-conformation as humour in present-day Northern Ireland. Although the central discussion is supported by insights from other linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural approaches, the theoretical framework which emerges, with its focus on language and communication in context, is situated squarely within contemporary linguistic pragmatics.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this article is to elucidate a serviceable framework of *irony* that helps explain how this type of figurative language functions in different contexts of use. In doing so, the paper does not seek to dismiss or reject *per se* any existing approach to irony, although by the same token, it does not align itself exclusively with any one of the prevailing schools of thought in linguistic pragmatics. Instead, this study attempts eclectically to collate different models of analysis, importing those aspects of a particular model that offer useful theoretical or explanatory currency. The scope of what follows will therefore, and of necessity, be broad-ranging because it tends to stand back from the micro-theoretical focus adopted much current research. This broader account is reached through a synthesis of existing work, and the model it sets out is realised principally in five overlapping categories for the organisation of ironic discourse. This model, it is argued, can usefully be pressed into service in the analysis of different types of ironic discourse in different types of contextual setting.

The article calls for a re-evaluation of the trope in the linguistic analysis of funniness and laughter, arguing that much traditional work on irony is hindered by its one-dimensional approach to what is after all a multi-faceted form. Over the course of the article, the multi-stranded approach to irony is paralleled with contemporary research in linguistic pragmatics, and it is argued that an expanded model of irony is justified, a model which comprises five principal categories. A consequence of this broader typology of irony is that it can help shed light on the cultural dynamic of irony and humour across place and time. It is also suggested that the perception of irony has a diachronic dimension and that productive analysis can be made of different interpretative paradigms that inform readers' and listeners' reactions to irony in the public sphere.

Using a range of examples from different media, the article seeks to demonstrate that such a framework of irony is workable, especially in understanding this type of pragmatic phenomenon in its cultural context. At the forefront of the discussion are the lay definitions and interpretations that ordinary (non-academic) users of the language use in the comprehension of irony. This includes a short survey of how changing cultural patterns have led to a change in perceptions of the appropriateness of irony in a post-conflict situation.

As noted, the thrust of the present study is informed principally by linguistic pragmatics, although this is not to exclude the insights offered by other disciplines like literary criticism and critical theory. Indeed, in her seminal study, Hutcheon attests to the pervasiveness of irony in the public sphere, arguing that the trope "happens" in "all kinds of discourses (verbal, visual, aural), in common speech, as well as in highly crafted aesthetic form, in so-called high art as well as in popular culture" (Hutcheon 1994: 5). Hutcheon approaches irony in a relatively global sense, focussing on its social and political ramifications rather than on its precise mechanics of delivery and reception. She also notes the special attention given to irony in literary criticism: the one thousand four hundred and forty five entries on "irony" in a ten-year span of the MLA Bibliography is evidence of this marked level of interest. This level of interest is not however sufficient to obviate the need for a study like the present one, because in spite of this sustained and almost obsessive focus, the literary critics have yet to develop a consensus about ironic discourse or to reach a workable framework of analysis that can be employed in the analysis of different (literary) texts. Not only has scant attention been paid by the critics to each others' findings, but when some attempt at definition is made it tends to fall well short of the rigour found in comparable investigations into irony in the disciplines of language and linguistics. For instance, the opening of a recent literary-critical textbook runs thus, "Irony has a frequent and common definition: saying what is contrary to what is meant" (Colebrook 2004: 1). While undeniably moving in the right direction, the definition falters in a key respect: someone saying (ironically) of a rain-sodden day "I just love sunny weather" is not quite stating the contrary of what they mean, nor are the uttered words the opposite of what the speaker believes (and see further below). In essence, the literary-critical approach to irony (as embodied in the type of definition referred to) is dominated by explorations of the trope in canonical literary texts, in the process subordinating the concept itself to a theoretical "given". And while there is nothing necessarily wrong with this academic focus, it is very unlikely to yield any insights into the discursive construction of irony in everyday written and spoken language or in its manifestation in the public and private spheres.

There are many reasons why we need a more sophisticated account of the "public" dimension of irony, an account which, *pace* Hutcheon above, emphasises its cultural and dynamic properties. Irony, as many commentators have observed, can have serious and far-reaching consequences. Many popular varieties of humour, such as parody and satire, have irony at their core, and for centuries, such forms of humour have been orientated towards the structuring and reshaping, at both the micro- and macro- level, of personal, political and social relationships. For example, British newspaper *The Guardian* recently ran the headline "Victory for irony" (2008) to introduce a report of how singer Elton John had failed in a libel writ against the paper. The writ was prompted by a humorous spoof diary entry, written by a *Guardian* columnist, which mocked the singer. The presiding judge's decision formally to brand this text "ironic" was hailed by the newspaper as "a groundbreaking libel decision".

In a similar vein, Billig (2005) examines the repercussions of (debates about) irony in the public domain by citing an episode from the European Parliament in 2003 involving the right wing billionaire and Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi (Billig 2005: 173ff). In the course of a speech that was not being well-received, Berlusconi likened a German MEP to the commandant of a Nazi concentration camp. In response to the predictable booing that followed, Berlusconi claimed that he was being "ironic". Billig argues that self-proclaimed irony and insulting humour (like Berlusconi's) should not be ignored because it is just as important an area of study as so-called "successful" humour (2005: 174).

Finally, Simpson and Mayr (2009) draw attention to the case of the lawyer Hilama Aziz, an Asian Muslim who worked in England for the British Crown Prosecution Service (Simpson and Mayr 2009: 26–7). Aziz was dismissed from her job by her employers on the grounds of certain inflammatory remarks she was alleged to have made. One of these, made in reply to a comment by a security guard that she was a security risk, was the patently ironic utterance, "Yeah, I'm a friend of Bin Laden". Aziz was pursued relentlessly by her employers, who dismissed her from her job and prompted seven years of litigation. The persecution of someone over a piece of manifestly ironic discourse quite rightly provoked outrage among all of the media outlets that covered the story. Eventually Ms. Aziz's case was upheld and she won a record pay out against her employers to cover aggravated damages, injury to feelings, and past and future loss of pension and earnings.

Irony as a pragmatic device not only has important implications for the study of many types of humour (given its centrality to banter, teasing, satire, parody, pastiche and more) but it also, as noted, has significant relevance to the broader types of political and forensic arenas documented above. In sum, irony can be both problematic and problematised, and this twin facet of ironic discourse will probed further over the course of this paper.

2. Approaches to irony

So from where, then, does a study of irony derive its principal impetus? There is no doubt that the starting point in linguistic pragmatics has been Grice's notion of the Co-operative Principle in language, his four sets of conversational maxims, and the attendant concept of conversational implicature (Grice 1975). In this traditional view, irony is seen as an inference of a non-conventional sort which is derived from a departure from one of the sets of maxims. Thus, the utterance

(1) I liked the way you helped with the washing up!

works as irony because the speaker (assuming no domestic help has been provided from the interlocutor) flouts one of the sub-maxims of Quality ("do not say what you believe to be false") in saying something they knowingly believe to be untrue. There is no need here to elaborate any further the particulars of a framework which has seen such extensive exploration and application in pragmatics (see for example Dynel 2009), other than to sum up *Gricean irony*, for the purposes of the present discussion, as inhering in some sense of *opposition*; more specifically, in an opposition engendered by the deliberate flouting of "maximally efficient" conversational strategies.

To take us further, consider the following triplet of utterances, imagined as uttered during a torrential thunderstorm:

(2) Nice day!
(3) It seems to be raining a bit.
(4) I just love sunny weather.

Whereas all three utterances are ironic in some sense, it is the nature of their conformation and status as irony which varies. Clearly, (2) is the most patently "oppositional" insofar as it asserts the opposite of what the speaker is intending to communicate. It is an obvious flout of Grice's Quality maxim and it most readily conforms to a definition of irony as the saying of something contrary to what is meant. The second example, as understatement, is less easily captured through the idea of opposition, and as Sperber and Wilson suggest, this type of utterance delivers not so much the reverse of what is meant, but just somewhat less than what the speaker thinks (Sperber and Wilson 1981). In other words, it is ironic not because what it says is false, but because its truth is so patently obvious. We shall return to Sperber and Wilson shortly, but the final example of the three raises an interesting issue. Example (4) exhibits neither oppositeness nor understatement, yet still functions as an ironic comment even though it embraces unequivocally the true sentiment of the speaker. A compelling answer to this seeming anomaly is offered by Utsumi (2000), in whose *implicit display* model of irony substantial provision is made for such utterances. Utsumi (2000) argues that an "ironic environment" is needed for an utterance like (4) to be interpreted accordingly. In this instance, the speaker's perception of a non-expected outcome establishes this environment, such that they have a negative emotional attitude to the incongruity between what is expected and what is realised in the discourse situation (Utsumi 2000). Interestingly, were the day in question sunny and not stormy, the ironic environment would evaporate, so to speak, rendering (4) a perfectly plausible non-ironic statement of belief. Considered as a whole, even a limited set of examples like (2), (3) and (4) shows the difficulty inherent in defining irony too narrowly or loosely. What is clear is that irony is rather more than simply saying the opposite of what you believe to be true.

In seeking to counter the typical explanations in pragmatics offered for examples like (2) to (4), Sperber and Wilson postulate a model of irony as *echoic mention* which is built on the logical distinction between *use* and *mention* (Sperber and Wilson 1981; and see Wilson and Sperber 1992). Thus, in an "ironic" exchange like

(5) A: I'm tired.
B: *You're* tired! And what do you think *I* am?
(after Sperber and Wilson 1981: 306; original emphasis)

the proposition *used* in the first part of the exchange is explicitly *mentioned* in the response in the second. The "mention" version indicates that the previous utterance has been heard and understood, and expresses the hearer's immediate reaction to it. The use-mention distinction is such that "USE of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to; MENTION of an expression involves reference to the expression itself" (Sperber and Wilson 1981: 303). The purpose behind mention is that the speaker may echo the remark (ironically) to suggest that "he finds it untrue, inappropriate or irrelevant" (Sperber and Wilson 1981: 307).

Now, there is no doubt that this "echoic" interpretation of irony offers much that is insightful. Forms of humorous discourse such as parody and satire clearly echo other texts and text types, and, as I have argued elsewhere, it is this echoic dimension in (inter)textual formation that imbues satirical discourse with its "spoof" or parodic quality (Simpson 2003). However one significant theoretical impediment in the Sperber and Wilson model, picked up by many commentators over the years, is their insistence that *all* ironic language usage is reducible to the echoic formula. In pursuit of this, Sperber and Wilson offer a highly speculative postulation of the sort of discourse context that could sustain an echoic interpretation of the weather examples discussed above. Their echoic interpretation of utterances like (2), (3) and (4) involves a rather tortuously imagined "prior" conversation with an invented interlocutor who has told us that the weather was going to be fine, hence activating the ironic status of the examples. Sperber and Wilson (1981: 23) insist that there is still some "vague echoing" even in the absence of such a prior conversation because the expectation of good weather, rather than an utterance about it, would still be enough to make such utterances echoic of the earlier "high hopes" the speaker would have entertained. Unsurprisingly, there have been many critics of this rather speculative provision in the echoic mention model, and there exist more cogent and detailed critiques than can be attempted here (see for instance Clark and Gerrig 1984, Giora 1997, Toolan 1996: 184–192, Utsumi 2000: 1780–1782; and see also the debates within the collection by Carston et al. 1998 and subsequent defences of the echoic framework mounted in Wilson 1998 and 2006). Suffice it to say, the position taken in the present paper is that in irony research one size does *not* fit all. There are simply qualitatively distinct forms of irony of which the echoic type numbers but one.

It is no surprise that the increased interest shown in irony over the last three decades has led to an abundance of approaches in linguistic pragmatics and related disciplines. Whereas the literary-critical practice has tended, as noted earlier, to shy away from the development of a theoretical model, in linguistics the opposite seems to be true, the upshot of which is the existence of an intimidating array of models, definitions and frameworks of analysis. Here for instance is a checklist of part of that range of current work, with key references supplementing the shorthand descriptors for each model of analysis:

– Irony as relevant inappropriateness (Attardo 2000a, 2000b)
– Irony as reversal of evaluation (Partington 2007)
– Irony as pretence (Clark and Gerrig 1984)
– Irony as implicit display (Utsumi 2000)
– Irony as indirect negation (Giora 1995, 2003; Giora and Fein 1999; Peleg et al. 2008)
– Irony as bisociation (Barbe 1993, 1995)
– Irony as bicoherence (Shelley 2001)

Even this thumbnail sketch, which does not attempt to incorporate the numerous studies in experimental cognitive psychology (e.g. Colston 1997; 2002; Colston and O'Brien 2000; Gibbs 1986; Gibbs et al. 1995; Gibbs and Colston 2007), is proof of the undeniable health of irony research in pragmatics and cognitive linguistics. Yet this proliferation of terms and theories can be daunting. Significantly, some approaches differ from others in major respects, others in narrower theoretical differences. In spite of many intersections, there are also notable points of departure and some models are set up in counterpoint to others. Clark and Gerrig for instance, rejecting the Sperber and Wilson approach, revert to Grice's observation that in order to be ironical, a speaker needs to pretend. Clark and Gerrig's model therefore sees irony as pretence where the speaker feigns an injudicious person talking to an uninitiated audience. Giora on the other hand rejects Gibbs's model of irony processing (e.g. Gibbs 1986) in which it is contended that ironic utterances are as easy to process as non-ironic ones.

Instead, Giora proposes a model that sees novel ironic discourse as a type of negation which lacks an explicit negative marker, and which, by activating both literal and ironic meanings, is more difficult to understand than non-ironic language.

As signalled at the start of this paper, I want to try to create a synergy between the various models on show here, but without privileging any one at the expense of another. I propose therefore to offer here a more eclectic set of definitions of irony, designed to capture broadly many of the overlapping senses mooted by the research paradigms above, but flexible enough to form an analytic model for the subsequent explorations of ironic discourse over the remainder of the paper. The definitions of course (and of necessity) subsume many of the observations made across the body of research surveyed above.

> *Irony*:
> Core definition: Irony is the perception of a conceptual paradox, planned or unplanned, between two dimensions of the same discursive event
> Sub-definition 1: Irony is a perceived conceptual space between what is asserted and what is meant
> Sub-definition 2: Irony is a perceived mismatch between aspects of encyclopaedic knowledge and situational context (with respect to a particular discursive event)

I prefer the idea of a *paradox* in the definitions, rather than the more familiar expressions like *oppositeness* or *incongruity*, in order to accommodate all of the examples of irony considered thus far (and this includes the non-hypothetical case histories which opened this section). Similarly, the idea of a *conceptual space* (sub-definition 1) helps to rein in the echoic form of irony – where the echoic *mention* creates a space in meaning between it and the non-ironic *use* it echoes. The approaches of, for example, Utsumi (2000), Partington (2007), Colston and O'Brien (2000) and others, are accommodated in the formulation (sub-definition 2) concerning the perceived *mismatch* in situational context, especially in terms of how a speaker or reader reacts to the contrast between expected and experienced events. The significance of the *perception* of irony is central to the definitions. Irony cannot work without some perception of it, and while much irony undoubtedly passes us by in everyday interaction, we also perceive irony which was not planned or intended (see Gibbs et al 1995; and further below). This also signals that irony is to some extent *negotiable*, because a speaker (or writer) can claim an ironic intention even if a hearer (or reader) does not identify one (cf. Berlusconi's claim to irony); alternatively, an ironic intention can be rescinded if it transpires that it has been rejected or it otherwise fails in the discourse context.

The definitions also embrace other forms of irony, such as "situational irony", a representative sample of which is the study by Shelley (2001) in the checklist above. Situational irony concerns those aspects of a situation, rather than an utterance, that cause people to interpret it as irony. Although research on such nonverbal irony is often separated off from the dominant focus on verbal irony, there is good reason to see the same organising principles at work in both ironic situations and ironic utterances.

For instance, Shelley describes the case of a Las Vegas Fire Department who returned from putting out a fire to discover that their own station was on fire because lunch had been left cooking on the stove (2001: 777). Shelley remarks of this situational irony (a fire in a fire situation) that it defies the normal way in which the situation fits with our repertoire of concepts. But this ironic event is easily mapped onto the present set of definitions in that a mismatch inheres between the premise "firemen don't start fires" (part of *encyclopaedic knowledge*) and the premise "firemen started a fire" which is located in the *situational context* of this discursive event.

3. Developing a broad-based account of irony

The purpose of this section is to develop the definitions and research context set out earlier by taking the survey of irony in a number of directions that are not within the traditional purview of research in this area. For a start, I want to examine more public perceptions and interpretations of irony. This means considering what ordinary, non-academic people think and do with irony and how the concept is negotiated and interrogated in real contexts of use. Second, I want to suggest further and additional categories of irony – categories which supplement the oppositional Gricean and echoic mention forms covered in the previous section but which are nonetheless reconcilable within the set of broad-based definitions developed there.

3.1 Irony in real-time interaction

There is no doubt that the research focus on irony, as suggested in the previous section, has been preoccupied with the micro-analysis of the pragmatic and cognitive dynamics of ironic communication, and such investigations, although often shored up by experimental informant-based testing, are normally underpinned by contrived, hypothetical examples that serve to illustrate the theoretical position adopted by this or that analyst. This procedure has perhaps given the mistaken impression that irony works in an entirely binary sense, that is, an utterance is either ironic or it is not; a speaker means to be ironic or they do not; and a listener/reader either accesses irony or they do not. The real world of irony to my mind is a lot messier than that and as a result is a lot more interesting for it. For example, there is relatively little attention in the research to situations where irony fails, and to the sorts of repair strategies interactants employ to preserve and negotiate the forward momentum of an exchange. Consider by way of illustration the following real example, recorded from a BBC Radio Two interview (4.30pm; 7/9/2008). Here Steve Cropper, the guitarist from Booker T and the MGs, is in interview with the popular DJ Johnny Walker. Cropper has previously been explaining his disillusionment with the pressures of being in a touring band before coming to the reasons why he quit life on the road:

(6) Cropper: ... I took the first bus right outa there and went back to Memphis
Walker: Bet that pleased your mother
Cropper: Greatly. She never liked me being out on the road.

This short exchange has a number of repercussions for our understanding of how irony works in real discourse contexts. From the perspective of the would-be irony producer, Walker attempts to establish an ironic framework through the contrast between the action of his interlocutor (a rock musician's return in later life to the family home) and the assumption of a less than favourable reaction to this by the musician's mother. But from the perspective of the potential perceiver of irony, this utterance stands as a non-ironic, literal reflection of his mother's true feelings. The exchange does not work as irony then because Cropper does not ratify, or chooses not ratify, the conceptual paradox inherent in the contrast between what Walker says and the assumed state of affairs his utterance represents. Nevertheless, the exchange progresses almost seamlessly in spite of its interlocutors having been temporarily at communicative loggerheads. Indeed, there is much more that could be said of this short sequence of dialogue, but it does highlight some of the problems that binarist models of irony would experience in attempting to deal with the negotiable aspect of irony in this exchange.

3.2 Irony and everyday use: Some corpus observations

A related issue to the foregoing sub-section concerns popular perceptions of irony and how everyday users of language often make subtle distinctions between the sorts of ironic utterances they use or interpret. For a start, irony is *gradable* in that there can be more of it or less of it in a particular form of language. Elsewhere, for example, I have explored irony and humour in the satirical "rockumentary" *This is Spinal Tap*, a satire whose ironic twists were so subtle as to render them imperceptible to many members of the cinema audience, especially those members who were connected to the rock music industry itself (Simpson 2003: 183–184).

It is my contention also that real users of language outside the academe have very well-developed opinions not only about degree of irony (i.e. very ironic vs. slightly ironic) but about certain attributes and qualities that distinguish different types of irony from one another. In other words, irony has an affective dimension as well as a continuum of intensity, and this is evidenced in expressions involving modifiers like "bitter", "cruel", and the like. In fact, corpus exploration of lemmas of IRONY ("irony", "ironic(al)", "ironically" and so on) reveals its concatenation with some intriguing descriptors. For example, Table 1 shows the most frequent nominal group patterns from the British National Corpus (BNC), displaying in rank order the occurrence of adjectival modifiers per million words.

The most common modifier is "heavy" suggesting a degree of intensity in the understanding of an ironic remark or situation, although it has to be said that this result is skewed upwards by its frequent occurrence in certain types of prose fiction. The

Table 1. BNC nominal group patterns

Heavy irony	14
Dramatic irony	12
Tragic irony	11
Bitter irony	10
Cruel irony	10
Final irony	9
Certain irony	8
Supreme irony	7
Curious irony	5
Nice irony	5

"Key Words In Context" check reveals that this combination is most common in the popular romance novel, suggesting that it is a rather hackneyed or clichéd expression in this genre of writing. The second most common pattern, "dramatic irony", clearly attempts to describe a particular sub-category of irony which has a tradition of analysis and a technical application of its own (see further below). Reflecting the implicit criticism often relayed by irony (Colston 1997), many of the remaining modifiers display a strongly affective negative stance: "cruel", "bitter", "tragic" and so on, while noticeably rarer in the corpus (and not making the list above) are positive modifiers such as "delicious" or "pleasant". Other of the modifiers suggest an implicit contrast with linguistic elements in the same body of text: "curious irony" hints at a surprise or unexpected occurrence of the trope, while "final irony" implies a temporal juncture, with the irony perhaps occurring at a point of narrative closure. This picture is also interesting when other, non-nominal forms of the lemma are considered. Although there is not the space to reproduce the corpus in detail here, the patterns for adjective phrases which include intensifying modifiers break down in much the same way, with a mix of intensifiers of degree ("quite ironic", "rather ironic", "heavily ironic") balanced with more evaluatively focussed clusters like "doubly ironic", "bloody ironic" or "suitably ironic".

3.3 Debating irony in the public sphere

The foregoing discussion is not intended to suggest that we all agree, unilaterally and unequivocally, on the affective parameters that enfold the discourse of irony. Whereas academic study has tended to narrow the terms of the debate, this has had no bearing on popular conceptualisations. Let me offer the following illustration of a debate about irony played out in the public sphere, where, in the course of a stand-up routine, a comedian interrogates the semantic foundation of a pop song. The piece of music in question is "Ironic" by Canadian singer-songwriter, Alanis Morrissette. A portion of the lyrics are reproduced here:

(7) And isn't it ironic ... dontcha think ...
It's like rain on your wedding day
It's a free ride when you've already paid
It's the good advice that you just didn't take
Who would've thought ... it figures

A traffic jam when you're already late
A no-smoking sign on your cigarette break
It's like ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife ...
And isn't it ironic ... dontcha think
A little too ironic ... and yeah I really do think ...

It would interesting to monitor the responses of readers of this paper to the song lyrics above, particularly with respect to just how neatly Morrissette conforms to commonly held definitions of (situational) irony. Whatever our responses, the song was enough to prompt a sketch by the popular Irish comedian Ed Byrne who lampoons the lyrics on the straightforward premise that the singer's examples simply do not constitute irony. Here is an informal transcription of part of Byrne's routine (which on stage is punctuated throughout by audience laughter) with ellipsis and additional cues on his spoken delivery placed in square brackets. The points of intersection between his monologue and the lyrics above should clear.

(8) D'ye remember that song "Ironic"? [sings:] "Isn't it ironic".

No – it's not, ask me another. She [Alanis Morrissette] keeps naming all these things in the song that were supposed to be ironic, and none of them are. They were all just... unfortunate. The song could have been called "Unfortunate". [pause]. You know, the only thing about that song is that it's called "Ironic" and it's written by a woman who doesn't know what irony is. [pause]

[...] 'Cos you look at some of the lyrics like "A traffic jam when you are already late". That's not ironic, that's just a pain the hole. When was the last time you were late for something, got stuck in a traffic jam and thought mmm "look at the irony in this", eh? "There's irony for ye. I tell ya, I was in a fierce ironic traffic jam the other day". Naw! There's nothing ironic about being stuck in a traffic jam when you're late for something. [pause] Oh, unless you're a town planner [pause] If you were a town planner and you were late for a seminar of town planners at which you're giving a talk on how you solved the problem of traffic congestion in your area and couldn't get to it 'cos you got stuck in a traffic jam ... now that would be well ironic, wouldn't it? [...]

[sings in high falsetto:] "It's like rain on your wedding day". Only if you're getting married to a weather man and he set the date. "A no-smoking sign on your cigarette break" ... that's inconsiderate office management. A no-smoking sign in a cigarette factory ... irony! It's not a difficult concept, Alanis. [...]

> But the best line in that song, the best line written ever, has got to be the line: "It's like ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife". That's not ironic, that's just stupid! [sketch continues] (Byrne 2006)

Here, Byrne takes Morrissette to task over a number of the assumed ironic situations portrayed in her song. For instance, rain on a wedding day is unfortunate rather than ironic, because, to recast Byrne's position in terms of the model outlined earlier, there is no perception of a conceptual paradox between aspects of the utterance and the scenario it depicts. It is, in other words, just plain bad luck. Similarly, Byrne mocks the traffic jam scenario because, and again in more formal terms, the situation lacks the sort of mismatch between encyclopaedic knowledge and situational context that was identified above in Shelley's fire station example. Byrne's position is that the happenstance does not make for the ironic, and perhaps one of the most entertaining aspects of this sketch is the way Byrne embellishes each scenario in such a way as to prompt a genuinely ironic status for it: a traffic jam is a nuisance, but ironic if the victim has responsibility for improving traffic flow; a wet wedding day is unfortunate, but ironic if the groom has a professional role in predicting the weather.

I have argued elsewhere that it is common for Irish humorists to use the system of language itself as an impetus and focus for their comic material (Simpson 2000). This type of culture-intrinsic humour often manifests in a delight in exposing, through *reductio ad absurdum*, the sometime absurdity of the language practices around us. Teasing out playfully the nuances and vagaries of everyday social interaction is a particularly Irish form of comedy, so in that respect, Byrne's routine slots well into an established pattern of verbal humour. That said, it is rare indeed to find humorous material that in itself addresses the central theoretical nub of a humour inducing mechanism; to find, in other words, a comedy sketch that develops a clearly articulated set of pragmatic criteria to interrogate, in this instance, the concept irony. While the Byrne routine confirms that there remains much work to be done on inter-cultural and cross-cultural perceptions of what exactly constitutes irony, it is worth underscoring the value of this material to the academic classroom, not least because of the entertaining pedagogical resource it offers for teaching discourse analysis and linguistic pragmatics.

A key aspect of the concept of irony in the public sphere concerns the chronology of discursive events in relation to ironic interpretation and understanding (and see the discussion of *Plan 9* in Subsection 3.4 below). It is surprising that commentators on irony have not made more of this diachronic dimension, of the possibility that a discursive event what was once serious and sincere may, over time, become ironised in the context of changing cultural and social attitudes. It is significant for example that in the (relatively) more peaceful Northern Ireland of 2010 many of the older tribal canards and taboos appear to be giving way in the face of a more recent sense of ironic lightheartedness. Consider the image below, which is one of many similar Loyalist wall murals painted on the gable ends of houses in working-class East Belfast (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Loyalist wall mural in working-class East Belfast

At the forefront of the image is the emblem of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which historically, as the Ulster Division of the British Army, suffered heavy casualties at the Battle of the Somme during the First World War (Rolston 1992: iii). The organisation's motto, "For God and Ulster", constitutes a strongly culturally valorised symbol of Protestant Loyalism, such that the consequences for anyone found defacing such an image would, through summary paramilitary justice, be very grave indeed.

Now consider the photograph below (Figure 2), taken in 2008, from the same part of Belfast's staunch Loyalist heartland. It is the frontage of a popular fish and chip shop on the Albert Bridge Road, again in the east of the city.

Here, the image on the security screen portrays two sworn enemies at the poles of Northern Ireland's conflict: Republican Gerry Adams and Loyalist Ian Paisley (who incidentally are in the picture agreeing over the high quality of the chip shop's food). The establishment itself bears the name "For Cod and Ulster" which is a classic example of satirical spoof. As has been argued by other commentators, a mainstay of parody is that it *echoes* an antecedent discourse, often reproducing a number of aspects

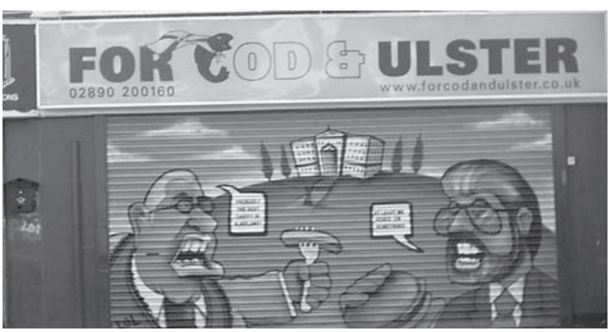

Figure 2. The frontage of a popular fish and chip shop on the Albert Bridge Road

of an original work as its principle point of departure (Carston 1981: 32–33; Bex 1996: 237). In the chip shop text, the echo is of the emblems embodied in the type of wall mural shown above. However, in terms of its progression towards satire, this echoic irony needs to be supplemented with a distortion or twist – a *dialectic* element in the terms of Simpson (2003). Without this element the text would otherwise resemble a facsimile (non-ironic) portrayal of the anterior discourse it reflects. The dialectic twist in the chip shop frontage is of course delivered through a phonological pun on the lexical items "God" and "Cod".

It would have been hard to imagine – even five years earlier – that there could be an ironic take on this, one of the Province's most sacrosanct emblems. Indeed, it is astonishing that a pictorial image of Gerry Adams should survive at all in this part of the city, and the fact that the image is allowed to stand un-defaced is evidence of the protection offered by its obviously humorous discourse context. In any other (non-ironic) context, of course, the spray paint would have been in force within hours of the completion of the painting. It is the changing social and cultural context that has allowed what was once the untouchable emblems of feudal iconography to become the material for healthy, good-natured ironic pastiche.

3.4 Irony: How many categories?

It was signalled at the start of this section that it is possible to adduce further, additional categories beyond the oppositional and echoic forms explored thus far, categories which, nonetheless, are still reconcilable with the model outlined towards the end of section two. Elsewhere I have developed the concept of *conferred irony* to account for situations where a text, in spite of its manifestly non-ironic initial composition, may be perceived to deviate from what is normally expected, to the extent that it has irony conferred upon it (Simpson 2003, 2010). Simpson (2010) investigates the "wrong" reaction to a piece of prose fiction that otherwise laid claim to be a sincere depiction of poverty and ill-health in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. Analysis of the text's stylistic and rhetorical composition reveals an unfortunate mismatch between, on the one hand, an attempt to paint an earnest picture of poverty and suffering and, on the other, the use of heavily stylised compositional features whose normal effect would be to engender comic distortion. Elsewhere, invoking the notion of a "B-movie footing", Simpson (2003: 181–183) accounts for the particular kind of ironic interpretation conferred by contemporary cinema audiences on Ed Wood's 1958 sci-fi horror film, "Plan 9 from Outer Space". Since its release, the film has passed into immortality by becoming, officially, the worst film ever made. And it has to be said, even by the production standards of the time, the film is bedevilled its ill-conceived plot and outrageous ham acting, and its ludicrous so-called "special effects" (where "flying saucers" really are saucers suspended upside-down by string). What has happened across the intervening years is that a degree of deviation and distortion has been *perceived* in the film's textual composition, a conceptual paradox in other words, and this has resulted in irony being *conferred* upon the text. Nowadays, Ed Wood's creation has become one of the most popular and widely watched films ever made, which in spite of its initial pretensions to seriousness is now interpreted as a comedic text.

As we bring the survey to close, it is worth returning to an area touched on briefly above. This is the notion of *dramatic irony*, for which there are good grounds for ascribing to a discrete category of its own in a model of irony. Referring to classic theatre, Gibbs et al. (1995: 189) describe dramatic irony as a speaker uttering words that have "a meaning intelligible to the audience but of which the speaker is unaware". Thus, in "Oedipus Tyrannus", when Oedipus calls down curses on another character, the audience knows that they will fall upon Oedipus himself. While Gibbs et al. (1995) argue convincingly that dramatic irony comprises elements both of verbal and situational irony, their contention that dramatic irony is "unintentional" is less convincing. It is after all entirely within the creative design of the creator of the dramatic text to influence the way in which certain elements are interpreted, so the irony is always intentional at least at some level of discourse. Rather, it is better to see the conceptual mismatch that occurs in dramatic irony as occurring between two different knowledge bases: the store of knowledge held by characters embedded within the story (for example, Oedipus and the other characters on stage) is smaller than the wider knowledge base of the audience watching the story. This is why dramatic irony can create suspense and tension. For instance, in the popular 1970s detective series "Columbo", the typical narrative pattern is for viewers to be made aware of who the murderer is very early in the episode. This pattern flies in the face of the typical introductory setting of the "whodunit" genre where neither the characters within the story nor the audience know the identity of the villain(s). This begs the question, then, as to why the Columbo frame could be so compelling or suspenseful. It is my contention that it is a particular characteristic of dramatic irony that, because the conceptual paradox is engendered by asymmetrical layers within the discourse, the audience is "ahead", in knowledge terms, of the characters they are watching. The suspense lies in watching the central character levelling out this asymmetry by getting ever closer to the truth, thus building up to a level of knowledge that matches that held at the higher interactive layer by the audience. In sum, the central irony generating device of dramatic irony is not to do with intentionality as such, but with the mismatch between the different interactive dimensions of the same discursive event.

Lastly, I want to touch briefly on what might constitute a potential fifth category in the developing model of ironic discourse. A seeming contradiction in terms, this form can be termed *ironic belief* and it inheres in a knowing interpretation of a fictional discourse *as if* it were true. In a revealing paper, Tobin explores the ways in which different groups of readers have interpreted the Sherlock Holmes detective stories. Although irony is not the primary focus of Tobin's examination, she, nonetheless, points to a lively tradition of "intentional" believers of the stories. These "Sherlockians" write scholarly articles, squibs, and entire books "under the conceit that Holmes and Watson were real people" (Tobin 2006: 74; see also Saler 2003). In other words, this group demonstrates an "ironic" (rather than genuinely held) belief in the existence of Holmes, a group who know that Holmes is a fictional character yet play out the circumstances as if he were real. It is easy to find other instances of ironic belief when it comes to portrayals in film and fiction; witness the number of speakers of the languages Elvish and Klingon by acolytes of the films, respectively, "Lord of the Rings" and "Star Trek"; or consider the fact that several hundred thousand people world-wide self-report their religious affiliation as Jedi (from "Star Wars") on official census forms.

This type of irony differs from conferred irony in the significant respect that it does not create a paradox by mapping onto a text an ironic distortion. Instead, the conceptual paradox in ironic belief resides in the enactment of the fictional text as if it had made an appeal to truth. Ironic belief is quintessentially "tongue in cheek".

4. Concluding remarks

Over the course of this eclectically developed account of irony, five principal categories have been postulated: oppositional (Gricean) irony; echoic irony; conferred irony; dramatic irony and ironic belief. Clearly, much more work needs to be done on exploring each category and it is likely that in the light of further investigation subsequent modifications would need to be made to the broad model of irony outlined towards the end of section two. As I have sought to emphasise throughout this paper, the aim has not been to reject out of hand any of the multifarious accounts of irony in contemporary pragmatics; rather it has been to find a common ground between different approaches and move towards an over-arching model that encompasses the many nuanced and subtle variations in the way irony is used and understood in late Modernity.

Much of the paper has focussed on "real" examples of irony as opposed to the sort of made-up forms and scenarios that are the mainstay of much experimental testing in pragmatics and cognitive linguistics. Again, this is not a criticism of such quantitatively-driven empirical work; the present account simply seeks to redress the balance by examining the dynamics of how real people approach, define, interpret, understand and negotiate irony in actual situations of use and across different historical periods. A substantial part of the paper has thus been concerned with how common perceptions of irony may vary, and how even debates on what constitute irony can be played out in the public sphere.

Echoing a point made at the start of the third section, there is a sense in much linguistics research that irony is a pragmatic device which in terms of its transmission and retrieval is essentially binary in nature; that is, a form of figurative language which splits easily into that which is ironic and that which is not. This paper has striven to reject binarism in favour of a more pluralist approach which favours construction and consensus in the development of irony; an approach where speech acts interact with context and situation often in very complex and finely-shaded ways. "It's not a difficult concept, Alanis" is Ed Byrne's mocking rejoinder to the dubious ironic situations portrayed in Morrissette's lyrics. On this count, I feel he may just be wrong.

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Irony via “surrealism”

Eleni Kapogianni

The aim of this paper is to support the general hypothesis that irony is a non-unified phenomenon comprising different devices with different semantic/pragmatic/cognitive characteristics. The arguments presented here stand on the boundary between semantics, cognitivism and pragmatics, focusing on the processes of production and retrieval of the ironic message. The main focus is a particular strategy in which the speaker employs a strikingly unrealistic, unexpected, and inappropriate (and thus “surrealistic”) question or assertion in order to create the ironic effect. This type of strategy is illustrated in Example (1).

(1) Are you going to school tomorrow?
No, I am riding my unicorn to Alaska![1]

The ironic device discussed is compared to other common ironic strategies which are distinguished with the help of five criteria: the *meaning derivation* process, *context dependence* (the amount of contextual information needed for the recognition of the ironic character of the utterance), *cancellability* (the possibility of cancelling the ironic character of the utterance), and, at the level of discourse, the *effectiveness* of interpretation and *humorous effect*.

1. Irony: Definition and necessary conditions

1.1 The problem of a theoretical definition

Having chosen verbal irony as the object of this case study, we are dealing with a very complex and broad communicative phenomenon. Our primary task is to set the

1. Most of the examples discussed in this paper come from a bilingual (Modern Greek/English) corpus of ironies that I have compiled for the purpose of my studies. The corpus contains examples from a variety of sources and contexts, both real and constructed (fictional). More specifically, Examples (1) and (3) come from fictional internet dialogues (see footnote 6), Example (4) comes from a Greek newspaper cartoon, Examples (5) and (6) come from a Greek TV comedy (translated and slightly modified due to length), and Example (7) comes from my corpus of recorded dialogues. Finally, Examples (2), (10), (11) and (12) are commonly used and discussed examples of irony which are not part of my corpus.

criteria which are necessary for its definition, since it is important to overcome the discrepancies between the numerous linguistic approaches to the concept. A satisfactory definition of irony (and its subtypes, one of which is the focus of this paper) as a pragmatic phenomenon with its distinctive communicative functioning can be constructed in the light of not only strictly pragmatic notions but also semantic and cognitive postulates.

There are a number of different questions concerning the discussed phenomenon to which the existing linguistic theories are trying to provide plausible answers. Specifically, these questions concern (a) the logical relation between the expressed meaning and the intended meaning, (b) the correlation between the trigger of the irony, the content of the expressed meaning and context, (c) the processing and retrieval of ironic meaning, and (d) the communicative goals of the ironist.

Question (a) concerns mainly accounts of irony as negation, in line with the view of irony as overt breaching of the maxims of quality (Grice 1975: 53). Of course, Grice's characterisation is very general and does not even attempt a distinction between irony and all the other phenomena that resort to the breaching of the same maxims. It must be noted that breaching the maxims of quality is not the only path to irony, since the phenomenon is produced though various other flouts (of maxims and other conversational rules as well, see Attardo 2000: 799).[2]

Question (b) arises from a different point of view, namely the recognition of the search for relevance as the main aspect of meaning interpretation. The Relevance Theoretic account (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1986/1995) introduced the crucial distinction between *use* and *mention*. According to this distinction, irony is a case of *implicit* mention (as opposed to *explicit* mention, such as the case of reported speech) and more specifically, it involves the echoic mention of a proposition. Criticism of this proposal has focused on the fact that echoing a previous (or even presumed) utterance is not always necessary for the presence of irony (see, among others, Martin 1992, Seto 1998, Yamanashi 1998). This has given rise to alternative theories such as the view of irony as *pretence* (Clark and Gerrig 1984, Martin 1992), according to which someone who expresses an ironic utterance pretends to adopt a stance that is not their own, and the view of irony as *reminder* (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989), according to which the ironist refers to some antecedent event/"state of affairs", which is either positive or negative. From a similar standpoint, Attardo (2000), based on Searle's notion of appropriateness, argues that irony should be viewed as an example of *inappropriateness* (inappropriate is an utterance that contradicts the presuppositions of previous utterances) which is relevant, however, to the context.

2. As the reviewers pointed out to me, most cases of overt breaching of a Gricean maxim, such as quantity, for the sake of irony also involve the flout of the first quality maxim. However, it is important for the examination of irony production to distinguish the specific maxims that are being flouted in each case (apart from the maxims of quality), since this will lead to finer typological distinctions.

The third question (c) is treated by theories that seek the psychological reality of irony processing. Focusing on experimental testing (see Gibbs and O'Brien 1991, Giora 1995 among others), these theories do not intend to provide a divergent theoretical definition of the phenomenon[3].

Finally, the fourth question (d) concerns the functional features of irony in use addressed by theories, such as Partington's (2007) *reversal of evaluation,* in which, similar to the theories addressing question (c), the issue of how to define and how to detect ironic instances is not addressed directly.

(2) What a nice weather for a picnic!

(3) [John sees Mary entering the house]
John: Are you back already?
Mary: No, that's my hologram you're seeing!

Considering a typical ironic example such as (2) (uttered after a sudden rainfall and *echoing* one of the interlocutor's previous statements) we notice that theories answering questions (a) and (b), namely theories that view irony as negation or as echoic mention, are not incompatible. Even when recognising the utterance as echoic, we still need to (*indirectly) negate* (Giora 1995) the expressed meaning ("it is a bad/awful weather for a picnic") in order to reach at least one of the meanings intended by the speaker. Of course, the speaker additionally intends to convey criticism against the interlocutor's previous optimism and/or disappointment about the situation, negation being only the first step in the process of retrieving the speaker's intentions.

In the same light, neither the approach to irony as reminder (which works in exactly the same sense as echoic mention) nor the approach to irony as pretence is incompatible with the first two theories. The view of irony as pretence, in particular, refers to irony as an act, being mainly related to discourse. That is, purposely flouting the maxims of quality, or any other maxim in that respect, as well as echoing utterances to the truth of which one does not commit, are acts of being intentionally insincere, or, in other words, enacting the role/adopting someone else's point of view.

Therefore, it is not due to any direct mismatch between the theoretical viewpoints that there is no convergence with respect to a general definition of irony, but it is rather due to the fact that each theory is concerned with different aspects and levels of irony in interaction, each answering a different question. Consequently, these theories separately do not provide a sufficient means for a global description of irony.

What is more, the fractional character of the existing theories is also reflected by the limited variety of ironic examples for which they account. As commented above, there are ironies that are not derived (exclusively) via negation (e.g. overstatement/understatement), ironies that are not echoic mention or even reminder and ironies that are not based on pretence. Example (3), for instance, being produced through the strategy which is the focus of this paper, cannot fall into any of the

3. Giora's view of irony as "indirect negation" is closer to the Gricean tradition.

aforementioned categories: the intended meaning is not "that's not my hologram you are seeing" (see Section 2.2.2 for its derivation process) but rather something like "that shouldn't be addressed as a question, since you can see that I am back" and it clearly does not resound any previous thought, utterance or expectation.

Having recognised that the existing linguistic approaches to irony are not incompatible, on the one hand, and do not capture the phenomenon in its entirety, on the other, it is of crucial importance to establish specific but more global criteria for the definition of irony.

1.2 Necessary conditions

The first step towards a solution to the abovementioned problem would be the examination of verbal irony as part of a larger conceptual unit (natural class of phenomena) where it belongs. After pinning down the constitutive factors of ironic utterances, we need to proceed by cross-checking the speaker's judgments and intuitions with theoretically plausible arguments. What complicates our task is the fact that speakers sometimes tend to loosen the use of the term "irony" and extend it to refer to related terms such as "sarcasm", "banter" or even "humour" in general. Thus, the criteria that we need to establish should differentiate verbal irony from other similar terms.

Irony, as an umbrella term for a number of different phenomena such as *situational* irony, *tragic* irony and *verbal* irony, is basically characterised by the existence of duality and contrast. This means that the phenomenon of irony presupposes the existence of an easily detectable contrast between two counterparts (see Simspon in this volume). Therefore, the existence of some kind of *contrast* is the first necessary condition for the manifestation of verbal irony. Contrast needs to exist in the background of every ironic utterance, either as conflict between the goals/beliefs of the ironist and those of his target (victim), or as discrepancy between hopes/expectations (of the ironist or, most commonly, of his target) and the reality. It must be clarified that this background contrast is different from and not immediately related to the contrast between the *said* and the *meant*, which is a matter of the specific ironic devices.

The second necessary condition for the characterisation of an utterance as ironic is *unexpectedness* or, following Attardo (2000), inappropriateness. The ironist says something that does not conform to the assumptions and expectations created by the context. An ironic utterance is always counterfactual in some sense, either directly contrasting reality or inviting inferences which are counterfactual.[4] This is the main

4. The observation that in some ironies the meaning that needs to be negated can be the inferred rather than the explicitly expressed one, might be a plausible solution to cases that are considered problematic in the literature such as the example of a mother entering her son's messy room and uttering "I like children who keep their rooms clean" (discussed in Gibbs and O'Brien 1991, Hamamoto 1998, Sperber and Wilson 1998) in which, although the expressed meaning is sincere, the natural inference (what people normally infer from the exclamation

difference between irony and *non-ironic sarcasm*, which is a bitter comment that does not contain any conflict with reality.

The third condition necessary for the presence of irony lies in the speaker's intention, which is usually the expression of a "feeling, attitude or *evaluation*" (Grice 1978: 124, my emphasis). This is an important feature distinguishing between irony and other "nonliteral" tropes. Irony is then an implicit *act of evaluation* of a specific target.

The three conditions described above are required by the very nature of verbal irony, and that is why the simultaneous presence of all of them is necessary for the detection of the phenomenon. At the same time, these conditions can be considered as sufficient for discerning between irony and other phenomena, such as metaphor and wordplay (e.g. puns).

2. Being absurd or "surrealistic": A strategy for irony

2.1 Everyday surrealism

Although the term *surrealism* refers to a particular cultural movement, with distinct idiosyncratic characteristics and a specific set of beliefs about art (encapsulated in "The Manifest of Surrealism", published in 1924), there is also a generalised notion captyured by this term, which is used and recognised in less specialised contexts. In the definitions proposed by André Breton, surrealism is seen as "thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason" based on the "[belief in] the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought" (Breton 1978: 122). Some of the devices used in (humorous) conversational rhetoric are not far from these characteristics. As Nerlich and Clarke (2001) point out, the principle of conventionality is challenged in daily conversational interactions with the intention of making them more "interesting" and "enjoyable". There are also conversational principles, such as the *Interest Principle* (Leech 1983: 156), besides the Gricean maxims. Therefore, we should recognise the existence of a great number of improvised and imaginative devices used in everyday interaction which cannot be fitted into strict sets of logical rules of conversation.

The existence of the particular ironic strategy that we will be focusing on in the following sections supports the observation that surrealism and creative absurdity are not just a "privilege" of certain artists, but they can be employed as rhetorical techniques by anyone who intends to have less conventionalised and more challenging verbal interactions. By observing various uses of these techniques, we notice that they serve various purposes. They are frequently employed in order to support or defeat an argument, but they are also part of a speaker's socio-cultural behaviour, as a means of face-saving, exhibition of communicational skills, etc.

"I like x!" in a relevant context, is that x is true in that context) must be negated for the ironic meaning to get through.

2.2 How does it work?

2.2.1 *Tactics*

Examples (4)–(7) exhibit different possibilities of exploiting a "surrealistic" or absurd utterance for the sake of being ironic.

(4) Son: baba, θelo na ziso se mia kinonia me anθropja ke δikeosini.
dad$_{\text{VOC}}$ want$_{\text{1SG}}$ to live in one society$_{\text{ACC}}$ with humanitarianism$_{\text{ACC}}$ and justice$_{\text{ACC}}$[5]
"Dad, I want to live in a society of humanitarianism and justice."
Father: ke se pjon planiti skeftese na metakomisis peδi mu?
and to which$_{\text{ACC}}$ planet$_{\text{ACC}}$ think$_{\text{2SG}}$ to move child$_{\text{VOC}}$ my
"And to which planet are you thinking of moving, child?"

In Example (4), taken from a Greek comic, the father reacts to his son's statement with a question that goes against commonsensical real-world assumptions. The content of the question in (4) presupposes that it is actually possible for people to move to other planets. Since this assumption is obviously counter-factual, the question is interpreted as an ironic comment, the target of which is the son's utterance. The intended meaning of this utterance is something along the lines of "what you are saying is unrealistic/naïve/impossible".

(5) Mother: How did you sleep?
Daughter: Hanging upside down from a log on the ceiling just like a bat!

Example (5) represents a common instantiation of surrealist irony, namely the unrealistic reply to a question. In particular, it has to do with the invention of absurd answers which break the conventions of everyday dialogue, with the aim of criticising the use of common questions considered "stupid" or "mundane" by the ironist.[6] The questions that become the target of irony are usually of two kinds: either (exclamatory) remarks in the form of questions (such as "You're home?" used to mean "Oh, I see you are home!", which are particularly common in Greek) or situation-bound utterances (Keckés 2000) such as "How was your day?", "How did you sleep?", etc. The fact that these questions make no significant contribution to the conversation is observed by the ironist, who decides to criticise them in an imaginative way, thus using the "surrealistic" strategy.

5. Grammatical Abbreviations: 1/2SG = 1st/2nd person singular, ACC = Accusative case, VOC = Vocative case, PST = Past tense. Whenever tense is not marked, it is the Present tense.

6. Lists of such invented answers are popular on the internet: see http://jokes.forwards4all.com/10-stupid-questions.html for an English list, http://www.phoxer.com/es/blog/post_37/- for a Spanish list and http://funny-jokes.pblogs.gr/2007/09/funny-humor-questions.html for a Greek list. Also, Example (1) comes from a "group" on the online social network "Facebook" (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Are-you-going-to-school-tomorrow-No-Im-riding-my-unicorn-to-Alaska/276290105428). [all pages last accessed 25$^{\text{th}}$ April 2010]

(6) Job interviewer: Introduce yourself please.
Candidate: You want me to introduce myself?
Job interviewer: No, you should sing us an aria from "The Marriage of Figaro".

Example (6) is different from the previous ones in the sense that the ironic utterance does not state or describe something impossible to happen under real-world assumptions. What makes the sentence "surrealistic" is the fact that it is completely inappropriate for the specific context. In that sense, this particular strategy can be called "context shift", since the original context of the utterance (in the case of Example (6) an opera audition) is in striking contrast with the actual context (a job interview).

(7) John: Although I hadn't studied, I am sure I did great in the exam.
Mary: Sure you did! And I am the Queen of England!

Finally, the irony in Example (7) is prone to conventionalisation since it has a highly predictable structure of a "counter-statement". The expression quoted is a fully conventionalised one (along with other expressions such as "And I am the Pope!") but, of course, other examples of this kind have a lesser degree of conventionalisation (e.g. "And I am a six-legged alien!").

All in all, the described tactic is based on the use of displaced utterances belonging to (usually unrealistic) contexts, strikingly different from the context at hand. In this sense, the choice of such utterances is inappropriate and, as explained in Section 1.2, it satisfies one of the three necessary conditions for irony. What is more, it is clear that this rhetorical strategy covers the other two conditions for irony as well. There is a *contrast* of ideas in the background. The speaker (who either disapproves of an idea or just considers a particular question as dull or unnecessary) adopts a conspicuous critical behaviour (negative *evaluation*). Thus, there is no doubt that this strategy is a distinct type of irony and, in particular, one that is more *constructive* than other (ordinary) strategies.

2.2.2 *Implicit Conditionals*

The ironic examples presented in Section 2.2.1 can be presented as underlying conditionals. While in Example (7), both parts of the conditional are explicit, Examples (4)–(6) show implicit conditional structures as well.

(4) a. If living in such a society is possible, then this society must exist on another planet (and you must be thinking of moving there).
(5) a. If you don't already know how I slept, then I slept hanging upside down from a log on the ceiling.
(6) a. If we don't want you to introduce yourself, then we want you to sing us an aria from "The Marriage of Figaro".
(7) a. If you did great at the exam, then I am the Queen of England.

These implicit structures can be considered to form part of an argument, the logic of which is a *modus tollens*. This means that the implicit conditionals such as those of

(4a)–(7a) are followed by a second premise, i.e. the obvious inference that the consequent of the conditional is not true. Therefore, the logic of the ironically expressed argument of this strategy is given in (8), with the full analysis of one of the presented examples (Example (4)) shown in (9).

(8) $((p \rightarrow q) \wedge \neg q) \rightarrow \neg p$

(9) If living in such a society is possible, then this society must exist on another planet (and you must be thinking of moving there). Under real-world, commonsense assumptions, there are no developed human societies on other planets (and humans do not move to other planets). Therefore, living in such a society is not possible.

This particular strategy contains a very specific logic which is reflected in a rather conventionalised structure. It functions as an argument with an implicit conditional as the first premise, an inferred assumption (the negation of the consequent) as the second premise and the rejection of the antecedent of the conditional as the conclusion, which is the speaker's intended meaning. Apart from cancelling the validity of the antecedent of the conditional, which coincides with an assertion or belief of the ironic target, the conclusion of the argument also conveys the speaker's evaluative attitude.

3. The "split nature" of irony

3.1 The hypothesis

The limitations of the existing linguistic theories on irony presented in Section 1.1, and their inability to capture all the possible manifestations of verbal irony, also point to the fact that this phenomenon is highly varied. This fact has already been observed by theoreticians, such as Sperber and Wilson (1981: 302), who note that "there is a whole range of utterance types that can more or less loosely be called ironical", recognising the diversity of the phenomenon. However, no efforts have been made so far to present clear divisions within the phenomenon.

The comparison between ironic examples such as the one in (2) (What a nice weather for a picnic!) and the examples produced via the "surrealistic" device reveals striking differences which are reflected by the fact that there is a tendency to treat examples of the former kind as *typical* and examples of the latter kind as *less typical.*

It is important to note that, examined from the perspective of the theories of humour, the need for a clearer typology of irony becomes greater. As Attardo (2001:167) points out, not all ironies have the same humorous effects. Although irony has been considered to be a phenomenon under the umbrella of humour, it is clear that there are ironies that are not considered humorous, while, among the ironies that have clear humorous effects, various degrees of funniness can be distinguished.

The examination of both the typical and the less typical examples reveals that they have regular and definable characteristics, a fact that makes feasible an attempt for a clear distinction between these two different ironic types, viz. *surrealist irony* and *meaning reversal irony*. Arguing for a non-unified nature of the phenomenon of verbal irony is bound to solve some of the theoretical problems concerning the definition of the phenomenon and, most importantly, to shed more light on crucial related distinctions, such as the distinction between literal and nonliteral meaning.

In order to support this hypothesis, it is necessary to provide evidence coming from specific meaning-related and discourse-related tests and observations. The existence of two distinct general types of irony should be reflected by their distinct behaviour with respect to various levels and aspects of meaning construction, derivation and interaction. In particular, we are going to use the semantic/pragmatic criteria of *meaning derivation*, *context dependence* and *cancellability*, as well as the discourse-related criteria of *effectiveness* and *humour* in order to exhibit the differences of the two proposed irony types.

3.2 Criteria

3.2.1 *Meaning derivation*

(10) a. We had fun at Mary's party! → (b) We did not have fun at Mary's party
(11) a. It is slightly cold outside → (b) It is freezing outside
(12) a. What a huge dog! → (b) What a tiny dog!

Examples such as (10a), (11a), and (12a) uttered in contexts where the speakers say that they had a very bad time at Mary's party (in 10), notice that it is minus 10 C° outside (in 11), and talk about a very small dog (in 12) are common instances of irony. It can be easily noticed that the logical relationship between the uttered and the intended meaning of these uterances is some kind of meaning reversal.

In particular, in Example (10), the intended meaning (10b) is the negation of the uttered meaning (10a), so, in terms of propositions, if (10a) is p then (10b) is $\neg p$. This is not the case with Examples (11) and (12), where we have cases of *understatement* and *overstatement*, respectively. In these examples, the intended meaning is not the logical negation of the uttered meaning but, rather, it can be considered as a higher or lower point on a scale on which the ironically exploited meaning occupies a point close to (or coinciding with) its extremes. In (11), we can imagine a scale from "not cold to extremely cold" [not cold < slightly cold < cold < very cold < extremely cold] where the uttered meaning is close to one end and the intended meaning occupies the other end.[7] In (12), we can imagine a scale from "tiny" to "huge", on which the uttered

7. Here, of course, we may not even need to include the term "cold" in the assumed scale, the irony may be even more local, playing with the terms "slightly" and "extremely" on a scale such as [not at all <slightly <moderately < considerably < a lot < extremely].

and the intended meanings occupy the extremes. The intended meaning is clearly not the case of logical negation, since, in such a case it would have to be "not huge" i.e. average/medium instead of "really small".

Therefore, in the cases of understatement and overstatement, the intended meaning is reached through movement towards the upper or lower part of a scale (which either may be of a relatively common kind containing naturally gradable notions, or may have been created ad hoc for the purposes of interpreting the current conversation). Another important observation about the logical operations that take place during the production and interpretation of these two strategies is the fact that they apply locally and not on the basis of the whole proposition. This means that reaching (11b) and (12b) from (11a) and (12a) does not involve modulating the whole proposition expressed in (11a) and (12a) but, rather, it results from a local modulation of the particular terms ("slightly [cold]" in (11) and "huge" in (12)) while keeping the rest of the proposition stable. In this sense, we could represent this strategy, which may be called "scalar reversal", $m_{n-x} \leftarrow m_n \rightarrow m_{n+x}$, where m_n is the expressed meaning occupying a particular point *n* on an assumed scale, which is modulated to mean m_{n-x} (a meaning being x points lower on the assumed scale) in the case of overstatement, or m_{n+x} (a meaning being x points higher on the assumed scale) in the case of understatement.

Moving on to examine the relationship between the uttered and the intended meaning in examples of "surrealistic" irony, such as the ones from (4) to (7) discussed in Section 2.2.1, we notice a different kind of operation. As described in Section 2.2.2, there is an argument underlying these examples, in which the expressed meaning is the (impossible) consequent of an implicit conditional forming the first premise of the argument, while the intended meaning is the conclusion of the argument. It becomes clear that in "surrealistic" ironies, the expressed proposition p ("I am the Queen of England", "I slept hanging upside-down from a log on the ceiling", etc.) is not directly related to the intended proposition q ("What you said can't be right", "Your question is stupid/unimportant since you already know the answer"). This means that proposition q needs to replace proposition p during meaning interpretation.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that there is notably little variation among the intended meanings of "surrealistic" ironies. In all cases, the intended meaning is some kind of negative evaluation of the preceding utterance. When the preceding utterance is a question, the intended meaning cancels the validity of that question (as in Examples (5) and (6)) and when the preceding utterance is a statement, the intended meaning undermines that statement by evaluating it as being "stupid" or "impossible" (as in Examples (4) and (7)). Since the intended meaning q is some kind of evaluation, we may call it "q-evaluative" (q_{eval}).

What is interesting about this q_{eval} meaning is that it remains the same, regardless of what kind of utterance is used to express the "surrealistic" irony. For instance, in Example (4), the father could have replied with any of the following – semantically unrelated – utterances (4b) and (4c) instead of what he actually said, retaining the original intended meaning.

(4) b. This society must exist in a parallel universe, right?
c. And I want to live in a society where people travel around on giant flying pancakes!

To sum up, the (logical) relationship between the expressed and the intended meaning in the different ironic strategies is as shown in (13a, 13b) and (14):

(13) a. $p \rightarrow \neg p$
b. $m_{n-x} \leftarrow m_n \rightarrow m_{n+x}$
(14) $p - q_{eval}$[8]

It becomes clear that (13a) and (13b) are very similar processes of the general character of *reversal* that apply to different units of meaning, while the process in (14) is a case of meaning replacement, the result of a more complex syllogism. Another important difference between these two types is that for the former type, the reversal operation can be applied either to the intended meaning, for the derivation of the expressed meaning (similar to what could occur during meaning production), or to the expressed meaning, for the derivation of the intended meaning (similar to what occurs during meaning interpretation, viz. $\neg(\neg p) \rightarrow p$). By contrast, for the "surrealistic" type, the derivation process functions only in one direction (from the expressed meaning to the intended meaning), since there is no way of predicting what kind of "surrealistic" expression will be used for the purposes of expressing the intended meaning.

3.2.2 *Context dependence*

Another criterion that helps to distinguish between the two different irony types is the criterion of context dependence, that is the amount of context that is needed for the correct interpretation of the expressed utterance and the ability of an utterance to express the same meaning in different contexts (or even out of context). Let us consider the following different contexts for utterances such as the ones presented above in (10), (11) and (12):

(10) a. We had fun at Mary's party!
C_1: Mary's party was a success and the interlocutors share this belief.
C_2: Mary's party was boring and the interlocutors share this belief.

(11) a. It is slightly cold outside.
C_1: It is autumn and the temperature is relatively low for the season
C_2: The temperature is minus 10° C, at a place where it rarely falls below 0° C

(12) a. What a huge dog!
C_1: The interlocutors see a dog of an unusually large size.
C_2: The interlocutors see a dog of an unusually small size.

8. q_{eval} is inferred from the assumption that p is impossible/inappropriate or counterfactual.

It is clear that the above utterances would be interpreted literally in C_1 and ironically in C_2, without containing any cues in their semantic content, able to predict either interpretation.

On the other hand, utterances such as (1) ("I'm riding my unicorn to Alaska") and (4) ("To which planet are you thinking of moving?") would never be interpreted literally under current real-world assumptions, regardless of the context. Of course, there are imaginary contexts of a fictional character where these utterances can be interpreted literally, but these are unrelated to the issues of everyday meaning production and interpretation, which is the main focus of this study. Furthermore, we must note that the particular tactic that we called "context shift" (Example (6)), is not context insensitive, unlike the other tactics of "surrealistic" irony, since the expressed utterance is drawn from a very specific context. However, even in this case, there is only one unique and less ordinary context in which the uttered sentence would be interpreted literally and the sentence seems to "carry" this context in its meaning, being hardly detachable from it. In that respect, the nonliteral interpretation of sentences such as "You should sing us an aria from 'The Marriage of Figaro'" can be considered as a very strong tendency across contexts.

All in all, ironies produced via meaning reversal can be considered heavily context dependent,[9] unless of course they have become conventionalised (i.e. expressions standardly used to express irony, such as "yeah, right!" or "a fine friend you are!"), while ironies produced via the "surrealistic" tactic show various degrees of context independence.

3.2.3 *Cancellability*

Immediately related to the issue of context dependence is the criterion of cancellability. Let us consider three examples:

(10) b. A. We had fun at Mary's party!
B. Was it really that boring?
A. No, not at all, I really mean it that we had a great time!

(11) b. A. It is slightly cold outside.
B. It's freezing, isn't it?
A. No, I really meant that it is slightly cold for me, since I'm from Canada and I am used to much lower temperatures.

9. Here, I deliberately leave out the issue of intonation. Intonation can mark an utterance as ironic, regardless of the contextual information. In that sense, ironic intonation can turn a context dependent and cancellable ironic interpretation into context independent and non-cancellable. However, since intonation is an optional, extra-linguistic and culture dependent cue, it is not studied further here, given that our main focus falls on the stable linguistic mechanisms of meaning construction and derivation.

(12) b. A. Are you going to school tomorrow?
B. No, I am riding my unicorn to Alaska!
A. OK, you don't have to be ironic.
B. But I was serious when I said that tomorrow I have to ride my unicorn to Alaska!

Since Grice's (1975) analysis of implicatures, cancellability has been widely considered as reliable for the detection of implicatures (Recanati 1989; Carston 1998). According to Grice, there are two types of cancellability:

A putative conversational implicature p is *explicitly cancelable* if, to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that p, it is admissible to add but not p, or I do not mean to imply that p, and it is *contextually cancelable* if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature (Grice 1989: 44, my emphasis)

Contextual cancellability is very close to context dependence discussed in the previous section. However, the problem with this notion is that it cannot lead to any useful distinctions among variously inferred meanings, since there is always a minimum degree of context dependence in inferred meanings. This means that even for the least context dependent meanings (such as the ironic meaning of "I am riding my unicorn to Alaska") there is always one possible imaginary context where the inferred (ironic) meaning would not arise.

Since Grice's second type of cancellability cannot be taken as a tool for distinguishing between the two types of irony proposed, we need to resort to the first type, that of explicit cancellability. It can easily be shown that retracting from the ironic content of an utterance (either because the hearer mistook for ironic a meaning that was not originally intended to be such or because the speaker changed his/her mind about his/her original intention) is not a difficult task for utterances, the ironic meaning of which would be derived through meaning reversal.

The ironic meaning of A's initial utterance in Example (10) can be very easily cancelled without the speaker needing to provide any further argument for that, since the notion of "having fun" is a highly subjective one. In Example (11), it is more difficult to cancel the ironic understatement, but it becomes possible with the provision of further contextual information to the interlocutor. By contrast, the final utterance of B in (12) in an everyday context of commonsensical real-world assumptions would be unable to cancel the initial ironic meaning (and, of course, it is impossible to explicitly cancel the irony of more conventionalised "surrealistic" ironies, such as "I am the Queen of England!").

Therefore, the criterion of explicit cancellability offers a rather clear boundary between the two types of irony proposed. The cancellation of the ironic meaning of "surrealistic" utterances is not acceptable.

3.2.4 *Effectiveness in discourse (successful interpretation)*

Moving on to a discourse-related criterion, we shall proceed to examine data drawn from the compiled irony corpus, in order to compare the degree of effectiveness of the two different strategies. It is expected that, since "surrealistic" ironies are less context dependent and difficult to cancel, hearers should not have problems in recognising their ironic character.

In order to estimate the degree of success in the interpretation of irony strategies, we need to examine instances of irony where the hearer's response is recorded. Among the ironic examples of my corpus, 127 were part of a larger dialogue, on the basis of which it could be judged whether the hearer successfully interpreted the ironic intention of the speaker. In Table 1 below, the percentage of *misinterpreted* ironic utterances is presented, for the two types of irony in both real (actual dialogues) and constructed (scripted/fictional) (see Chovanec's paper in this volume) contexts (54 real dialogues and 73 constructed dialogues).

The percentages of misinterpreted ironies in real contexts confirm the hypothesis that "surrealistic" ironies cannot be easily misinterpreted, since only 4.76% of them were mistakenly taken as literal in contrast with the 24.4% of the reversal tactic ironies, which were misinterpreted in cases where the hearer did not have enough factual information about the speaker's beliefs, knowledge and assumptions.

Interestingly, the situation was not the same with constructed dialogues, where the percentage of misinterpreted utterances was higher for "surrealistic" ironies. However, this is easily explained by the fact that the main goal of irony in constructed dialogues (such as movies, TV series, cartoons and literature) is the production of humorous effects. This means that misinterpreting irony is a method of pointing out the naivety of a comic character. Also, from the viewer's perspective (see Dynel's paper on sitcoms in this volume), the more difficult (less possible) the misinterpretation of irony, the funnier the situation when a character does not recognise the irony.

3.2.5 *Humour*

This section considers the special relationship between "surrealistic" ironies and humour. In general, irony is seen as satisfying a few basic prerequisites for humour, namely incongruity and the broader requirement of an "element of surprise" (Dews et al. 1995: 348). Although it is taken for granted that many ironic instances have a humorous style, it is not clear what it is that makes some ironies more humorous than others.

Table 1. Percentage of misinterpreted ironies in dialogical contexts

–	**Meaning reversal ironies**	**"Surrealistic" ironies**
Real contexts	24.4%	4.76%
Constructed contexts	15.9%	20.68%

One way of approaching the question is by observing the humorous characteristics of "surrealistic" ironies separately from their ironic purpose. If we examine Examples (1) and (3)–(7), we notice that there is significant incongruity between the context to which each expression belongs (i.e. the context in which it would normally be uttered) and the actual context. Notably, this incongruity is very different from the one that exists between the appropriate and the actual context of typical ironies of meaning reversal. In the latter, the appropriate context is the *mirror* of the actual context. For instance, in (10), the appropriate context is one in which the speakers had fun at Mary's party, while in the actual context, the same speakers talk about the same event, but the difference is that they share the assumption that they did not have fun at Mary's party. On the other hand, the two contexts (appropriate and actual) related to the utterances of the "surrealistic" type are strikingly different and irrelevant to each other, with the additional characteristic that most of the appropriate (or original) contexts are also impossible to occur in the real world.

Furthermore, the act of uttering an apparently irrelevant and inappropriate expression could by itself be considered an act of absurd or surreal humour, since there is no explicit resolution ("absurd humor lacks resolution", Attardo et al. 2002: 25[10]) and the utterance is considered conversationally acceptable only through the recognition of its ironic character.

Of course, the recognition of the ironic character is by itself a kind of resolution, which is the necessary third characteristic of humorous utterances according to Suls (1972), the other two being unexpectedness and illogicality. As seen in the examples, both characteristics are particularly prominent in the irony type we are studying as well as being out of context, inappropriate and unreasonable, which are the characteristics assigned to incongruity (a necessary condition for humour) by McGhee (1979:10; as quoted in Dynel 2009).

In this light, it is reasonable to suppose that greater incongruity between contexts would implicate a greater degree of humorous effect for the "surrealistic" ironies, which also seem to allude to a particular kind of humour strategy. Evidence for this hypothesis can be drawn from a wide-range study, a part of which concerns the humorous effects of different irony types.

In the abovementioned study (Kapogianni 2010), 30 participants (15 male and 15 female, aged 18–28 and with higher education) were presented various examples of ironic interactions, either successful or infelicitous, in which the ironist attempted to explicitly cancel the ironic character of their initial utterance. Among other tasks, participants were asked to rate 54 ironic items (36 of which were variations of the meaning reversal type and 18 belonged to the "surrealistic" type) in terms of the humorous effect. There were 3 choices for each item ("humorous", "not humorous" and "unable to judge"). For the purpose of the present study, each item is marked as *humorous* or *not*

10. However, as Marta Dynel pointed out to me, even absurd humour may have some kind of resolution, when "cognitive mastery of the stimulus" is gained (Forabosco 1992: 60).

Table 2. Correlation between irony types and humorous effect

Irony type	Items	Humorous	Not humorous	Inconclusive
Reversal	36	22.2%	27.8%	50%
“Surrealistic”	18	94.4%	0%	5.6%

humorous depending on whether the majority (more than 50%) of the participants were able to judge it as such; in all other cases, the judgment about the item was considered *inconclusive.* The results, shown in Table 2 below, exhibit a strong correlation between the “surrealistic” type of irony and the humorous effect, while the ironies by reversal have a lesser degree of the humorous effect.

Therefore, although irony is generally related to humour, the distinction between different types of irony is also reflected by different humorous effects. The ironic type that is the focus of this paper is not only a distinct type of irony, but also a distinct type of humour (absurdist humour with evaluative characteristics), the recognition of which provides further insight into the different correlations between the principles of humour and the mechanisms of irony.

4. Conclusions

The particular irony strategy that we have studied in this paper indicates that it is not uncommon “in our daily conversational interaction [to] challenge the ‘principle of conventionality’ through the introduction of incongruity and dissonance” (Nerlich and Clarke 2001: 4). This imaginative strategy for irony is used in order to serve rhetoric purposes, such as invalidating an opposing argument, as well as being a means of “everyday art”, hence contributing to the aesthetics of conversation.

The observable differences between the “surrealistic” irony type and all other cases of irony, which are based on various strategies of meaning reversal, show that irony is a non-unified phenomenon. This hypothesis is corroborated through five different tests. First, there is a very specific logical relation (negation or scalar reversal) between the expressed and the intended meaning of the common irony strategies while there is no such relation between the expressed and the intended meaning of “surrealistic” ironies, which form part of an implicit argument, its conclusion being the intended meaning (an evaluative proposition). Secondly, the successful recognition of meaning reversal ironies depends on context more than the successful recognition of “surrealistic” ironies does, with the result that the latter are much more difficult to cancel. In real discourse, this characteristic is reflected by the fact that it is much more difficult to misunderstand a “surrealistic” irony than to misunderstand a common meaning reversal irony. Finally, there is a strong affinity between “surrealistic” ironies and humour, since their nature is close to that of surreal/absurd humour and they are broadly recognised as humorous. Conversely, the relation between meaning reversal ironies and humour is much less stable, depending on various contextual, stylistic and intentional factors.

On the whole, using a "surrealistic", contextually irrelevant and inappropriate expression not only is a creative strategy for being ironic, but also constitutes a distinct type of irony, indicating the split nature of the phenomenon. What remains as a question for future research is whether the difference between the two proposed irony types is also detected in the processing of utterances based the two irony types.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Kasia Jaszczołt for her helpful advice on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to Dr. Marta Dynel and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments.

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1.2 Puns and other wordplay

The role of syllables and morphemes as mechanisms in humorous pun formation

Sarah Seewoester

Central to the pragmatic study of puns are their underlying linguistic mechanisms which enable the ambiguity of meaning. This study explores the role of syllabic and morphological mechanisms in humorous pun formation. While traditional approaches to humorous ambiguity formation focus on the sound, word, or syntactic levels, this study pays tribute to mechanisms at syllabic and morphological levels as an alternative method for phonological, lexical, and syntactic ambiguity distinction and pun-making strategies. Given that nearly half of the data set (43%, 106) relies on syllabic/morphological mechanisms for ambiguity to be realized, a need for revision in existing approaches to categorization is identified. Several reasons for mismatches in other researchers' findings are indicated. By exploring the role of syllables and morphemes in the creation of ambiguity and humorous puns, this study proposes a five-tier matrix for categorizing instances of humorous linguistic ambiguity, including those that depend on sub-word level components (i.e. syllables and morphemes).

1. Introduction

Puns find their humorous power through ambiguities apparent in their language of origin. Some rely on ambiguity of sound ("sprain" the ailment vs. "Spain" the country), some rely on ambiguity of word meaning ("trunk" of a car vs. "trunk" of an elephant), while still others rely on ambiguity of syntactic interpretations in context ("rose" the flower vs. "rose" past tense of "rise"). Pragmatically speaking, it is the intertwining of co-text (and general context), linguistic form, and meaning that enables the phenomenon of punning. In other words, neighboring co-text does not resolve ambiguity of a lexical item but rather encourages and enhances multiple meanings that are represented in a particular linguistic form. Additionally, issues of salience of alternative meanings, length and strength of context, and correspondence of world knowledge between the pun producer and receiver play roles in how successful a punning interplay may be. For humorous puns in particular, incongruity, novelty, and/or surprise can affect the level of amusement realized in the execution of a pun. In addition, the communicative act of punning may have many motivations (exhibitions of wit, superiority, or pure entertainment) and can be intentional or unintentional, which is the case of many forms of humour. However, the element which sets puns apart from other forms of humour is linguistic ambiguity present in the surface structure. In humour literature, punning ambiguities are traditionally labelled as phonological, lexical, and syntactic based on the linguistic level which enables the pun. But what often remains hidden within these three categories are peripheral cases: cases that fall not-so-nicely into one category or another and may rely on mechanisms that challenge the larger categorical boundaries of phonological, lexical, and syntactic ambiguities. This paper focuses on these types of ambiguities, on the strength of their occurrence. Such ambiguities then show pragmatic usefulness as sources of puns produced by language users for the sake of humorous communication.

This study analyzes 225 English puns from a linguistic perspective taking into account syllabic and morphological phenomena that up to this point have not been explored in depth. The puns used in this study are not limited to a particular genre (e.g. punning riddles, punning advertising slogans or newspaper headlines); nor are they limited to a particular topic (e.g. puns on animals or colours); they simply needed to be considered free-floating units humorous enough to be included on Websites intended to entertain and capable of being reproduced in both spoken and written language. Specifically, this chapter will: (1) identify, describe, and define four syllabic and morphological mechanisms, (2) show that these mechanisms are not isolated incidences, but major components involved in pun formation, (3) propose syllabic and morphological levels as an alternative method for categorizing marginal phonological and lexical ambiguities, and finally (4) provide a matrix through which puns utilizing syllabic or morphological mechanisms can be identified appropriately as phonologically, lexically, or syntactically ambiguous.

But before paying tribute to these cases that challenge traditional boundaries, it is important to understand the linguistic tradition from which these categorizations were born.

2. Language, linguistic ambiguity, and puns

Humour expressed through language has been a topic of frequent study. However, definitions and categorizations have seen more controversy than agreement. Attardo et al. (1994) make the distinction between *referential jokes* and *verbal jokes* both of which can be expressed through language. According to Attardo at al. (1994: 32) (and commonly attributed to Cicero) "referential humour depends only on the meaning of the words in the joke, while verbal humor depends also on the verbal form of the words involved in the joke". In other words, if the disjunctor of the joke is changed and "the joke remains funny, it is referential. If it loses its humour, it is a verbal joke, its humour depending upon the specific words in which it is formulated" (Attardo at al.

1994: 32). From this perspective, verbal jokes depend not only on the meaning of a particular word but also on the linguistic form in which the meaning exists.

Attardo (1994) includes verbal jokes in the overall category of verbal humour, which includes any humour that is expressed through spoken language, words, or text. This can include items that are ambiguity based (e.g. puns) and non-ambiguity based (e.g. alliteration). Other authors utilize the term *linguistic humour* to distinguish humour based on linguistic form from humour merely expressed through language. As Raskin (1987: 12) explains it, linguistic humour "usually means a pun or a somewhat more sophisticated version of Freud's (1905) 'double entendre' as well as any other form of word play". Dynel (2009: 120) concurs seeing that "linguistic humour covers primarily punning (puns), in which similar or identical structural features (homophony or paronymy, homonymy, homography and syntactic ambiguity) are exploited for the confrontation of two different meanings". Similarly, Lew (1997: 124) considers almost all linguistic jokes to be ambiguity based and is a proponent of classifying linguistic jokes based on their "status within the linguistic system of the fragment of a joke's text that is open to two radically different interpretations". In these approaches, linguistic humour can be ambiguity based (i.e. puns) or non-ambiguity based (i.e. alliteration). This type of ambiguity-based punning humour is the focus of this study.

One additional distinction must be made in regards to this study and terminology. While puns and double meanings do not have to be humorous per se, the puns considered for this study were humorous puns. In addition, the two authors focused on later in this chapter (Attardo et al. (1994) and Bucaria (2004)) considered their corpus to be composed of jokes or humorous puns rather than non-humorous puns. For the purposes of this study, *humorous puns*, which depend on linguistic ambiguity for their effect, are of interest here.

Regarding the specific components that enable pun formation, linguistic ambiguity "can reside in a range of components in the linguistic system, such as the syntax, the lexicon, or the phonology" (Lew 1996b: 127). Attardo (1994) and Attardo et al. (1994) also place ambiguity into lexical and syntactic categories, but leave out the phonological component. Oaks (1994) looks for specific enablers of ambiguity that fall into lexical and syntactic categorizations, while Bucaria (2004) uses the three categories presented by Lew as the basis for his categorization. Taking these ideas collectively, the ambiguity categories used for the purposes of this study are: (1) phonological, (2) lexical, and (3) syntactic.

In distinguishing between these three categories, Lew (1996b: 127) notes: "One way to determine the level of structure at which the ambiguity is situated is to identify the minimal string containing the part that varies between the two readings". In other words, does the linguistic ambiguity depend first and foremost on variance in sound (phonological), variance in meaning (lexical), or variance in sentence structure (syntactic)? Lew (1996b: 127) also points out that being situated at a particular linguistic level means "that the ambiguous string can be represented in at least two distinct ways at this level".

While this study somewhat adheres to Lew's (1996b) distinctions as discussed above, as well as to Hirsh-Pasek et al.'s (1978) distinctions, what exactly is meant by these three categorizations often differs from author to author. These differences are discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.1 Phonological ambiguity

Phonological ambiguity involves manipulations of words at the sound level. For example:

(1) If you put three ducks in a box what do you have? A box of quackers.
(Hirsh-Pasek et al. 1978: 118)

As Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978: 115) define it, phonological ambiguity is "an ambiguity that results when two similar phonetic sequences (which differ only in a single phonological segment) identify separate words, which have different meanings, e.g., cracker/quacker". Here we see a manipulation of two distinct but similar phonological interpretations. It is the phonological skewing and distinctness involved in the words "cracker" and "quacker", rather than lexically or syntactically ambiguous elements, that allow the ambiguity to manifest. And while clearly this example sits at the phonological level, Lew (1996b: 130) points out "phonological ambiguity...is not mutually exclusive from lexical ambiguity". In other words, humour based on phonological elements may result in lexical changes as well. Take the following pun as an example:

(2) I keep reading "The Lord of the Rings" over and over. I guess it's just force of hobbit. (www.punoftheday.com)

It is clear in the above pun that "hobbit" and "habit" have two different lexical meanings; however, the humour is caused by their status as minimal pairs, varying only in the first vowel sound. In other words, it is the phonologically ambiguous element, first and foremost, that causes the humour with underlying lexical distinctions based on which sound choice is made.

In looking at other authors' examples, other elements may fall into the "phonological" realm; however, the distinction is whether the humour relies on ambiguity or not. Chiaro (1992: 31) distinguishes between "playing with sounds" (Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers), transposition of sounds and syllables, and instances where one sound (either inferred or revealed) is changed. The important point here is that humour based on a phonological element (such as alliteration) and humour based on phonological ambiguity are two different things entirely.

In addition, Chiaro (1992: 33) reserves her phonological category for items, which "play with supra-segmental features such as stress". She offers the following example:

(3) Q: How do you make a cat drink?
A: Easy, put it in a liquidizer.

Despite the fact that phonologically "drink" is pronounced the same in both interpretations, in Chiaro's (1992: 33) opinion this falls under phonological manoeuvring due to the involvement of stress.

While Chiaro addressed items that may or may not have been considered phonological ambiguous, Schultz and Pilon (1973) explored phonological ambiguity specifically. They consider phonological ambiguity to be "the condition of homophony where two historically distinct words happen to have similar pronunciations (e.g., pear vs. pair)" (Schultz and Pilon 1973: 728). Hirsch-Pasek et al. (along with the approach of this study) find issues with Schultz and Pilon's definition. As Hirsch-Pasek et al. explain it:

> the problem is that these authors call the ambiguity of "He often goes to the bank" (river or financial institution) "lexical," but they call the ambiguity of "He saw three pairs (pears)" "phonological." Apparently they had in mind the spelling distinctions, or possibly a postulated level of underlying phonological structure (or historical relationship among roots) on which such speaking distinctions might be explicable. (Hirsch-Pasek at al. 1978: 111–112)

This is precisely the argument this study makes, seeing both of the examples offered by Schultz and Pilon (1973) as lexically ambiguous despite the use of homophony in one.

Though not submitting to a separate phonological category per se, Lew (1996a) also finds the issue of homophony problematic and in fact used the same homophone as Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978) to exemplify:

> it is difficult to see what would make the ambiguity phonological but would at the same time disallow the inclusion of jokes such as [these] within the phonological category. One difference between the two cases is that club "society" and club "truncheon" are historically related whereas pear and pair are not. The only indication of this that speakers may be conscious of is the identicality versus difference in spelling. (Lew 1996a: 44)

In another study, Lew identifies primary and secondary ambiguities, allowing for homophony in linguistic jokes to be considered for both lexical (Two boys were talking about their afterschool jobs. Harry asked Larry: How do you like your chimney sweeping job? Larry answered smugly: It soots me.) and syntactic categorization (Man: I'd like to buy a pair of stockings for my wife. Clerk: Sheer? Man: No, she's at home.) (Lew 1997: 134). And though Lew's (1997) approach is a bit different than here (seeing the phonological/non-phonological distinction as being independent from lexical and syntactic ambiguities), Lew (1997) nonetheless is addressing the point in question – it is possible for homophony to exist in lexical and even syntactic ambiguities.

Lew (1997) also includes homophony (along with polysemy and homonymy) in the overall lexical joke category and even considers homophony for the syntactic category as in the following example:

(4) "Oh sir, what kind of an officer are you?"
"A naval [navel] officer."
"My goodness, how you doctors do specialize."
(cited by Lew 1997: 131)

Lew (1997: 131) in the end considers this a lexical joke since "the difference in syntactic class is not mirrored in a similar difference in syntactic function". However, these examples highlight the possibility of homophones playing a role in lexical and syntactic ambiguities. While others (e.g. Bucaria 2004, Schultz and Pilon 1973) see homophony as being strictly phonological, the approach of this study adheres to Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978) and Lew (1997) in allowing for homophony to be considered lexical and even syntactic at times.

For the purposes of this study, phonological puns are determined not by suprasegmental characteristics or homophony, but rather different phonemic structures (usually near minimal pairs) that result in ambiguity. It also adheres to Hirsch-Pasek et al.'s (1978) definition of phonological ambiguity – an ambiguity that results when two similar phonetic sequences (which differ only in a single phonological segment) identify separate words, which have different meanings, e.g., cracker/quacker. In addition, homophones would be not considered phonological as proposed by Schultz and Pilon (1973); however, puns that depend on homophony for the humour to be realized will be considered for lexical or syntactic categorizations in this study.

2.2 Lexical ambiguity

While phonological ambiguity depend on "the modification of a sound, a unit smaller than the word" (Lew 1996b: 130), lexical ambiguity often relies on homophones, homonyms, or polysemes (not paronyms) where sounds remain the same and the ambiguity lies in the lexical unit or lexeme (Attardo et al. 1994: 34). Take the following as an example:

(5) Who is that woman having lunch with Don? Oh…that's a distant relative of his; his daughter. (Attardo et al. 1994: 33)

Here we see what may be considered a classic example of lexical ambiguity. The adjective "distant" in its salient interpretation means "separated in a relationship other than spatial" while the less salient interpretation means "reserved or aloof in personal relationship". The word, its pronunciation, and its syntactic interpretation remain the same while the meaning is what changes. As Attardo at al. (1994: 33) explain this example, "since the ambiguous element is a lexical unit (lexeme) this joke is classified as 'lexical'".

A distinction must be made here regarding Attardo et al.'s (1994) definition of lexical ambiguity and that of Lew (1996b) and Hirsch-Pasek et al (1978). Attardo at al. categorize their data based on three categories: lexical, syntactic, and alliterative. The alliterative category does not account for ambiguous elements at the phonological level, merely "the unexpected and exceptional repetitions of a sound or group of sounds" (Attardo et al. 1994: 36). As a result, Attardo et al. (1994) slip ambiguity based on phonology into the lexical category as in this example:

(6) Best wishes from Mama and Pauper. (Attardo et al. 1994: 34)

Attardo et al. (1994) do distinguish between different types of lexical ambiguity, one based on identical phonetic construction and the other nonidentical; nevertheless, they include both types in the lexical category:

> based on identical phonetic construction (for instance, "high" and "hi") and lexical puns in which there is a phonetic difference of some sort between the first and second sense/lexeme; that is, the lexical items are paronyms so that both of the "senses" are apparent to the reader/hearer, though the "words" are not phonetically identical. (Attardo et al. 1994: 34)

Where Lew (1996a, 1996b, 1997) and Hirsch-Pasek et al. (1978) might label the above pun as phonological, Attardo et al. (1994) (despite mentioning several times the phonological dependence of this type of pun) would label it as lexical. Contrary to Attardo et al.'s (1994) approach, this study includes puns based on homonyms, homophones, and polysemes in the lexical category and those based on paronyms in the phonological category.

In sum, lexical ambiguity involves two words with identical phonological representations but separate meanings that coexist within the context of the pun. In addition, lexical ambiguity utilizes homonymy, homophony, or polysemy in creating the ambiguity, and can involve word class change (to be discussed in the next section).

2.3 Syntactic ambiguity

Though seemingly clear-cut, different authors have varying interpretations of what constitutes syntactic ambiguity. On the surface, syntactic puns depend on a "duality" of semantic interpretations motivated by the structural patterns of the language system" (Lew 1996b: 128) and ambiguity not of any single lexical item but of the sentence at the syntactic level (Attardo et al. 1994: 35). Most authors would agree that the following pun clearly involves syntactic ambiguity:

(7) Customer: May I try on that dress in the window?
Salesgirl: No ma'am. You'll have to use the dressing room like everyone else.

The motivating factor behind the ambiguity in this case is prepositional phrase attachment. Items such as prepositional phrase attachment (Franz 1996, Lew 1996b, Oaks 1994, Stageberg 1971, Taha 1983, Chiaro 1992), relative clause reduction (Franz 1996, Stageberg 1971), modifier attachment (Oaks 1994, Taha 1983), pronoun antecedent (Oaks 1994, Taha 1983), and anaphoric referents (Attardo 1994) are generally considered "non-lexical" or syntactic ambiguities (Attardo 1994: 93). They will also be considered syntactically ambiguous for the purposes of this study.

A bit more complex, however, is the realm of word class change. Word class ambiguity can overlap both lexical and syntactic realms, exhibiting legitimate changes in meaning and many times (but not always) exhibiting changes in syntactic function as well. Stageberg (1971: 357) sees word class ambiguity as one of three types of structural ambiguity, which "stems from the grammar of English, not from the meanings of words". (Pattern ambiguity and deep structure ambiguity are the other two mentioned.) Taha (1983) also places word class ambiguities in the structural realm regardless of a double lexical meaning. In using the example French teacher, he acknowledges its lexical nature with two meanings of the phrase "a teacher of French, or as a native of France who teaches" (Taha 1983: 253); however, he categorizes the ambiguity as syntactic focusing on the confusion between compound noun and noun phrase containing a modifier. Bucaria's (2004) study of humorous headlines also shows support for word class ambiguity as syntactic. In her categorization of 135 humorous headlines, all of those that changed word class were considered syntactic. Finally, Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978) distinguish between ambiguity of underlying structure and surface structure. The former involves sequences of words that have two transformational sources or different sentential meaning as in "make me a milkshake" as "make a milkshake for me/out of me"; and the latter involves bracketing ambiguity as in "man (eating fish)"/"(man eating) fish."

Further complicating the situation, most of the authors mentioned previously dealt with examples that have two legitimate syntactic interpretations. In the case of puns, we cannot carry the presumption that sentences and phrases will make grammatical sense in both interpretations. In many cases, puns will ignore the rules of grammar and syntax and merely depend on word play allowing for one grammatically correct interpretation while offering another that butchers English syntax. This situation could prove important when categorizing word class changes as lexical or syntactic, and we may find word class ambiguity stopping at the lexical level in many cases. Chiaro may shed light on this distinction in the following example:

(8) The corral's the big joke now – it just doesn't look very stable.

Chiaro sees "lexical choices" as being key in this pun and then notes "the recipient with a sense of humour will misread the adjective 'stable' for a noun" (Chiaro 1992: 20). Clearly word class change plays a role in the ambiguity involved in this pun; however, in the noun version of the pun, syntactic sense in not made. Perhaps Oaks (1994) makes this distinction the best. He uses the following two examples to illustrate:

(9) Man in restaurant: I'll have two lamb chops, and make them lean, please. Waiter: To which side? (cited by Oaks 1994: 378)

(10) Why was Cinderella thrown off the baseball team? Because she ran away from the ball. (cited by Oaks 1994: 378).

Oaks (1994: 378) distinguishes between the two types of ambiguity above indicating that the first pun "represents more than just a particular word functioning with more than one meaning: the difference helps to create a structural ambiguity". According to Oaks, the puns

> may initially appear to be very similar. But the ambiguity in 1 is significantly different than the ambiguity in 2, since 1 is not limited to only lexical ambiguity. The change in the meaning of lean in 1 actually results in a change in our perception regarding the structure of the sentence, creating structural ambiguity. (Oaks 1994: 379)

For the purposes of this study, a change in word class does not presume a syntactic ambiguity categorization. Word class change that involves two grammatically viable interpretations will be considered syntactically ambiguous; those not producing two or more viable syntactic interpretations will be considered lexical.

Lew (1996a) shows agreement with this study for the most part, but does make some distinctions that differ from the approach taken here. As Lew (1996a: 31) sees it, "Jokes based on syntactic class ambiguity exhibit (typically) two readings corresponding to two different syntactic representations, within which a fragment of text may be assigned two different syntactic class structures". Franz (1996) also seems to agree with Lew's approach in his discussion of lexical-syntactic ambiguities involved in word class change. Franz regards ambiguity in prepositional phrase attachment as "structural" (like Attardo's "lion" example mentioned previously) while designating part of speech ambiguity as "lexical syntactic ambiguity." From Franz's perspective, lexical-syntactic ambiguity seems to lie at the word level, i.e. "many words can belong to more than one syntactic category or part of speech" (Franz 1996: 13), while structural ambiguity seems to lie on the sentence level, i.e. "when more than one syntactic structure could be assigned to a given sentence, the sentence is structurally ambiguous" (Franz 1996: 19). In addition, his approach takes into account that changes in the meaning of a word often involve changes in syntax at the word level. While word class change seems to suggest syntactic ambiguity by Lew's (1996a) and Franz's (1996) interpretations, the approach taken here is that word class change does not automatically suggest a syntactic category.

Take the following pun as an example of how the approach taken by this study might differ from Lew's (1996a) approach regarding word class change:

(11) Miss Wornout wrote on Bobby's report: "Bobby's trying — very."
(cited by Lew 1996a: 31)

Lew considered this pun syntactic, despite the fact that one interpretation ("trying" in its verb form) does not fit grammatically within the context of the sentence (i.e. "very" cannot be used to modify the verb "trying").

Compare this with the following pun from this study:

(12) A man rushed into the doctor's office and shouted, "Doctor! I think I'm shrinking!" The doctor calmly responded, "Now, settle down. You'll just have to be a little patient."

Here we see word class change occur (ADJ to N) and syntactic sense being achieved in both interpretations. By this study's standards, syntactic sense in both interpretations is requisite (among other requirements) for a pun to be considered syntactic.

One other discrepancy may arise in the classification of syntactic puns: the role of compound nouns within a particular pun. Take words such as "hot dog" or "high chair." As Taha (1983) explains it, these constructions are ambiguous because they may be construed in two different manners: a cooked sausage or a dog, which is hot, and a chair for babies or a chair, which is high (Taha 1983: 253–254). He notes, "in each case the compound noun has a derived meaning, whereas the noun phrase can always be paraphrased as a ____which is ____" (Taha 1983: 255). Taha considers these to be syntactic ambiguity (compound noun or noun phrase with modifier). Bucaria concurs (2004: 304–305), placing the following examples in the syntactic realm:

(13) Bush, Dukakis Butt Heads
(14) Henshaw Offers Rare Opportunity to Goose Hunters
(15) Marijuana Issue Sent to a Joint Committee
(16) Antique Stripper to Display Wares at Store

Perhaps explaining it best, Stageberg (1971: 357) identifies these syntactic ambiguities as "pattern ambiguity, [which] results from the syntactic pattern, or arrangement of words and structures". According to Stageberg (1971: 361), patterns such as noun + noun head ambiguity (woman doctor, girl kidnapper) "offer a fertile field for structural ambiguity". For the purposes of this study, compound nouns and/or noun phrase constructions of this nature also will be considered syntactically ambiguous.

3. Methodology

In this study, more than 6,000 humorous puns were collected from 12 different online Web sources. Using this collection as a master list, each pun was assigned a distinct number. From this, 225 puns were randomly selected for analysis. (Microsoft Excel was used to generate random numbers.) The sampling unit for this study was one complete pun. Of the 225 puns, 24 were eliminated for lack of a punning element (namely absence of phonological, lexical, or syntactic ambiguity). In analyzing the remaining 201 puns, a total of 248 instances of linguistic ambiguity occurred. As may be noted, more instances of ambiguity were identified than puns sampled. This is because many puns may exhibit more than one instance of ambiguity in realizing the puns' humour. Lew (1997) recognizes this phenomenon by proposing *multiple ambiguity* as a classification category in and of itself. While this study does not submit to Lew's (1997) opinion of this separate categorization, it nonetheless adheres to the possibility of multiple ambiguous elements and categorized each ambiguous instance separately based on their phonological, lexical, or syntactic characteristics.

For each instance of ambiguity, two interpretations were identified: the salient and less salient interpretation. As defined by Giora,

> if a word has two meanings retrievable directly from the lexicon, the meaning which is more popular, or more prototypical, or more frequently used in a certain community is more salient; or, the meaning an individual is more familiar with, or has just learned is the more salient; or, the meaning activated by previous context, or made predictable by previous context is the more salient. (Giora 1999: 921)

The less salient meaning would be seen as the one that is less frequent, prototypical, or familiar.

In addition to salience, all instances of ambiguity, word class, word class progression, use of morphological/syllabic mechanisms, and ambiguity type (phonological, lexical, and syntactic) were identified. Patterns involving syllabic and morphological mechanisms were identified, categorized, and analyzed for phonological and lexical mechanisms.

In determining ambiguity type, any possible pronunciation of ambiguous words was considered legitimate. For example, one pun in this data set involved manipulation of the word "conservatory" with its joking counterpart being "conserve-a-tree". Though the American English pronunciation would not have identical phonological constructions, the British English pronunciation would. Therefore, the British English version was the pronunciation considered in determining phonological, lexical, or syntactic categorizations. This is in response to Lew's (1997) identification of orthographic jokes as its own joke type. As noted by Lew (1997: 137), "not all jokes are equally affected by a switch from oral communication to written communication". To try and curb this concern of the orthographical element "which cuts across the basic categorizations", only spoken counterparts were considered in determining pun categories and all possible pronunciations were considered as legitimate.

In addition, Merriam-Webster online dictionary (www.m-w.com) as well as the Online Etymology Dictionary (www.etymonline.com) were used to determine items such as syllabic divisions and etymological source words when necessary.

4. Inter-author discrepancies

In taking the traditional categories of phonological, lexical, and syntactic, findings indicate an overwhelming presence of phonological ambiguity (52%, 128) followed by lexical (34%, 85) and syntactic ambiguities (14%, 35; see Figure 1). But when comparing these results with two similar studies – Attardo et al. (1994) and Bucaria (2004) – significant discrepancies in the authors' findings emerge (see Figure 2).

In Attardo et al.'s (1994) analysis, they identified lexical ambiguity as the most frequent by far (95%) followed by syntactic (5%). Bucaria's (2004) study of humorous and ambiguous newspaper headlines also found lexical ambiguity to be more prevalent

(52%) and phonological ambiguity to be the least prevalent (1%; only one example in the corpus); however, syntactic ambiguity (47%) was "much higher than that found by previous research regarding jokes" (Bucaria 2004: 280). In contrast, this study found phonological ambiguity to be the most prevalent (52%) followed by lexical (34%) and syntactic ambiguities (14%; see Figure 1). In comparing the results of all three authors (see Figure 2), obvious discrepancies have emerged.

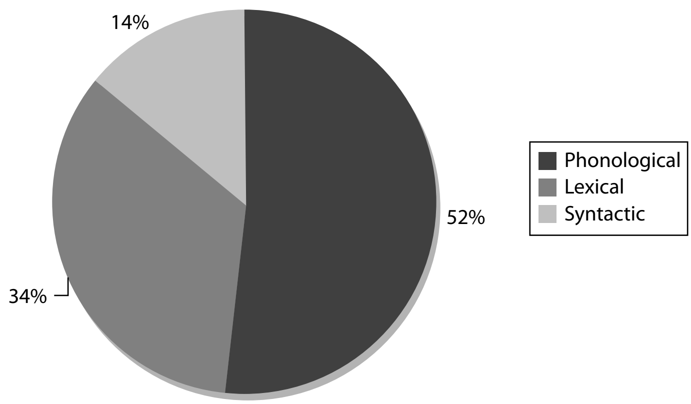

Figure 1. Ambiguity type (phonological, lexical, syntactic)

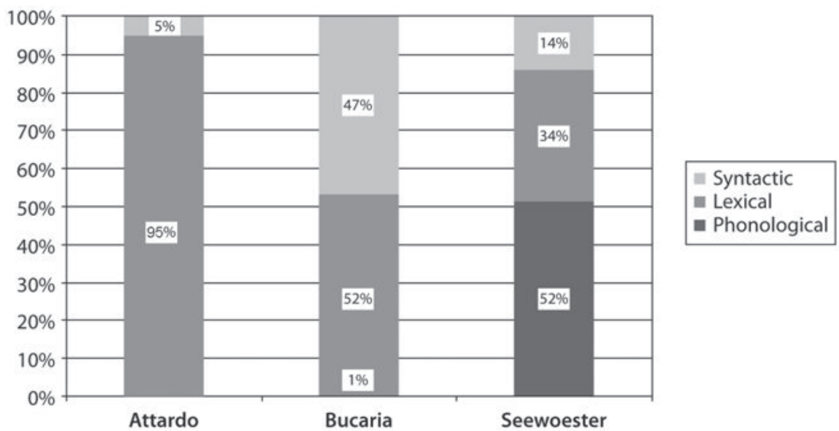

Figure 2. Ambiguity type by author
*Note: Alliterative categories were eliminated from all results since the focus of this study is on ambiguity. Percentages of each category were thus recalculated for comparison purposes as appropriate.

First, Attardo et al. found lexical ambiguity to be by far the most prevalent. When compared with the other authors, Attardo et al.'s lexical category is almost triple that of Seewoester's percentage-wise (95% vs. 34%) and almost twice that of Bucaria's (95% vs. 52%). Despite the fact that Attardo et al. and Bucaria both found lexical ambiguity to be the most prevalent, Attardo et al.'s numbers are highly inflated in comparison.

Second, Bucaria found the syntactic category to be much more prevalent than the other authors'. At 47%, Bucaria's syntactic findings are triple that of Seewoester's percentage-wise (14%) and almost 10 times that of Attardo et al. (5%). Clearly Bucaria's inflated syntactic category requires some further explanation.

Third, Seewoester's phonological category accounts for more than half of all ambiguity encountered at 52%. In contrast, phonological ambiguity in Bucaria's and Attardo et al.'s studies is practically non-existent – Bucaria finds only one instance of phonological ambiguity, while Attardo et al. do not indicate any phonological ambiguity at all in their results.

Further problematicizing the disparate findings is Stageberg's (1978) claim that (1) "lexical ambiguity is not a major cause of misunderstanding, because context usually restricts the possible meanings of a word to the one intended by the speaker or writer" and (2) "[structural ambiguity] is a widespread and active deterrent to clearness in writing" (Stageberg 1978: 357). Taking Stageberg's claims alongside the lexical results of all the authors and with Seewoester's and Attardo et al.'s syntactic results, this points to yet another discrepancy regarding frequency of ambiguity type.

These discrepancies may call into question the findings of all three studies. However, in taking a more in-depth look at a number of factors (i.e. category elimination, genre, classifying word class change, and presuming a spoken counterpart), the differences between the authors can be adequately explained.

4.1 Genre

Probably the most apparent discrepancy when comparing results between authors is the relative absence of phonological ambiguity from Bucaria's study and the large percentage of syntactic ambiguity (see Figure 2). Bucaria's study focuses only on ambiguous/humorous headlines, and he acknowledges "that differences exist between the humorous mechanisms of the register of jokes and that of headlines" (Bucaria 2004: 280). In other words, particular strategies that are focused upon in specific genres of humour may show a propensity for certain types of ambiguity.

For example, Tom Swifty jokes focus on manipulations specifically involving adverbs. Based on a fictional children's book character, a Tom Swifty "is a play on words that derives its humour on a punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker, and at the same time refers significantly to the context of the speaker's statement" (www.go.to/puns) – "'I needn't have been cloned,' said Dolly sheepishly, 'my family used to do exactly what I did anyway!'" Though not requisite, syntactic sense is usually made in the realization of both interpretations. Story puns also involve unique strategies that are characteristic of this type of humour. Specifically, story puns play on "a distorted form of some well-known saying, usually a proverb but sometimes a famous quotation" as in "People who live in grass houses shouldn't stow thrones" (Binsted and Ritchie 2001: 276, 279). Finally, in the genre of riddles, Pepicello and Green (1984) identify linguistic ambiguity and metaphor as being key in riddle formation, the former being of interest in this study. Specifically, Pepicello and Green (1984: 38–57) identify a number of strategies utilized within this genre, which include but are not limited to: Question Formation Transformation, Unspecified Pronoun Deletion, and Contraction Changes. In this manner we see how different genres can utilize different strategies for ambiguity formation, lending them a propensity for certain types of ambiguity to dominate.

In looking at Bucaria's (2004) study, we see a similar trend: "the language of headlines makes use of linguistic and stylistic devices that are specific of this genre and are imposed by the constraints and functions of newspaper writing in general" (Bucaria 2004: 284). Syntax reduction is one of these genre-specific devices utilized in newspaper headlines and focused on by Bucaria (2004). In other words, markers that indicate grammatical value are omitted for the sake of brevity allowing for more possibility of confusion in structural interpretations. Klammer, Shulz, and Volpe acknowledge this mechanism as well: "you may encounter ambiguous constructions, especially in headlines, where structural clues are often omitted to achieve brevity" (Klammer et al. 2000: 361; examples found pp. 59, 143, 361, 381, 397, 405). Noun/verb (Klammer et al. 2000: 361) and gerund/participle ambiguity (Klammer et al. 2000: 381), as well as transitive phrasal verbs with direct object modifiers and intransitive verbs followed by prepositional phrase modifiers (Klammer et al. 2000: 404–405) are all fair game in creating structural vagueness according to Klammer, Shulz, and Volpe (2000). Therefore, syntax reduction (and the resulting lack of structural clues) specific to the genre of newspaper headlines may account for the large percentage of syntactic ambiguities in Bucaria's results and the relative paucity of examples in the other two categories.

Also, the practically non-existent appearance of phonological ambiguity in Bucaria's (2004) study contradicts the results of this study. Presumably, the potential for phonologically ambiguity in newspaper headlines should be the same as for punning humour collected from Websites or joke books. However, the existence of headlines in a primarily written format with little or no intention of a spoken counterpart may make ambiguities based on sounds (phonological) less likely. Similarly, lexical and syntactic ambiguities (which dominate Bucaria's (2004) results) often employ double meanings without spelling or aural differences; phonological ambiguities always involve one or both of these characteristics. Phonological ambiguities may be avoided given that the genre is a professional one that intends to be taken seriously, and misspellings would likely be caught in the editing process. Lexical and syntactic ambiguities in print media are a bit harder to catch from the editing standpoint, which may also account for the large percentage of both in Bucaria's (2004) study.

Also possibly related to genre is Stageberg's (1978: 357) claim that "lexical ambiguity is not a major cause of misunderstanding, because context usually restricts the possible meanings of words to the one intended by the speaker or the writer". This is in direct contrast to all three authors' results, of which the author accounting for the least number of lexically ambiguous instances still found 34%. Stageberg (1978) collected all his specimens in student papers. Writings of a serious nature, where context is strong, may "prime" particular lexical meanings making lexical ambiguity particular difficult to manifest. On the other hand, this does not seem to be the case for puns found online (here) or in joke books (Attardo et al. 1994), or for puns in newspaper headlines (Bucaria 2004).

It appears genre may play a large role in what types of ambiguity are encountered. In regards to the discussion here, different tactics used for ambiguity appearing in newspaper headlines could account for the inflation of lexical and syntactic categories in comparison with the other two authors' results. Genre finds importance when not only comparing results between authors but also in developing general assumptions about ambiguity formation.

4.2 Phonological category eliminated

One of the main reasons for discrepancies between Bucaria's (2004) and the other two authors' results could be related to genre as discussed previously. But the differences between my and Attardo et al.'s (1994) results cannot be accounted for in this manner. Both gathered their data from large collections of jokes/humorous puns (not headlines). Of interest, however, is one point of classification in which Attardo et al. (1994) differ from both Bucaria (2004) and Seewoester, namely Attardo et al. (1994) do not include a phonological category in his analysis. Though Attardo et al. account for an alliterative category, which involves "the unexpected and exceptional repetitions of a sound or group of sounds in a given stretch of discourse" (Attardo et al. 1994: 36), they do not provide a separate phonological category to account for ambiguity at the sound level.

This absence of a phonological category leads to a second issue: instances of phonological ambiguity were considered lexical in Attardo et al.'s (1994) results. As I and Bucaria (2004) (presumably) approach it, the phonological category includes items that depend on "the modification of a sound, a unit smaller than the word" (Lew 1996b: 130). As an example, I would categorize the following as phonological:

(17) Best wishes from Mama and Pauper (Attardo et al. 1994: 34).

Attardo et al. (1994), on the other hand, distinguish different types of lexical ambiguity: one "based on identical phonetic construction (for instance, 'high' and 'hi') and one in which there is a phonetic difference of some sort between the first and second sense/lexeme"; that is, the lexical items are paronyms "so that both of the 'senses' are apparent to the reader/hearer, though the 'words' are not phonetically identical"

(Attardo et al. 1994: 34). Where I would label the above example as phonological, Attardo et al. (1994) (despite mentioning several times its dependence on a phonological component) labelled it as lexical.

While acknowledging that the above example is phonetically skewed and defining paronyms as words that are phonetically similar but not identical, Attardo et al. (1994) still place ambiguity based on paronyms into the lexical category making their approach a bit incongruous. This study, on the other hand, uses categorizations as proposed by Lew, which take into account each linguistic level on its own accord and identify "the minimal string containing the part that varies between the two readings" (Lew 1996b: 127). The approach taken here is to include instances based on paronyms in the phonological category. Had I approached classification in the same manner as Attardo et al. (1994), phonological category results would have been much closer (Attardo 95% vs. Seewoester 86%).

But the "elimination" of or "unaccountability" for a particular category points to another matter at hand: each type of ambiguity may be defined differently by different authors. While Attardo et al. (1994) do not seem to account for the phonological category at all, it was simply a logistical decision of categorization. After all, Attardo et al. (1994) do distinguish two different types of lexical ambiguity: one in which there is a phonetic difference of some sort between the first and second sense ("Papa" and "Pauper") and one based on identical phonetic construction ("Ball"). In other words, Attardo et al.'s (1994) lexical definition seems to encompass both phonological and lexical ambiguities. From this perspective, the more pertinent matter is that even authors who account for the phonological category may define this (and the other categories) differently as already discussed.

Due to this broad interpretation of what is considered lexical and the elimination of the phonological category, we can account for the large percentage of puns that were considered phonological by Attardo et al.'s (1994) standards. In addition, this discrepancy points to a bigger issue in analyzing humorous ambiguity: there seem to be as many definitions of phonological, lexical, and syntactic ambiguity as there are authors studying them. Though this study cannot completely rectify these differences, it hopes to at least shed light on some of the more obvious incongruities.

4.3 Classifying word class change

As discussed previously, syntactic differences between Bucaria and the other two authors could be accounted for based on genre. However, what accounts for the differences in syntactic percentages between Attardo et al. (1994) and Seewoester is not immediately apparent. Attardo et al. (1994: 35) see syntactic ambiguity being "based on the ambiguity not of any single lexical item, as in lexical jokes, but of (parts of) the sentence at the syntactic level". The only example Attardo at al. (1994) offer is one involving prepositional phrase attachment:

(18) I killed a huge lion in my pajamas. How did the lion get into your pajamas? (cited by Attardo et al. 1994).

While this example would unquestionably be considered syntactic ambiguity by most authors, instances of word class change have seen less agreement within the literature and could account for the differences in syntactic percentages between Attardo et al. (1994) and Seewoester.

There appear to be three approaches to word class change: (1) word class change is lexical, (2) word class change is syntactic, and (3) word class change could be both. The first approach seems to be the approach taken by Attardo et al. Take the following example from Attardo et al.'s study:

(19) Today's tabloid biography: high chair, high school, high stool, high finance, high hat – hi, warden!

This example is labelled as alliterative, but also Attardo et al. (1994: 37) mention, "it has, however, a lexical element that did make its analysis less straight forward". Despite the change from ADJ to INTJ ("high" to "hi") and the syntactic sense that is realized in both interpretations, the syntactic element is not mentioned or considered at all. Though it is difficult to say exactly how word class change was approached in Attardo et al.'s (1994) study, this example seems to imply a lexical approach to word class change. Chiaro (1992) also seems to approach word class change in this manner. In the following example, she sees "lexical choices" as being key despite the change in word class, and (like Attardo et al.) reserves the syntactic category for when "sentences contain rank-shift prepositional groups", lack a subject and/or object, or when indefinite articles are used (Chiaro 1992: 40–42):

(20) The corral's the big joke now – it just doesn't look very stable. (cited by Chiaro 1992)

Regarding the second approach to word class change (and exhibiting more support than the first approach), some authors find word class change to be indicative of structural or syntactic ambiguity (Stageberg 1971, Taha 1983). In Bucaria's (2004) study of humorous headlines, all of those that changed word class were considered syntactic. While the approach of this study for the most part is in line with Lew's (1996a), the subject of word class change may be a point of contention. Take the following as an example:

(21) Miss Wornout wrote on Bobby's report: "Bobby's trying — very." (cited by Lew 1996a: 31)

Lew (1996a) considered this example syntactic, despite the fact that one interpretation ("trying" in its verb form) does not fit grammatically within the context of the sentence (i.e. "very" cannot be used to modify the progressive form "trying").

Finally, the third approach in which word class change could be either lexical or syntactic is the approach endorsed in this study. MacDonald et al. (1994) speak to the connection of lexicon and syntax in their study of syntactic ambiguity resolution. MacDonald et al. propose a unified model through which "lexical and syntactic information in sentence comprehension is governed by common lexical processing mechanisms" and "syntactic ambiguities...are based on ambiguities at the lexical level" (MacDonald et al. 1994: 682). They include grammatical tendencies (such as word class) into the lexical make-up of a word: "We assume that the lexical entry of each verb, preposition, noun, and adjective includes a representation of argument structure information...we also assume the lexical representation of a word includes other syntactic information" (MacDonald et al. 1994: 683). In other words, within the meaning of a word is also information as to how a word can or cannot function in conjunction with other words or structure possibilities. Though the authors' interests lie on the processing level, they base their study on the idea that "the lexicon and syntax are tightly linked, and to the extent that information required by the syntactic component is stored with individual lexical items, it will be difficult to find a boundary between the two" (MacDonald et al. 1994: 682).

Franz (1996) also speaks to the lexical-syntactic ambiguities involved in word class change. Franz regards ambiguity in prepositional phrase attachment as "structural" (like Attardo et al.'s "lion" example mentioned previously) while designating part of speech ambiguity as "lexical syntactic ambiguity" (Franz 1996: 13). From Franz's perspective, lexical-syntactic ambiguity seems to lie at the word-level ("many words can belong to more than one syntactic category or part of speech" (Franz 1996: 13)), while structural ambiguity seems to lie on the sentence level ("when more than one syntactic structure could be assigned to a given sentence, the sentence is structurally ambiguous" (Franz 1996: 19)). In addition, his approach takes into account that changes in the meaning of a word often involve changes in syntax at the word level.

Perhaps outlining the distinction best is Pepicello and Green (1984). In their analysis of linguistic ambiguity in riddles, they offer the following example to illustrate their approach:

(22) Why is a goose like an icicle? Both grow down

This example shows

> two syntactically different constituents, for example, a noun and an adjective (...) may occur within a string of words in such a way that the syntactic parsing of the sentence is unclear. Thus...it is the grammar, and not merely the lexicon, that is central to the creation of ambiguity. (Pepicello and Green 1984: 48)

Contrast this with their definition of lexically ambiguous riddles in that we find "two homophonous words that are the same parts of speech and that are not distinguishable syntactically in the riddle in which they are employed" (Pepicello and Green 1984: 45).

But even if word class change does occur, syntactic sense is also requisite for a "syntactic" categorization. Take the following two examples encountered in this study:

(23) The surgeon was unfamiliar with the new leg operation. It was too hip for him.

(24) A man rushed into the doctor's office and shouted, "Doctor! I think I'm shrinking!" The doctor calmly responded, "Now, settle down. You'll just have to be a little patient."

The first example exhibits word class change (ADJ to N); however, it was considered lexical. The reason for the lexical categorization being that the noun "hip" cannot be grammatically modified by "too". In other words, syntactic sense is not achieved in both interpretations. Compare this to the second example in which word class change occurs (ADJ to N) and syntactic sense is achieved in both interpretations. For the purposes of this study, word class change that involves two grammatically viable but different interpretations will be considered syntactically ambiguous; those not producing two or more viable syntactic interpretations will be considered lexical.

4.4 Presuming spoken counterpart

It has already been discussed that genre could account for Bucaria's (2004) inflation of the syntactic category. Given that Bucaria's (2004) corpus came from headlines, in which syntactic sense is most likely requisite, Bucaria's large percentage of syntactic ambiguity make sense. But considering that Attardo et al. (1994) and Seewoester both took their data from collections considered humorous at the onset, their syntactic results should have been more similar (Attardo et al. – 5% vs. Seewoester – 14%). One possible explanation is the assumption of spoken counterparts in the analysis of each ambiguous instance. Despite the fact that the data set for this study was taken from written puns found online, the phonology of puns plays a large role in their execution and often their ambiguity (as we have seen in previous sections). As a result, the approach of this study was to presume a spoken counterpart.

Part of the reason for this was to not bias data toward one pronunciation over another, one region over another, one social class over another, etc. Also, in the interest of time and ease, deciding upon the "correct" pronunciation could prove an insurmountable task. Finally, the pun teller would presumably want the ambiguity enabled by the closest possible pronunciations for both interpretations. Taking all of this into account, any possible pronunciation was considered and the pronunciation that most enabled the realization of the "double entendre" was used for ambiguity categorizations.

For example, in this data set one of the puns manipulated the word "conservatory" (with its joking counterpart being "conserve-a-tree"). Both American English and British English pronunciation were considered as well as any other possible regional pronunciations. The British English was the pronunciation used in determining phonological, lexical, or syntactic categorizations due to its proximity in pronunciation with its punning counterpart. As discussed in the methodology section, only spoken counterparts were considered in determining ambiguity categories and all possible pronunciations were considered as legitimate.

Because of the dependence on spoken counterparts rather than the written forms, I considered a number of puns based on homophony as syntactically ambiguous. This would be a departure from other authors' interpretations of ambiguity categorization, as many would have categorized ambiguity based on homophony as lexical. This does not mean that all homophonous instances were automatically labelled syntactic. Rather, ambiguities based on homophony were considered for syntactic categorization and only labelled as such if syntactic sense was achieved in both interpretations. Take the following as examples:

(25) A bicycle can't stand alone because it is two-tired.
(26) I'm clueless when it comes to the life of Henry VIII. Someone needs to Tudor me.

I considered the first example syntactic. Since the phonetic realization of "two" and "too" are the same, despite their spelling differences, it was possible to achieve a syntactically ambiguous statement here. In addition, both interpretations made sense by the rules of English grammar (i.e. "is too tired" – V + ADV + ADJ vs. "is two-tired" – V + ADJ[compound]). By contrast, the second example, despite the homophonous tactics, was considered lexical. This is primarily due to the ungrammatical use of the proper noun "Tudor" in the less salient interpretation.

It is difficult to say to what extent this affected syntactic numbers in comparison to Attardo et al.'s (1994) results. As mentioned previously, Attardo et al.'s (1994) approach to the syntactic category seems to be more tradition (i.e. prepositional phrase attachment, anaphoric referents, etc.). Nevertheless, presumption of spoken counterparts and the possibility of homophony in syntactic categorizations in Seewoester's results could have caused an inflation of her syntactic category.

5. Syllabic and morphological mechanisms

Up until this point, the discussion has focused on examples that utilize phonological, lexical, or syntactic mechanisms for the ambiguity to be realized. These are considered the traditional categories for ambiguity as seen in the literature. But within the phonological and lexical categories, a number of peripheral cases were identified that utilized more specialized mechanisms. These mechanisms involved syllabic and morphological components, which were clearly unique from other phonological and lexical ambiguities, but still fell within these traditional categorizations. Specifically, the mechanisms identified involved syllables (rather than phonemes), morphemes (rather than lexemes), hanging syllables or morphemes, and inflated morphemes.

In looking at these four mechanisms, this study found that almost one half of all ambiguity encountered (43%, 106) relied on syllabic or morphological mechanisms rather than phonological, lexical, or syntactic means alone (see Figure 3). Clearly, it is not just phonemes and lexemes that contribute to ambiguity formation within the

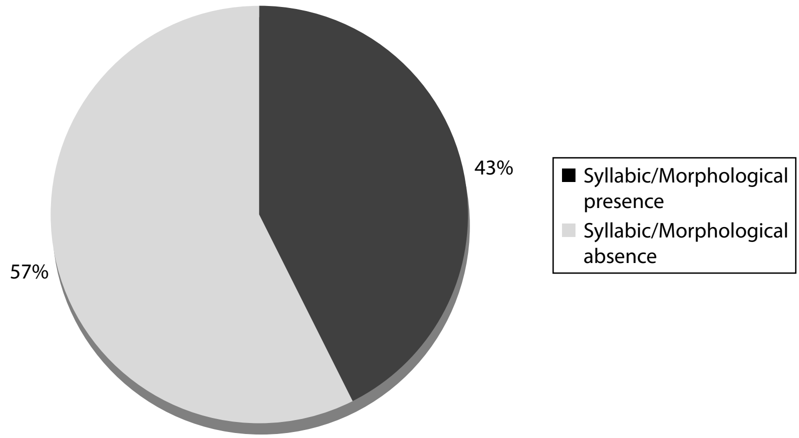

Figure 3. Presence/absence of syllabic and morphological mechanisms

English language, but also those mechanisms that fall between and dance around the traditional phonological and lexical categories.

Though much of the literature has discussed classification of ambiguity based on characteristics of sound (phonological), word-level meaning (lexical), and syntactic interpretations (syntactic), approaches to categorizations based on segments that are bigger than sounds but smaller than words have not been a major focus. Based on the results of this study, syllabic and morphological mechanisms are explored, discussed, and analyzed for possible uses in ambiguity categorizations. In the following sections, these "in-between" categories – syllables, morphemes, hanging syllables/morphemes, and morpheme inflation – will be discussed in more detail.

5.1 Syllabic ambiguity

Unlike phonological ambiguity which relies on similar but not identical phonetic constructions of words for the humour to be realized, the humour elicited from syllabic ambiguity is driven by ambiguity of groups of sounds, or syllables. Similar to what Schultz and Pilon (1973) call phonological sequencing, unlikely divisions or pairings of groups of sounds help form the humour, as in the following examples from this study:

(27) When I built the extension to my house, I used as little wood as possible, because I wanted to conserve-a-tree.

(28) The farmer's new pig enclosure lacked a horizontal piece of wood below the window. The architect really should have drawn the blue prints with a pen-sill.

For examples such as these, one but not both interpretations can involve legitimate morphological meanings. In other words, "conserve a tree" all exhibited their own legitimate meanings but the component parts of "conserv-a-tory" did not. Though a case could be made that "-ory" does possess morphological meaning ("place of or for"), the play was with the sound sequence "-tory" rather than the morpheme "-ory". And that is the crux of the matter. In this example, it was the groupings of sounds or unlikely syllabic divisions and not confusion between legitimate morphemes that caused the humour. The same occurred in the second example in which "-cil" carried no meaning on its own. Again, the minimal string involved manipulation at the syllabic level and not ambiguity at the morphological or lexical level.

Syllabic divisions can work in both directions, with the divisions occurring in the salient or the less salient senses. Take the following examples for comparison:

(29) Homer was blind, which makes his "Oughta-see" so impressive.
(30) My sister was trapped under a pile of old Dutch coins. In fact it was so heavy it almost guilder.

The first example reflects the most prominent trend in which the salient interpretation requires all syllables be taken together ("Odyssey") and the less salient interpretation requires a separated syllabic interpretation ("Oughta-see"). The second example reflects the less prevalent trend in which the salient interpretation is taken separately ("Killed her") and yet the less salient interpretation ("guilder") takes all syllable together. (Remember that for this study we are working with spoken counterparts, so priming based on spelling would be irrelevant.)

Also of interest is the appearance of the word class progressions N to NP (14.8%, 19 instances), N to VP (4.7%, 6 instances), and N to NPVP (5.5%, 7 instances). It can also work the opposite way though with much less frequency as found in this study (NP to N – 3.1%, 4 instances; VP to N – 1.6%, 2 instances; and NPVP to N – 0.8%, 1 instance). These progressions are almost exclusively characteristic of phonological ambiguities. Rather than relying solely on similar sounding words, phonological ambiguity depends greatly on the united syllables of longer words sounding like legitimate, lexically-bound shorter words that form humorous phrases ("mastectomy", "ma-stuck-to-me"; "leprechaun", "leper-con"). For these, syllabic division of one word creates a humorous phrase as in the following examples:

(31) What tragedy occurred when the discoverer of radium served her pet a caffeinated beverage meant for equines? Curie horse-tea killed the cat. (N to NP)
(32) Do violinists sleep around? Yes, they straddle various. (N to VP)
(33) My mother-in-law got her mammaries replaced by suction cups. Now whenever she leans in for a kiss, I get ma-stuck-to-me. (N to NPVP)

In looking at the total number of phonological ambiguities – those syllabically motivated and those that are not – syllabic mechanisms accounted for 39%. In addition, of those exhibiting syllabic or morphological mechanisms, 47% (50) were considered syllabic (see Figure 4).

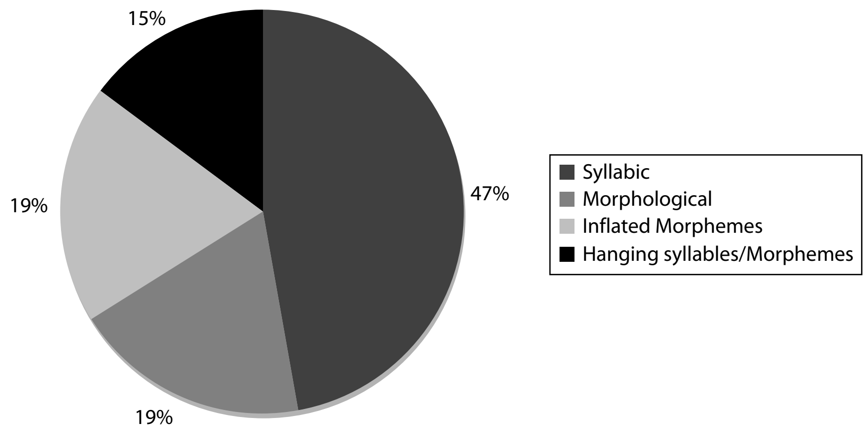

Figure 4. Types of syllabic and morphological mechanisms

Chiaro (1992: 35) recognizes this syllabic phenomenon in which word boundaries are played with "by generating more than one item from what was a single item in the first place by means of the elimination of the original word boundaries". While Chiaro does not situate this phenomenon in a particular category (other than "playing with word boundaries"), Schultz and Pilon (1973) consider this clearly phonological, and in fact use *phonological sequencing* as one of two types of ambiguity that epitomizes phonological ambiguity: "Phonological ambiguity occurs when a given phonological sequence can be interpreted in more than one way", which can result in "a confusion about the boundaries between words (e.g., 'eighty cups' vs. 'eight tea cups')" (Schultz and Pilon 1973: 728). In addition, "phonological sequencing puns draw together two different grammatical patterns within the same (or highly proximal) phonetic string" (Simpson 2003: 23). This study does take the approach that these sequences involving syllabic mechanisms should be considered phonological, regardless of resulting grammatical similarities. There is an exception – instances in which the syllabic divisions are morphological in nature, leading to ambiguities at the meaning level rather than phonological level.

Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978) more or less identify this distinction or syllabic vs. morphological ambiguity. In their study of ambiguity recognition by young children, two categories involving word divisions and combinations evolved: morpheme boundary with no phonological distortion and morpheme boundary with distortion. This first is defined as "an ambiguity that results when a polysyllable can be interpreted as a single morpheme or as a sequence of morphemes, e.g., 'engineers/engine ears'" while the second is seen as "an ambiguity that results from the interaction of a phonological problem acting together with a morpheme boundary problem e.g. 'let's hope/let's soap'" (Hirsch-Pasek et al. 1978: 116).

Though Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978) do pay tribute to the syllabic/morphological distinctions, they are nonetheless considered independent categories and are not used methodologically to distinguish between the tradition categories of phonological, lexical, and syntactic. For the purposes of this study, and in using syllabic divisions to their fullest as a method of ambiguity categorization, instances of this type involving humorous syllabic divisions and combinations are considered phonological in nature due to their reliance first and foremost on sound ambiguities for the humour to be realized.

5.2 Morphological ambiguity

Like phonological ambiguities that utilized syllabic divisions and combinations as a humour-making strategy, many lexically-based ambiguities rely on morphological divisions for the realization of humour, the main difference being that each syllabic division is actually morphological in nature and exhibits a morphological value in both interpretations. Take the following as examples:

(34) The essay doesn't reflector true feelings about contraptions designed to reflect light.
(35) Many people major in biology in college; however, not all of them go on to pursue careers in the subject. Those people who leave it behind cease to study the science of life and instead begin learning a new branch of the science: byeology_of the subject.

In the first case, the free morpheme "reflect" is taken in its figurative and literal forms; while "her" ("feminine possessive") and "-or" ("one that does a specified thing") not only sound similar, but each carry their own legitimate morphological meanings. The second case is similar. "-Ology" has the same meaning in both interpretations, while "bi-" and "bye-" exhibited separate morphological meanings ("living organisms or tissue" or "interjection used to express farewell"). In both cases, it is confusion between morphological meanings that causes the ambiguity.

In this study 19% (20) utilized this strategy to produce alternative interpretations (see Figure 4). Of these 20 instances, 85% (17) required the morphemes be taken together in the salient interpretation while the less salient interpretation required one or more morphemes to be interpreted on its own merit. Take the following as examples:

(36) What creature staked out a bathroom, lustily awaiting a gazelle? The loo-tenant, come-on deer.
(37) There was one absentee PM who may as well have been locked in a plastic bin. The other MPs would sit around inquiring, "Tupper – where?"

The first example exhibits the dominant trend, in which the salient interpretation requires that the morphemes be taken together ("lieutenant"). The less salient interpretation, on the other hand, requires each morpheme to be taken on its own merit ("loo" – toilet; "tenant" – occupant) in order for the double meaning to be realized. This is considered morphological in nature because the salient interpretation, though taken in its combined form, has etymological counterparts for each morpheme that contributes to the meaning of "lieutenant" ("lieu [place]" + "tenant [hold]"). The second example represents the three exceptions to the rule, in which the salient interpretation requires each morpheme to be taken on its own merit ("Tupper–where" vs. "Tupperware"). In the case of morphological ambiguity, no particular morpheme seemed to be more prevalent than another; although almost all involved derivational morphemes rather than inflectional morphemes. As Bucaria (2004: 285) notes, "structural ambiguity in English is also favoured by the morphologic characteristics of the language, where a noun often has the same form of a verb, or vice versa, or the past tense and the past participle of a verb often coincide".

In addition to the examples given above in which morphological mechanisms indicate instances of lexical ambiguity, morphological mechanisms can be present in both phonological and syntactic ambiguities. This is similar to the previous discussion regarding phonological and lexical ambiguities not being mutually exclusive (i.e. phonological ambiguity often results in lexical changes). Take the following two examples:

(38) Do Arctic sommeliers worry about the wine-chill factor?
(39) What is the difference between a nicely dressed man on a tricycle and a poorly dressed man on a bicycle? A tire.

In the first example, the play on words relies partly on a split at the morphological level ("wind-chill" vs. "wine-chill"). While utilizing morphological mechanisms in the ambiguity formation, the "minimal string" that differs dictates a phonological categorization based on the phonological differences between "wind" and "wine". Morphemes may also play a role in syntactic ambiguity as we see in the second example. While clearly playing on the Determiner + N word class progression alongside "attire's" etymological meanings ("a-" –[from Latin ad-] + "tire" – order, rank), this example not only utilizes morphological mechanisms to realize the humour but also relies on syntactic underpinnings. In other words, *morphological ambiguity does not automatically espouse a lexical categorization*; rather, morphological cues must also be considered in light of possible phonological or syntactic mechanisms. In the next section, a matrix is proposed which accounts for these varying factors.

Pepicello and Green (1984: 43) identify "sequences of phonemes that are treated as morphemes may be referred to as 'pseudomorphemes'" although most of the examples cited play with portions of words with morphological values leaving remnant syllables to fend for themselves. Chiaro (1992: 37) touches on morphological mechanisms briefly, though she again looks at them on their own merit rather than submitting them to a phonological, lexical, or syntactic categorization. Hirsh-Pasek et al. (1978), as mentioned previously, account for the category "morpheme boundary with no phonological distortion." But again it is considered its own category. For the purposes of this study, ambiguities that rely on morphological divisions for the realization of humor will be considered for phonological, lexical, and syntactic categorizations.

5.3 Hanging syllables/morphemes

In addition to puns playing with syllabic sounds or morphological meanings, sometimes only parts of words or phrases are used in humour formation. For these, one interpretation may use all the syllables or morphemes while the other may use the alternative meaning of only a few syllables or morphemes, leaving a "hanging" component. This was identified as yet another way in which syllables and morphemes can be manipulated and utilized in the formation of ambiguity. In this study, hanging syllables and morphemes accounted for 15% (16, see Figure 4) of all puns involving syllabic or morphological mechanisms. Take the following two cases as examples:

(40) Do old-time hockey players get gerihat-tricks?
(41) What did the announcer scream when the wooden model of the Hindenburg burst into flames? "Oh, the mahogany!"

In the first example above, all sounds are taken together for the salient interpretation ("geriatrics"); while the less salient interpretation requires some of the syllables to be taken on their own merit, namely "hat" and "tricks" for the humour to occur. Only two of the syllables are used, leaving the hanging morpheme "geri-" (meaning "old age" or "to grow old"). Contrast this with the second example in which the opposite happens – all syllables are taken together in the less salient interpretation ("mahogany"), while the salient interpretation is the one leaving the hanging component ("[mah]agony"). Specifically, the first part of the word is left hanging ("mah-") while the second part of the word is associated with the common phrase "oh, the 'agony'!" In this example, the hanging component not used in both interpretations is a syllable having no morphological meaning.

Ritchie (2004: 115) addresses a similar phenomenon in which there is a "looser form of phonetic similarity between strings" as in his example:

(42) Some South American stamps are un-bolivia-ble. (Headline cited in "Have I got News For Your", BBC TV, May 2002 as cited by Ritchie 2004)

Here we see a hanging morpheme on one end ("un-") and a hanging syllable on the other ("-ble"). While Ritchie (2004) does not commit to a particular categorization in this case, he brings up a good point. In comparing it with another of his examples "Home is where the hearth is," Ritchie projects that we may be faced with two choices:

> we could consider the pun to be based on the comparison between "hearth" and "heart" [or] we could analyse the pun as using a comparison between "home is where the hearth is" and "home is where the heart is," in which case the established motto participates directly in the analysis but only one part of it, heart, manifests lexical differences from the utterance (Ritchie 2004: 115–116).

While addressing a methodological dilemma regarding how to treat common phrases (as we are dealing with parts of whole phrases like parts of whole words), this study would consider the minimal string of the part that differs as phonological for both: in the first (Example 41), disparate phonology is driven by hanging syllables/morphemes; in the second (Example 42), disparate phonology is driven by similar but not identical phonemes.

For the purposes of this study all cases of hanging syllables/morphemes are considered phonological due to the incongruity of sound caused by the "extra" syllables or morphemes. For plays on phrases, we take the ambiguous instance on its own merit (rather than as part of a phrase as a whole) in determining the ambiguity type.

5.4 Morpheme inflation

Discussed previously were hanging components in which portions of the ambiguous element were not used in one of the interpretations. Contrast those with the examples below:

(43) What's a snappy title for a review on Edward Scissorhands?
(44) Why is the man who invests all your money called a broker?

These examples reflect another trend that is realized in the creation of ambiguity, *morpheme inflation*. Similar to Stump's (1991) linguistic phenomenon known as morphosemantic mismatch, morpheme inflation applies the meaning of a particular morpheme to a word that either (a) cannot grammatically accept it, or (b) already has another meaning associated with the morpheme and main word when taken together. While morphosemantic mismatch involves paradoxes of meaning and grammar presented within a word or words component parts, morpheme inflation also includes morphemes that inappropriately indicate grammatical value with meaningful purpose (i.e. the realization of the humour). In addition, they do not involve paradoxes in compound words. Take the following as examples:

(45) The Scotsman's lover cheated on him. How did he feel? Ewesed.
(46) A minuscule of sub-atomic particles.
(47) Exposed...A retired model.

In the first example, we see an instance of ungrammatical acceptance of a legitimate morpheme. It plays with the morpheme "-ed" that is often used to transform verbs to past participles or adjectives. It requires the humour recipient to ignore the grammatical soundness of the statement (despite the fact that the "-ed" gives information on the role the noun *should* play) in order for the less salient interpretation to be realized. It also requires that the rules for past participle/adjective formation be stretched (i.e. adding "-ed" to the end of a plural noun does not create a past participle/adjectival form of the noun). In both the salient and less salient interpretations, all morphemes are used with meaningful purposes, but the less salient instance cannot grammatically accept the "-ed" causing it to syntactically not make sense. Though this approach can be used in a number of ways, Tom Swiftys pay tribute to this tactic.

The second example above is similar to the tactic just described except it involves the free morpheme "a(n)" instead of a bound morpheme. In the second example, we see an adjective being used as a noun as is indicated by the use of "a" before it and its placement in the phrase. This is a common tactic in play on words known as collective nouns or terms of venery. Originating from the English hunting tradition days, these words describe a group of objects (usually animals) based on their characteristics or habits of life (www.wikipedia.com): "a gaggle of geese, a pride of lions".

The final tactic involved in morpheme inflation takes a word whose separate component parts have legitimate morphological values but when taken together exhibit a legitimate meaning (the salient interpretation) unrelated to the component parts. We see this tactic in the third example. In its traditional sense, the base verb "expose" involves two morphemes: "from ex- + ponere to put, place". It is then inflected with the verbal morpheme "-ed". Despite the separate meaning of "ex- (former)" and "pose (to assume a posture or attitude usually for artistic purposes)", the meaning of these two morphemes when taken together has evolved ("to cause to be visible or open to view"). This example, however, plays on these historically separate morphemes, which have since taken on a new meaning together. As a result we see the salient interpretation of "exposed" transformed into a less salient interpretation when the morphemes are taken separately (i.e. "a former poser").

Morphological inflation tactics such as these account for 19% (20, see Figure 4) of instances utilizing syllabic or morphological tactics. Of the morphemes used, "-ed" (7 instances), "-ly" (3 instances), "-er/or" (3 instances), and "a" (3 instances) appeared most frequently, with all others only appearing once. Instances of morpheme inflation in which phonological representations are equal (e.g. "exposed") were considered lexical rather than syntactic due to their typically ungrammatical usages of morphemes, while those utilizing inflated morphemes but exhibiting some other phonological discrepancy were considered phonological (e.g. "uncouth" vs. "untooth").

6. Using syllabic and morphological mechanisms for ambiguity categorization

As delineated previously, traditional categories of ambiguity categorization (phonological, lexical, and syntactic) seem appropriate and have stood the test of time. Not only are they reflexive of linguistic disciplinary divisions as a whole, but they do not hone in on categorizations that may be specific to the genre of humour nor do they unnecessarily create more and more categories from which to choose.

Syllabic and morphological mechanisms are not proposed as categories in and of themselves. Rather, they are seen as key components in determining a phonological, lexical, or syntactic ambiguity categorization (especially peripheral cases where the categorization may not be clear-cut). Since the driving force behind these peripheral cases considered in this study remains ambiguity of sound (syllabic), ambiguity of meaning (morphological), and grammatical ambiguity (more than one syntactic interpretation driven by morpheme ambiguity), the current categorizations maintain their strength. Ambiguities driven by syllabic mechanisms, therefore, fall into the phonological realm. While ambiguities driven by morphological mechanisms, with no other phonological discrepancy, fall into the syntactic or lexical realms as in this example:

(48) Did you hear about the frog who traced his family history to Warsaw? He was a tad Polish. (www.punoftheday.com)

In this example, “tad (1. from tode toad; 2. a small or insignificant amount or degree)”, “pol(e) (1. from polle head; 2. a native or inhabitant of Poland)”, and “ish (1. characteristic of; 2. of, relating to, or being)” all carry their own legitimate meanings in both interpretations and would therefore be considered lexical.

In looking at similar examples in Bucaria’s (2004) study, she seems to agree with this interpretation (though the argument is not explicitly stated). Bucaria (2004) considers the first instance of ambiguity below to be phonological (it relies on syllabic reinterpretation for the ambiguity to be realized); the second example she considers to be lexical (it is divided along morphologic lines):

(49) Is There a Ring of Debris Around Uranus?
(50) Air Head Fired

But how exactly can these syllabic and morphological mechanisms be used in practice as a standardized method for ambiguity categorization as a whole? The following section will propose a methodology for doing so that encompasses both the traditional categories as well as the syllabic and morphological distinctions.

6.1 Ambiguity categorization matrix

Peripheral cases utilizing strategies that ride the line between phonological, lexical, and syntactic ambiguity often make classification more difficult. Rather than proposing new categories that account for peripheral cases, it seems appropriate to use the tactics described above as a method of assigning a phonological, lexical, or syntactic categorization. In other words divisions along syllabic boundaries that produce alternative interpretations would be considered phonological, while divisions along morphologic boundaries that produce alternative interpretations would be considered lexical or syntactic as appropriate. In addition, hanging syllables and morphemes (due to their incongruent phonological representations) would also be considered phonological, while morpheme inflation with its agrammatical use of morphemes would be placed in the lexical realm.

Based on these characteristics and descriptions, along with the characteristics of the traditional categories (phonological, lexical and syntactic), the following categorization matrix is proposed:

1. Determine if initial level of ambiguity is clearly phonological, lexical, or syntactic.
   a. If so, assign it appropriately.
   b. If not, move to 2.
2. Determine if all syllables/morphemes are used (i.e. hanging syllables/morphemes).
   a. If not, the item exhibits a hanging component and is phonological.
   b. If so, move to 3.
3. Determine if syllables have "meaningful" counterparts (i.e. morphemes).
   a. If not, the item utilizes syllabic divisions and is phonological.
   b. If so, move to 4.
4. Determine if word can grammatically accept all morphemes used (i.e. morpheme inflation).
   a. If not, the item exhibits morpheme inflation and is lexical.
   b. If so, move to 5.
5. Determine if word syntactically works by rules of grammar.
   a. If not, the item is lexical.
   b. If so, the item is syntactic.

This matrix can be used for peripheral cases in which the ambiguity-type classification may not seem immediately apparent. Consider the following two examples for analysis:

(51) The essay doesn't reflector true feelings about contraptions designed to reflect light.
(52) The Scotsman's lover cheated on him. How did he feel? Ewesed.

6.1.1 *Example 1*

In this example, we see the following being played with for humorous realization: "reflector" and "reflect-her."

1. Determine if initial level of ambiguity is clearly phonological, lexical, or syntactic: As mentioned previously, any possible pronunciation is considered legitimate so as not to bias the data set or regional pronunciations. In this case, the underlying phonetic construction would be considered the same. In taking an initial glance, this example could not be syntactic since the noun "reflector" does not fit with the auxiliary verb set up just prior in the sentence. But other mechanisms may be at play, which could assign it to either a phonological or lexical category. Since the level of ambiguity is not clear-cut, we would move down the matrix.
2. Determine if all syllables/morphemes are used (i.e. hanging syllables): The word "reflector" is used in its entirety for the less salient interpretation. The salient interpretation uses all parts of the word though divided: "reflect-her". In this case all syllables/morphemes are used so we would move down the matrix.
3. Determine if syllables have "meaningful" counterparts (i.e. morphemes): Since this example does utilize divisions of some sort, we must determine whether these

divisions play with mere groups of sounds, or if these groups also exhibit legitimate morphological meanings as well. In both cases, the word "reflect" has a legitimate morphological meaning ("to throw back light or sound" and "to make manifest or apparent"). The second part of the division involves "-or" and "her". As it happens, "-or" is a noun-making morpheme which means "one that does a (specified) thing"; in this case, something that reflects (light). Its counterpart, "her", also exhibits its own legitimate meaning being the female possessive. In this case, all groups of sounds key to both interpretations have meaningful morphological counterparts, so we would move down the matrix.

4. Determine if word can grammatically accept all morphemes used (i.e. morpheme inflation): In this case, the word "reflect" can grammatically accept the noun-making morpheme "-or". While in the other interpretation, the verb "reflect" can also accept the subsequent noun phrase ("her true feelings") that includes the grammatically sound female possessive form of "her". Since in both interpretations the morphemes are not used atypically or agrammatically, we can move down the matrix.
5. Determine if word syntactically works by rules of grammar: As discussed previously, the less salient interpretation does not make sense since a noun ("reflector") cannot follow the auxiliary verb "does" in context. ("Does" requires another verb to adhere to English grammatical rules.) Though the other interpretation does work grammatically, the presence of the agrammatical interpretation indicates that sentence structure ambiguity is not at play here. *In other words, this example would be considered lexical and not syntactic.*

6.1.2 *Example 2*

1. Determine if initial level of ambiguity is clearly phonological, lexical, or syntactic: At first glance, both interpretations of the punch line, "ewesed" and "used", have the same phonological interpretations. In addition, the punch line is a single word answer to a question, allowing for a bit more grammatical flexibility in its use. Though "ewesed" may seem a bit awkward, exactly what is driving the awkwardness may require a bit more explanation. Since the level of ambiguity may not be initially clear, we will move down the matrix.
2. Determine if all syllables/morphemes are used (i.e. hanging syllables): Upon initial inspection, it may seem that the "-ed" following "ewes" may indicate a hanging component. However, its set up dictates an adjectival answer of some sort. The bound morpheme "-ed" is often used in combination with nouns as an adjectival forming morpheme (like "spike" the noun and "spiked" the adjective or "date" the noun and "dated" the adjective). Bearing this in mind, the "-ed" is used with grammatical intent and contributes to the joking interpretation. Therefore, no hanging syllable or morpheme is apparent and we would move down the matrix.
3. Determine if syllables have "meaningful" counterparts (i.e. morphemes): In this case, the groups of sounds being played with are "ewes"/"use" and "-ed". Here we see the plural noun form of "ewes" and the verb "use" not only having the same

phonological realizations but also meaningful morphological definitions in both interpretations. In addition, the "-ed" is used in both cases to indicate an adjectival grammatical value. It can thus be determined that we are in fact dealing with morphological groups in this case, with meaningful counterparts in both interpretations, and so we move down the matrix once again.

4. Determine if word can grammatically accept all morphemes used (i.e. morpheme inflation): Now that the groups of sounds have been determined as morphemes, we can explore whether these morphemes are being used in their legitimate senses on their own and outside the context of the sentence. In the salient interpretation, the verb "use" can legitimately accept the morpheme "-ed". This acceptance can indicate the past tense form of the verb, the past participle, or as an adjective-making morpheme, as is the case we see here. In its less salient interpretation, however, we run into a bit a trouble. While nouns could accept "-ed" as an adjective-making morpheme, plural nouns cannot. And though technically we could combine all the meanings of the morphemes to elicit an interpretation (as in the Scotsman may feel not just like one female sheep but perhaps like many female sheep), grammatically it will not adhere to English language rules. In this case, we have an instance of morpheme inflation, and thus a lexical categorization.

7. Conclusions

Based on this study's results (specifically, the frequent use of syllables and morphemes for ambiguity formation), a more concise categorization is proposed that pays tribute to tactics that involve segments larger than sounds but smaller than words. In being more specific, syllables and morphemes often dance within, around, and between traditional boundaries making categorization more difficult and not as clear-cut. In other words, rather than utilizing the basic categorizations tactics, which rely solely on phonemes, lexemes, and syntax, this study uncovered a need to look in between these linguistic attributes and pay tribute to syllabic and morphological mechanisms as well.

In this study, syllables (groups of phonemes) and morphemes (smallest linguistic units that have semantic value, not necessarily words) were used to determine phonological, lexical, and syntactic categories for marginal cases. In addition, hanging syllables/morphemes (one interpretation used all the syllables/morphemes while the other used only some syllables/morphemes) were positioned in the phonological realm due to incongruity of sound, while morpheme inflation typically contributed to lexical ambiguity.

The sheer number of puns that utilize syllabic and morphological tactics within this study (43%) suggests a need for ambiguity-type categorization, which takes these mechanisms into consideration. As a result, this study proposes a standardized five-tier matrix that both accounts for possible syllabic and morphological mechanisms while still adhering to the traditional framework of phonological, lexical, and syntactic ambiguity.

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Context-sensitive aspects of Shakespeare's use of puns in comedies

An enquiry into clowns' and pages' punning practices

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This paper is a data-driven analysis of Shakespeare's punning discourse carried out on a collection of puns culled from two comedies, viz. "Love's Labour's Lost" (*LLL*) and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (*TGV*). A pun is defined here as a phenomenon which depends on the juxtaposition of identical/similar *forms* and dissimilar *meanings*. The study is designed to examine the phenomenon from a strictly socio-pragmatic vantage point and sets out to explore the impact of punsters' social roles (public/professional, rather than private, i.e. those of clowns and pages) on the peculiarities of their punning which prove to have considerable potential for explaining various contextually strategic moves, such as the choice of interlocutor to pun with, the topic to play on, the number of puns to make in individual interactions, etc. It becomes plainly evident that, while both pages and clowns fit into the category of habitual punsters, their punning practices are markedly different, being a product of acerbic wit in the former case, and of intellectual primitivism in the latter.

1. Preliminaries

1.1 The definition of a pun

There exists no single universally applicable definition of a pun, which is attributed to a lack of terminological and typological rigour in the domain of humour studies. While reasons for this state of affairs can be multiplied many times over, only those of prime importance will be mentioned below. Firstly, puns have been approached from diverse angles in multiple academic disciplines, linguistic and other (e.g. semantics, psycho- and socio-linguistics, philosophy, rhetoric, stylistics), each addressing a different aspect of punning production and submitting its own terminological apparatus (Delabastita 1993: 56). Secondly, the phenomenon has merited the attention of scholars from all over the world who, understandably, describe it with the use of native nomenclatures (alongside English, principally German and French). These, in turn, barely congruent intralingually, tend to soak through language borders and mix with each other in a somewhat haphazard manner. Symptomatic in this respect may be the fact that names like "jeau de mots" or "double entendre", fairly foggy concepts in French itself, pass as currency in English critical literature. What adds to the general confusion is the fact that, not infrequently, modern terminology draws on that of ancient and Renaissance rhetoric which, while lacking the notion of a pun as such, made quite disorderly use of formal devices (chiefly *paronomasia*, *antanaclasis*, *syllepsis* and *asteismus*), lumped together under a common name *figura elocutionis* and corresponding roughly to individual pun types (Freidhof 1984: 12; Kohl 1966: 55, 94; Redfern 1984: 82). Finally, as a result of the Empsonian (1953) tradition, ambiguity, the cornerstone of scores of puns, has often been defined loosely as a blanket term for any uncertainty that permits alternative meanings/interpretations of a single piece of language, which has hugely obliterated some of the phenomenon's niceties (Delabastita 1993: 56).

Luckily, irrespective of the resultant disorderliness, the majority of the existing accounts of puns, as found in both specialist texts and regular dictionaries, seem to concur in the recognition that the phenomenon depends for its existence on the juxtaposition of (at least two) identical/like *forms* and (at least two) unlike *meanings*. By way of example, Wurth (1895: 15) refers to a pun as a "connection between two or more words of identical or similar sound and often wholly opposite meaning" and Kreutzer (1969: 142) speaks of "similarity of signs and dissimilarity of the denoted meanings" (translations mine). In a similar vein, the identity/approximation of forms and discreteness of meanings are brought to the fore in "The New Oxford Dictionary of English" (1998), where a pun is recognised as "a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings" and in Delabastita (1993), who defines the phenomenon as a cover term for

> the various textual phenomena (i.e. on the level of performance or *parole*) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or *langue*) are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near-) simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifieds) and more or less similar forms (signifiers). (Delabastita 1993: 57)

On top of that, it should be accentuated that, broadly speaking, the subtler the formal contrast and the sharper the semantic one, the finer the punning effect (Wurth 1895: 18). So far as the formal arrangement of puns alone is concerned, the identity/similarity of punning components is determined by either of the following language phenomena: homonymy (identity in sound and spelling), homophony (identity in pronunciation), homography (identity in spelling)[1] and paronymy (similarity in both

1. As expected, homography is absent from the entire Shakespearean canon since it surfaces only in a perfectly codified orthographic system, of which the 16th-century spelling is clearly a poor example (Kökeritz 1953: 87).

pronunciation and orthography). The semantic composition of puns, in turn, is a hybrid of primary (surface-level) and secondary/tertiary/quaternary, etc. (underlying) meanings which, to permit a pun, need to be sufficiently distinct.

Finally, for the sake of expedience, the term "pun" as used throughout the present paper is considered synonymous and interchangeable with "wordplay" (despite the fact that the latter is on many occasions defined less rigorously as an umbrella term for any sort of playful fiddling with words[2]). The rationale for doing so is the fact that even though the Shakespearean brand of humour is an impressive miscellany of playful forms, where non-punning wordplay (hinging on mechanisms, such as alliteration, rhyme, spoonerism, malapropism, etc.) is fairly frequent, in the entire canon, pun-based wordplay makes up the overwhelming majority of cases and in the present paper it is the exclusive category subjected to examination. At the same time, it should be clearly underscored that the name "wordplay" as used throughout this study contrasts starkly with the term "word game", despite the fact that in common (semi-scholarly) use they are often practically equivalent. A relatively rigid distinction between the two phenomena is drawn in Cazden (1976: 607), who speaks of games as artificially created formations, such as palindromes, pangrams or word squares, and refers to instances of wordplay as impromptu, unique inventions. Along similar lines, Dressler (1985: 99) stresses the difference between "isolated jocular forms" and "established language games". By contrast, Sobkowiak (1991) voices his scepticism over the feasibility of drawing a sharp distinction between the two linguistic devices.

1.2 Participants' social roles

Given that the present paper seeks to pin down the peculiarities of punning routines as shaped by the type of social roles the Shakespearean characters are cast in, the notion of "role" takes on a supreme importance and becomes the core concept here, functioning as a broad organising principle of the empirical study. Accordingly, what follows is designed to afford a bird's eye view of selected role theories and, thus, to provide a solid theoretical underpinning for the analysis.

Of multiple types of roles taken on by participants in an interaction (e.g. deictic, discursive), social roles, remarkably diverse, constitute an extremely broad category and exhibit considerable potential for defining speech peculiarities of individuals.

> From the standpoint of participant structure (...) the [discourse] role of speaker, however crucial is only one of the roles in a speech event (...) Social roles of the participants, and the power rights which define them in relation to each other in situations in which they are cast, will also influence the course of "purpose" and

2. A representative example thereof could be the description of wordplay as "the witty exploitation of the meanings and ambiguities of words" as found in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) or Chiaro's (1992: 5) definition: "the use of language with intent to amuse" (for a critical commentary on such relaxed attitudes towards defining wordplay see Dynel (2009)).

> "goals" in speech. This is not an argument against the notion of agency in speech, but an observation that in interaction such factors can blunt, curtail or distort an agent's effectiveness in a speech context. (Herman 1995: 47)

The notion of "role" has proved to rank high among concepts extensively exploited in sociology and social psychology. Approached from a purely sociological vantage-point is the structural-functionalist role theory (for extensive coverage of the role theory see Fabiszak (1997: 32–48)) strongly represented by, inter alia, Knowles (1982), Davis (1948), Parsons (1951), Banton (1965) and Secord (1982). The core concept employed here is that of (social) "status" which, quite predictably, is essentially non-dynamic, "a collection of rights and duties" conferred/imposed on an individual that can be enacted by virtue of a role alone (Linton 1936: 113). Accordingly, status emerges as a critical factor in deciding precisely which role is to be assumed by (an) interactant or, to put it differently, a role emerges as being pre-determined by status, indeed "the enactment by an individual of the social structure" (Knowles 1982: 7). More importantly, as articulated by Merton (1957: 11), there is no one-to-one correspondence between status and role in that hosts of roles are needed for the status to be fully manifested, given its multi-faceted nature.

A competitive theoretical framework for understanding the notion of role, viz. symbolic interactionism, has been established in social psychology and championed most vigorously by Mead (1934), Turner (1966, 1976, 1978), Kuhn (1964), Goffman (1969), Cicourel (1973) and Heiss (1981). In all these approaches "role" emerges as a highly dynamic concept subject to incessant (re-)construction in social interaction which is, accordingly, viewed as an on-going process of "role-making" (in Turner's (1994) nomenclature). The degree of role-making dynamics is closely contingent on the type of the adopted perspective; in a word, the supporters of the "Chicago School" firmly insist on total fluidity of social roles, whereas the rival "Iowa School" recognises their mutability as being limited.

A particularly notable aspect of the symbolic-interactionist research into social roles pertains to typological attempts, one of the most successful being Banton's (1965: 33–41), where roles are argued to fit into three distinct categories: (i) *basic* (roles ascribed by criteria laid down independently of individual merits, such as sex, age, race, descent), (ii) *general* (role assignment being pre-conditioned by the type of activities an individual undertakes on (moral) behalf of society, in particular, a plethora of occupational roles which involve instilling morals (e.g. priests)) and (iii) *independent* (chiefly occupational roles carrying no morale-bolstering function).

In linguistic studies, the notion of social role has been discussed at length by Lyons (1977: 574), where it stands in marked contrast to the deictic role (decisive, by way of example, in assigning 1st, 2nd, 3rd person pronouns). While an individual may be cast in diverse roles (e.g. son, brother, parent, husband, writer, etc.), a single speech event activates the relevant one(s) only in accordance with the type of an interacting party, to whom the entire discourse is, consequently, tailored. Levy (1979: 193), in turn, comments on the fact that the selection of a role with reference to an interactant is far from being fortuitous, and as such may reveal salient facts about the relationships between participants (cf. Morgan 1975).

2. A note on the empirical data and the method

There is no denying that a pun is one of the linguistic devices which rank high among the most recurrent markers of Shakespeare's idiosyncratic style, and is perhaps as much a response to the 16th-century vogues as it is a reflection of his deep-seated propensity for a playful tinkering with forms and meanings of words. The entire body of data subject to investigation has been culled from two early comedies by Shakespeare, i.e. "Love's Labour's Lost" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", which have been assumed (and indeed have proved) to be a true goldmine of finely contextualised puns. The underlying assumption is based on the fact that in the Elizabethan Renaissance the status of puns was so high as to render them strongly recommended linguistic devices in literary discourse (dramatic and otherwise), popular culture and everyday speech.[3] As Ellis (1973) reports,

> [b]y Shakespeare's day, the national interest in witty language had reached such a pitch that wordplay was almost *de rigueur* in the conversation of English courtly society, in the jest-books, ballads, and broadsides of popular literature, and even, according to Addison, in much more serious language. (1973: 12)

The admittance of candidate forms to the category "puns" has been conditioned by their fulfilment of the requirements laid down in some detail in Section 1.1, which involves essentially a simultaneous *formal* identity/similarity and *semantic* dissimilarity between punning components. Special care has been taken not to confuse the concept of (homonymic) pun with cognate phenomena such as metaphor[4] or allusion.

Clearly, the process of selecting data from historical texts, such as the two comedies under study, is fraught with difficulties arising from appreciable temporal distance separating Shakespeare's plays from their modern recipients, which affects language materially, blurring the true picture of the playwright's punning practices. Luckily, the

3. At the same time, it should be stressed that, on the whole, the history of wordplay in English literature was deeply troubled as favourable responses it received (following from the appreciation of the potential of under-the-surface meanings) constantly alternated with dissenting voices (stressing its devastating impact on the preset order in language).

4. Most importantly, a sharp distinction should be drawn here between *nonce* metaphor (which, existing independently of the language system, is incapable of engendering wordplay and has, therefore, been excluded from the present study) and *institutionalised* metaphor (which is an integral part of the word stock of a given language and, involving duality/multiplicity of meaning, functions as an effective pun-generating mechanism, of interest for the present purposes).

advances made in Shakespeare Studies, together with an impressive research toolkit that modern scholarship is equipped with, make it possible to partly obviate the problems. Particularly helpful in construing the obsolete meanings, plenty of which fail to be signalled, proved to be dictionaries of Shakespeare's language, e.g. Onions (1919), lexicons of his wordplay, principally Ellis (1973) and West (1998), as well as editorial and critical comments.

This empirical study attempts to zoom in on the characteristics of punning discourse of the Shakespearean clowns and pages, as determined by their social roles (public/professional rather than private) which show considerable potential for explaining various contextually strategic moves in punning, such as the choice of interlocutor to pun with (according to his/her social status), the topic to play on, the number of puns to make in individual interactions, but also the level of their sophistication, the inclusion/exclusion of obscenity, etc. Examining the correlation between the static notion of social role on the one hand and the dynamics of context on the other, the perspective adopted in this research allows direct insight into complex processes operating in punning interactions and is strictly socio-pragmatic. Most importantly, despite the fact that Shakespeare's puns are, in a way, artificial formations in the sense of being carefully preplanned by him and tailored to individual characters (depending on numerous contextual factors), they are designed to be interpreted by readership at large as inextricably woven into impromptu dramatic speech. Accordingly, in the present study, they are approached and examined as genuinely spontaneous linguistic tools used in naturally occurring communication.

The peculiarities of punning practiced by clowns are demonstrated on the example of Costard's verbal experiments in *LLL*, whereas the incumbent of the role of a page in the examined corpus of data is the heavily punning Speed from *TGV*. While, for reasons of space, it is only the two characters that come under examination, broader generalisations (principally in Section 4) from the findings on their punning styles are made about the idiosyncratic character of wordplay exercised by clowns and pages as stock characters. This move has been dictated by the following two independent facts. Firstly, the characters of Shakespeare's comedies (chiefly of the earlier ones) constitute, by and large, social types rather than individuals, who share a large number of distinctive characteristics (among which the linguistic ones rank remarkably high) that tend to reappear in stock figures across different plays. Secondly, the present enquiry is a fragment of a more extensive research project (see Adamczyk 2006), where a wider sample of characters cast in the roles of clowns and pages were collected and studied, which can be assumed to yield sufficiently reliable data.

The study is essentially qualitative and aims to highlight the key hallmarks of punning routines followed by Costard and Speed locally and clowns and pages globally, which include the participant framework of pun-based exchanges, the subject matter, intentionality, as well as quality of wordplay and others. With the exception of a handful of examples of isolated single puns (specifically those illustrating the topics to play upon), cited are lengthier interactions studded with puns, where many diverse punning patterns emerge, affording insight into the dynamics of the examined wordplay production. Where possible, this qualitative analysis is aided with numerical calculation.[5]

3. Shakespeare's punning vis-à-vis public social roles

3.1 The Clown: Costard (*LLL*)

Making 72 quibbles, Costard is the most heavily punning character in the two plays under examination in the present paper (the critical factor in establishing the "ownership" of a pun is the responsibility for the intention to make it). In his case, however, as remains to be seen, quantity and quality do not, on the whole, go hand in hand in that wordplay effected by him, humorous though it may be, rarely represents sparkling wit.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, Costard's punning revolves, by and large, around down-to-earth topics related chiefly to human day-to-day functioning. The most conspicuous category here is constituted by taboo topics, where puns, totalling 32 instances, run to 44.44% of the aggregate number of his examples. The entire tabooed area, with human sexuality and physiology clearly standing out, lends itself to further subdivision, as depicted (also quantitatively) in Figure 1.

The following excerpts of exchanges are quoted as a vivid illustration of some of these categories:

(1) a. *King*: Sir, I will pronounce your sentence: you shall fast a week with bran and water.
Costard: I had rather pray a month with *MUTTON* and *PORRIDGE*.
(*LLL*, I.I.284–286)

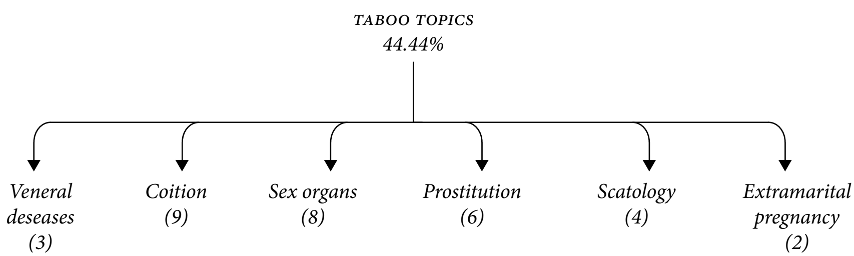

Figure 1. Taboo topics in Costard's punning

5. For weaknesses of the quantitative approach to the Shakespearean wordplay, see Adamczyk (2010: 186–187), where a number of factors potentially misrepresenting the overall picture of pun frequency distribution are suggested.

MUTTON
s1 (*sense 1*) = the flesh of mature sheep
s2 (*sense 2*) = a prostitute, courtesan (*vulg.*)[6]

PORRIDGE/(PARTRIDGE)
s1 = oatmeal
s2 = (collectively for) prostitutes (*vulg.*)

(1) b. *Maria*: Wide o' the bow-hand! i' faith, your hand is out.
Costard: Indeed, a' must *SHOOT* nearer, or he'll ne'er *HIT* the clout.
Boyet: An if my hand be out, then belike your hand is in.
Costard: Then will she get the *UPSHOOT* by cleaving the *PIN*.
Maria: Come, come, you talk greasily; your lips grow foul.
Costard: She's too hard for you at *PRICKS*, sir: challenge her to bowl.
(*LLL*, IV.I.132–137)

SHOOT (s1)/*UPSHOOT* (s2, s3)
s1 = to hit, bring down
s2 = the best shot
s3 = seminal ejaculation

HIT
s1 = to target
s2 = to copulate

PIN
s1 = a peg
s2 = a male sex organ

PRICKS
s1 = targets, butts
s2 = phalli

A careful examination of the participant framework in the entire play leads to the conclusion that puns are absent from Costard's interactions with characters ranking similarly low in the Elizabethan social-class system, such as Dull (constable) or Jaquenetta (country wench), his punning partners being exclusively his social superiors, i.e. Armado (knight), Berowne, Boyet (lords) and the King of Navarre. Of these, the least expected interlocutor is surely the latter, who, despite his kingly magnificence, is neither spared the exposure to smutty content in Costard's puns (see Example 1a *supra*), nor occasionally interrupted with them in mid-flow, as seen below:

6. The adopted method of elucidating the meanings at play is borrowed from Delabastita (1993).

(2) *King*: [*Reads*] Great deputy, the welkin's vicegerent, and *SOLE* dominator of Navarre, my *SOUL'S* earth's God, any body's fostering patron.
Costard: Not a word of Costard yet.
King: [*Reads*] *SO* it is, –
Costard: It may be *SO*; but if he say it is *SO*, he is, in telling true, but *SO*.
King: Peace!
(*LLL*, I.I.216–223)

What seems to be most intriguing about Costard's punning interactants is, nevertheless, a notable absence of women, which upon closer inspection proves barely fortuitous. Given that it is solely male moves that are presented as acts of sheer folly (namely, pledging to give up women for two years (king and lords) and surreptitious wooing of and being with a country girl (knight)), Costard's puns, which reflect folk wisdom, deep in its simplicity, seem to be a much-desired foil for such nonsense. This counterbalancing function of Costard's punning discourse can be noticed in Example 5 *infra*, where the clown, who has the courage to openly admit to his sexual encounter with a country wench, is closely questioned on the circumstances thereof by Berowne, who, though solemnly sworn to forget women, is just about to violate the oath and subsequently deny having done it. Even more powerful evidence of the antithetical character of Costard's wordplay emerges from the following single-pun exchange with Armado, where punning on *GONE* (synonymous with both "departed" and "pregnant") is not only formally but also semantically a vehicle for matching male folly (as seen in Armado's keeping silent over the fact of having fathered a child) against folk wisdom:

(3) *Armado*: This Hector far surmounted Hannibal,
The party is *GONE* –
Costard: Fellow Hector, she is *GONE*; she is two months on her way.
(*LLL*, V.II.660–662)

The clown's wordplay, while apparently capable of making absurdities blatant, does not seem to be a pre-planned effect; rather, it presents itself as a by-product of his primitivism that happens to be insightful commentary on folly. Some tangible argument thereof is hoped to be gathered from the following (excerpt of an) exchange between Costard and Armado, which opens with the clown's account of a minor accident he has just been involved in:

(4) *Costard*: Thou hast no feeling of it, Moth: I will speak that l'envoy.
I, Costard, running out, that was safely within,
fell over the threshold and *BROKE MY SHIN*.[7]
Armado: We will talk no more of this *MATTER*.
Costard: Till there be more *MATTER* in the shin.
Armado: Sirrah Costard, I will *ENFRANCHISE* thee.

7. There seems to be a risqué overtone here, the phrase *broken shin* denoting "sexual disappointment".

Costard: O! marry me to *ONE FRANCES* – I smell some
l'envoy, some goose in this.
Armado: By my sweet soul, I mean setting thee at liberty,
enfreedoming thy person: thou wert immured, re-
strained, captivated, *BOUND*.
Costard: True, true, and now you will be my *PURGATION* and let me *LOOSE*.
Armado: I give thy liberty, set thee from durance (...).

(*LLL*, III.I.112–126)

Contrary to what might be expected of a fairly short interaction overloaded with puns, the above-quoted passage is neither an instance of a standard "ping-pong punning"[8], which requires from both/all participants a genuine willingness to pun and scathing wit, nor of a purposeful victimising of one party by another – none of the interactants is intent on playing with words and at least one of them (Costard) is not bright enough to do so by design. Instead, this stretch of discourse is a full-colour illustration of the clown's falling prey to words capable of double/multiple signification, the potential which he fails to recognise. That the idea of a name standing for more than one concept is alien to Costard (a halfwit, as the play on his name makes crystal-clear) can be seen in his inadvertent puns *MATTER* and *BOUND*, where he seems to show the inability to understand the more abstract meanings of the two words ("case" and "constrained", respectively), picking up the concrete ones only ("purulence" and "constipated", the latter surfacing thanks to the activation of the scatological meanings in two more unwitting puns *PURGATION* and *LOOSE*). Interestingly enough, the linguistic context set for the primary meaning of *BOUND* is capable of demonstrating further that, just as the clown cannot come to terms with the idea of two (or more) objects being subsumed under a collective name (as in wordplay), he does not grasp the concept of a single object being labelled in a variety of ways (as in synonymy), either. A playful juxtaposition of *ENFRANCHISE* ("set free") and *ONE FRANCES* ("one courtesan"), in turn, betrays Costard's expected ignorance of sophisticated vocabulary of foreign provenance, which is, however, on the whole, more readily manifested throughout the play in his numerous malapropisms rather than puns.

Similar conclusions regarding the quality and intentionality of the clown's verbal play can be reached from the following piece of conversation between Costard and Berowne, where the former reports on the circumstances of his intimate encounter with Jaquenetta:

(5) *Costard*: The matter is to me, sir, as concerning Jaquenetta.
The *MANNER* of it is, I was taken with the *MANNER*.
Berowne: In what *MANNER*?

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8. Chiaro (1992: 114) defines this illustrative term as one "used to describe what happens when the participants of a conversation begin punning on every possible item in each other's speech which may contain the slightest ambiguity".

> *Costard*: In *MANNER* and *FORM FOLLOWING*, sir; all those three: I was seen with her in the *MANOR*-house,
> sitting with her upon the *FORM*, and taken *FOLLOWING*
> her into the park; which, put together, is in
> *MANNER* and *FORM FOLLOWING*. Now, sir, for the
> *MANNER*, – it is the *MANNER* of a man to speak to a
> woman; for the *FORM*, – in some *FORM*.
> *Berowne*: For the *FOLLOWING*, sir?
> *Costard*: As it shall *FOLLOW IN* my correction; and God
> defend the right!
>
> (*LLL*, I.I.199–211)

The above exchange reveals that, again, Costard's puns, being the immediate consequence of his puzzlement over duality/multiplicity of signification of words, are unintentional and, as such, far from being specifically directed against his discourse partner. The extent of Costard's manifest obliviousness to the process of generating wordplay, which follows from the inability to discriminate between the meanings of words used, is self-evident in his complete failure to understand the workings of the linguistic processes of homonymy and homophony operating on *MANNER*, *FORM* and *FOLLOWING*. While this may come as little surprise, given Costard's intellectual condition, the clown proves equally incapable of discriminating between the meanings of formally identical words (*MANNER* as "a method" and "a stolen thing found at a thief's place", *FORM* as "a manner" and "a bench", *FOLLOWING* as "ensuing" and "pursuing"), as well as of words alike in sound only (as in *MANNER/MANOR* or *FOLLOWING/FOLLOW IN*).[9] Apparently, for an unlettered rustic such as Costard the form (sound) of a word is primary to its meaning, no matter the consequences for interactive business.

3.2 The Page: Speed (*TGV*)

Pert pages, as represented by Speed in the present study (cf. Kohl (1966: 134) for a note on alternative character grouping), appear to be the most colourful and charming punsters in the entire Shakespearean canon. While quantitatively they can be safely grouped together with the habitually punning clowns examined above, in terms of quality their wordplay, fully conscious and witty, stands in marked contrast to the previously quoted examples of largely forced puns.

Speed's verbal resourcefulness, a firm guarantee of successful punning, is surely best foreshadowed in his very name, which indicates not only his physical but also intellectual swiftness. The most compelling evidence of Speed's acerbic wit, other than

9. Given the oral medium of the interaction and the fact that Costard knows words only as they are spoken, the distinction between homonymy and homophony has been drawn solely for the sake of theoretical accuracy.

his own wordplay, as investigated below, can be derived from frequent meta-commentaries given thereon by his master:

(6) *Proteus*: Beshrew me, but you have a quick wit.

(*TGV*, I.I.118)

In all likelihood, the most typical contexts for punning performed by the page are interactions with his own master, where wordplay is targeted squarely at teasing the latter and, further, ridiculing him as a lover. Conversations of this type are all centred on love, females and related topics and, quite surprisingly, it is the page who, despite his young age, is expected (and proves) to have the expert knowledge of these sensitive matters. All this can be seen in the following exchange between Speed and Valentine beginning just after a number of symptoms of Valentine's falling in love have been detected by his page, which include "walk[ing] alone", "weep[ing] like a young wench", "relish[ing] a love-song like a robin redbreast" (II.I.16–20), and the like:

(7)
1. *Valentine*: Are all these things perceived in me?
2. *Speed*: They are all perceived *WITHOUT* ye.
3. *Valentine*: *WITHOUT* me? They cannot.
4. *Speed*: *WITHOUT* you? Nay, that's certain; for *WITHOUT* you were so simple, none else would. But you are so *WITHOUT* these follies, that these follies are within you and shine through you like the water in an urinal, that not an eye that sees you but is a physician to comment on your *MALADY*.
5. *Valentine*: But tell me, dost thou know *MY LADY* Silvia? (...)
6. *Speed*: Is she not hard-*FAVOURED*, sir?
7. *Valentine*: Not so fair, boy, as well-*FAVOURED*.
8. *Speed*: Sir, I know that well enough.
9. *Valentine*: What dost thou know?
10. *Speed*: That she is not so fair as, of you, well *FAVOURED*.
11. *Valentine*: I mean that her beauty is exquisite, but her *FAVOUR* infinite.
12. *Speed*: That's because the one is painted and the other out of all *COUNT*.
13. *Valentine*: How painted? And how out of *COUNT*?
14. *Speed*: Marry, sir, so painted to make her fair that no man *COUNTS* of her beauty. (...)
15. *Valentine*: I have loved her ever since I saw her, and still I *SEE* her beautiful.
16. *Speed*: If you love her, you cannot *SEE* her.
17. *Valentine*: Why?
18. *Speed*: Because Love is blind. (...)
19. *Valentine*: In conclusion, I *STAND* affected to her.
20. *Speed*: I would you were set, so your affection would cease.

(*TGV*, II.I.28–36, 42–53, 58–62, 74–75)

[Puns brought into play in this exchange include: *WITHOUT* (s1 = outside, s2 = unaccompanied by, s3 = unless), *MALADY/MY LADY* (s1 = ailment, s2 = my woman), *FAVOURED* (s1 = as in *well-favoured* "gracious, charming", s2 = liked, fancied), *FAVOUR* (s1 = kindness, good-will, s2 = face, countenance), *COUNT/COUNTS* (s1 = as in *out of all count* "incalculable, infinite", s2 = rates highly, values), *SEE* (s1 = regard in a specified way, s2 = catch sight of), *STAND* (s1 = be in a specific state; stay, remain, s2 = (of a male sex organ) assume erected position).]

While it comes as little surprise that in a superior-inferior type of relationship between discourse participants there is considerable room for interactive dominance of one over another, the fact that the role of a leading party is taken by a socially low-ranking page may be initially astonishing. Yet, as a closer inspection of the above piece of discourse allows one to conclude, the proper control over the entire conversation is secured by way of strategic employment and distribution of puns alone, rather than of any standard non-collaborative discourse procedures of authoritative interactants, such as interrupting, monopolising the floor, grabbing turns, showing no joint orientation to the topic(s), etc. (see Herman 1992), all surely more assertive and rude than puns (made after all in a humorous vein) and, accordingly, inappropriate in a page's exchange with his master. As mentioned previously, Speed's pressing need to dominate the conversation, satisfied through vigorous punning, is ultimately intended to mock his master as a lover, who is constantly teased as he provides an idealistic description of love (both feeling and Silvia). Quite expectedly, not a single pun is generated by Valentine, who, instead, unwittingly provides the necessary input to Speed's play, directly (in the form of primary meanings) or otherwise. Right from the outset, his role in the interaction is sharply reduced to trying to work his way through the labyrinth of constantly proliferating meanings in an attempt to keep the conversation going and make it a successful communicative event. This is particularly noticeable in sequences functioning as either covert/overt requests for clarification (turns 3, 13 and 17) or self-imposed explanations of meanings intentionally twisted by Speed (turn 11). By way of contrast, Speed, the initiator of all puns in the dialogue, is the attacking party, not hesitating to wittingly misapply his master's words when opportunity offers. What seems to augment the assaultive character of his puns, and point to his impudence, is the semantic content of some of them, as is the case in *FAVOUR* – a biting commentary on Silvia's beauty, and a dirty play on *STAND*.

In this exchange, Speed's puns are used discursively as a powerful instrument for asserting interactive dominance and serve a vital dramatic function of unveiling the naivety and pretentiousness of his master in matters of love. While a similar function has already been argued to be successfully fulfilled by Costard's wordplay (*q.v.* Section 3.1), it needs to be re-emphasised that his puns were predominantly fully unintended. As can be expected, inadvertent puns are anything but clever stratagems intended for a specific discursive purpose. It is only intentional play, such as that effected by Speed throughout the above-quoted exchange, that can be consciously used as a powerful interactive instrument.

A lengthy stretch of conversation quoted below is a heavily punning dialogue between Speed (page) and Proteus (gentleman) who, in terms of social distance, stand in a superior-inferior relationship to each other, similar to that in Example 7 above. Unlike it, however, Proteus is not cast in the role of a master to Speed, which seems to loosen the bond of one-directional dependency between them and, thus, to have a direct bearing on the degree of discreteness between the two interactions.

(8)
1. *Speed*: Sir Proteus, '*SAVE YOU*! *SAW YOU* my master?
2. *Proteus*: But now he parted hence to embark for Milan.
3. *Speed*: Twenty to one then, he is *SHIPPED* already,
   And I have played the *SHEEP* in losing him.
4. *Proteus*: Indeed, a *SHEEP* doth very often stray,
   And if the shepherd be awhile away.
5. *Speed*: You conclude that my master is a shepherd then and I a sheep?
6. *Proteus*: I do.
7. *Speed*: Why then my *HORNS* are his *HORNS*, *WHETHER* I wake or sleep.
8. *Proteus*: A silly answer and fitting well a *SHEEP*. (...)
   The sheep for fodder follow the shepherd, the shepherd
   for food follows not the sheep; thou for wages followest thy
   master, thy master for wages follows not thee: therefore thou art a *SHEEP*.
9. *Speed*: Such another proof will make me cry '*BAA*'.
10. *Proteus*: But dost thou hear? Gav'st thou my letter to Julia?
11. *Speed*: *AY*, sir; *I*, a *LOST MUTTON*, gave your letter to her, a *LACED MUTTON*, and she, a *LACED MUTTON*, gave me, a *LOST MUTTON*, nothing for my labour.
12. *Proteus*: Here's too small a pasture for such store of muttons.
13. *Speed*: If the ground be overcharged, you were best *STICK* her.
14. *Proteus*: Nay, in that you are *ASTRAY*; 'twere best *POUND* you.
15. *Speed*: Nay, sir, less than a *POUND* shall serve me for carrying your letter.
16. *Proteus*: You mistake; I mean the *POUND*, a *PINFOLD*.
17. *Speed*: From a *POUND* to a *PIN*? *FOLD* it over and over, 'tis threefold too little for carrying a letter to your lover.
18. *Proteus*: But what said she?
19. *Speed*: [*Nods*] *AY*.
20. *Proteus*: *NOD-AY*? Why, that's '*NODDY*'.
21. *Speed*: You mistook, sir. I say she did *NOD*; and you ask me if she did *NOD*; and *I* say '*AY*'.
22. *Proteus*: And that set together is '*NODDY*'.
23. *Speed*: Now you have taken the pains to set it together, take it for your pains.
24. *Proteus*: No, no, you shall have it for *BEARING* the letter.
25. *Speed*: Well, I perceive I must be fain to *BEAR* with you.

26. *Proteus*: Why, sir, how do you *BEAR* with me?
27. *Speed*: Marry, sir, the *LETTER* very orderly, having *NOTHING* but the word '*NODDY*' for my pains.

(*TGV*, I.I.70–80, 88–117)

[A humorous interplay of meanings in this interaction is the following: *SAVE YOU/SAW YOU* (s1 = salutation, s2 = did you see), *SHIPPED/SHEEP* (s1 = transported on a ship, s2 = a person too easily influenced or led), *SHEEP* (s1 = a domesticated mammal, s2 = s2 above), *HORNS* (s1 = hard outgrowth on the heads of sheep, s2 = emblems of cuckoldry), *WHETHER/WETHER* (s1 = a conjunction, s2 = a castrated ram), *BAA/(BAH)* (s1 = bleat, s2 = an exclamation of contempt or disagreement), *AY/I* (s1 = a form of expressing assent, s2 = a personal pronoun), *LOST MUTTON/LACED MUTTON* (s1 = a strayed sheep, s2 = a strumpet, harlot (*lit*. having the waist compressed with a laced corset)), *STICK* (s1 = stab or pierce, s2 = have sexual intercourse with sb), *ASTRAY/(A STRAY)* (s1 = into error, wrongdoing, s2 = indefinite article + lost), *POUND* (s1 = enclose in a pound (public enclosure for stray cattle), s2 = beat, pummel, s3 = a monetary unit), *PINFOLD/PIN + FOLD* (s1 = a pound for stray cattle, s2 = something trivial + multiply), *NOD-AY/NODDY* (s1 = ("bow"-"yes") affirmation of the act of bowing, s2 = a simpleton, halfwit), *BEARING/BEAR* (s1 = carrying, s2 = tolerate), *LETTER* (s1 = an alphabetical character, s2 = an epistle), *NOTHING/NODDY* (s1 = no single thing, s2 = as above).]

When matched against the examples quoted heretofore, the exchange under consideration appears to be the first one in which the page's discourse partner can be labelled his "fellow punster", even though he stands no chance of ever outwitting the rival. Of all 19 puns scattered throughout the entire passage the responsibility for as many as 14 instances lies with Speed.[10] As can be noticed, it is hardly the gentleman's intention to engage in a punning combat with the page and surely not his ambition to outdo the rival, which is presumably most conspicuous in turn 10, where he clearly signals his readiness to disengage himself from the abusive punning. At the same time, Proteus does not seem to be a hapless and passive victim of his interlocutor's sustained assault, which is presaged already in his second turn in the play on *SHEEP*, in point of fact the first interactional pun in the dialogue (repeated next in turn 8 twice), and later strongly supported in *NOD-AY/NODDY*, resulting probably from Proteus's growing irritation at Speed's recurrent attacks.[11] As far as Speed's playing on words is concerned, it is little surprising that nearly each of his turns contains at least a single pun and that patterns employed by him in wordplay are often fairly elaborate, yielding stretches of tightly interlaced puns. Neither is it a novelty that verbal experiments designed by

10. What appears to be quantitatively troublesome is punning on the word *sheep* (as "an animal" and "a fool") uttered altogether 11 times, yet certainly not always in a playful vein. It is only three intuitively obvious instances of a play on this word (in turn 4 and twice in 8) that have been taken into account in calculations.

11. The latter example is most intriguing formally, as it is not purely verbal in that part of Speed's input is provided by gestural means (i.e. nodding).

Speed are largely calculated to insult his addressee and that the potentials of the semantic category of "sheep" and "pasturing" are used to this end. What is striking about Speed's wordplay in the exchange under consideration is surely the fact that he presents himself as an intensely vulgar punster, as evident in his play *LOST MUTTON/LACED MUTTON* as well as in most forthright allusion to sexual intercourse in *STICK*.

As mentioned earlier, Proteus is the first and, as the examination of all Speed's interlocutors reveals, the only discourse partner capable of responding to a highly provocative wordplay of the page in a punning mode. Accordingly, the conversation (or at least its stretches, given Speed's overall quantitative predominance in puns) provides a unique example of a successful "ping-pong punning". Apparently, this type of punning is possible only in pages' interactions with gentlemen other than their masters because such participant configuration removes the necessity of restraining verbal indulgence in the case of pages and legitimises stooping to deliberate quibbling with social inferiors in the case of gentlemen. Needless to say, wordplay matches, much more than solo punning, afford a golden opportunity to demonstrate interactants' verbal virtuosity and sharp wit.

Even though on the surface wordplay proves a communicative hindrance (as made perfectly plain by Proteus and Speed in turns 16 and 21 respectively, both being clarifications of the meanings distorted through verbal play) seemingly born out of uncooperativeness of participants, some collaborative effort is surely necessary for such a lengthy interaction to be at least a moderate communicative success in the end.[12]

4. Concluding remarks

The analysis above points to and exemplifies the major idiosyncrasies of Costard's and Speed's play on words, as representative of punning styles adopted by the Shakespearean clowns and pages.

For the sake of clarity, the central claims about the peculiarities of punning practiced by clowns are recapitulated below:

a. Compared to other dramatis personae, clowns appear to be habitual punsters.
b. The subject matter of their puns is predominantly centred on down-to-earth topics (of which a large area may be tabooed).
c. Punning is, for the most part, unintended, which is why clowns in wordplay are rarely uncooperative by design.

12. With reference to participant behaviour of this type Raskin (1985: 103) speaks of adhering to a specific "cooperative principle for the non-*bona-fide*-communication mode", such as punning, joke-telling, lying, play-acting, etc. (however, for how this view has been convincingly challenged cf. Dynel (2009), where serious deficiencies in Raskin's juxtaposition of his model to Grice's (1975) are amply demonstrated).

d. Clowns do not engage in spectacular "ping-pong punning", which, requiring skilful juggling of meanings, is beyond their capabilities.
e. Puns are not calculated to victimise their interlocutors (even though, as the present data indicate, the clowns have a disproportionately bigger share in punning than their discourse partners); instead, they are the effect of the rustics being victimised by language (and more specifically, by a blatant unfamiliarity with linguistic phenomena which rest on other than one-to-one type of correspondence between meaning and form, such as homonymy or synonymy).
f. Wordplay constructed by Costard is tangible proof that for the unlettered, the meaning of a word is, all things considered, secondary to its form.
g. Clowns' punning serves as a perfect foil for other characters' foolish affectation.

By way of contrast, the key indicators of the idiosyncratic character of punning practiced by pages, as highlighted and exemplified in the above discussion, can be listed as follows:

a. Similarly to clowns, pages come into the category of vigorously punning characters.
b. Formally, puns may fall into intricate patterns, being multiply piled up; in terms of their semantic composition, the only identifiable recurrent meaning in the examined corpus is related to the category of "pasturing" and "sheep".
c. Unlike clowns', pages' wordplay appears to be a fully conscious, intentional form of entertainment; in the analysed punning exchanges, they never end up victimised by independent linguistic processes and rarely (in single instances only) by their discourse partners.
d. As a conscious practice, punning is capable of fulfilling at least two key functions: discursive, as a powerful discourse management strategy, and dramatic, as a valuable instrument for mocking naivety and immaturity of male lovers.
e. Wordplay produced by pages appears to be carefully tailored to the type of a discourse partner.
f. Lengthy punning interactions, principally the rare ones which assume the form of spectacular "ping-pong punning", are designed to demonstrate pages' acute intelligence and virtuosity in repartees, present to the same extent in no other category of characters.
g. A closer inspection of the pages' interlocutors points to the conclusion that they are, by and large, their social superiors.
h. Of all categories of interactants none seems to be capable of outpunning a page and only a gentleman other than his master successfully manages to trade wits with him.

Even a fleeting glance at the above inventories suffices to notice that in punning, viewed from a socio-pragmatic vantage point, the Shakespearean clowns and pages are poles apart, the only area of common ground being a massive amount of wordplay effected by them. Again, while pages' verbal experiments, the spin-offs of their intellectual brilliance, are premeditated and scintillating, those of clowns, naïve and ignorant rustics, are insipid and totally fortuitous, yet designed by Shakespeare to counterbalance the folly of other figures.

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Dimensions of incongruity in register humour

Chris Venour, Graeme Ritchie and Chris Mellish

Register-based humour consists of texts in which most of the language is in a particular style or tone, except for one or two words which are radically different in tone (or register) from the rest. It is not initially clear how to define register formally in terms of constructs such as literariness, archaism, formality, etc. We have adopted a perspective in which words are located in a multi-dimensional space, and incongruity between words should correspond to a relatively large distance between those words, within this space. In order to construct this space in a way which shows up differences relevant to the question of register, we have based each dimension on a word's frequency of occurrence in a particular corpus of texts. We have put together a number of corpora between which there are likely to be differences of tone/register, and for each word in a text we compute its frequency within every corpus. These numbers are then used to plot the word's position in our abstract space. The most successful techniques, for building the space and for computing outliers, were tested on the task of distinguishing humorous texts from plain newspaper sentences, where they performed quite well.

1. Incongruity of register

It is widely proposed within humour research that *incongruity* is at the heart of most, perhaps all, humour. Despite this, there is as yet no clear definition of what constitutes incongruity, or at least what kind of incongruity leads to humour. In the field of computational humour, it has become routine to concentrate on very restricted phenomena, allowing detailed, precise, limited models to be developed. In the research reported here, we have chosen to explore a very narrow type of incongruity-based humour, so as to apply computational techniques in a manageable way. Our chosen form is sometimes known as *register-based humour* (Attardo 1994). The notion of *register* (or *style*, or *tone*) is not a precisely defined concept, but seems to be related to other factors such as formality, literariness, archaism, etc. As Attardo comments, register has mainly been discussed in stylistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Hence a formalisation of register could have relevance to aspects of pragmatics beyond the narrow area of humour.

Humour can arise from a text in which there is a marked conflict between the register of the words or phrases within it. As Attardo (1994) and Partington (2008) discuss, register-based humour occurs in a variety of types of text, particularly comic fiction and entertainment. Usually the text as a whole will mostly have one dominant register, but some small parts of the text, sometimes just one word, will be of a noticeably different register, thereby leading to a potentially humorous clash. That is, a simple form of incongruity is created. For brevity, we shall refer to this type of joke as a *lexical joke*. (Since it is tied to specific words, it can also be regarded as a type of *wordplay)*.

An example can be found in the script for the comedy film "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (1975, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones), where a medieval figure warns some knights of an impending danger:

(1) Follow. But! Follow only if ye be men of valour, for the entrance to this cave is guarded by a creature so foul, so cruel that no man yet has fought with it and lived! Bones of full fifty men lie strewn about its lair. So, brave knights, if you do doubt your courage or your strength, come no further, for death awaits you all with nasty, big, pointy teeth. (www.textfiles.com/media/SCRIPTS/grail, Dec 2008)

In this extract, the overall tone of the passage is rhetorical, grandiloquent, and archaic. The final phrase "nasty, big, pointy teeth" is, by contrast, informal, not archaic, and slightly childish. This clash of styles contributes to a humorous effect.

The tone or register of a text is determined by various aspects, but our research focusses on the contribution of *lexical choice*. (We return to the other aspects briefly in Section 9 below.) That is, we are investigating the effect that individual words have, in particular when a small number of the words in a text are, intuitively, of different registers from that of the majority of the vocabulary within the text.

Partington (2008, 2006) discusses examples of register-based humour, although he considers a wider range of phenomena than we do here. For example, he includes clashes between the status of the event or situation described and the language used for it, or between the words actually used and those phrases which could more naturally have been used. However, some of the examples he quotes are exactly the sort we are considering (i.e. clashes between the tones of different words within the text). For example, Partington (2008: 193) offers this extract from a P.G. Wodehouse novel, in which a very colloquial and informal question receives a pedantic and literate reply:

(2) You mean you slipped him a Mickey Finn?
I believe that is what they are termed in the argot, madam.

The work reported here is still in progress, so this is an interim report. Our longer term aim is to develop a model which is capable of *generating* jokes of this type, but our plans for that stage are still very preliminary. However, that longer term goal informs some of the decisions that we have made in the existing work. In the rest of this chapter, we shall briefly set the scene (Sections 2 and 3) before outlining (Section 4) our computational model of the stylistic tone of a word; this formalisation is not based on humour, and could be applied to language more widely. We also indicate the way in which this may show up an incongruity of register within the text. Then we will describe (Sections 5, 6) the way that we refined the details of the model. The method has been implemented and tested on a collection of suitable joke texts, by having it detect the most incongruous word in a text and also by using it to distinguish these texts from non-humorous texts (Section 7). We have also tested some ways in which the mechanisms might be made more accurate (Section 8). Finally, we highlight some limitations and possible extensions of this approach (Section 9).

2. Incongruity as difference along dimensions

Despite the prevalence of "incongruity" as an explanation of humour, there are hardly any precise formal models of what is meant by incongruity. Perhaps the most detailed proposal is in the work of Nerhardt (1970, 1976, 1977). Nerhardt carried out a study in which participants were asked to hold, while blindfolded, a sequence of items of varying weights. By systematically adjusting the sequences of weights given to a participant, the experimenter established expectations, for example that each weight would be slightly heavier than the preceding one. When a weight violated that expectation, the participant would typically express amusement in some way. Nerhardt suggests that the participants are implicitly locating the weights along dimensions, and that more generally: "(t)he greater the divergence of a stimulus from expectation in one or many dimensions, the funnier the stimulus" (1976: 59). Since the weights could most naturally be classified using one dimension, this is something of an over-generalisation, but Nerhardt's proposal is interesting from our point of view. As indicated in Section 1 above, we have the intuition that differences in register/tone are a result of differences in a number of aspects of the language. This naturally suggests a multi-dimensional model, with incongruity showing up as differences along these dimensions, much as Nerhardt proposes. There are a number of mathematical techniques for defining notions such as "distance" or "cluster" within a multi-dimensional space. Hence, once words are modelled spatially in this way, we can explore possible ways of defining the configurations that constitute incongruity; that is, words which are far away in "register-space" from the majority of the words in the text. This leads to the questions: how can we define these dimensions more precisely, and then position individual words within this space?

3. Existing lexical resources

Our plan is to devise a computational method for estimating the register of each word in a text (except for "function" or "stop-words" such as "the" or "of"), then to use these ratings to detect differences in the tone of words. If this difference were to exceed some empirically determined benchmark, our program could conjecture that the text is humorous. One obstacle to this route is that there is no ready way to determine the stylistic properties of a given word in isolation.

We considered using a number of machine readable resources, such as the American Language Standardized Dictionary[1], the Moby Thesaurus[2] or an electronic version of Roget's 1911 thesaurus[3], but found that they do not provide information about the kind of tone we are interested in. In fact these lexicons do not even provide partially useful information such as whether a word is archaic or not.

Other resources such as WordNet (Fellbaum 1998), the MRC psycholinguistic database (Coltheart 1981) and the lexicon created for the STANDUP project (Manurung et al. 2008) provide familiarity ratings. This might be potentially useful information because familiarity may have something to do with our vague cluster of concepts (i.e. formality, archaism, literariness, etc). Even so, familiarity is only one of a number of features we might be interested in.

The General Inquirer lexicon[4] contains 11,788 words which are tagged in terms of 182 categories. The lexicon indicates, for example, whether a word is positive, negative, strong or weak, and whether a word has certain overtones such as connotations of virtue, vice or pain for example. Unfortunately none of the GIL categories provides information about how a word scores in terms of the tone we feel is at play in lexical jokes. Also, the GIL only provides, for the most part, 2 point scales (e.g. a word either has an ethical overtone or not). We are interested, however, in knowing not only whether words have a certain kind of tone but to what degree they express this tone. We reluctantly concluded that existing lexical resources contain little of the kind of information we require.

4. A corpus-based model of register

In our search for a way to define the register of a word in a computationally useful way, we had definite intuitions about the aspects of language that would be relevant (Section 1 above). However, we did not yet have precise definitions of the dimensions at play in lexical jokes, nor did we know which of them are independent of each other, nor exactly what combination of these dimensions is involved in humorous incongruity. We therefore turned to a more broadly empirical approach, based on the observation that different genres of text manifest different registers, even within the same time

1. http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs/project/ai-repository/ai/areas/nlp/corpora/dicts/sigurd/0.html

2. http://icon.shef.ac.uk/Moby/

3. http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

4. http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/˜inquirer/

period. For example, an online blog will be written in a different style from a scientific paper. When there are also differences in era (e.g. 17th century versus 21st century), stylistic contrasts will be even greater. This means that texts which typify particular genres will manifest different styles, and hence act as ostensive definitions of these variations. For this reason, we adopted the following central hypothesis: The pattern of occurrence of a word across a suitably varied collection of corpora provides an indication of its stylistic tone or register. That is, the frequency counts of a word in the various corpora could act as a kind of "tonal fingerprint" of that word. This is illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, where the frequency counts for the words "personage" (formal, old-fashioned) and "operator" (scientific, modern) are plotted, across the same 12 corpora (details of these corpora are given in Section 5.1). There are markedly different profiles for these two words.

We therefore gathered a collection of text corpora, aiming for a range of variation in all the respects that we expected to be pertinent to register, such as the time period when the text was written and the genre to which the text belongs. This is based on two important assumptions:

i. The selected corpora actually display differing degrees of formality, archaism, etc.; that is, the dimensions which we think are central to the workings of lexical jokes.
ii. Word choice is a significant determiner of tone in a text. Syntax and metaphor, for example, may also play a very important role, but these are not considered here. This will be truer for some corpora than for others however. For example, Shakespeare's writing has many archaic words in it (e.g. "doth", "beseech", "thou"), but in Jane Austen's novels, formality may be expressed not as much through individual words but through syntax, metaphor, etc. (See Section 9).

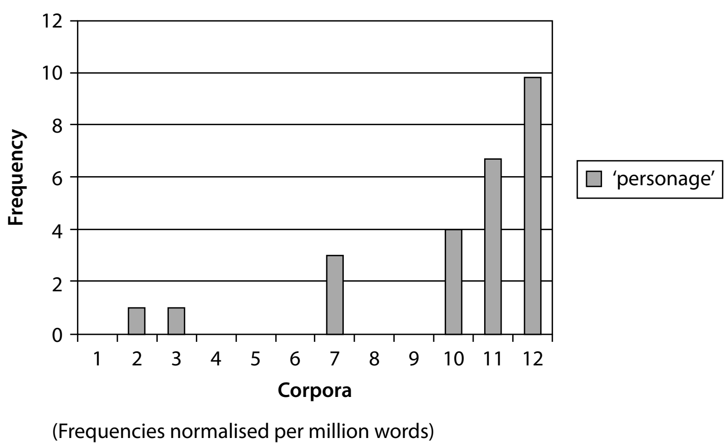

Figure 1. Frequency pattern for *personage*

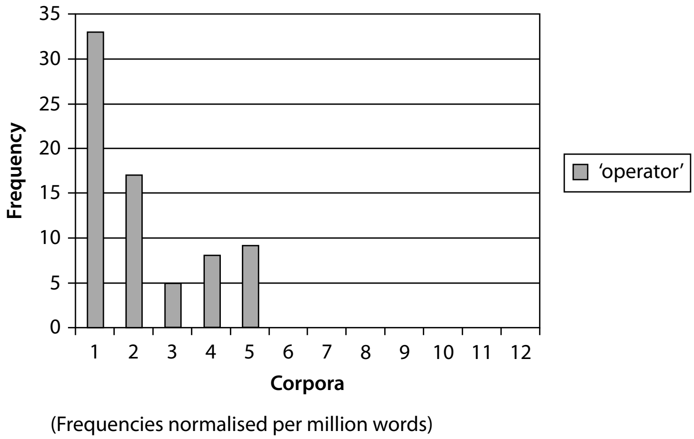

Figure 2. Frequency pattern for *operator*

If we can allocate each word in a text to a "profile" which indicates how that word shows up across the various corpora, we can compare these profiles throughout the text. Incongruity of register should show up as patterns of markedly different corpus-derived profiles.

Formally, we treat each corpus in our set as corresponding to a dimension in a multi-dimensional space; in the examples in Figures 1 and 2, it would be a 12-dimensional space. More precisely, our proposed model is as follows:

i. select corpora which we judge to exhibit different styles or registers
ii. compute profiles of words in terms of their frequencies within the corpora
iii. use the corpora as dimensions, and the frequencies as values, to form a multidimensional space
iv. plot words from texts into the space
v. try various outlier detection methods to see which one displays the outlier and clustering patterns we anticipate seeing.

5. Stage 1: Refining the mechanisms

The approach we adopted led naturally to the need to consider further design decisions:

i. what corpora should be used?
ii. how should the coordinates of a word, within the multi-dimensional space, be computed from the corpora?
iii. how should discrepancies of register be computed within this space?
iv. what method of testing is appropriate?

5.1 The initial corpus set

Our choice of corpora was determined by what was available, tempered by our own intuitions about what would constitute the kind of variety we were interested in. The first exploratory corpus set we adopted is shown in Table 1. As will be explained, we refined this set in the light of later testing. The sources used were:

OTA: The Oxford Text Archive. http://ota.ahds.ac.uk/
PG: Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page
OMCS: OpenMind Common Sense statements. http://commons.media.mit.edu, http://openmind.media.mit.edu/.
NLTK: The Natural Language Toolkit. http://www.nltk.org/
CUVP: The CUVPlus dictionary provides BNC frequency counts directly.

5.2 Computing coordinates

For each of our sample texts, we assigned tuples of numerical values to individual words in the following way. Stop-words were first removed, and for each word in the text, the frequencies within the 12 corpora were normalised per million words. We then tried three different methods of further processing to convert these into coordinate tuples:

No further balancing: The basic normalised frequencies of words were used.

TF-IDF adjustment: This technique is well-established in information retrieval (Salton and Buckley 1988). To weight words according to their informativeness, we replace the

Table 1. Corpus set A

Corpus	No. of words	Source
Virgil's *The Aeneid*	108,677	OTA
Jane Austen's novels	745,926	OTA
King James bible	852,313	PG
Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies	996,280	OTA
Grimm's fairy tales	281,451	PG
Poems of Samuel Coleridge	101,034	OTA
Two novels by Henry Fielding	148,337	OTA
Common sense statements	2,215,652	OMCS
Reuters new articles	1,614,077	NLTK
New Scientist articles	366,393	NLTK
Movie reviews	1,298,728	NLTK
Written section, British National Corpus.	80 million	CUVP

normalised frequency by multiplying it by the log of the following ratio: (number of corpora in the set)/(how many corpora the word appears in). This gives a higher weight to words that appear in relatively few corpora, and so are probably more distinctive in some way.

Log entropy adjustment: This calculation gives more weight to the corpora in which the frequency of different words (within the text under scrutiny) varies more, and less weight to corpora showing uniform word-frequencies. Full details can be found in Turney (2006).

5.3 Distance metrics

In order to find a text's most outlying word in the frequency-space, a list was computed of the words in the text, ordered according to how far the word lay from the other words in that text. The word at the top of the list had the greatest distance from the other words and was therefore considered the one most likely to be incongruous. We explored three different distance metrics to work out the distance D of a given point x from the other words:

Euclidean distance: This distance metric, commonly used in information retrieval (Li and King, 1999), computes the distance δ between points $p = (p_1, p_2, \ldots p_n)$ and $q = (q_1, q_2, \ldots q_n)$ as:

$$\delta = \sqrt[2]{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(p_i - q_i)^2}$$

A word's Euclidean distance from each of the other words in a text joke was calculated and the arithmetic mean of these values gave the outlier distance, *D.*

Mahalanobis distance: According to Li and King (1999), the "two most commonly used distance measures in IR" are the Euclidean distance (above) and the Mahalanobis measure, which computes how far a point (i.e. a word) is from the rest of the points in the space; it does this directly, without further averaging or combining. It is defined as:

$$D = \sqrt[2]{\sum_{r=1}^{p}\ \sum_{s=1}^{p}(x_r - \mu_r)^2 v^{rs}(x_s - \mu_s)}$$

where $x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p)$ is the point under consideration, μ is the population mean vector, V is the population covariance matrix and v^{rs} is the element in the rth row and sth column of the inverse of V.

Cosine distance: This method regards the word-positions as vectors *p* and *q* and computes the cosine of the angle θ between them:

$$\delta = \cos ine(\theta) = \frac{p \cdot q}{||p||.||q||}$$

Cosine distance is commonly used in vector space modelling and information retrieval (Salton and McGill 1986). Since distances are represented as cosines, values near 1.0 indicate great proximity and values near 0.0 indicate divergence. As with the Euclidean distance, the distance to all other points (words) was averaged to give *D*.

5.4 Testing the settings

Twenty lexical jokes were used to try out the model and choose between the various design options listed above. Some examples are:

(3) Cancel my appointments for this afternoon miss I am *rapping* with my son.
(4) Gentlemen nothing stands in the way of a final accord except that management wants profit maximisation and the union wants more *moola*.
(5) Last chance to see the beautiful reflections in Mirror Lake before *eutrophication* sets in.

All of these jokes contained exactly one word, shown in italics in the above examples, which we judged to be incongruous with the tone of the other words in the text. Most of the items (15/20) are captions from cartoons appearing in "The New Yorker" magazine, one is taken from a scene in "Monty Python and The Holy Grail", and three of the twenty jokes are from different episodes of "The Simpsons" television show. Thus all the texts – except possibly one whose exact provenance is difficult to determine – are snippets of dialogue that were accompanied by images in their original contexts. Although the visual components enhance the humour of the texts, we believe the lexical incongruity is central to the humorous effect.

In the tests, stop-words were filtered from the joke, frequencies of words were computed in the various corpora, normalised per million words, and treated as coordinates of a word in one of the three ways listed in Section 5.2, with ranked lists being created in the three ways listed in Section 5.3; thus there were 9 possible combinations of methods. If position in the space is in fact an estimate of tone, the word furthest away from the others (i.e. first in the ranked list) should match our pre-labelled incongruous word. If that was the case, a score of 2 was awarded. If the labelled word appeared second in the ranked list, a score of 1 was awarded. Any results other than that received a score of 0. For our set of twenty texts, the maximum possible total score is therefore 40. The baseline for comparison corresponds to a random ordering of the words of a text, the exact score for which depends on the number of words in the text. This computation was performed for each text and the sum of baseline scores for the test set of 20 lexical jokes was 9.7.

Table 2 shows the outcomes of testing on the development examples using corpus set A (Table 1). Of the three distance metrics, the simple Euclidean distance produced

Table 2. Scores out of 40 from first set of testing

	Euclidean	Mahalanobis	Cosine
No adjustment	2	11	24
tf-idf	3	4/36[5]	14
log-entropy	13	23	32

the poorest results, and the cosine metric the best. Of the three ways of weighting the frequencies, log entropy was the most successful. The combination of these two (log entropy weighting and cosine distance) was the most effective overall.

6. Experimenting with different corpora

On the basis of the tests summarised in Section 5.4, we adopted log entropy pre-processing and the cosine distance metric as the main framework, and went on to experiment with the set of corpora used to compute frequency counts. In experiment #1 corpus set B was built simply by adding four more corpora to corpus set A: works by the authors Bulfinch, Homer, Keats and Milton (which are relatively archaic and formal sounding). This increased the overall size by about 600,000 words but resulted in the score dropping from 32 to 31 out of a maximum of 40.

In experiment #2 corpus set C was built by adding another four corpora to corpus B: Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe", a collection of academic science essays written by British university students,[6] a corpus of informal blogs, and a corpus of documents about physics.[7] As we see from Table 3, adding this data (about 1.5 million words) improved the score from 31 to 35.

In corpus set C, archaic and formal sounding literature seemed to be overrepresented, and so in experiment #3 a new corpus set D was created by combining Virgil's *Aeneid* with works by Homer into a single corpus, as they are very similar in tone.

Table 3. Results from testing with revised corpus sets

Corpus set	Score (out of 40)
B	31
C	35
D	37

5. Octave, the software we are using to compute the Mahalanobis distance, was, for reasons unknown, unable to compute 2 of the test cases. Thus the score is out of 36.

6. The latter two corpora are from OTA.

7. The latter two corpora were created using SketchEngine, http://www.sketchengine.co.uk/

Shakespeare and Coleridge's works were also merged for the same reason, as were the works by Bulfinch and Scott. In this way, fewer columns of the "tonal fingerprint" consisted of corpora which are similar in tone. Also, works by Jane Austen and by John Keats were removed because they seemed to be relatively less extreme exemplars of formality than the others. These changes resulted in a score of 37 out of 40.

The decisions made in constructing corpus set D, indeed most of the decisions about which corpora to use as foils for estimating tone, are admittedly subjective and intuitive. This seems unavoidable, however, as we are trying to quantify obscure concepts in such an indirect manner. Individual words in our model can be compared to atoms which crystallographers use to bombard crystals in order to determine the shape of those crystals. In our case however, we are "bouncing" words off corpora, our targets, not to determine characteristics of the corpora, but characteristics of the words themselves. To differentiate between words in ways we care about requires experimenting with different targets. To the degree that our assumption that frequency counts in various corpora can be an estimate of a word's tone, the kind of experimentation and guesswork involved in constructing our semantic space seems valid.

Thus corpus set D, with log entropy pre-processing and cosine distance, produced excellent results: 92.5% (37/40) success on the development set, according to our scoring, in identifying the incongruous word in the set of lexical jokes (Table 3).

7. Detecting jokes

So far, we have a method which seems to be successful in selecting which is the incongruous word within a lexical joke. The next step is to determine whether the space can be used to detect lexical jokes within a collection of texts; that is, whether it accurately decides whether a given text is or is not a joke of this type (cf. Mihalcea and Strapparava 2006). For this, we need to convert the existing mechanism into a decision procedure, yielding yes/no answers when given a text.

The method we have adopted is as follows. The technique outlined above is used to find the most outlying word in a text, within the multi-dimensional stylistic space. Then the distance, within that space, of the outlying word from all the other words is calculated. If the distance exceeds a pre-set threshold, the text is classed as a lexical joke. This imposes the criterion that lexical jokes must have one word which is noticeably more of an outlier than any of the other words. We tried the test procedure (below) with a variety of thresholds, to determine which would give the best results; that is, we are still adjusting our mechanism to tune its performance.

The testing was set up as a classification task, in which the program had to give a "joke/not-joke" verdict on each text in a given set. The test set of texts was made up of the initial development set of 20 lexical jokes, together with a sample of 20 non-lexical-joke texts. The latter were formed by taking sentences randomly from the June 5 2009 issue of the "Globe and Mail", a Canadian national newspaper, ensuring that none contained proper names, and truncating the texts after the 17th word so that the lengths would be comparable to the joke texts, whose average number of words is 16.1. Two typical examples were:

(6) it is a shining example of the intersection of cultures that the president stressed in his historic
(7) there is definitely dancing at the prom, an annual rite for muslim teens but no boys, no

The test procedure used the cosine method with log entropy pre-processing and co rpus set D. As noted earlier, with cosine distances, values near 1.0 indicate closeness and values near 0.0 indicate distant points. Hence the criterion for being "further away" is to have a lower cosine value than the current threshold T.

For each of the 40 texts:

- stop-words were removed;
- the most outlying word W was determined;
- the cosine measure δ_i from this word W to each of the other words w_i in the text was computed;
- the arithmetic mean D of these cosine values δ_i was computed;
- where D < T, the text was labelled as a lexical joke, otherwise it was deemed to be a non-joke.

There are a number of ways of quantifying the success of this kind of task. To simplify somewhat, there are two possible perspectives:

Retrieval: In such a task, the program has to find a relatively small number of target items within a much larger set of items, as when searching for a relevant document in a library or a matching page on the world-wide web. Here there are two measures of success: to what extent did the search program miss items it should have found, and to what extent were the items it claimed to have found actually correct? The first of these is measured by *recall*, the ratio (number of returned correct items)/(number of correct target items in the entire collection). The second is measured by *precision*, the ratio (number of returned correct items)/(number of returned items) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Different measures of success (where A, B, C, D are actual numbers of classified items)

Recall (of jokes) = A/(A + C) **Precision (for jokes) = A/(A + B)** **Accuracy = (A + D)/(A + B + C + D)**		**Actual correct classification** **JOKE**	 **NON-JOKE**
As classified by the program	JOKE	A	B
	NON-JOKE	C	D

For both these ratios, the nearer it is to 1.0 the better. Notice that there is a trade-off here: a program could achieve a perfect recall score of 1.0 by simply choosing every item in the entire collection, but its precision would be extremely poor. Sometimes precision and recall are combined into a single *F-score*, to allow for potential trade-offs.

Classification: In such a task, the program has to classify all the items in the supplied collection into some small set of categories, often just two. In this, the central success measure is how many times the program's choice of category was correct. This is usually computed as *accuracy*: (number of correct classifications)/(number of classifications made). These measures are sometimes described as values between 0.0 and 1.0, sometimes as percentages.

If we had mixed our 20 joke texts into a very large number of other texts, and set our program to "retrieve" just the jokes, then measures of precision and recall would be appropriate. However, our data set was evenly balanced between the two types of text, which means that these measures tell us less. This is largely because the relationship between precision and recall is undermined, and a program could achieve not only 100% recall but 50% precision simply by retrieving all 40 items. This gives an F-score of 66%, which is not bad for a completely dumb program.

Classification tasks, on the other hand, often operate on balanced data, and are routinely assessed in terms of accuracy, which is not distorted by this mix of data. We therefore regard accuracy as the primary success measure in these tests.

We experimented with a number of thresholds T. A threshold of 0.5 yielded an accuracy of 80% (32 correct out of 40), and 0.425 gave 75% (30 correct). As a secondary measure of success, we also looked at the precision scores. This is because we are interested in developing a computation which will lead to the *generation* of this type of joke. For that purpose, not all forms of inaccuracy are equally bad. For a generator, it is desirable that as many as possible of its output items are indeed what they should be (jokes); it matters much less if it is tacitly overlooking chances to generate other possible jokes. Hence precision (the percentage of items which the computation deems to be jokes which really are jokes) is more pertinent than recall (the percentage of the possible jokes which the computation manages to identify).

In the test here, a threshold of 0.5 gave precision of 73.1%, but 0.425 yielded 77.8%. The figures quoted so far include *pathological cases*; that is, texts which contain words which do not appear in any of the corpora. These words were "moola", "tuckered", "flummery", "eutrophication" and "contorts". If these 5 texts (4 joke, 1 non-joke) are excluded from the evaluation, the program achieves 26/35 accuracy (74.3%) and 10/13 (76.9%) precision using the 0.425 threshold. The semantic space was developed to maximise its score when identifying the incongruous word in a lexical joke, but these results show that it has limited success in estimating how incongruous a word is. We believe that differences in tone in lexical jokes are much larger than those in regular text but the semantic space achieves, at best, scores no greater than 80% in reflecting the size of these discrepancies.

One reason for this might be that the set of corpora is simply not large enough. When the threshold is set at 0.425, the three newspaper texts (not containing a pathological word) mistakenly classified as lexical jokes are:

(8) the tide of job losses washing across north america is showing signs of *ebbing*, feeding hope that...
(9) yet investors and economists are looking past the grim *tallies* and focusing on subtle details that suggest...
(10) both runs were completely sold out and he was so *mobbed* at the stage door that he...

The most outlying words in these texts (shown in italics) appear only rarely in the set of corpora: the word "ebbing" appeared in only three corpora, "tallies" in two and "mobbed" in only one corpus. None of the other words in the newspaper texts appear in so few corpora, and perhaps these words are considered significantly incongruous, not because they are truly esoteric (and clash with more prosaic counterparts) but because the corpus data is simply too sparse. Or perhaps the problem is more deeply rooted. New sentences which no one has ever seen before are constructed every day because writing is creative: when it is interesting and not clichéd it often brings together disparate concepts and words which may never have appeared together before. Perhaps the model is able to identify relatively incongruous words with precision but is less able at gauging how incongruous they are because distinguishing between innovative word choice and incongruous word choice is currently beyond its reach.

8. Abstracting the space

In text processing applications in which large numbers of documents are classified into multiple dimensions, there are a number of closely related techniques for sharpening up the appropriateness of the abstract space for the task being tackled. Factor analysis, latent semantic analysis, and principle component analysis all share core concepts and mechanisms. We have looked at principal component analysis (PCA) to see what benefits it might yield. PCA is a popular method, used abundantly in all forms of analysis from neuroscience to computer graphics, which can reduce a complex data set to a lower dimension to reveal the sometimes hidden, simplified structures that often underlie it (Shlens 2009). Given some data spread across a number of abstract dimensions (as in our studies), it detects patterns, in the form of correlations between dimensions, and uses these to construct more abstract underlying dimensions which follow the trends in the data. For example, if dimensions 1 and 4 are strongly correlated positively, this suggests that these may not be independent factors, but can be seen as manifestations of one underlying component. Similarly, if two of the original data dimensions are strongly negatively correlated, the conjecture is that these represent opposite poles of a single underlying factor. Each of the new dimensions postulated is automatically rated according to how much of the variance in the data it accounts for. In this way, some components are more influential ("principal") than others, so that arranging the data in terms of these few more dominant abstract factors may reveal a more accurate picture of the patterns within the data.

Our hope is that PCA will find components (i.e. groups of correlated features) in the feature space which have something to do with the tone of words. Distances between words could then be measured in terms of only those components rather than in terms of all the features of the space, removing possible redundancy and focussing on the genuine differences. The results so far are based on a space of 15 features, each feature derived from one of the 15 corpora. To perform PCA, a large sample of words was created by randomly choosing 1000 words from each corpus in corpus set D (except the BNC, whose frequency counts are taken from a separate dictionary), resulting in a list of 14,000 words. Stop-words, proper names and abbreviations were then removed from the list, by hand, leaving a list of 13060 words. The frequency counts of these words were computed in the 15 corpora, resulting in a 13060 x 15 matrix, and log entropy pre-processing of this matrix was performed. Application of the PCA algorithm then yielded a set of 15 components.

The main criterion for taking a component seriously is the extent to which it accounts for variance in the data. By this yardstick, the first two components are clearly of interest (see Figure 3). The 1st component explains 48.4% of the variance, and the 2nd component 18.1%.

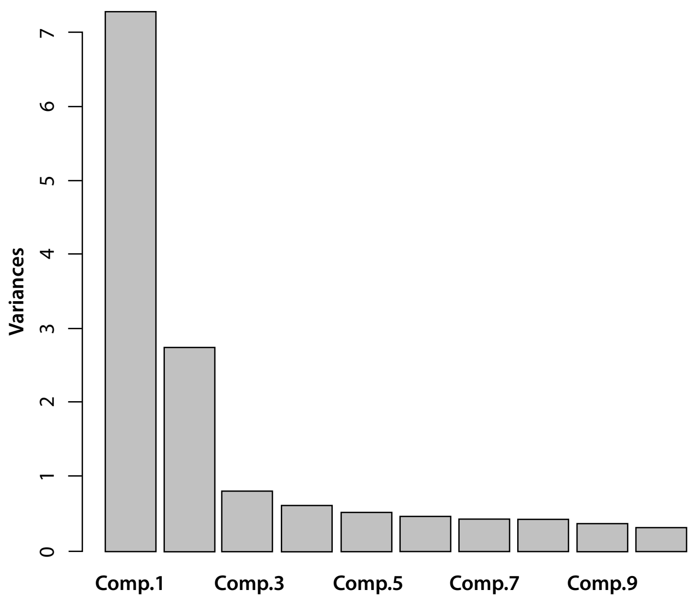

Figure 3. PCA – The 10 components accounting for most of the variance

The contributions of the 15 initial features to component #1 are roughly equal, and so this first component essentially consists of all 15 features. The second component is positively correlated with frequencies in the group {Shakespeare/Coleridge, Virgil/Homer, Milton, the Bible, Bulfinch/Scott and Grimm's fairy tales} and is negatively correlated with {OTA science, OTA arts, Physics, Reuters, New Scientist, BNC}. The first of these two groups is positively correlated with frequencies in mostly archaic works of literature while the second group is positively correlated with modern works, so component #2 could be regarded as a dimension that estimates how archaic a word is. For this component, the ten highest scoring words were: "system", "based", "research", "development", "data", "problems", "problem", "international", "group", "technology". The ten lowest scoring words (for component #2) were: "thou", "thy", thee", "shall", "hast", "ye", "shalt", "behold", "thine", "lord". This provides further evidence that component #2 could be interpreted as a kind of archaic *vs.* modern dimension.

As well as assessing how much of the variance is accounted for, another consideration is the extent to which one of the abstract components seems intuitively to reflect the pre-theoretic notion of "register" that we are exploring. The third component is interesting from this point of view. Although it accounts for only 5.3% of the variance (not much more than the fourth component), its loadings are of some interest. It is based on the group {blogs, common sense, movie reviews, Grimm's fairy tales, the Bible} and the inversely related group {OTA arts, Reuters, Milton, OTA science, Virgil/Homer, Physics, Bulfinch/Scott}. Words which receive the highest scores in terms of component #3 were: "movie", "fun", "shit", "girls", "stupid", "funny", "girl", "cute", "favourite", "movies", and the ten lowest scoring words were: "labour", "favour", "region", "increase", "yield", "greater", "proposed", "regions", "cited", "relation".

Those with the highest scores are generally common, modern, and informal sounding. Words with the lowest component #3 scores also seem commonplace, although they are neither particularly modern nor archaic sounding. Also, they are relatively more formal and "serious" but not extremely so – they are not particularly learned or arcane, for example. Therefore component #3 might be viewed as a (perhaps flawed) "common-modern-informal" vs. "common-modern-formal" dimension. The extent to which this component is useful will become apparent in the experiments (described below) in which it and the first two components are used to measure incongruities of tone.

The 12 remaining components suggested by the PCA (which together account for 18.2% of the variance in the data), seem unrelated to tone. It is difficult to imagine, for example, what kind of tone might be characterised by the following group of dissimilar corpora: works by Milton, essays on physics, blogs, movie reviews and Shakespeare's plays. These corpora are correlated, however, in component #4, and the remaining 11 components also propose other correlations which are equally discordant in terms of tone.

We therefore investigated using some subset of the first three components thrown up by the PCA (which together represent 71.8% of the total variance of the data). This meant repeating our incongruity-detection tests, but using multi-dimensional spaces which contained some subset of these three components, and no others. We tried the following combinations: 1; 1 + 2; 2 + 3; 1 + 3; 1 + 2 + 3. Of these, 1 + 2 (i.e. a space based solely on the two abstract components which account for the vast majority of the variance) gave the best results: an incongruity-identification score of 36/40, and accuracy of 70% and precision of 83.3% in the text-classification task. This is not noticeably different from the previous best results with the full 15-dimensional space (37/40, 75%, 77.8%), which suggests that little has been gained by the further abstraction. Of course, this may simply be an accident of our particular data set, which is relatively small.

9. More subtle models

The perspective on lexical jokes that we have adopted so far includes a number of simplifications. Although simplification is always necessary in order to develop formal models, it is interesting to consider these assumptions explicitly, and to speculate on how they might be relaxed.

9.1 Phrases and idioms

In the studies we have carried out so far, information relevant to the computation of register is associated with individual words, rather than with phrases. It is fairly clear that the tone of a passage is established not just by isolated lexical items, but by phrases of various sorts. For example, in one of our development items, "The market gave a good account of itself today daddy after some midmorning profit taking", the phrases "profit taking" and "good account" establish a more formal tone than the individual words in those phrases would in isolation. This effect is even more marked when the phrase is an idiom, in the sense of a conventionalised phrase whose meaning is not composed directly from its component words. For example, "chill out" (meaning "relax") is idiomatic, in that its sense is not directly computable from the words "chill" and "out". More importantly from our point of view, the component words are relatively neutral in tone, but "chill out" has a very distinctive register in terms of the era or cultural settings where it would be appropriate. The automatic detection of instances of idioms has long been known to be a very hard problem, unfortunately.

9.2 Multiple incongruous items

We have focussed on the case where a text contains exactly one outlying (incongruous) item. There are also texts where there may be several instances of incongruous items, possibly quite congruous with each other, but incongruous with the main tenor of the text. The extract below, from "Monty Python and the Holy Grail", illustrates this (the incongruous terms are in italics).

(11) And the Lord spake, saying, "First shalt thou take out the Holy Pin. Then, shalt thou count to three, no more, no less. Three shalt be the number thou shalt count, and the number of the counting shalt be three. Four shalt thou not count, nor either count thou two, excepting that thou then proceed to three. Five is right out. Once the number three, being the third number, be reached, then *lobbest* thou thy Holy Hand *Grenade* of Antioch towards thou foe, who being *naughty* in my sight, shall snuff it."

Our mechanisms would need to be generalised to handle such patterns.

9.3 The role of neutral material

We have assumed that the humorous texts have just two competing registers, the dominant and the incongruous. However, there are many words (and phrases) which are relatively neutral and may not contribute much to setting the register (this includes stop-words, but there are others).

For example, in Figure 4 the grey cells represent the frequencies of words (rows) in various corpora (columns): the darker the cell, the higher the frequency. The words "person", "make" and "call" display similar frequency count patterns and so would be considered similar in tone. The pattern for "personage" is quite different, indicating that its tone may be different, but the pattern for "operator" is different from both {personage} and {person, make, call}. This may illustrate a situation in which many of the words (not just the stop-words) are similar, with a general, non-distinctive tone, while there are outliers which serve to set the dominant tone and other outlier(s) which show up as incongruous against that dominant background.

Such a three-way analysis would be more difficult to devise, but we are considering an approach which might also help with the multiple incongruous items (Section 9.2 above). This is to look not for single outliers in the register space, but try to identify

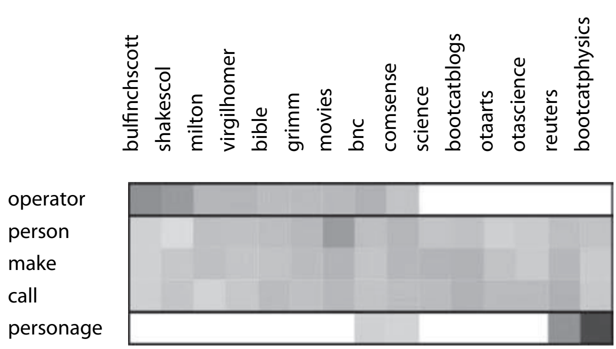

Figure 4. "Tonal fingerprints" – darker cells indicate higher frequencies, columns represent corpora

clusters of words and phrases. Our results reported above can be seen as a special case of this, in which we seek two clusters, one containing exactly one word. The multiple cluster approach introduces a number of difficult questions, which there is not space to go into here.

10. Conclusions

As stated at the outset, this work is still in progress, so the findings reported here have to be viewed as preliminary. It is important to emphasise that all the testing has been *formative*, in that we are still using feedback from the results to fine-tune our mechanisms; they are not *summative* in the sense of providing a rigorous empirical test of whether this model is correct. One obstacle we have encountered is the dearth of real data: there are so few clear examples of register-based humour upon which these data-intensive methods can be based. Nevertheless, the results so far are encouraging. It appears to be possible to change some of the parameters in our model without adverse effects on the success rate. The accuracy scores of around 80%, while not overwhelming as evidence for a theory, are relatively respectable in fields where large-scale data are used to predict patterns (cf. Mihalcea and Strapparava 2006). As noted earlier, the multi-dimensional corpus-based model of register could, if found to be empirically accurate, be of interest to pragmatic research beyond the study of humour.

Section 9 raises some points which would have to be considered if a fuller treatment of all forms of register-based humour were to be developed. For the moment, these have to remain as possible future work.

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PART 2

(Non)interactive forms of humour

2.1 Jokes

Displays of “new” gender arrangements in Russian jokes

Nadine Thielemann

Jokes can reflect dominant and changing gender norms as well as arrangements active in a speech community. Analyses of Russian jokes from the Soviet era have so far revealed a male, and often also misogynist, perspective and a jocular perpetuation of gender norms and arrangements of rural Russia (cf. Draitser 1999). Up-to-date jokes posted on the Russian internet analysed in this paper testify to new tendencies in humorous *doing gender*, i.e. gender displays in humour, notably in jokes. The GTVH is applied in order to describe the innovative features of these new jokes and to compare them with the traditionally gendered ones. The analysis at the same time serves as a check of the GTVH, developed as a linguistic tool to capture joke (dis)similarity. It is thereby shown that not all differences in gender displays can be detected and described in terms of the GTVH.

1. Introduction

Gender linguistics is engaged in answering the question as to whether men and women are treated by language in different ways and whether they use language in different ways. The potential of humour and joking in displaying gendered identities was neglected for a long time. However, recently there has been an increasing interest in the contribution of conversational joking (cf. the overview by Kotthoff 2006) and jokes (cf. Crawford 2003) to performing gender and reflecting gender arrangements. This is mostly analysed on material coming from Western speech communities. This paper tries to shed some light on the construction of gender identities and the display of gender arrangements in Russian jokes. The humorous construction of gender identities and gender arrangements in Russian jokes is in flux due to the ongoing social changes that have been taking place from the time of *perestrojka* until today and because of the influence and reception of Western trends.

The *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) (Raskin and Attardo 1991, Attardo 1997, Attardo 2001: 22–30, Attardo et al. 2002, Attardo 2008: 108–115) has been developed to capture joke similarity, among other goals. Therefore, it offers a linguistic framework for a reference analysis of traditionally and newly gendered Russian jokes. Although this theory has been developed to detect and describe joke similarity, its application in this context will show that it has some shortcomings, as there are still relations of (dis)similarity that the GTVH cannot account for.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold. On the one hand, the GTVH will be applied in the search for and analysis of "new" gender displays in up-to-date Russian jokes. Jokes with "new" and jokes with "traditional" gender displays will be compared and it will be checked whether their differences or similarities can be captured in terms of the GTVH. On the other hand, this attempt of application serves the scrutiny of the GTVH and its potential to detect and describe (dis)similarity between jokes.

Before introducing and applying the GTHV to the comparative analysis of gendered Russian jokes in order to reveal how up-to-date jokes reflect or subvert new or traditional gender arrangements, we will briefly comment on the potential of the humorous construction of gender and on jokes as instances of urban folklore.

2. "Doing gender" and making fun

Linguistic research on the relation of gender and humour, to which this paper contributes, most frequently adopts a sociopragmatic perspective, whose focal area is the relation between language use and social context. Such research addresses the question how social and cultural gendered identity or role is constructed in and by language use. This paper pays attention to how gender roles manifest themselves in the Russian culture, as influenced by western cultures. In this paper, we, therefore, adopt the social constructivist view of "doing gender". According to this approach, gender identities are actively performed by people's social actions and conduct and not biologically determined. Gender is not given, but it is performed. Humour provides a site for the construction and display of gender identities and gender arrangements in different regards. Kotthoff (2006) distinguishes between *explicit* and *implicit doing gender* by and through humour. On the one hand, a person's joking style (e.g. in conversations) can implicitly perform his/her gender (cf. Hay 2000 or the contributions in Kotthoff 1996). On the other hand, jokes and other humorous genres (e.g. anecdotes, performances of comedians) can explicitly display gender identities and arrangements in a humorous way (cf. Crawford 1995, 2003). Here, the focus will be on explicit humorous "doing gender" in jokes. Jokes that deal with gender issues in the widest sense provide humorous representations of men and women or masculinity and femininity. They serve a display of gender arrangements and hierarchies, and they frequently supply the recipient with an evaluation of gender roles and gendered conduct. As long as such jokes take gendered identities as the central theme, we are dealing with a narrow notion of "doing gender", as supported by Schegloff (1997). He stresses that only cases where gender functions as an explicitly mentioned members' category should be taken as instances of "doing gender", because only in such cases it can be taken for granted that gender is a relevant category.[1]

Jokes can display actual gender arrangements and illustrate them in an exaggerated way. But they can as well subvert the dominant or traditional gender arrangements. In sum, the existing gender arrangements can be approved and confirmed or contested and subverted by and in jokes.

Previous analyses of Russian and Soviet jokes dealing with gender issues mostly detected a display of traditional gender arrangements. In his extensive analysis of Russian and Soviet "jokelore" Draitser (1999) shows that mostly rural Russian gender arrangements and presentations are continued even in jokes stemming from the Soviet era, and that the jokes are predominantly told from and characterised by a male point of view, thereby frequently revealing a misogynist perspective. Furthermore, especially sexual humour (cf. Raskin 1985: 148–180, Raskin 1981) is a realm for humorous "doing gender"[2] in the sense of illustrating male power and offering a misogynist presentation of female characters. The traditional Russian folk genre of the *častuška* (cf. Raskin 1981, Raskin 1985: 170–177, Draitser 1999: 229–252) is also a distinct genre of obscene humour that conveys traditional gender arrangements in a similar fashion. According to the existing analyses, Russian jokelore reflects traditional gender arrangements, presents traditional gender identities and gendered patterns of conduct and displays an asymmetrical power structure between the genders.

Analyses by Bing (2007), Crawford (1995, 2003) or Kotthoff (2000, 2007) testify to new tendencies in gendered humour and joking in Western speech communities and describe instances of new feminist jokes and conversational joking playing with traditionally gendered behavioural patterns. They present jokes and other humorous forms that subvert the dominant gender arrangements and gender displays, for example, by presenting women as quick-witted, by a humorous reversal of roles or inversion of the power structure or simply by poking fun at traditional gender arrangements and gendered behavioural patterns from a female (as well as feminist) perspective. So far, evidence for similar tendencies from the Russian speech community or from Russian jokelore is absent.

Latest findings from the internet and the author's private collection speak in favour of a similar but slightly different tendency in Russian jokelore. Searching for "newly" gendered jokes Draitser's (1999) analysis served as a point of departure. Looking for jokes that reveal a different, deviant or in the widest sense "new" form of humorous "doing gender" we referred to two sources. Russian online joke collections were looked through for jokes dealing with gender issues. This collection was completed

1. There has been an extensive debate whether this narrow notion of doing gender is apt or whether also other ways of displaying gender such as speech style should be taken into account as ways of "making gender relevant" (Smithson and Stokoe 2001) on the pages of *Discourse & Society*. Ayaß (2008) offers a comprehensive overview.

2. Bubel and Spitz (2006: 71) even mention the telling of *dirty jokes* as "one of the last vestiges of gender bias".

by additional jokes from the author's private collection. These were jokes elicited from friends and colleagues who are Russian native speakers and who were asked to tell jokes dealing with gender issues.

Among the jokes collected in this twofold way there were a few that fit quite well in the picture drawn by Draitser. But there were also some jokes in which the gender display deviates from mainstream jocular "doing gender". The analysis further focuses on these "newly" gendered jokes and aims at describing in what respect they are different. It is, at this stage, indeed difficult to judge whether the jokes dealing with a "new" gender display are a marginal phenomenon restricted to those postings. They only reveal that there are also "new" tendencies in Russian humorous "doing gender". This similarly holds true for the analyses by Bing (2007) and Kotthoff (2000, 2007), who analyse humorous subversions of mainstream "doing gender" in certain social environments (feminist all-female groups, or left-winged intellectuals).

Before these new jokes are linguistically examined against the background of traditional gender displays, the sources of the data as well as the joke as a genre of urban folklore will be briefly commented on in order to show what the findings (can) reflect.

3. Joke as a genre and its sources

Mainly jokes from up-to-date online sources served as data for this study. Printed joke collections are supposed to reflect humour that is gendered in the mainstream way. Jokes enter such collections with a slight delay of their actual telling, and editors decide which jokes enter the collections. Bing (2007: 337) further points to the fact that those interested in humour and involved in collecting (especially sexual) jokes "have historically been predominately male, the sexual jokes collected, published and analysed have generally been those told in all-male groups."[3] The jokes for this analysis were mainly taken from internet sources[4] to which people can freely and continuously add their own jokes or jokes they have recently heard: "Dozens of thousands of visitors assure that fresh, newly born jokes would appear on the site very quickly." (Gorny 2006: 296). Therefore, online collections are closest to the latest state of gendered joking. They immediately display current and ongoing changes and "new" tendencies in humorous "doing gender".

3. Russian collections of *anekdoty* are also mainly edited by men (cf. Barskij 1992, Sannikov 2003). The oldest Russian online joke source was initiated by a man (Dima Verner), too.

4. Here the following online joke sources have been consulted: http://anekdoti.ru/; http://anekdot.ru/; http://www.anekdots.ru/; http://anekdots.smeha.net/; http://shutky.ru/; http://www.5ft.ru/.

The Russian term for joke is *anekdot*, which may be confusing for the Western scholar.[5] The anekdot represents an instance of urban folklore (cf. Gorny 2006: 276–308). As illustrated by Graham (2003), in its history, the anekdot has proven to be a genre that quickly absorbed and adopted topics and motives triggered by social as well as political changes. According to Graham (2003: 27), "The anekdot accrued new stylistic, compositional, and thematic attributes with each major stage of Russo-Soviet cultural history." This is why this genre can be expected to reflect "new" forms of "doing gender" as well.

Moreover, online sources are apt for research on urban folklore, such as jokes, for other reasons. The joke is actually an oral genre – it is told and retold in oral communication, face-to-face to a listener. The internet is a medium that is especially well suited for this genre of folklore because it allows jokes to spread quickly in a way that simulates oral communication.[6] Furthermore, jokes posted on the internet can be accessed immediately by a wide audience. The internet is then an ideal site for genres and forms that are characterised by "secondary orality" (Ong 1989, 1978). It offers space for orality in societies that are in Ong's sense not "untouched by the written word".[7]

Nevertheless, it remains an open question whether all of the online anekdoty are genuinely Russian. The foreign, mostly Western provenance of at least some of the jokes must be considered. Some of the findings are probably translations or adaptations of Western templates. Gorny (2006: 293–300) points to this with reference to Dima Verner, the founder of the first internet page with Russian jokes (www.anekdot.ru). He argues that, especially at the beginning, a large part of the audience of the Russian joke sites lived abroad. But the number of CIS-hosted users of the Russian internet is constantly increasing. Initially, the Russian joke sites were mainly visited by Russians abroad, but "in 2002, Russia with CIS countries provided about 75 percent of visitors to joke web site" (Gorny 2006: 294). Gorny also emphasises that the majority of Russian internet users have higher education and live in large cities, mainly in Moscow. Therefore, online jokes probably reflect primarily the taste and values of a certain social class.

Jokes on websites are not contextualised at all, because such websites exclusively serve the collection of jokes. Anybody is free to add jokes heard or invented and a wide

5. Graham (2003) offers a comprehensive cultural and genre history of the Russo-Soviet *anekdot* and shows how it developed from and was influenced by folk tales, classical anecdotes and other (imported as well as genuine Russian) genres.

6. Gorny (2006: 276–308) devotes a whole chapter in his *Creative History of the Russian Internet* to the joke and its role and status on the Russian internet.

7. Furthermore, the internet is a site not only for telling jokes but also for spreading other forms of urban folklore that are peculiar to this medium and arise under the specific conditions of this medium. Burkhardt and Schmidt (2009) analyse forms of internet-specific folkore which they label as 'Internet-lore'. This is closely linked with the emergence of specific online slang called *olbanskij jazyk*. Finally, the internet shows a tendency to delete intellectual property rights and authorship, which is also relevant to the delivery of folklore such as jokes.

audience can read them there. Despite the benefits of online joke sources as a data source for modern urban folklore, it should be acknowledged that jokes, albeit free-floating units, are actually designed to be told in the flow of conversation. In face-to-face conversations, the telling of a joke has to be introduced and licensed by the interlocutors. Sacks (1974) describes the sequence preceding the telling of a joke as an "opener". The teller asks whether his or her interlocutors know the joke, and if the latter respond negatively, they thereby license the telling of the joke. For the time of the telling, the default mechanism of turn-taking is suspended. The recipients of the joke only provide minor contributions, such as laughter particles or they repeat crucial phrases or lines of the teller.

Only a small number of analyses deal with the actual telling of a joke such as the classical study by Sacks (1974) or its further application by Norrick (2000: 170–182; 2001), who is also concerned with rhetorical techniques of presenting jokes in face-to-face interaction. After the teller has delivered the punch line, the recipients' laugher is normally the prototypical reaction, after which the discourse can proceed further and a non-humorous discourse modality can be established again. Jokes told in face-to-face conversations are dissociated from the surrounding non-humorous discourse. They are sequentially embedded in a similar way as conversational narratives are (cf. Norrick 2000: 170–182).

Besides these conversation analytic approaches to jokes and their telling which pay attention especially to the fact that jokes are an oral genre and to the ways how they are sequentially embedded, Attardo and Chabanne (1992) show that the general textual criteria according to De Beaugrand and Dressler (1981) also apply to jokes. They try to specify the text type of the joke and "identify a set of features shared by all jokes" (Attardo and Chabanne 1992: 165) independently of what their surface structure ((micro)-narratives, question-answer structures, one-sentence verbal jokes, etc.) may be. According to them, jokes are short witty narratives with a punch line near the end defeating the expectations nurtured during the build up. By default, the joke is a third-person narrative, usually told in present tense, and consisting of text by the anonymous author and dialogue by the characters presented by and acting in the joke. Furthermore, jokes are anonymous narratives. The teller does not claim authorship, but he/she just retells a collectively authored narrative (cf. Hockett 1977: 174–178). Attardo and Chabanne summarise the main characteristics of this genre as follows:

> Thus, a joke is an anonymous, partially or completely recycled text that contains a non-bona-fide linguistic/cognitive disturbance (the punch line) that "closes" the previous text. The text itself is tendentially [sic!] short and contains the basic features of a narrative. (Attardo and Chabanne 1992: 172)

Also Hockett (1977) and Oring (1989) observe that jokes are short narrative texts with a build-up or setup followed by a punch line near the end that defeats expectations raised in the build-up. This feature is seen as constitutive for humour in *incongruity* theories (cf. Attardo 1994: 47–49) and makes jokes the prototype of a humorous genre.

4. The General Theory of Verbal Humor

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994: 219–229; 1997; 2001: 22–30, 2008: 108–115, Attardo et al. 2002) is a humour theory which is designed to account for jokes. Its main benefit for the actual analysis is that it is conceived to explain joke similarity (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Ruch et al. 1993, Attardo 1994: 228), which is an aspect that speaks in favour of the GTVH as a tool for a reference analysis of traditionally vs. newly gendered jokes, which will be provided in the next section. In this section a brief summary of the GTVH is given.

The GTVH distinguishes six *knowledge resources* (KR) in its formalised representation of a joke, which also represent parameters regarding joke similarity (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 321–324; 1994: 223–226), which means that versions of a joke or similar jokes are characterised by shared KR values (Attardo 1994: 228). The KRs are *script opposition* (SO), *logical mechanism* (LM), *target* (TA), *situation* (SI), *narrative strategy* (NA), and *language* (LA). LA concerns the verbal realisation of the joke, the wording of the text. By NS, Attardo and Raskin (1991: 300) account for different "microgenres" of jokes, such as narrative jokes, jokes consisting of question-answer-sequences, riddles, etc. TA can be realised by a character to which negative attributes are stereotypically or habitually ascribed, a suitable *butt of the joke* well known from ethnic jokes, for example. But TA may as well be an ideological or abstract one. Moreover, TA is an optional KR that can as well be absent (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 302). Finally, SI captures the kind of circumstances and activities that are apt for a certain joke.

The last two KRs, LM and SO, are more abstract. SO evokes two scripts that stand in opposition. The GTVH acts on the assumption that "the number of oppositions exhibited by jokes is finite and limited" (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 308), because concrete or specialised SOs can be traced back to more basic SOs and the *real* vs. *unreal* opposition is treated as the most abstract SO. LM corresponds to the resolution of incongruity evoked by the SO (cf. Attardo 1997: 405–410; Attardo et al. 2002). It provides a *paralogical* or *pseudological justification* (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 304, 307, Attardo 1994: 225–226, Attardo 1997: 409–410) for the clash of the scripts, which makes the recipient find a solution. LM is another optional KR, which is, for example, absent or unrealised in "absurd humor" (Attardo 1997: 409).

Attardo and Raskin (1991: 311, 313, 320, 322, 325; see also Attardo 1994: 227 and Attardo 2001: 28) propose a "hierarchical joke representation model [...] based on the weak psychological intuitions about the degrees of similarity among jokes" (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 324). The lower a shared value of two or more jokes is situated in this model, the more similar the jokes are. The higher one or more shared values are on this scale, the lesser the degree of similarity (cf. Attardo and Raskin 1991: 323).

SO

↓

LM

↓

SI

↓

TA

↓

NS

↓

LA

Figure 1. Hierarchy of the KRs proposed by Attardo and Raskin (1991: 325)

Further evidence from conversational joking and from *folk taxonomies* of jokes supports the claims of the GTVH concerning the KRs as an explanation tool for joke similarity. Chiaro (1992: 101–117) analyses *joke-capping sessions*, in which interlocutors in a conversation consecutively tell jokes which are coherently connected. "During joke-capping sessions, jokes are not recited at random but in clusters which are determined either by topic or by joke type" (Chiaro 1992: 105). The connection between the jokes can be explained in terms of the GTVH by the fact that these jokes share values in at least one KR (cf. Attardo 2001: 68f). In Chiaro's examples, the shared values concern, for example, NS. Thus, the jokes are in a certain manner also similar and therefore clustered in this way. Attardo (2001) further points to the fact that folk taxonomies of jokes often rely on perceived similarity as the result of shared values in the KRs, i.e. TA (e.g. *jokes about blondes*) and NS (e.g. *riddles*), whereas shared values for SO or LM do not seem to provide enough similarity in order to allow jokes to build a group of their own labelled within the parameters of a folk category.

Apart from that, jokes can also be grouped by shared values in higher KRs (e.g. SO or LM). Nevertheless, these groupings only lead to a weaker perception of similarity. Taxonomies relying on shared values in KRs, such as SO or LM, provide descriptive and linguistic categories or classes of jokes.[8] In defining and identifying sexual humour, Raskin (1985: 148–179) for instance implicitly refers to a value of a KR. As

8. Of course, there are also other criteria underlying joke taxonomies such as the kind of ambiguity (e.g. phonetic, graphic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) exploited in a joke (cf. Ritchie 2004, Chiaro 1992).

sexual humour, he analyses jokes in which at least one script in the SO is sex-related. So he arrives at a grouping that is based on shared values concerning at least one script in the SO.[9] Ritchie (2004: 84) suggests,

> If it were accepted that, of the GTVH parameters, only LM and SO are humorous factors (...) then we could define a notion of "using" the same SO and LM', which might capture the notion of "same abstract joke".

As an example of such an attempt to build a category, Ritchie points to Hofstadter and Gabora's (1989: 431) notion of *ur-joke* which was conceived by the authors as an "abstract skeleton shared by many different jokes" (Hofstadter and Gabora 1989: 430). According to Ritchie, the ur-joke could be interpreted as "a 'skeleton' from which many jokes can be built, all with some deep similarity" (2004: 84).[10]

In sum, differences or similarities between jokes can be ascribed to or explained by shared values in KRs. Some of the newly gendered jokes show similarities with traditionally gendered jokes and can therefore be analysed on their background. The GTVH thereby provides a framework to detect and describe in what respect newly gendered jokes represent counterparts of the traditionally gendered jokes. However, it will also become clear from its application in the analysis that the GTVH is not able to capture forms of similarity and modification that rely on features that cannot be linked to or explained in terms of one of the KRs.

5. Gender displays in jokes

Concerning the question of how new gender displays are humorously communicated by contemporary Russian jokes, the focus of the analysis is on jokes that explicitly deal with gender issues in different ways. For example, at least one script in the SO deals with gender issues (gender specific conduct or role expectations, sexuality etc.), the gender of the TA is relevant for the joke or the SI raises expectations concerning gender issues

5.1 Traditional gender displays

Prior to the analysis of jokes that testify to new tendencies in Russian humorous "doing gender", a sample analysis of two traditionally gendered jokes is conducted. The first joke reflects traditional "doing gender" and owes its funniness to the stereotype of

9. Furthermore, the majority of Raskin's (1985) examples of sexual humour are characterised by a certain order of the scripts in the SO (non-sex vs. sex). Bing (2007) shows that this order of scripts in the SO is reversed in women's liberated humour (sex vs. non-sex).

10. Attardo et al. mention the *ur-joke* or *joke skeleton* as "an idea related to the LM" (2002: 5). The examples from Hofstadter and Gabora (1989: 431) cited by Ritchie (2004: 84f) illustrate, for example, the *role reversal* ur-joke. And Attardo et al. (2002: 18) mention *role reversal* as one among several LMs.

the dumb female that is active not only in Russian jokelore. The analysis serves to illustrate how a traditional stereotype is confirmed and continued in a humorous way. The joke is taken from a radio talk show broadcasted on Radio Ėcho Moskva whose transcript is included in the Russian National Corpus.[11] This issue of the show is about the question of women's rights (Беседа о женском вопросе в эфире радиостанции «Эхо Москвы» // «Эхо Москвы», 2003–2004).

(1) [№ 1, муж] У меня анекдот есть/собираются три женщины/одна жалуется/что муж пьяница/другая/что бьет/а третья говорит/а у меня муж/сифилист. Со второго этажа свешивается муж/кричит/Маша/сколько раз я тебе говорил/не сифилист/а филателист.
[№ 1, male] I have a joke/three women get together/one complains/that her husband is a drunkard/the second/that he beats her/and the third says/and my husband is a syphilitic. The husband leans over the balustrade on the second floor/shouts/Maša/how many times have I told you/not syphilitic but philatelist.[12]

Attardo (1997: 403) defines *scripts* as "collections of semantic information pertaining to a given subject. As such, they embody the sum total of the cultural knowledge of a society, which can be represented as a set of expectations and/or weighted choices."[13] The script activated in the setup of this joke is that of pitiful women moaning about their husbands' negative behaviour and way of treating them. The tripartite list of alcoholism, violence and adultery – here replaced by a sexually transmitted disease as an effect of adultery – is a frequently exploited strategy in jokes (cf. Sacks 1974).[14] In the punch line delivered by the last woman's husband, suddenly quite a harmless picture is evoked – that of a humble man collecting stamps (*philatelist*). In terms of the GTVH, the punch line triggers a script switch. Suddenly, the last woman is no longer perceived as a pitiful victim of her husband's adultery but as a dumb female that cannot cope with words of foreign origin. In the SO of this joke, there is a clash between the representations of the wife as a pitiful victim vs. that of a dumb female, pitiful misery is confronted with dumbness. The TA of the joke is the third wife who is exposed to laughter for her illiterateness.

The joke relies on verbal humour which gets lost in the translation.[15] The Russian words for "syphilitic" and "philatelist", i.e. "сифилист" and "филателист", sound

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11. <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/search-spoken.html> (last accessed 25th October 2009).

12. All jokes were translated by the present author.

13. Other definitions used by SSTH and GTVH say that scripts are linked to or activated by lexical items. Raskin defines script as "a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it" (1985: 81). A similar understanding of script can be found in Attardo et al. (2002: 20).

14. Furthermore, tripartite lists are a well-known and frequently applied clap-trap strategy in political oratory (cf. Atkinson 1994: 57–72).

15. For detailed discussions and taxonomies of wordplay, verbal play and puns see, for example, Freidhof (1984), Kosta (1986: 435–526), Attardo (1994: 108–173) or Chiaro (1992: 17–76). Chiaro (1992) and Kosta (1986) focus on the translation of wordplay.

similar. The LM providing a resolution of the incongruity is therefore "paronymy" (Attardo et al. 2002: 15). The similar sound offers a locally active and paralogical justification for the co-occurrence of both words.

The next example, taken from the same talk show, illustrates another frequent topic in traditionally gendered Russian jokelore, i.e. violence directed against wives. The joke is therefore a good example of Russian "wife beating folklore" (Draitser 1999: 151–160) also quoted by Draitser (1999: 182).[16] It is told by the host of the show who afterwards adds that he considers this joke to be an adequate illustration of real-life gender relations in Russia.

(2) [Гагапольский, муж] Анекдот. Собрались француженка/американка/и русская/говорят о взаимоотношениях с мужьями. Француженка/Я сразу сказала Пьеру/что я стирать дома не буду. Он резко развернулся/вышел/и я его три дня не видела. Через три дня он принес стиральную машину/которая сама стирает/отжимает/белит/гладит и складывает в шкаф. Американка/А я Джону сказала/что готовить не буду. Три дня не видела/потом он приходит/приносит кухонный комбайн/сам готовит/сам моет посуду/невероятно вкусно. Маня говорит/я своему сказала/что не буду ни готовить/ни стирать. Три дня его не видела/но теперь уже один глаз открылся/и я его могу видеть. Вот анекдот/который достаточно точно отражает/как мне кажется/правильные взаимоотношения в России между мужчиной и женщиной.
[Gagapol'skij, male] A joke/a French/an American/and a Russian woman get together. They talk about their relationships with their husbands. The French woman/I've told Pierre/that I won't do the washing at home. He suddenly got up/went out/and I didn't see him for three days. After three days he returned with a washing machine/that washes on its own/dashes/bleaches/irons/folds everything and puts it in the wardrobe. The American/And I told John/that I won't cook. I didn't see him for three days/then he returned/he brings a food processor/cooks himself/washes the dishes/very delicious. Manja says/I told mine/that I will neither cook/nor do the washing. I haven't seen him for three days/but now I can already open one eye/and I can see him. Well that's a joke/which quite adequately reflects/as it seems to me/the real relationship between men and women in Russia.

In this joke, the gender issue merges with ethnic stereotypes typical of jokes confronting representatives of three cultures. In the first part, the expectation is built up that the Russian husband will correspondingly find a comfortable technical solution which compensates for his wife's refusal to do the housework. This expectation is defeated near the end of the joke when the recipient realises that the Russian husband has not left the house like the French or the American husband but that he has battered his wife

16. Dynel (2009: 36–37) quotes a very similar version of this joke, in which the last woman is not Russian but Polish.

and that the Russian wife has not seen her husband for three days because she has had a black eye. The scripts opposed are domestic duties and housework vs. matrimonial violence. This SO can further be traced back to *good* vs. *bad* on the most abstract level. The LM that offers a paralogical resolution in this joke is a garden-path mechanism (Dynel 2009). The first part of the joke raises the expectations that the Russian husband cannot be seen because he left like the other women's husbands. It is only at the very end of the joke in the last woman's comment "that the interpreter realises that her utterance needs to be retraced for the second interpretation capitalising on the polysemous word "saw" [here: see]" (Dynel 2009: 37). The Russian wife *cannot see her husband* (because he has left) but because she *cannot see at all* (because of a black eye).

Both jokes reflect traditionally established gender relations and gender stereotypes in Russian jokelore. The first one illustrates the stereotype of the dumb woman and makes fun at the expense of a female TA. The second one humorously exploits violence against wives in the punch line. Both jokes reveal a misogynist perspective and fit well in the picture drawn by Draitser (1999). But there are also jokes that break off with these gender displays by introducing new scripts that clash with traditionally gendered stereotypes and role expectations or new specified SO in which conventional expectations concerning gendered roles, gendered patterns of conduct and sexual orientations are defeated. Examples of such jokes will be presented in the subsections below.

The discussion is also supported by results of a survey conduced among Russian respondents. In order to evaluate whether a joke is an adaptation and translation of a Western joke, the findings of "newly" gendered jokes were presented to 81 Russian native speakers from Moscow, Sankt Petersburg, Minsk and Charkov. In a questionnaire, they were asked whether they consider a joke to be of Russian or Western origin and whether they can imagine that the joke is really told in Russia or the Ukraine. The results of the questionnaire are given after each joke in this form: [number of respondents considering the joke to be Russian]: [number of respondents considering the joke to be of Western origin]: [number of respondents thinking that this joke is actually also told in communication].

Some jokes were indeed perceived as not genuinely Russian. Nevertheless, the respondents frequently stated that they could imagine the jokes actually being told. This may as well serve as an indicator that these "newly" gendered jokes need not be circumstantial phenomena. Furthermore, even the appearance of adapted versions of Western jokes on the Russian internet (as well as in face-to-face-communication) testifies to the need to fill in a gap or to provide material perceived as being necessary. The unknown online-teller must have felt some need to adapt the joke and post it. This practice turns online jokes into an intercultural phenomenon.

5.2 Jocular presentation of matrimonial life

A series of jokes is devoted to the ridicule of traditional relations within couples. Behavioural patterns, roles or traits in these jokes are sometimes not distributed in the traditionally gendered way which informs and guides expectations concerning the life of couples. They work on the assumption that these gender arrangements are still active and shape the expectations of the audience. At the same time, these jokes subvert the traditional gender arrangement to different degrees. As the anonymous reviewer rightly stressed, these jokes do not totally or completely subvert the existing mainstream gender arrangement as they, for example, still exploit the script of the woman as a cook. The subversion here concerns the direction of matrimonial violence. In the following joke, for instance, we have an unconventional treatment of matrimonial violence, namely it is the wife who wants to beat her husband.

(3) Пьяный муж возвращается поздно домой. Открывает дверь, перед ним стоит жена, в руке сковородка... Муж: – Иди ложись спать, я не голодный.[17]
<http://www.5ft.ru/cat/muz_i_zena/>(last accessed 6th May 2009); 54:12:56
A drunken husband returns home late in the evening. He opens the door; his wife stands in front of him with a pan in her hand....The husband: "Come on, go to bed, I'm not hungry."

The violence script does not correspond to the traditional Russian or Soviet jokelore mentioned by Draitser (1999), where wives are victims of domestic violence. Nevertheless, the subjects rated the joke being of Russian origin. Frequently the pan was mentioned as the typical weapon held by a wife. The SO is between beating (the husband with the pan) and cooking (a meal for him in the pan). In comparison to joke (2), the order of the scripts is reversed. In (3) it switches from domestic violence to domestic duties and housework, from *bad* to *good* (for the husband). The husband tries to save himself from becoming a victim of domestic violence. His comment, which triggers the script switch and points to the LM of faulty reasoning or false priming, presents him as a quick-witted person and not as a victim.[18] He cleverly chooses an advantageous, but rather devious

17. Several respondents pointed out to another version of this joke, which ends with the husband saying, "Милая, а ты все еще печешь?" ("My dear, are you still frying?").

18. The confrontation of a (though more modest) script of violence by the wife and directed to her drunken husband with a non-violent (not necessarily domestic) script in the SO, whereby the punch line and, hence, also the script switch is delivered by the figure of a quick-witted husband is found in a number of similar jokes. All of them share the LM of faulty reasoning.

(3) a. Каждый раз перед новым годом жена подносит мне кулак к носу и заявляет:
- Не будешь пить в Новый год! Не будешь!
А я в ответ улыбаюсь и радостно думаю про себя: "Почти 15 лет уже вместе живем, а сколько в ней еще оптимизма!"
<http://anekdots.smeha.net/muzhchini/1.html> (last accessed 6th May 2009)
Always on New Year's Eve my wife shakes her fist at me and tells me: "You won't drink on New Year's Eve! You won't!" And I answer her with a smile on my face happily thinking to myself: "We are already together for almost 15 years, and she still continues to be an optimist!"

(3) a. Жена в ярости бьет пьяного мужа:

reason for his wife holding a pan in her hand. This joke functions as a counterpart to joke (2) in two respects. It evokes the same scripts but the order of the scripts in the SO is reversed and the roles are changed. What is different and puzzling is the presentation of the husband as a (potential) victim of domestic violence that the first script evoked. Nevertheless, this joke preserves a male point of view by presenting the male character as quick-witted and controlling the course of action. The husband is not the TA of the joke. He rather pokes fun at the wife. He protects himself from becoming a victim thanks to his sharp tongue. It is the female character who remains the TA of the joke.

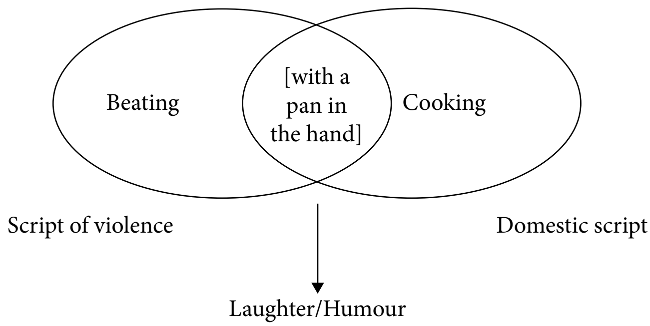

Figure 2. SO underlying joke (3)

The case is slightly different in the next example, where the order of the scripts conforms to (2).

(4) – Отличные грибочки! – говорит муж жене. – Где рецепт взяла? – Из криминального романа.[19] <http://shutky.ru/?cat=13> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 29:41:28
Husband to his wife: "Marvellous mushrooms! Where have you found the recipe?" "In a detective story."

The first script is correspondingly a domestic one. The husband praises his wife's mushroom dish and is interested in the recipe. This time the wife triumphantly surprises him in the punch line by confessing that it was a "lethal" recipe taken from

– Будешь пить, скотина? Будешь пить, скотина?
– На-ли-ва-ай… Уговорила….
(Sannikov 2003: 464)
A wife furiously beats her drunken husband: "You will drink, crock/dirty swine? You will drink, crock/dirty swine? "Pour in…. You've persuaded me….

19. This joke works quite well in many cultures. Here a Western model is most likely presumed because of the notion *криминальный роман* (detective story). Respondents mentioned this indicator, too. The joke is also quoted (in translation) by Draitser (1999: 177) and serves as an illustration that "[m]any Russian marriage jokes are almost identical with Western jokes dealing with […] warefare between spouses" (1999: 176).

an unusual source, a detective story. As in (2), there is a domestic script confronted with a script of violence or murder. The order of the scripts in the SO parallels that of (2). But this time the husband is not only the victim (in contrast to (2)) but also the TA in the joke, and the wife is presented as being quick-witted and delivers the punch line (in contrast to (3)). Therefore, in joke (4), the role reversal is fully materialised. Furthermore, the evaluative perspective is changed and a female point of view is suggested. In joke (4), it is the male character who becomes the target of violence and the target of ridicule. He is made the *butt* of the joke (TA).

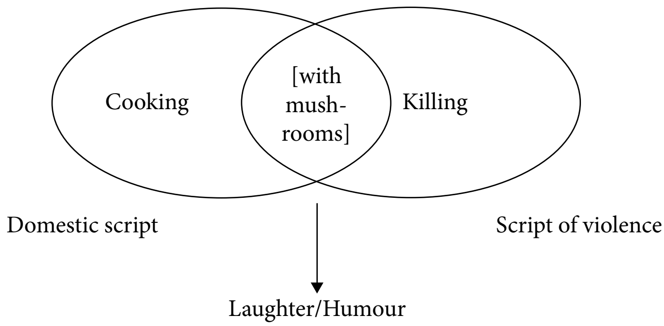

Figure 3. SO underlying joke (4)

Some jokes similarly exhibit a female perspective and present female protagonists with intentions towards their husbands that do not match the image of a caring wife or a wife as a victim. The female character delivers the punch line and has a glib tongue. Generally, one of the involved scripts is a domestic one as in the other jokes. Every time a puzzling effect is achieved by associating the husband with domestic duties as in this one-liner from a chat forum.[20]

(5) Согласно данным судебной статистики, еще ни одна жена не застрелила мужа в тот момент, когда он мыл посуду. <http://forum.rc-mir.com/topic1810452_50.html> (last accessed 4th August 2009), 6:67:21
According to forensic statistics, so far no wife has shot her husband when he was doing the dishes.

This one-liner is an invitation for men to get more involved in housework. Respondents' comments pointed especially to the "feminist pathos". Accordingly, they presumed a Western origin. It is implicitly presupposed that husbands can run the risk of

20. This joke circulates on the internet in different variations, for example:
(5) a. ...ещё ни одна жена не застрелила мужа, когда он мыл посуду!!!.а как ещё можно мужьям уберечься?...:)))))....
<http://otvet.mail.ru/question/24282809/> (last accessed 2nd January 2010)
...so far no woman has ever shot her husband when he was washing the dishes!!!. or how else can husbands protect themselves?...:)))))....

becoming the target of female aggression if they do not show a certain conduct and clean the dishes. This joke contests social stereotypes in a twofold manner: women, and not men, are presented as (potentially) acting violently, and men, not women, are associated with housework. Both items are puzzling. Men are unusual victims and doing the dishes is an unusual way of protecting oneself from being killed. In the next joke, there is a similar sudden switch to the domestic script.

(6) Женщина обращается к доктору:
– Доктор, пожалуйста, не скрывайте от меня ничего! Сможет ли мой муж после этого ужасного перелома руки хоть как-нибудь мыть посуду?! <http://shutky.ru/?cat=13> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 13:53:24
A woman asks the doctor: "Doctor, please, tell me the whole truth! Will my husband after this terrible fracture of his hand at least somehow be able to wash the dishes?!"

During the setup, the script of a caring wife talking to the doctor about her husband's recovery is activated. The punch line consists of the wife asking whether her husband will somehow be able to do the dishes after the fracture of the hand and evokes again a domestic script. The first part highlights the medical treatment of the severely injured hand. The second part stresses the applicability of the hand in the fulfilling of a concrete domestic duty. Once more, the second script is structured in a way that puzzles conventional expectations of the gendered distribution of domestic duties among couples. On the other hand, the wife that cares about her husband's ability to wash the dishes rather than about the general recovery defeats the expectations concerning the gendered distribution of emotional dedication in couples. Draitser (1999: 183) quotes this joke, too, and interprets it as a "misogynist" joke because "the wife is solely preoccupied with her husband's usefulness." The wife's turning the husband into a victim illustrates her ill intentions and lack of care and compassion.

In the next joke, the punch line also relies on the subversion of traditional stereotypes concerning gendered conduct and habits.

(7) Встречаются две подруги.- Я слышала, ты развелась со своим Николаем. Почему?- Ну, ты бы смогла жить с человеком, который курит, пьет, ругается, да ещё к тому же и дерется?- Нет, конечно!- Ну, вот и Коля не смог...
http://anekdoti.ru/show.php?joke=2920 (last accessed 6th October 2010), 60:7:51
Two friends get together: "I've heard that you and Nikolaj got a divorce. Why?" "Well, could you live with somebody [ru. a man$_{generic}$] who smokes, drinks, swears and who above all brawls, too." "Of course, not!" "Well, Kolja couldn't either…"

The joke only works on the background of a gender stereotype which conventionally attributes the above-mentioned negative habits (drinking, smoking, swearing, etc.) to men and not to women. These expectations are eliminated in the punch line when the woman's turn makes it clear that it was she who behaved in this way and that it was probably not her but him who wanted a divorce. The LM in (7) is that of *role reversal* (cf. Attardo et al. 2002: 18). This mechanism can only be employed when the ascription of the negative habits attributed to male characters is conventional. Only then a reversal can reach a surprising effect. The joke breaks the stereotypical ascription of negative habits to men but confirms the existence of this gender stereotype or prejudice as such. This stereotype has to be active and shape the recipient's expectations in order to be exploited by its subversion in the punch line.

"New" gender displays reflected in these jokes can be explained in terms of the GTVH by a few features. The jokes share at least one script within the SO (mostly a domestic one). They parallel the SO of traditionally gendered jokes and change the TA by gender or they reverse the order of scripts in the SO. Sometimes the LM of role reversal is employed, whereby the role is associated with a certain traditional gender stereotype. Sometimes the reversal is to the detriment of the genders, for example, negative scripts are attributed to them.

5.3 Jocular presentation of courtship

Another group of jokes focuses on courtship as a central theme.[21] The following jokes stand out due to the presentation of the female character as being quick-witted and straight forward. The following two jokes share the value in SI. In (8) and (9), a man approaches a woman asking a common question that could be easily used as a flimsy chat-up line. Both jokes in addition show the same NS (question-answer-sequence).

(8) – Девушка, вы не подскажете, который час?
– Ладно, только в постели не курить! (private collection), 48:20:41
"Madame, what time is it?" "O.K. but no smoking in bed!"

(9) – Девушка, а можно вас?
– А можно не вы? (private collection), 57:9:49
"Excuse me, Madam? [Madam, may I have your attention?] "Maybe not you?"[22]

In both jokes, each man's question is characterised by a more or less obvious ambiguity (asking the time, attempt to attract attention, for example, in service encounters vs. chatting up a woman) and in both jokes the woman reacts straightforward to the

21. The jocular presentation of courtship in the jokes analysed by Draitser (1999: 117–123) focuses on "traditional" courtship rituals such as talking about literature in chatting up women.

22. The following joke parallels the pattern of joke (9):

(9) a. – Бонд, Джеймс Бонд.
– Офф, Фак офф. (private collection)
"Bond, James Bond.
– Off, fuck off.

initially or just superficially less salient intention of chatting someone up. In (8) the woman seems to accept the suggestion, whereas in (9) and (9b) she rejects it. Both women talk in a quick-witted way. On this background, the rejection of the proposal as in (9) is unusual. This lack of sexual submissiveness in comparison to (8) suggests a female perspective as in the next example.

(10) Во время танца кавалер нежно прижимает к себе партнершу и шепчет:
– Ах, я чувствую себя как в раю!
– В самом деле? – отвечает она. – А я как в автобусе.
<http://shutky.ru/?cat=13> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 51:16:40
While dancing a gentleman tenderly snuggles his partner and whispers: "Oh, I feel like in heaven!" "Really?" she answers. "And I feel like on the bus."

The first script evoked is that of closely dancing in the context of romantic courtship, which is also maintained by the man's comment. He positively evaluates the closeness. This is contrasted with the woman's negative evaluation delivered in her punch line. She compares the closeness with the situation in a crowded bus evoking the highly culture specific script of crowded public transport. Physical contact is an element of both scripts. The punch line represented by the woman's comment clearly displays a female point of view and presents once more a quick-witted woman that does not (silently) yield to male approaches and neglect her own interests.

In the next joke, a courtship-related script is presented in a slightly different way. During the setup, the script of courtship is evoked with the female as the active part trying to chat up a man.

(11) Заходит мужик в ювелирный магазин. Девушка-продавщица:
– Ой, мужчина, как хорошо что вы к нам зашли, ко дню Святого Валентина у нас две недели 20% скидки, купите что-нибудь в подарок вашей девушке. Вот кулончик золотой в форме сердечка, вашей девушке очень понравится.
Мужик грустно:
– У меня нет девушки...
Продавщица кокетливо:
– Не может быть, такой видный, красивый, высокий мужчина и нет девушки? Почему?!
Мужик грустно:
– Жена не разрешает...
<http://anekdots.smeha.net/muzhchini/1.html> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 47:23:35

A guy enters a jewellery store. The female shop assistant: "Oh, very good that you've come to our shop. We offer a 20% sales discount two weeks before Valentine's Day. Buy something for your girl-friend! There's a heart-shaped golden pendant. Your girl-friend will like it a lot." The guy says sadly: "I don't have a girl-friend..." The shop assistant says flirtatiously: “That’s impossible, such a handsome, good-looking, tall man and you don’t have a girl-friend? Why?!” The guy sadly: “My wife doesn’t allow ...”

In the setup, the expectation is nurtured that the customer is a lonely bachelor. This is also the implicitly presumed reason for his lack of a girl-friend. These implicit expectations are disconfirmed by his answer that his wife does not allow him to have a girl-friend. This comment triggers the switch from the courtship-script to the script of matrimony. The lack of a girl-friend is interpreted in the context of the first script as a pitiable but reversible aspect of the man’s life. In the context of matrimony activated by the punch line, “having a girl-friend” gets reinterpreted as (forbidden) adultery. “Not having a girl-friend” in the context of the second script is in accordance with the default expectations regarding matrimony.

Whereas (11) presents a switch from a courtship-related script to a matrimonial or adultery-related script and conveys a male perspective, (12) is to a certain degree an inverse version of (11), where the roles of the male/female part of the couple are switched.

(12) Я спрашиваю в последний раз, почему вы хотите расторгнуть ваш брак? -спрашивает судья.
– Жена жаждала иметь мальчика, а я был против.
– Почему? Ведь дети – украшение семьи.
– Но она хотела иметь двадцатилетнего мальчика!
<http://www.anekdots.ru/st/mn/2/> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 9:64:22
“I ask you for the last time, why do you want to have a divorce?” asked the judge. “My wife wanted to have a boy, and I didn’t.” “Why? Children are an adornment for the family.” “But she wanted to have a 20-year old boy!”

This joke relies on the verbal ambiguity of the phrase “иметь мальчика” that conveys the meaning of “having a baby-boy” (meaning$_1$) and “having a younger boy-friend” (meaning$_2$). Therefore, (12) is an instance of a *poetic joke* (Hockett 1977) based on ambiguity. The first script activated is a matrimonial one. The family court judge is interested in the reason for the divorce, and the husband explains that his wife wanted to have a boy but he did not. In this context meaning$_1$ is activated. In the punch line, when the age of the desired boy is added, meaning$_2$ is activated and the script switches from matrimony to adultery.

Jokes (11) and (12) illustrate that different gender arrangements (adultery by husband vs. adultery by wife) can be displayed by jokes that are patterned in a similar fashion. Although the SI has a different value, both jokes share one script (adultery in matrimony). What is different is the role of the main protagonist. In (11), it is the man wishing to commit adultery, and, in (12), the woman. Both jokes work well in pointing to a certain flexibility and equality within the gender arrangements. Nevertheless, respondents rated (11) as Russian and (12) as foreign.

5.4 Heterosexuality and homosexuality

Since the period of the *perestrojka* and the opening of the Russian society, other sexual orientations have become more common and homosexuals have become more visible in the public life. These changes are also reflected in and by Russian jokelore. A number of jokes introduce the (restricted) new gender-relevant script of homosexuality. Homosexuals traditionally serve as TA in Russian jokelore. Those are mostly disgusting sexual jokes poking fun at male homosexuals.[23] What is new in the following jokes is that they do not focus on sexual actions.[24] This fact may also enhance their circulation.

The following jokes dealing with homosexuality are characterised by a specific SO. In the first part of the joke, a script is activated that is associated with heterosexuality. This is confronted with a script of homosexuality in the SO.

(13) Разговаривают две подружки:
– А вообще сейчас настоящие мужчины встречаются?
– Встречаются, но все чаще друг с другом.
<http://www.anekdots.ru/st/mn/2/> (last accessed 6th May 2009), 39:35:37
Two friends$_{\text{fem.}}$ are talking. "Generally, do you meet real men nowadays [literally: are real men met/can one meet real men]?" "One can meet them [literally: they are met], but more often they meet one another."

Joke (13) is another instance of a *poetic joke* (cf. Hockett 1977) that is based on verbal ambiguity. The phrase "настоящие мужчины встречаются" is the passive voice construction in Russian conveying the meaning "real men are met" or "one can meet real men". Literally, it would be "real men meet each other". In the context of two women chatting, this phrase activates the script of heterosexual dating. This is the salient interpretation. The second woman's comment activates and clarifies another less salient interpretation by adding the phrase "one another" ("друг с другом") and evokes the script of homosexual dating among men, i.e. that men more often meet each other.

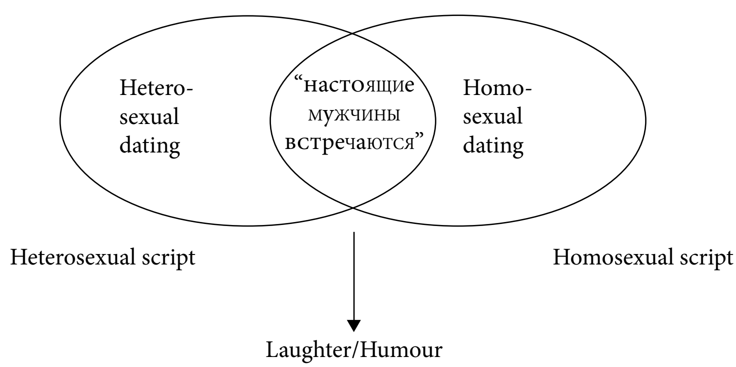

Figure 4. SO (are real men met/can one meet real men) underlying joke (13)

23. Evidence for the telling of such jokes can also be found in the Russian National Corpus.

24. Draitser (1999: 127–128) mentions some modest examples that illustrate the harsh folk attitude towards homosexuals.

This new SO is quite productive as can be seen from the next example where the SO *heterosexuality* vs. *homosexuality* is merged with a political joke or mapped on political protagonists. This joke is thereby reliant on the stigmatisation of a man by linking him with homosexuality.[25] Homosexuality is here attributed to Dmitrij Medvedev, who at the time was as candidate running for President and the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.[26]

(14) – Правда ли, что Путин, как Саркози, разводится с женой и женится на более молодой?
– То, что разводится, наверное, да. Про остальное ничего не могу сказать. Но он все чаще показывается в обнимку с Медведевым. (private collection), 30:43:25
"Is it true, that Putin like Sarkozy wants a divorce his wife in order to marry a younger woman?" "That he wants a divorce, probably yes. About the other thing I can't tell you anything. But he lately often shows in embrace with Medvedev."

Once more in the setup, the heterosexuality of the main character is salient. Putin and his plans to divorce are compared to Sarkozy's latest divorce and new marriage. The homosexual orientation is only pointed out to in the punch line, which indicates his appearing with the future Russian President during the election campaign. Public embracing, as illustrated in the second script, is seen as a sign of personal affection rather than being motivated by the demonstration of political unity and support. In both jokes, (13) and (14), the SO can be traced back to *heterosexuality* vs. *homosexuality* at a more abstract level.

A similar contamination of political, or rather ethnic, humour with this SO is found in the following joke which is not in Russian but in *suržyk*, a mixed language with elements from Ukrainian and Russian that is mainly spoken in the central and eastern parts of Ukraine which for the longest time have been exposed to a strong Russian influence. The example is taken from the album "Неформат" (2002) (track 3) of the Ukrainian rap group TNMK. The joke has the NS of a short dialogic exchange between a mother and her son. The dialogue is placed between the songs and both parts are performed by male speakers who try to imitate voice features of the characters.

25. The laughter earned by such jokes can very well be explained in terms of superiority theories. The audience experiences *sudden glory* (Thomas Hobbes) with regard to the rejected person.

26. According to Draitser (1999: 128), homosexuality is in Russian jokes frequently attributed to characters that are perceived as *others vs. us*: "Many jokes on homosexuality, however, show Russian unwillingness to accept the reality of homosexuals existing among them; they shift it outside of the group: to foreigners (usually Frenchmen), minorities (Armenians and Georgians), or socially disparaged members of law enforcement agencies (policemen)."

(15) – От скажи мені Коля, чого ти не женишся, га? Диви он Нінка, яка дебела дівчина, і біля корів і біля гусей. Чого ти на ній не женишся?
– Мамо, я її не люблю.
– Тю ти їй богу! А он диви Света, он яка ж красіва, коса до попи, ноги дебелі, руки дебелі, очі диви які круглі. Чого ти на ній не женишся?
– Мамо, я її не люблю.
– Тьху ти господи! А кого же ти любиш?
– Мамо, я люблю сусідського Серьожу.
– Тьху ти господи! Так він же москаль!
"Tell me Kolja$_{\text{male}}$, why don't you get married? Have a look at Ninka, what a stout girl, working with the cows and the geese. Why don't you marry her?" "Mum, I don't love her." "Oh my God! Then have a look at Sveta, what a beauty, a braid reaching the bottom, strong legs, strong hands, and look what round eyes. Why don't you marry her?" "Mum, I don't love her." "Oh my God! And whom do you love?" "Mum, I love our neighbour Sereža$_{\text{male}}$." "Oh my God! He's Russian$_{\text{pejorative}}$!"

This joke is one of the few examples with two SOs organised sequentially. The first few turns exchanged by the mother and her son (Kolja) introduce the script of a young man looking for a bride. The mother highlights different qualities (hard-working and rural beauty) of possible brides in the village (Sveta and Ninka). The first script switch is materialised after the son has rejected two candidates and the mother has asked her question. The son confesses that he's in love with the neighbour's son (Sereža). The script once more switches from *heterosexuality* (young man looking for a bride) to *homosexuality* (young man finding another young man). The dialogic exchange would already at this stage satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for a joke as claimed by the GTVH, but the dialogue continues, introducing another SO. After the first script switch from heterosexuality to homosexuality, expectations are nurtured that the mother will react in a homophobic way. These expectations are contextually raised and salient in the rural surrounding that is implicitly supposed to be quite staid. The script of homophobia remains actually implicit and has to be inferred by the recipient of the joke. This script and these expectations are broken by the mother's reply. She does not disapprove of her son's choice because of the partner's male sex but because of his ethnic background. The term "москаль" is clearly a pejorative word denoting a "Russian". The mother reveals her dislike and antipathy for Russians by her lexical choice. Therefore, the second SO is *homophobia* vs. *xenophobia.*

6. Conclusion

The analysis of contemporary Russian jokes from the internet and the author's private collection concerning "new" gender displays shows new joke tendencies. Assuming that at least some of the jokes are translations or adaptations of Western jokes, future developments and research will show which of these jokes find their entry to and enduring distribution in the sphere of oral joke-telling in face-to-face communication. On the other hand, one has to consider some of them to be indigenous Russian jokes, especially the instances of poetic jokes.

From the analysis, the following tendencies emerge concerning the gender displays and gender arrangements as presented in the "newly" gendered jokes. Firstly, some jokes reveal a feminist tendency, for which Western origin may be accountable, as they contain role reversals or subvert gender stereotypes. Puzzling effects are caused by attributing male traits to female characters or female activities to male characters, as in (5), (6) or (7). Secondly, some jokes present female characters as being quick-witted, for example, when actively rejecting male approaches. Women are not, as in traditionally gendered Russian jokelore, presented as TAs, i.e. butts, or as passive victims. They appear as active quick-witted protagonists, as in (4), (7), (8), (9) or (10). Finally, in comparison to traditionally gendered Russian jokes, as analysed by Draitser (1999), there is a female perspective encoded in many of the new jokes. The punch line is frequently delivered by a female. The presentation encodes a female point of view and evaluation, such as (5), (9) or (10).[27]

These innovative features that characterise "new" gender displays in contemporary Russian jokes cannot all be captured within the framework of the GTVH. One can argue from these findings that the GTVH has to be at least enlarged by a module capturing perspective or point of view, because an important upcoming tendency is situated in a change of perspective from the man's to the woman's point of view (cf. Bing 2007: 357–360). What distinguishes many of these new jokes from the traditionally gendered ones and what is shared by most of the new ones or what links the new ones is the woman's evaluative perspective they are told from. In this regard, they are in sharp contrast to the jokes analysed by Draitser (1999) that are characterised by an underlying male and sometimes also misogynist perspective.

The second innovation that seems to be rooted in a genuine Russian development and in the social changes continuing since the 1990s is the way the topic of homosexuality is dealt with in current Russian jokelore. Whereas in Western societies, either political correctness or honest acceptance prevents homosexuality from being exploited in the SO of jokes that can be told in public, the ascription of homosexuality to a person serves as a means of stigmatisation in Russian jokes. This aspect of "newly" gendered jokes can easily be captured within the framework of the GTVH as it can be described as a new

27. This tendency is also revealed by Crawford (2003) and Bing (2007) as being characteristic of women's liberated humour in Western speech communities.

and specific SO (*heterosexuality* vs. *homosexuality*). Furthermore, this SO is also productive and mapped on other classes of jokes, such as political jokes or ethnic humour.

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Understanding ethnic humour in Romanian jokes

Carmen Popescu

The study of ethnic humour is as popular in the world as ethnic jokes themselves. However, the topic has scarcely been addressed in the Romanian context, and certainly not from a linguistic perspective. This small-scale study represents an attempt to map the territory and understand the interdependence of these jokes with the changing social reality of the transition period that Romania is going through at present. The paper aims to identify, describe and discuss the main ethnic scripts and targets used in Internet Romanian ethnic jokes, and to account for culture-specific elements. Next, the study focuses on jokes about Roma and Hungarians, the two leading minorities in Romania, specifically on *stupidity* jokes based on *language distortion*. Language jokes can relate to *stupidity* but also to *canniness*, and the two ethnic minorities are portrayed as both *stupid* and *canny*, a fact that both constitutes an exception and complements existing theory in ethnic humour research.

1. Introduction

The *canned joke* is perhaps the most common and popular genre of humour, consisting in a narrative (and/or a dialogue) followed by a punch-line, always in final position. However, the element which differentiates the joke from other forms of narrative is "the cryptic element" (cf. Chiaro 1992: 50–55) implicit within the punch-line. While the first part of the joke introduces the features of a given situation, the closing of this narrative is ensured by the punch-line, which is characterised by unpredictability. The punch-line is then an incongruous element which must initially resist interpretation, but at the same time must be interpretable rapidly enough to produce a humorous effect. By being self-contained, meaningful and complete, canned jokes are memorable and are usually repeated verbatim by a narrator and thus decontextualised. Dynel (2009) observes that because the term "joke" is often used in the sense of a "canned joke", the epithet "canned" is dropped as redundant. This study focuses on ethnic canned jokes targeted at the leading minorities living in Romania, i.e. Roma and Hungarians.

The article presents the findings of a small-scale study based on the analysis of a sample consisting of fifty-one ethnic jokes selected from seven Romanian sites available on the Internet, starting from the assumption that there is a reasonable correspondence between spoken and written jokes. To date, Romanian ethnic jokes have not been studied from a linguistic perspective and the data has a lot to offer on the important life the genre leads on the Internet, especially since, in Romania, as throughout Eastern Europe, joke-telling has lost ground as a form of socialising since 1989 (Davies 1998, Laineste 2009). The fall of communism brought about a different political and social reality, and Romania, like all the other countries of the former Soviet bloc, started the long and difficult journey of transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy. Catching up, adapting, redefining values and identifying and rediscovering tradition were only some of the challenges that Romania had to face in a larger context of change, which the whole of Europe was going through, with new countries joining the European Union. Globalisation and the beginning of the Internet era have added to the difficulties that the country has with its identity. The ethnic jokes that the study explores are collected from the Internet, a very popular medium that is increasingly influential in the post-communist Romanian society as well. Laineste (2009) notes that, due to its unlimited memory space, the Internet allows all texts, be they active or inactive in everyday interaction, to co-exist simultaneously for a long time. Therefore, post-socialist jokelore reunites both old and new jokes, thus permitting an evaluation of its creative tendencies during the "transition" years.

The interest in the topic stems from the assumption that what we joke about and how says more about us than about the targets of the jokes, and that the analysis of ethnic jokes directed at others can shed light on changing social realities. In spite of the fact that different plausibility requirements operate in jokes in comparison to the serious mode (Mulkay 1988), a closer sociopragmatic analysis of the interaction in these jokes can add a socio-cultural perspective on the way in which the changing cultural context is affecting the topics of canned ethnic jokes in the current Romanian context, the interaction within the jokes, the identity of the targets, as well as the direction of joking.

2. The debate on aggressiveness

The aggressiveness thesis of (ethnic) humour has long been the subject of debate in humour scholarship. The earliest published writer on the aggressive element of humour was Thomas Hobbes (1660/1994: 49), who formulated the idea that laughter arises from a sense of superiority of the joke teller towards some object, known as the "butt of the joke". Such sociological theories of humour often emphasise the aggressive/exclusive or cohesive/inclusive aspect of humour and are also known as hostility/disparagement theories (Attardo 1994). They also emphasise the (negative) attitude of the producer and/or user of humour towards its target, and the alleged aggressive character of the laughter. Humour is said to be pointed against some person or group, typically on political, ethnic or gender grounds. Conflict theories deriving from this approach, which see humour as an expression of antagonism or as a weapon, are mostly used in the investigation of political and ethnic humour. Hence, there began the famous debate around the possible aggressiveness of humour, ethnic humour in particular, a theory that is widely contested in humour scholarship.

Studies of ethnic humour, contested for building on the "dark side" of humour (Kuipers 2008: 368), combine linguistic approaches, i.e. incongruity theory, with conflict theories. In this view, ethnic jokes are based on over-generalisations, treating an individual "solely and entirely as an instance of the targeted ethnic group" (Raskin 1985: 207).

These jokes imply "the pinning of an undesirable quality on a particular ethnic group in a comic way or to a ludicrous extent" (Davies 1990: 4). However, a person who enjoys ethnic humour does not necessarily subscribe to the stereotype ridiculed in the joke. Enjoyment of ethnic humour can have various explanations and does not always imply aggressive feelings towards the target. The aggressiveness thesis has come to be considered a mistake made by social researchers of humour, and Davies' main theme (1990, 1998, 2002) is that there is no correlation between hostile tensions between peoples or groups and ethnic jokes, and that joke tellers do not believe the targets to have the qualities described in the jokes.

Theories of release, or relief, also known as psychoanalytic theories, focus mainly on the *recipient* of humour, or, more specifically, on the psychological effects humour brings about in the recipient. Freud (1976) considered humour as one of the so-called "substitution mechanisms" which enable conversion of one's socially tabooed aggressive impulses to acceptable ones, thus avoiding wasting additional mental energy to suppress them. Humour theory is indebted to Freud for the relief theory, and its assumption that humour can act as a "safety valve" has had great influence on modern humour scholarship. His contribution to the view that jokes can be seen in relation to social *taboos* has become central to humour scholarship.

To summarise, the answer to the question whether and, if so, how exactly jokes mirror reality, is not a simple one. This may be because so many use this "mirror" and, as in the case of parallel mirrors, there are multiple reflections. However, a more optimistic academic answer could point to three variants of human kind that have been identified so far.

One variant is that we are an aggressive species always ready for humorous combat, who take pleasure in hurting our fellow human beings, cruelly ridiculing and sanctioning disadvantage of all kinds. The second is that we are individuals so stressed by the constraints of society we created ourselves that we have to stock and afterwards suppress our inherently aggressive impulses, so that we may become acceptable and even lovable when we use joking as an anger management device in our endeavours to appear well-educated and polite.

Finally, the third variant entails a relaxed, benevolent individual, who makes "tasteless" humorous remarks or tells ethnic jokes with the innocent intention of having fun. If the joke is perceived as offensive, then "just kidding" comes in handy and counts as a retracted offence or even as an apology.

3. Analytical framework

In the analysis of the Romanian ethnic jokes in the sample, I draw on Raskin's (1985) concept of "script" and the classic categories of ethnic scripts discussed in Davies' comparative study of ethnic humour.

3.1 Raskin's approach to ethnic humour

Raskin is credited with a significant contribution to the linguistics of humour, i.e. the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH), where he develops the notion of "script", previously used in psychology, sociology and anthropology, artificial intelligence, and education with other names, e.g. "schema", "frame" and "daemon". The script encodes semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it and is defined as a cognitive structure internalised by the native speaker that "represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world". Formally, it can be represented by "a graph with lexical nodes and semantic links between the nodes" (Raskin 1985: 81). Raskin argues that all scripts of a language constitute a continuous graph. The scripts store encyclopaedic information that is conventional, fictional, and mythological and express approximations of reality.

Raskin defines ethnic humour as a special category of humour, based on specific scripts. Thus, the "normal group" represents the majority against whose behaviour the actions of a minority are perceived as being different. Raskin identifies two popular ethnic scripts: *stupidity* and *canniness* or *craftiness*, claimed to be universal because they are found in virtually any language and any country. Ethnic jokes can be quite similar across languages and countries with the sole minor substitution of the target group with another for which the same ethnic script holds. While *stupidity* and its subscripts *language distortion* and *dirtiness* (see below) are negatively labelled, *canniness* has an intrinsic contradictory axiological character: it is closely related to the script of *deception* but also presumes a quick mind, a combination of scripts which may result in "some reluctant admiration" (1985: 191). This means that to be truly ethnic, an ethnic joke does not have to be culture-specific, i.e. referring to just one ethnic group, but it must be rooted in an ethnic script. *Stupidity* jokes, for instance, are similar in any language, but while in the United States the target position is occupied by the Poles, in France it is the Belgians.

In addition to the main scripts, Raskin introduces more specific scripts (1985: 194) that tend to be associated with one particular ethnic group, such as the script of *efficiency* and *beer-loving* for the Germans, the *oversexed minority* script for many

Latino cultures, *asexuality, methodicity* and *blind obedience* for the Germans, *respect for tradition* and *cold politeness* for the British. Raskin argues that "most of ethnic humour is functionally deprecatory or disparaging" (1985: 180).

3.2 The comparative study of ethnic humour

In his comparative studies, Davies (1990, 1998, 2002) shows that the same jokes are told in many parts of the world, thus making visible a cross-cultural pattern. His survey confirms the universality of the ethnic scripts discussed by Raskin (1985), by identifying in every culture which ethnic group is labelled *stupid* or *canny*. Ethnic jokes, he claims, fall into pairs (*stupidity* and *canniness*, for instance, or *militarism* and *cowardice*) and *stupidity* and *canniness* jokes are the most widely spread. He establishes that the targets of *stupidity* jokes are always groups that are geographically, linguistically or culturally marginal in a nation or domain and who are perceived as culturally ambiguous by the culturally dominant group. In addition, they are likely to be rustic people or immigrants in search of unskilled and low-prestige manual work. They are often, however, to a great extent similar to the joke-tellers themselves, sharing the same cultural background or even speaking a similar or identical language. The majority group member often teases the minority group for its strong foreign accent or mimics it in order to elicit laughter.

Davies also examined special problems of marginality, such as peoples caught between two cultures (Belgium, Bosnia) and ethnic jokes about alcohol. Davies produces evidence that ethnic jokes are playful, not expressions of aggression, and do not create or exacerbate tensions between peoples or groups, as their authors or animators do not believe the targets have the qualities ascribed to them in the jokes.

3.3 The notions of "ethnic script" and "ethnic joke" adopted in this study

Drawing on Raskin's (1985) characterisation of scripts as being conventional and fictional (Raskin 1985), Davies warns against a common confusion between ethnic scripts and corresponding, equivalent stereotypes, which may or may not exist. In this paper, I am using the term "ethnic scripts" to refer to humorous ethnic scripts in the more restricted sense of "humorous topics", i.e. "more specific scripts" (Raskin 1985:194), as distinguished from serious ethnic stereotypes (Davies 1990: 326).

Thus, I see humorous ethnic scripts as "humour enhancers" (Triezenberg 2008: 538), i.e. not necessarily funny in themselves, but helping an audience to understand that the text is *supposed to be* funny. Triezenberg (2008) suggests that scripts often take the form of shared stereotypes, already familiar to the audience, and that the recognisability of the stereotype can be a useful resource for the author of the joke instead of building up a fresh script in the mind of the audience.

The ethnic joke is a subgenre that can be described as "a misleading tale that begins as a plausible account of a real people and then suddenly switches to an absurd script based on a well-known, established convention" (Davies 1990: 320). The mention of a well-labelled group can act as a hint that the tale is actually a joke on one of the themes of *stupidity*, *canniness*, *cowardice, alcohol*, etc. (Davies 1990, Chiaro 1992). Its essential ingredients are two possible contradictory scripts, viz. on the one hand, events in real life and, on the other, a fantasy based on the comic convention that the characters possess "some unwanted human quality to an absurd degree" (Davies 1990: 320).

In *ethnic language jokes*, i.e. jokes that contain a strong linguistic pattern that points to the distortion of the language, grammar mistakes, semantic-pragmatic ambiguity and misinterpretation are exploited in order to make the character appear foolish.

4. Methodology

In this study, I analysed ethnic jokes from seven Romanian sites by looking at all jokes on each of the sites on one day in January 2010. All the jokes are assigned to pre-defined categories (e.g. specific nations, regional ethnic groups, blondes, stupid Romanian characters, professions, politics, animals, sex, etc.) and counted by the site editors. I performed a simple frequency count to identify the number of jokes per ethnic group. I then selected and translated a sample of one/two-nation 51 ethnic jokes for qualitative analysis based on humorous ethnic scripts. The number of jokes per nation in the sample is proportional to the number of jokes per nation identified on the investigated sites. Thus, the corpus included one/two-nation jokes selected according to the frequencies presented in column 2 of Table 3.

The analytical tools used in this study are categories of jokes and scripts identified by comparative studies of ethnic humour: stupidity, dirtiness, canniness, stinginess, cowardice, alcohol consumption, teetotalism, etc. (Davies 1990).

5. Analysis, findings and discussion

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study and then focuses on the analysis of language jokes about two minorities, i.e. Roma and Hungarians, which reveal interesting cultural aspects. The same stupidity subscript, *language distortion*, is used to make fun of both Roma and Hungarians, in spite of the fact that while the former are mostly illiterate, the latter are educated and bilingual (see Section 5.3). In other words, language misuse in ethnic jokes could be indicative of a different script than the one indicated in the literature, i.e. *stupidity*.

5.1 Quantitative analysis

Of the 24,171 jokes surveyed on the seven Romanian sites, ethnic jokes of various types represent 9.5% (2,302). Table 1 presents the findings on the seven sites.

A survey of the ethnic jokes showed the following main types: one/two-nation jokes, i.e. jokes about one nation/ethnic group alone or in interaction with a Romanian character; jokes about Radio Erevan, an Armenian radio station; and three-nation jokes, i.e. jokes where a Romanian character interacts with characters from two different nation/ethnic groups. Table 2 presents the frequencies for each category.

The second largest category, the Radio Erevan jokes (488–21.2%), was one of the most popular joke cycles in all the Eastern bloc countries when they were behind the Iron Curtain (Dundes 1971). Mostly political jokes voicing anti-Russian sentiments, these jokes are today "de-politicised" (Laineste 2009) and they only circulate by way of tradition. Although the historical circumstances under which they were born have disappeared, they continue to be part of our collective memory. This joke cycle has lost its ethnic vein and Radio Erevan is no longer associated with either a particular ethnic group or political regime, playing instead on absurd amusing details. Therefore, I consider these jokes to be a distinct category, which was not included in the analysis of this study and which can constitute the focus of further research.

Table 1. Frequency of ethnic jokes on Romanian web pages

Website	**No. of jokes**	**No. of ethnic jokes**	**(%)**
http://www.bancuri.us/index.htm	2,510	306	12.2%
http://www.bancuri.net/	3,894	495	12.7%
http://bancuri.haios.ro/bancuri.php?lang=ro	5,514	371	6.7%
http://bancuri.cere.ro/	6,378	361	5.7%
http:www.bancuri.biz/	1,990	207	10.4%
http://bancuri.cc/	1,790	167	9.3%
http://www.bancuriglume.com/	2,097	395	18.8%
Total	24,171	2,302	9.5%

Table 2. Frequency of one nation, two-nation, three-nation, and Radio Erevan ethnic jokes

Nation	**No. of jokes**	**(%)**
One/Two-nation jokes	1,619	69.9%
Radio Erevan	488	21.2%
Three-nation jokes	195	8.9%
Total no. of ethnic jokes	2,302	100%

Three-nation jokes (195–8.9%), the third category, do not represent the focus of the present study, and therefore were not included in the sample. Only one/two-nation jokes were selected, analysed and discussed in this study.

The ethnic groups and nations that Romanians joke about most are Scots (345–21.3%), Jews (303–18.7%), Roma (297–18.3%), Hungarians (188–11.6%), Blacks (166–10.3%), Somalis (121–7.5%), British (jokes 65–4%), Russians (60–3.7%), Albanians (29–1.8%). Table 3 shows the frequency of ethnic jokes per nation, both on the sites and in the sample, where frequencies under 1% were not included.

The analysis of the data revealed that the overwhelming majority of the jokes share the *stupidity* script (23), or its opposite, *canniness* (23). The next frequent scripts are *the oversexed* (Blacks and Roma – 2), the overenthusiastic *drinkers* (Russians – 1) and the calm Brits (2). Table 4 presents the number of jokes by nation and script. The last column lists the targets as Remote Foreign (F), Minorities (M) or Neighbours (N).

Therefore, the targets of Romanian ethnic jokes identified in the sample constitute three important groups: *remote foreign targets* (Scots, Jews, Blacks, Somalis, Brits), *inhabitants of neighbouring countries* (Russians and Albanians) and *minorities*.

Tables 5 and 6 summarise the findings according to two criteria: nation and subscripts, i.e. stupidity and canniness, respectively. The subscripts found for the *stupidity* script are: *pure stupidity* (7) *language distortion* (6), *technical stupidity* (5), *poverty* (3), and *dirtiness* (2). The subscripts identified for *canniness* are: *stinginess* (Scots – 11); *traditional concern with money* (Jews – 10) and *deception* (Hungarians – 1; Roma – 1).

Table 3. Frequency of ethnic jokes by nation

Nation	**No. of jokes**	**(%)**	**No. of jokes in the sample**
Scots	345	21.3%	11
Jews	303	18.7%	10
Roma	297	18.3%	10
Hungarians	188	11.6%	6
Afro-Americans	166	10.3%	5
Somalis	121	7.5%	4
Brits	65	4.0%	2
Russians	60	3.7%	2
Albanians	29	1.8%	1
Arabs	24	1.5%	–
Americans	11	0.7%	–
French	4	0.2%	–
Chinese	4	0.2%	–
Italians	1	0.1%	–
Germans	1	0.1%	–
Total no. of one/two-nation jokes	1,619	100%	51

Table 4. Number of ethnic jokes by nation and script in the sample

Nation	No. of jokes	Stupid	Canny	Alcohol	Oversexed	Calm	Codes
Scots	11	–	11	–	–	–	F
Jews	10	–	10	–	–	–	F
Roma	10	8	1	–	1	–	M
Hungarians	6	5	1	–	–	–	M
Blacks	5	4	–	–	1	–	F
Somalis	4	4	–	–	–	–	F
Brits	2	–	–	–	–	2	F
Russians	2	1	–	1	–	–	N
Albanians	1	1	–	–	–	–	N
Total	51	23	23	1	2	2	

Table 5. Number of jokes by nation and subscripts of *stupidity*

Nation	Stupidity	Language distortion	Technical stupidity	Poverty	Dirtiness	Total
Roma	4	3	1	–	–	8
Hungarians	2	3	–	–	–	5
Blacks	2	–	1	–	1	4
Somalis	–	–	–	3	1	4
Russians	–	–	1	–	–	1
Albanians	–	–	1	–	–	1
Total	8	6	4	3	2	23

In Table 5.5, the *minorities* group hold the first position, while *language distortion* appears as the most significant category in jokes about them, 6 out of 13 (46.2%). Interestingly, by contrast, Roma and Hungarians are listed among the ethnic groups identified as *canny* (see Table 5.6 and 5.4, for further comments).

Table 6. Number of jokes by nation and subscripts of *canniness*

Nation	Stinginess	Concern with money	Deception	Total
Scots	11	–	–	11
Jews	–	10	–	10
Roma	–	–	1	1
Hungarians	–	–	1	1
Total	11	10	2	23

The number of these jokes invites further investigation of the *stupid-canny* opposition in Romanian ethnic jokes about minorities.

5.2 Qualitative analysis

I will now discuss each group of targets, i.e. the remote foreign targets (international stereotypes and exotic cultures), neighbouring countries and national minorities.

5.2.1 *Remote foreign targets: International stereotypes and remote exotic cultures*

These are ethnic groups or nations that Romanians have not had contact with until recently, if at all. As Davies (1990) argues, although the main scripts are universal, some ethnic groups are associated with one feature across different cultures, such as the canny Jew, the stingy Scotsman, or the calm Brit. The Scots actually occupy the first position, which is surprising. As in the case of Blacks (discussed next), or of jokes about the Brits, Scottish jokes are about a nation that Romanians rarely had contact with, if at all, when behind the Iron Curtain, and that they have only learned about indirectly, via television or jokes in English textbooks. The isolation in which Romania remained for nearly half a century limited travel of both people and jokes. These stereotypes may have been the only information accessible to Romanians when behind the Iron Curtain, suggesting an important role played by various media in maintaining and circulating ethnic stereotypes in the form of ethnic jokes.

Remote exotic cultures (Blacks, Somalis) are also targets of Romanian *stupidity* jokes, mainly playing on the scripts of *poverty* and *the oversexed*. The Somalis constitute a distinct group in the data and the unique script for jokes about them is *poverty*; the jokes themselves are of the "cruel" variety (Billig 2005: 121), ridiculing pain and suffering from hunger. A possible explanation could be that Black people, both in real life situations as immigrants and as characters in American movies, formerly inaccessible to the Romanian public, represent a complete novelty in Romania after the fall of communism and thus arouse interest. These jokes may be popular because Romanians consider themselves to be more fortunate than Somalis, a nation that makes them appear as being better-off in contrast.

In the data, there are also interesting deviations from the stereotype, as in the following joke, which depicts a different situation.

(1) In Africa, a missionary visits the patients in a Black village. In a hut he finds a young man with fever. He caresses his forehead, gives him medicine and tells him: "In a week you will be well and you will be able to work like an elephant." "This is good, the young man replies, it means I can fly to Sorbonne to teach my sociology course."

Here, the source of humour is the incongruity between the script of the stereotypical image of a young African man and his real status. The stereotypical status is created through the missionary's perception of what an African is, based on a superficial judgment which takes into consideration only the colour of someone's skin and his/her location. The surprise element in the punch-line is the young man's actual high social and professional status. Humour arises from the clash between this real identity presupposing a highly skilled, specialised job in an urban intellectual environment (the Sorbonne) and the preconceived identity that the missionary has attributed to him based on the script of unskilled, physical work ("work like an elephant"), given the rural setting of the joke. Several issues are raised in this joke, pointing to the complexity of ethnic humour interpretation. If we consider Sorbonne University as a metaphor for civilised society and occupying a position in it as a means of belonging to the intellectual elite, then the young man is represented as making a strong statement about his identity and sense of self-worth in the modern world. A racist interpretation of the joke could however question the criteria which made an inhabitant of an African village ascend and maintain such a position. Moreover, the choice of sociology as his specialty, a discipline whose aim is to explore human relationships and the role that people play in society, is in itself ironic, hinting at yet unresolved contemporary social issues.

5.2.2 *Inhabitants of neighbouring countries (Russians, Albanians) sharing post-communist problems with Romanians*

In the question-answer joke below, the question alludes to the issue of shortage, so familiar to ex-communist countries.

(2) Q: Why is there a shortage of elastic gum in Albania?
A: Because they are preparing the launching of their first artificial satellite!

The *stupidity* script is present in the form of the technological naivety of the Albanians, who are depicted as using a catapult to launch a satellite.

5.2.3 *National minorities (Roma and Hungarians)*

These ethnic groups live in close contact and share an official language with the joke-tellers representing the second largest group of targets in the collected data.

Although ethnic jokes are claimed to be universal, the specific cultural context in which they are told plays a crucial part in their understanding. In Romanian ethnic jokes the two minorities are both targets of language jokes, in spite of the fact that Roma and Hungarians are perceived differently by Romanians and "pose" different problems (Baican et al. 2010). This interest is further justified by the fact that 46.2% of the jokes about these ethnic minorities are language jokes.

5.3 Background to the leading ethnic minorities in Romania: The language issue

Before discussing *stupidity* jokes based on *language distortion* about Roma (allegedly 2.46% of the population in 2002) and Hungarians (6.6%), a succinct account of the historical and social background against which these jokes originated is useful.

5.3.1 *Roma*

Since the 19th century, alternative English names for *Gypsy* have included *Rom*, whose plural forms are *Roma* or *Roms,* and *Romani* (*Romany*), with the plural forms *Romanies* or *Romanis*. *Romani* began to be used as a noun for the entire ethnic group, while *Roma* is used to designate the branch of the Romani people with historic concentrations in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In this chapter, I use the term "Roma" to refer to the minority group living in Romania, where a lot of discussion and debate has centred on what was perceived as the danger of creating confusion between the names *Romanies* and *Romanians*. In order to distinguish between them, *rom* and *romani* are often spelled with a double *r*, i.e. *rrom* and *rromani* mostly in academic writing.

Even though a large number of programs for integration and social advancement are taking place in Romania, Roma are still the most socially-disadvantaged minority group and not many have managed to totally integrate into the wider society. With the fall of communism, and the accession of Romania to the European Union, the opportunity of unrestricted travel enabled significant numbers of Roma people to move to the West, on a quest for a better life (mostly to Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany, France). The exact number of emigrants is unknown.

At present, the Roma minority is perceived in Romania as a social problem and a source of national shame. Romanians tend to believe that, without its Roma citizens, the international prestige of the country would be much higher. The public discourse on the Roma is dominated by overt and covert protests ringing with hate speech and revolves around issues such as Roma living on government subsidies and charity, criminal activity and begging (Csepeli and Simon 2003).

A common belief is that Roma do not value education (Baican et al. 2010). The language issue plays an important part, as the lack of command of the official language contributes to their lack of success. In spite the efforts of the Ministry of Education to hire Roma language teachers in Roma speaking communities, the issue of adequate pre-school education for Roma children is not yet resolved. Consequently, the majority of Roma are unable to work, and many remain illiterate. Because of their high birth rate they are also perceived as a demographic threat.

5.3.2 *Hungarians*

Situated in the northwestern part of Romania and neighbouring Hungary, Transylvania is the centre of interethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians. Turda (2001) comments that many Romanians share the concern of Romanian nationalists, that Transylvania is in danger of being occupied by Hungarians.

In 1965, when Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, the situation for the Hungarian minorities gradually worsened as an increased emphasis was put on nationalism. The merging of Hungarian schools with Romanian ones had begun and was completed in the mid-1980s. Teachers were progressively Romanianised, so the proportion of Hungarian children educated in their mother tongue steadily decreased.

Kontler (2001) notes that the confrontation over the status of the Hungarian minorities in Romania reached its climax with the inter-ethnic violence in Tîrgu Mureş in 1990, followed by the freezing of diplomatic relations with Hungary between 1990 and 1994. In September 1996 a "basic treaty" between the two countries was signed, stipulating the acceptance of the existing borders and the implementation of the European standard of the rights of ethnic minorities.

In spite of the steps taken, conflicting historical myths, prejudices, and negative stereotypes have continued. The Hungarian minorities would like to see Hungarian become an official language in the regions where they live and this is a current theme in the Romanian political debate around Hungarians and explains why this minority is perceived both as a territorial and a linguistic threat by many Romanians.

In his overview of the main themes of Romanian jokes, Nedelcu (2006: 191) argues that Roma are the most "productive" minority as far as stereotypes are concerned. He enumerates the main stereotypes: promiscuity, excessive birth rate, violation of basic cohabitation rules (e.g. playing loud music, holding noisy outdoor weekend parties, breeding horses in flats), the refusal to learn and work, "macho" attitudes. As far as Hungarians are concerned, the first on the Nedelcu's list of stereotypes is the linguistic issue: "not knowing the Romanian language and being discriminated against".

5.4 Language distortion jokes about the Roma and Hungarians

Language is an important means of defining ethnic identity (Davies 1990) and misuse of the dominant language can indicate an ethnic group's peripheral position. This section focuses on ethnic jokes based on language misuse by the two leading minorities in Romania. It aims to clarify and illustrate more subtle, idiosyncratic aspects that can show differences in the way in which the two minority groups are perceived by the ethnically dominant population, although at a glance the same script, i.e. *language distortion*, is activated.

In Romania, linguistic minority groups may speak Romanian, the language of the culturally dominant group, imperfectly, in large part because it is a second language. The implication in such jokes is that errors in language also reflect errors in thought or action. The dominant group regards the language use of such groups, who are not clearly "foreign" but not clearly Romanian, as "nonthreatening ambiguity" (Davies 1990: 55), which is a comic situation.

Raskin (1985) discusses at length the script of *language distortion* in relation to *stupidity*. This script is easily evoked by a mispronounced, misused or misplaced word, sound or utterance. Davies (1990) also refers to this phenomenon as a strategy to verbalise the ethnic script of *stupidity*, often signalled by the use of distinctive speech or accent to indirectly point to a certain ethnicity. The *language distortion* script relates to the strategies of stereotyping by ridiculing and mimicry; the majority group often teases the minorities for their strong accent or it mimics them in order to elicit laughter. The jokes below illustrate how language inaccuracies can become a source of poking fun at an ethnic minority.

(3) A Gypsy couple are in the law court, getting a divorce. "Why are you divorcing this woman?" "Because she is very stupid." "How come?" "We were playing a word game, it was my turn to say a word beginning with 'a' and I said 'A cat.'" "So?" "Now it was her turn to say a word beginning with 'h' and she said 'ha-nother cat.'"

(4) A Hungarian attending a Romanian class:
"Gyury, form a sentence, please."
"On Sunday I is going to the forest"
"Dear Gyury, this is wrong!"
"Then I won't go."

Both jokes show triggers of the *language distortion* script, for example playing with word boundaries/manoeuvring phonology (Chiaro 1992) and an explicit insult ("Because she is very *stupid*!") in the case of the Roma (joke 3), whose stereotyped mispronunciation results from placing the "h" sound in front of vowels. In the case of Hungarians (joke 4), the stereotypical language mistakes in the jokes are incorrect gender and number agreement, playing with the rules of conversation by misinterpreting speech acts, i.e. interpreting the error correction as disapproval of the action ("Then I won't go").

However, depending on the joke and the minority group being depicted, the humour can reveal the different perceptions and the social status of the two ethnic groups. The setting of the jokes about Roma is mostly in a criminal court, a police station, or during the burglary of someone's home. The Roma themselves appear as burglars, thieves, or the accused. As mentioned, no schooling exists in their mother tongue and the linguistic problem described here is illiteracy. In the jokes about Hungarians, the setting does not evoke the "law and order" discourse and they are depicted in school, on holidays, as polite hosts, students, customers in restaurants who have Romanian friends. The reason why Hungarians are poor speakers of Romanian is different from Roma's situation, as they benefit from education in their mother tongue and their language mistakes are of a different nature, difficult to render in the translation of jokes based on *language distortion*. The joke could point to their unwillingness to learn or use Romanian. Thus, while both jokes (3) and (4) poke fun at the characters' inability to speak correct Romanian and share the *language distortion* script, the social problems that they point to are of a different nature.

Further examination of jokes based on this script shows that it can also produce jokes in which the targets who initially appear, or are expected, to be *stupid* prove to be *canny*. The following narrative joke is such an example:

(5) On the twentieth anniversary of his marriage, a Hungarian invites a family of Romanian friends to celebrate. The host gives a toast, trying to speak Romanian as correctly as possible: "I want to thank God for the twenty years spent with mine wife." "Spent with MY wife," his Romanian friend corrects him. "With your wife only four years," answers the Hungarian.

Due to his insufficient knowledge of Romanian, the Hungarian is unable to understand that his friend's statement is a correction of the possessive form. Instead, he understands that he is being corrected about the referent of the direct object "my wife". Instead of rephrasing the same sentence and using the recommended form, in a sudden, inappropriate and ridiculous attempt to restore the truth, he "repairs" it by changing it to "your wife" (the Romanian's wife), which corresponds to the real situation. Thus, he reveals without any restraint the adulterous act of a man (partially) living with his friend's wife. The misinterpretation is based on linguistic ambiguity, i.e. a grammar mistake gives rise to an event, in other words, uttering the ambiguous text gives rise to multiple interpretations. The linguistic ambiguity is crucial to the joke (Ritchie 2004: 92) and it does not occur in the supporting narrative, but only in an utterance by a character (the Hungarian) in the story. This insult, Ritchie argues, is not sufficient to create humour, unless it accords with the audience's beliefs.

The question is then raised whether the Hungarian is depicted as being *stupid* or *canny*. Although the *stupidity* script seems to be at work, via the *language distortion* script, *canniness,* the opposite script, extended to deception and disloyalty, i.e. adultery, is also activated. Here, I see *language distortion* and *stupidity* as secondary to *deception*, i.e. the serious counterpart of the comic script. The Romanian who corrects the Hungarian with a feeling of superiority becomes the surprise victim of cuckoldry and is put to shame in the light of the punch-line: "I have been living with *your* wife only for four years". While this is inappropriate in the context of a marriage celebration, so is the correction of the language mistake. The rules of polite conversation are broken by the Romanian, who inappropriately and rudely corrects (Billig 2005) his Hungarian friend. In turn, the Hungarian rebels and takes vengeance by ruining the party (and, probably, more!) with his "stupid" remark.

The same question can be asked about Roma characters in some jokes: are they the *stupid* or the *canny*? In one example *language distortion* is not present, but it poses other problems related to the direction of the joke:

(6) A Gypsy and a Romanian are neighbours. The Romanian wants to sell his house. "How much do you ask for it?" "200,000 Euros." "Then I will sell it too and I will ask 300,000 Euros." "How come?" "Well, I don't have Gypsy neighbours."

This joke portrays a Romanian and a Gypsy who are not exactly friends, as in the case of the Hungarian (joke 5), but who, nevertheless, mingle, live in the same neighbourhood and have a similar lifestyle or real estate business, a set-up which suggests a symmetrical social or at least occupational relation between the two, that can even entail financial competition. This sheds new light on the direction of the jokes, as here the central group member is ridiculed and the marginal group member is depicted as the *canny*.

Actually, both the Hungarian and the Gypsy characters in jokes (5) and (6) arouse our "reluctant admiration" (Raskin 1985: 191) precisely because they are *canny,* and *canniness* has a dual nature: one deceives, therefore commits a bad act, but manages to do so due to a particular quality, a nimble mind, better business skills, masculine charm. In these jokes, the marginal group becomes the *canny* group because they manage to turn the negative stereotype, i.e. speaking poor Romanian (joke 5) or being difficult to live with according to Romanian standards (joke 6), into an advantage over the central group, Romanians, who are losers and thus depicted as the *stupid*.

6. Conclusions

The presence of ethnic jokes on the Romanian Internet sites suggests the survival of this form of humour and its extension to new media. The linguistic perspective of this study sheds light on the controversial issue of the relationship between the teller and the target of the jokes, highlighting some of the mechanisms of script activation and also attempting explanations for the reversal of the "direction" of the jokes between particular ethnic groups in the ongoing changing reality in Romania.

The main scripts identified in the data are the universally known *stupid-canny* juxtaposition, divided among three categories of ethnic targets, i.e. *the canny* international stereotypes, i.e. Scots, Jews and Brits; *the stupid*, i.e. local ethnic minorities; and groups situated either very close to or very far from Romania (for example, Africans vs. Albanians).

The most common script found in the data is *stupidity*, and two local targets were identified, i.e. Roma and Hungarians. However, in a number of jokes the same groups are also depicted as being *canny*, which can point to a tendency towards social change in the direction of the inter-ethnic relationships represented in the jokes in the collected data.

This becomes particularly evident in language jokes, where the language mistake shifts from being the object of ridicule, to being used by the supposedly stupid ethnically marginal character in order to win a victory over the interlocutor belonging to the ethnically central group. Speaking poor Romanian, i.e. *language distortion*, can backfire and put down the initiator of the "face threatening act" (Brown and Levinson 1987) of correcting language mistakes by the activation of a competing script, i.e. *canniness.* The marginal ethnic group appears representationally to have acquired some of the attributes of the socially dominant group, and some jokes depict them as being equally well-integrated and economically successful groups of people. This could correspond to a developing tendency in Romanian society, i.e. the boundaries between the centre and the margin becoming blurred due to the reversal of identities of the better-off and the worse-off. Thus, during transition, when some have become rich, it is sometimes less clear who the economically and socially superior are, and consequently there is a change in the direction of the economic (linguistic, territorial or demographic) threat that is mediated through a different "direction" of the jokes. This corresponds to the "confusion in the direction of joking" reported in other studies carried out in the former Soviet bloc (Laineste 2008: 87, 2009: 46), which did not support the unique direction from centre to margin, as claimed by previous humour research (Davies 1990: 11).

Further research on Romanian self-disparaging humour, including regional humour, is needed in order to identify the culture-specific elements in the jokes and how they travel in this transition, research which may provide insight that could shed light on the nation's continuing efforts to redefine its self-identity.

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Jokes available at:

http://www.bancuri.us/index.htm
http://www.bancuri.net/
http://bancuri.haios.ro/bancuri.php?lang=ro
http://bancuri.cere.ro/
http://www.bancuri.biz/
http://www.bancuriglume.com/
http://bancuri.cc/

Sexuality in Anglo-American anti-proverbs

Anna T. Litovkina

Proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct. On the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic or humorous comments on relevant situations. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term "Antisprichwort" (anti-proverb) for such deliberate proverb innovations, based on distortions of original texts. All's fair for anti-proverbs; there is hardly a topic that they do not address. The focus of the present paper is on one of the main topics that emerge in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, namely sexuality. Based on an extensive corpus of data generated by the author from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti, the paper presents a qualitative and quantitative study of sexuality notions recurrent in anti-proverbs in the English language. The results indicate a number of socio-pragmatic tendencies in the treatment of sexuality in English-speaking cultures.

1. Research background and terminology

For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades, they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term *"Antisprichwort" (anti-proverb)* for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, fractured proverbs) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in German (for a summary of relevant research, see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006).

Like traditional gems of wisdom, anti-proverbs appear in a broad range of generic contexts, from personal letters to philosophical journals, from public lectures and sermons to songs, from science fiction to comics and cartoons, from fables to poetry. Anti-proverbs are also found in great abundance on the Internet, in advertising slogans, in the titles of books and articles, and in magazine and newspaper headlines. Anti-proverbs are commonly quoted in collections of puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti. There is no sphere of life where they are not used.

It should be noted that while some anti-proverbs negate the "truth" of the original piece of wisdom completely (e.g., "All's unfair in love and war" {"All's fair in love and war"}[1], the vast majority put the proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit.

Typically, an anti-proverb will elicit humour only if the traditional proverb upon which it is based is also known. Otherwise, the innovative strategy of communication based on the juxtaposition of the old and "new" proverb is lost. Thus, using Norrick's (1989) terminology, anti-proverbs may be called *intertextual jokes*. "Intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written" (Norrick 1989: 117; for intertextuality in a definition of the proverb genre, see Winick 2003).

In distortions of traditional proverbs, new patterns with innovative twists and unexpected new senses are created. Humour emerges through unexpectedness and violation of the old folk wisdom. Since humour reflects the values, beliefs, and world views of social groups, it has long been recognised as a cultural indicator. Berger points out in this regard, "Because humor is intimately connected to culture-codes, it is useful in providing insights into a society's values" (Berger 1976: 115). According to Ziv and Gadish, "humor allows expression of ideas which would otherwise be rejected, criticised, or censored" (1990: 247). Humour can achieve its radical purposes largely because many people construe a humorous communication as a message "not to be taken seriously" (Ziv and Gadish 1990: 247). Since proverbs are considered by many of us sacrosanct, their reinterpretation in innovative ways can create humour. We laugh at some anti-proverbs because they skew our expectations about traditional values, order, and rules. We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in proverb parodies, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of making punning possible.

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments. More often than not, however, being based on mere wordplay or puns, they are playful texts generated primarily for the goal of amusement and function as canned jokes (for types of proverb variation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina 2005: 28–54, 2007; for punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina 2005: 55–86, 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

There is hardly a topic that anti-proverbs do not address. "Just as proverbs continue to comment on all levels and occurrences in our daily life, so do anti-proverbs react by means of alienating and shocking linguistic strategies to everything that surrounds us" (Mieder 1989: 244). Mieder's statement is compatible with Dundes and Hauschild's remarks on humour (1976: 249):

> Nothing is so sacred, so taboo, or so disgusting that it cannot be the subject of humor. Quite the contrary – it is precisely those topics defined as sacred, taboo, or disgusting which more often than not provide the principal grist for humor mills.

1. For the reader's ease, all anti-proverbs are followed by their original forms, given in { } brackets.

Among the themes treated in Anglo-American proverb alterations are women, professions and occupations, money, love, marriage, divorce, friendship, education and learning, alcohol and drugs, children and parents, taxes, God and religion, telephones, cars and computers, and many other ones.

Sexuality is undoubtedly one of the most frequent themes in Anglo-American anti-proverbs (for techniques of creating sexual proverb parodies and some themes in sexual proverb variation, see also Tóthné Litovkina 1999a, 1999b; T. Litovkina 2005: 87–99) and in many other cultures as well, such as Hungarian, Russian, German, and French ones (see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 28–29).

Because of all this, anti-proverbs offer substantial analytic material for linguists with interests in socio-pragmatics and ethnography, which this article represents. Topics and notions occurring in anti-proverbs reflect those relevant to language users within a given culture, present in their communicative practices or, at least, cognitive environment. A case in point is the topic of sexuality, and its numerous manifestations addressed in the analysis below. Studying such anti-proverbs, one may observe and investigate the notions reverberating in the humorous discourse of a language society, notions which may frequently be suppressed outside the humorous mode of communication.

2. Discussion

All three main types of sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality) are brought up in the material analysed, just in vein with the proverb alteration below:

(1) Sexual orientation: Lifestyle. A matter of taste and smell. Different pokes for different folks. {Different strokes for different folks}

Sexual activities described in the vast majority of our anti-proverbs involve two people (most frequently heterosexuals[2]); but we can also find one-person activities such as masturbation, or sexual acts in which three or even more participants are involved, as well as sexual intercourse with an animal.

The focus of the present study is on one of the main topics that emerge in Anglo-American anti-proverbs: sexuality as it is reflected in these free-floating humorous texts. The anti-proverbs discussed in the present study (N = 259) were taken primarily from American and British written sources. The texts quoted, and others too many to include here, were drawn from hundreds of books and articles. All the anti-proverbs quoted here (with references to their sources) can be also found in the books "Twisted

2. The nature of the sexual activity is frequently not stated outright, but rather implied, as in the following sexual parody: *A pill a day keeps the stork away* {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}, which definitely refers to sex between heterosexuals.

Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs" (see Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999) and "Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs"[3] (see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006). The vast majority of anti-proverbs are the products of the playfulness of a solitary author; and thus they will be found in just one source. There are some texts, however, which appear in many sources, exactly in the same form (for more, see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006).

This survey and study cover the most common topics appearing in sexual proverb variations, including sex acts (e.g. kissing or orgasm), female and male parts of body (e.g. penis, vagina, breasts or testicles), procreation, pregnancy and birth control (e.g. birth control pill or condom), culturally taboo and less accepted erotic pleasures (e.g. oral-genital intercourse, sadomasochism, anal sex, masturbation, zoophilia, or sexual activities involving three or more people), homosexuality, bisexuality, monogamy, adultery, bigamy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Let us discuss these and many other themes appearing in sexual anti-proverbs. My discussion is organised into 6 sections. While certain themes occur pervasively in sexual anti-proverbs, some others might appear in only a few examples. For this reason, my discussion might sometimes seem uneven and the treatment of certain thematic categories might either seem to be narrower or broader. It must also be mentioned here that a number of our anti-proverbs treat several thematic categories simultaneously. Consider the anti-proverb "One orgasm in the bush is worth two in the hand" {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush} which could be assigned to at least three thematic categories (orgasm, female pubic hair, and masturbation). Such examples could be discussed in various sections of the present study, under various headings. As a rule, anti-proverbs that embrace more than one theme will be quoted and discussed only once, except in cases in which only a few anti-proverbs have been identified to illustrate a specific theme.

Although the title of this study features the word "anti-proverbs" and the study's goal is to analyse sexual proverb transformations, I could not resist temptation to quote a few sexual examples employing proverbs without any change. The following sexual examples might not be considered anti-proverbs but they offer too clear a parallel to omit (the first one represents the wellerism[4]):

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3. The compilation gives over 5000 texts based on 580 traditional Anglo-American proverbs. The texts were located in hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti, most of which are part of Wolfgang Mieder's international archive of proverbs in Burlington, Vermont.

4. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens' character, Samuel Weller, are particularly common in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (see Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, Mieder 1982). This form of folklore is normally made up of three parts: 1) a statement (which often consists of a proverb or proverbial phrase), 2) a speaker who makes this remark, and 3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation. The meaning of the proverb is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerism. "In this way a

(2) "Every little bit helps," as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband. {Every little bit helps}
(3) Make Love Not War. (See driver for details.) (written on back of a large van) {Make love, not war}

2.1 Sexual intercourse

A recurring theme in our anti-proverbs is *sexual intercourse* itself, as illustrated by "Coito ergo sum" (Norrick 1993: 98), a parody of Descartes' famous formulation, "Cogito ergo sum":

(4) It is better to copulate than never. {Better late than never; 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}

In one anti-proverb, sexual intercourse is ironically revered: "To masturbate is human, to f..k, divine" {To err is human, to forgive divine} (for more on masturbation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see Section 2.4).

Sex is regarded rather harshly in the anti-proverbs below:

(5) Sex is just one damp thing after another. {Life is just one damned thing after another}
(6) You are who you fuck. {You are what you eat}

A number of anti-proverbs from our corpus demonstrate where the sexual act might take place. Although sex acts can, of course, be performed almost anywhere, the most frequently represented place is a bed or a couch (see the expression for coitus: "go to bed with somebody"):

(7) A girl had in bed is worth two in the car. {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush}
(8) If you're not interested in being healthy, wealthy, and wise – how about early to bed? {Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise}

But one may depict sexual activity in more farfetched places, for example, a basement, cab, or van, or in more startling places such as a deserted conservatory, veranda, haystack, or bush:

(9) Two in a bush is the root of all evil. {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush}

Kissing in Western society is very frequently considered to be a romantic act, expressing sentiments of affection, passion and love. See reference to kissing from the Song of

wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality" (Mieder 1989: 225).

Solomon (1: 2): "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; For thy love is better than wine." Along these lines, many anti-proverbs depict or speak of kissing:

(10) A kiss is better than a pile. {A miss is as good as a mile}
(11) A kiss in time saves a nine mile's walk. {A stitch in time saves nine}
(12) To kiss is human; to seduce, divine. {To err is human, to forgive divine}
(13) Lovers. Look before you lip. {Look before you leap}

Without any doubt, women are one of the most popular targets of humour in sexual Anglo-American anti-proverbs. As in traditional Anglo-American proverbs in general, many proverb parodies in my corpus are antifeminist and demeaning to women, reducing them to a mere sex object:

(14) A woman's place is in the hay. {A woman's place is in the house}
(15) Behind every good moan – there's a woman. {Behind every good man there's a woman}
(16) Underneath every successful man there's a woman. {Behind every good man there's a woman}

Nowadays it is not only the man who seduces the woman or encourages the sexual intercourse; this age-old stereotype is often reversed. Therefore, a number of stereotyping proverb transformations depict women as promiscuous and lustful:

(17) The way to a man's heart may be through his stomach, but a pretty girl can always find a detour. {The way to a man's heart is through his stomach}

A woman's unsatisfied sexual appetite and demands are expressed in the following graffito:

(18) When I lay with my bouncing Nell,
I gave her an inch, and she took an ell:
But I think in this case it was damnable hard,
When I gave her an inch, she'd want more than a yard[5]. {Give him an inch and he'll take a yard}

Two proverb transformations may coach men in satisfying women:

(19) Make love slowly! {Make haste slowly}
(20) If at first you don't succeed with a girl, try a little ardor. {If at first you don't succeed, try, try again}

The anti-proverb below may even be interpreted as a warning for a man: thus, if he doesn't pay attention to satisfying his partner and has an ejaculation too fast, his partner might soon reject him:

(21) Easy.com – Easy.go {Easy come, easy go}

5. The word "yard" is also a euphemism for the penis.

One anti-proverb gives an unsatisfied woman a bit of advice: "If at first you don't succeed – cheat!" {If at first you don't succeed, try, try again}, i.e. pretend that you have had an orgasm even if you have not. A reworking of the same proverb may refer to the male's inability to achieve erection or to the woman's inability to reach orgasm: "If at first you don't succeed, you're average".

Orgasm is a pervasive theme in a number of other proverb alterations:

(22) The family that lays together stays together!
The family that shoots together loots together!
The family that kicks together sticks together! {The family that prays together stays together}

Orgasm is playfully defined as:

(23) Gland finale. Where push comes to shove. Tumescence quintessence. Erection ejection. Sometimes how you spell Relief. "Love comes in spurts." "To go together is blessed. To come together is divine." {To err is human, to forgive divine}

Although it is not the goal of this study to present a comprehensive survey of the different techniques of humorous alteration in sexual anti-proverbs, one of the most frequently employed techniques, punning, should be definitely mentioned here. Puns have been frequently attacked as being "the lowest form of wit", especially in English-speaking communities. Victor Raskin points out, "If the trigger is there but the scripts and the oppositeness relation are not, the pun remains an artificial, low-quality product" (Raskin 1985: 116). Proverbs very frequently lend themselves to manipulation exclusively for the sake of manipulation. The humour of many anti-proverbs analysed in the study is based upon the incongruous use of the vulgar or taboo word, as well as on the contrast between an innocent text of a proverb and the sexually-loaded reinterpretation of it. One meaning of an ambiguous word offered by anti-proverbs, may be risqué or indecorous. Thus, the previous example, as well as the ones below, plays upon the contrast two meanings—one "innocent" and one sexual—of the word "come":

(24) Christmas comes but once a year. Thank God I'm not Christmas. {Christmas comes but once a year}

(25) A notorious whore named Miss Hearst
In the weakness of men is well versed.
Reads a sign o'er the head
Of her well-rumpled bed:
"The customer always comes first." {The customer is always right}

Anti-proverbs of this type, which combine a sexual meaning with a non-sexual one, present examples of double entendre in its strictest sense. To understand the numerous puns of sexual anti-proverbs discussed in the study it is essential to know an array of slang terms and euphemisms for sex organs (e.g., "bush" for female pubic hair; "cock," "meat," "rod," "organ," "prick" or "yard" for penis; "balls" for testicles), for masturbation ("jack off," "pull off," "in the hand"), for ejaculation ("come"), for sexual intercourse (to "go to bed," to "screw", to "diddle"), and so on.

According to Peter Farb, the obscene pun is a major variety of the pun; he further argues that it is:

> dangerous because it cleverly attacks the sacredness of taboo words, and it manages to do so with an innocent appearance. A dirty story usually leads up to the punchline by the use of taboo words, but a well-fashioned obscene pun never overtly uses obscene words. Rather, the pun allows two different words, which are pronounced in the same way, to be substituted for each other. Usually one of the two ambiguous words is taboo, but the teller of the pun claims innocence by leaving it up to the listener to connect the innocent and the taboo meanings. (...) The offering of a choice between two meanings, one innocent and the other taboo, is essential to the obscene pun. Because the taboo word is not expressed directly, the listener is therefore given the option either to accept the ambiguity or not to accept it (signified by his refusal to laugh nervously or by his uttering a deprecating groan). (Farb 1974: 99–89)

2.2 Female and male parts of body

Just in line with the famous Freudian quotation, "A desire to see the organs peculiar to each sex exposed is one of the original components of our libido" (Freud 1960 [1905]: 98), female and male parts of body are frequently mentioned or alluded to in proverb alterations.

Male parts of body are much more frequently brought up in our examples than the female ones. The penis (or "cock", "rod", "prick", "meat"), without any doubts, is the champion. In the example below, which stresses the most powerful role of this sex organ, the substitution of the *pen* of the original proverb ("The pen is mightier than the sword") by "penis" is based on phonological similarity of the words "pen" and "penis". The example also employs the technique of punning in which two words ("pen" and "is") are merged in one ("penis"):

(26) The penis is mightier than the sword.

According to some men, the size of their organ does not really matter. In fact, a small organ might be quite playful. Women, however, might have quite different opinion:

(27) A little bit goes a long way but women won't believe you. {A little bit goes a long way}

In the following joke, one of the themes of which is artificial insemination, the text of the well-known proverb "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is preserved. The word "rod," however, adopts a phallic meaning:

(28) An Irishman in a maternity ward is worried that the thin and sickly baby he sees is his own. "No," says the nurse, pointing to a fine, chubby, baby boy, "this is yours; the other child was born by artificial insemination." "Just what I've always heard said: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.'"

Testicles are also frequently mentioned or alluded to, as in the following alteration of the proverb "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away":

(29) Old rugby players never die. They simply have their balls taken away.

Female body parts occur less frequently in our examples than the ones of a male. The following example while containing the slang term "cock" for penis, introduces into its context also a slang term for the female vagina (snatch):

(30) Don't count your chickens before they hatch, There's many a slip twixt the cock and the snatch. (Men's room, University of California at Berkeley) {Don't count your chickens before they hatch; There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip}

Breasts and female pubic hair (bush) appear in:

(31) The breasts on the other side of the fence look greener. {The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence}

(32) One orgasm in the bush is worth two in the hand. {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush}

The vagina and female pubic hair are referred to in the wellerism below:

(33) "Everyone makes mistakes," said the hedgehog after trying to mount the hair-brush. (recorded from Carl Lindahl on the 12 January, 2006) {Everyone makes mistakes}

The punchline of the joke below also treating the euphemism "bush" for pubic hair refers to the most frequently quoted line from former President George Bush's acceptance speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention, "Read my lips; no more taxes":

> You know how Hillary Clinton has been giving political speeches everywhere? Well, she was getting ready to give another speech, and in preparation for it, she shaved off her pubic hair. The next day she was on the platform in front of a big crowd of people, and she gave her speech, at the end of which she raised her skirt and said, "Read my lips; NO MORE BUSH!" (Boulder, Colorado, 1992, in Preston 1994: 27)

The following proverb alterations refer to the anus and buttocks:

(34) Behind every great man there's an asshole. {Behind every great man there's a woman}

(35) Cold hand, warm ass. (Men's room, Germany) {Cold hands, warm heart}

2.3 Variety is the spice of love

The benefits of monogamy (here, the state of having only one sexual partner at any one time) are stressed humorously in one of our examples, "Most men believe in monogamy because enough is enough" {Enough is enough}; plenty of other anti-proverbs, however, seem to advocate that each person should have a number of partners:

(36) Spice can be found in a variety of wives. {Variety is the spice of life}

The two transformations of the proverb "One man's meat is another's man's poison" below, suggest that one man's spouse, therefore, might become another man's lover:

(37) One man's Claire is another man's affair.
(38) One man's Jill is another man's thrill.

Only a brave man, one who has plenty of affairs, has a really exciting life:

(39) He who loves and runs away may live to love another day. {He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day}

It might be, however, very difficult to maintain two or more sexual relationships at the same time:

(40) The course of two loves never does run smooth. {The course of true love never runs smooth}

The discovery of one's simultaneous affairs might lead to serious consequences:

(41) A young Air Force cadet managed to get himself engaged to two beautiful girls at the same time. One was named Edith, and the other Kate. Unfortunately for the cadet, the two girls met, discovered his duplicity and confronted him, crying, "We'll teach you that you can't have your Kate and Edith, too!" {You can't have your cake and eat it too}

Marriage is very often associated with unhappiness, which is summarised in the witty proverb transformation "Matrimony is the root of all evil" {Money is the root of all evil}. A number of anti-proverbs comment on the sobering effect of married life, which can lead not only to the diminished intensity of young love and lust, but even to their utter disappearance:

(42) Marriage makes strange bedfellows. {Politics makes strange bedfellows}
(43) 'Tis better to have loved and lost than to have loved and married. {It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}

Spouses frequently become accustomed to each other, and even bored with each other, and sex in such cases is sometimes thought of as a chore. In the following transformation of the proverb "Business before pleasure", "business" refers to the mere kiss given to one's wife, while "pleasure" alludes to sexual intercourse with the lover:

(44) "Business before pleasure," as the man said when he kissed his wife before he went out to make love to his neighbor's.

Matrimony is frequently associated with constant fighting. See this transformation of the proverb "Make love, not war", the students' slogan from the 60's:

(45) Make love, not war. I'm married, I do both.

Therefore, not surprisingly, spouses instead of being engaged in passionate sexual activities are frequently shown as simply wishing to kill their second "half":

(46) "Every little bit helps," as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband.
(47) "Every little helps," as the captain said when he threw his wife overboard to lighten the ship.

Keeping sexual passion alive is one of the most difficult tasks for the married couple, and is considered to be one of the secrets of a good marriage. Therefore, a husband who is still sexually attracted to his wife (i.e. who still has an erection when he is with her) and who does not have to look for an extramarital liaison is considered extremely lucky:

(48) Lucky the husband who discovers that home is where the hard is. {Home is where the heart is}

A striking proportion of Anglo-American anti-proverbs refer to adultery, a form of extramarital sex which has been historically considered to be an extremely serious offence or even a crime in many cultures. A number of passages from the Bible—most notably the sixth (or in some traditions seventh) commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery"—brand adultery as immoral and a sin. While adultery has been decriminalised in most European countries, in some countries it is still a crime (e.g., Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines). According to Muslim law, adultery is punishable by stoning. In the United States of America, laws vary from state to state.

The popularity of extramarital sex in our proverb parodies may be symptomatic of modern societal mores. Adultery is humorously defined as "Two wrong people doing the right thing" or "Two wrong men in the right place" {Two wrongs don't make a right}. Some more examples demonstrating justification of extramarital relationship:

(49) Before marriage, two's company and three's a crowd; after marriage, two's company and three's a great relief. {Two's company and three's a crowd}
(50) The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the proof of the marriage is in the cheating. {The proof of the pudding is in the eating}

Not surprisingly, the proverb most[6] frequently parodied for sexual purposes in our material refers to adultery; this is the Biblical "Love thy neighbor as thyself":

6. The second proverb most frequently varied for humorous purposes in our material is "It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all".

(51) Love thy neighbor, but make sure her husband is away.
(52) Love thy neighbour – but don't get caught.
(53) Love thy neighbour – but make sure his wife doesn't find out.

The proverb innovations below indicate that one ought to keep one's extramarital activity a secret, i.e. that adultery is still considered to be a prohibited form of sexual intercourse:

(54) Early to bed, early to rise makes sure you get out before her husband arrives. {Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise}
(55) When pa comes in at the door, ma's boyfriend flies out the window. {When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window}

Sometimes the "product" of adultery might be clearly discovered:

(56) An oriental wife gave birth to a white child and explained: "Occidents will happen." {Accidents will happen}

The same kind of an "occident" occurs in the following joke, employing puns that play on personal names and exploiting the popular proverb "Two wrongs don't make a right" with a transformation that mocks the inability of Chinese people to pronounce "r":

(57) Mr. Wong, a Canadian of Chinese extraction, visited the nursery in the maternity ward, and then hastened, much perturbed, to his wife's bedside. Said he: "Two Wongs do not make a White!" Said she: "I can assure you it was purely occidental."

Even in the cultures where adultery nowadays is not viewed as a criminal offence, it may still constitute the most serious grounds for divorce. Those who have extramarital affairs might end up in a divorce, even if they do not want it:

(58) The course of true love never runs smooth
Two's company and three's a divorce. {The course of true love never runs smooth; Two's company and three's a crowd}
(59) He who courts and goes away,
May court again another day;
But he who weds and courts girls still
May go to court against his will. {He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day}

Therefore, nowadays the old "Till death do us part" is not an eternal truth any longer. If someone's marriage ends up in a divorce, no wonder that many people are curious to learn more about the details of a liaison:

(60) All the world loves a lover and loves to snicker at his love letters in court. {All the world loves a lover}

Bigamy (i.e. the act of entering into a marriage with one person while still being legally married to another) turns out to be an all-too-common theme in our anti-proverbs. View the following examples, all of which employ the words "bigamy" or "bigamist":

(61) A bigamist is a man who makes his bed and tries to lie out of it. {As one makes his bed, so he must lie in it}
(62) Bigamists. Variety is the spice of wife. {Variety is the spice of life}
(63) Bigamy is the proof that there can be too much of a good thing. {Too much of a good thing is worth more than none at all}
(64) Bigamy is when two rites make a wrong. {Two wrongs don't make a right}

2.4 Culturally taboo and less accepted erotic pleasures

Although most sexual proverb parodies centre on heterosexual relations between a single man and a single woman, other sexual activities frequently appear as well. These include acts that in many cultures are treated (or were treated until the sexual revolution) as taboo or even as sins: oral-genital intercourse (fellatio and cunnilingus), anal sex, sadomasochism, masturbation, homosexuality, bisexuality, bestiality (or zoophilia) and group sex. Naturally, what is (or what was) considered a taboo or less accepted erotic pleasure by one group or culture may not be considered as such by another. Moreover, what challenged one's sense of modesty or decency a few decades ago might be perceived as innocent today and not be considered taboo any longer.

If for centuries female sexuality was linked with biological function (i.e. procreation) but not with erotic pleasure and gratification, nowadays (as has already been stressed in Section 2.1), women are as likely as their male partners to seek erotic pleasures and gratification. Therefore, coitus is frequently displaced by other forms of sexual pleasure which do not have much to do with procreation, notably oral-genital sex, which in fact may be also lauded as a means of birth control for heterosexual partners (see also the discussion of condoms in Section 2.5 below). Consider the following joke: "What bird brings the babies?" "Storks." "And what bird doesn't bring babies?" "Swallows." (Legman 1968: 793).

One common subject of our anti-proverbs is, therefore, oral-genital intercourse (or oral intercourse), which might be performed by people of all sexual orientation, and which is still considered in many cultures to be a taboo. The reasons for such treatment are twofold: first, this sexual activity does not lead to procreation, still viewed by some cultures and some religions (e.g., Catholicism) as the main purpose of sex, and second, certain organs of the body (e.g., penis, vagina, anus) being stimulated during such intercourse are also considered to be unclean.

Both fellatio (i.e. oral sex performed on the penis, also referred to as "blowjob", "sucking dick", "sucking off", "eating") and cunnilingus[7] (i.e. the act of using the mouth, lips and tongue to stimulate the vagina) are brought up in our material:

7. The word is derived from a Latin word for the vulva ("cunnus") and a Latin word for the tongue ("lingua").

(65) Aural sex should be heard and not obscene. {Children should be seen and not heard}
(66) Cunnilingus is next to godliness. {Cleanliness is next to godliness}
(67) Sucking a cock every day keeps the doctor away. {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}

The two examples below rework the proverb "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again", both employing the word "suck", a paronym of the word "succeed" from the original proverb (in the first example the "succeed" is even merged in two words: "suck seed"):

(68) If at first you don't succeed, just keep suckin' till you do suck seed.
(69) If at first you don't succeed, keep on sucking till you do succeed.

At first we might not understand connection between "meat" and "perversion" in the following proverb transformation:

(70) One man's meat is another man's perversion. {One man's meat is another man's poison}

If we recognise the word "meat" as a euphemism for the phallus, we understand what kind of "perversion" is meant here, namely fellatio for a homosexual male. A similar kind of "perversion" might be referred to in the transformation below:

(71) Practice makes pervert. (men's room in homosexual bar in Greenwich Village, New York City) {Practice makes perfect}

The following transformation of one of the most anti-feminist proverbs in the USA, "A woman's place is in the house", shows us a form of oral-genital sex called facesitting, in which the receiver (in this case a female) sits on the giver's face (presumably a man) and pushes her genitals into his face:

(72) A woman's place is sitting on my face.

Anal intercourse which involves insertion of the penis into the anus of either a male or female and which (like oral sex, masturbation, and bestiality) has been widely considered taboo and a sin, may be suggested in the following example:

(73) Home is where the asshole is. {Home is where the heart is}

Buggery[8], here understood as anal intercourse between two men, is treated in the following anti-proverbs:

(74) Buggery: For sexists, the right peg in the wrong hole. Different pokes for different folks. {Different strokes for different folks}
(75) Buggers can't be choosers. {Beggars can't be choosers}

8. Another meaning of the word is a vaginal intercourse by either a man or a woman with an animal (zoophilia, or bestiality) which is discussed later in this section.

The following example also refers to anal sex and appears in our material via a wellerism, with animals as characters:

(76) "No pleasure without pain," said the monkey as he buggered the hedgehog. {No pleasure without pain}

Masochistic and sadistic (or collectively, sadomasochistic[9]) images of sexual intercourse emerge in a number of other examples (the last one, in a form of a wellerism, with animals as participants):

(77) Eat, drink, and bite Mary. {Eat, drink, and be merry}
(78) A sadomasochist's secret: Sticks and stones will break my bones, but whips and chains excite me. {Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me}
(79) As the monkey said when diddling the porcupine, "There is always some pain with pleasure." {There is always some pain with pleasure}

The examples below relate to masturbation ("pull off", "in the hand", "jack off"):

(80) Never pull off tomorrow what you can pull off today. {Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today}
(81) A woman in the bushes is worth two in the hand. {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush}

The following proverb alteration discusses auto-fellatio, an act of oral stimulation of one's own penis[10]:

(82) Auto-fellatio is its own reward. {Virtue is its own reward}

Numerous anti-proverbs from our material conjure images of homosexuality[11], or sexual attraction and behaviour among members of the same sex (also "gays", "fairies", "buggers", or "queers"[12]):

(83) Tim's Gay bar: Eat, Drink and be Mary. {Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die}
(84) A fuck a day and you'll never be gay. {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}
(85) The queers in this town are the ugliest in England! Buggers can't be choosers sweetie! {Beggars can't be choosers}

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9. Terms derived from the names of two authors Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) and Leopold Rittervon Sacher-Masoch (1836–1895).

10. The practice of auto-cunnilingus has not been found in our examples.

11. Nierenberg (1994: 552) states that up to 80% of bathroom graffiti are homosexual comments and invitations.

12. In many cultures, homosexuals might be subject to prejudice, stereotyping and, therefore, marginalisation.

As opposed to the frequency of anti-proverbs about homosexuality, bisexuality is treated only in a few proverb transformations:

(86) Bisexuals: In San Francisco, Castro convertibles. Everywhere, those for whom a miss is as good as a male. Always, those unafraid to take a walk on the Wilde side. {A miss is as good as a mile}

The following anti-proverb might show the practice of a homosexual or bisexual's publicly revealing his (or her) sexual orientation which for a long time has been repressed by the mask of heterosexuality and remained latent, and is metaphorically expressed in the English language by an idiom, "coming out of the closet":

(87) Better latent than never. {Better late than never}

Zoophilia, or bestiality (i.e. sexual relations with animals), appears in the following transformations (all in the form of wellerisms):

(88) "Everyone to his own taste," as the farmer said when he kissed the cow. {Everyone to his own taste}
(89) "There's no accounting for tastes," said the old maid as she kissed the cow. {There's no accounting for tastes}
(90) "Love thy neighbor," as the parson said to the man who lived next door to the pigsty. {Love thy neighbor as thyself}

The "truth" of the preceding wellerisms is also reflected in the following joke:

> A young farmer about to be married is told by the doctor that he can enlarge his penis by dipping it in milk every day and allowing a calf to suck it. Two months later the farmer and doctor meet in the street. "Well, I suppose you're married and settled down now, eh?" says the doctor. "Well not exactly, Doc. I bought the calf instead." (Legman 1968: 211–212)

Sexual activities involving three or more people of any gender or sexual orientation (including group sex and sexual orgies) are mentioned in a number of proverb transformations:

(91) "Annual sex orgy here on Friday – First served, first come" {First come, first served}

The following transformations of the proverb "Two is company, three is a crowd" refer to three-person sexual activity:

(92) Two's company, three's great sex if you're kinky.
(93) Two is company, three is an orgy.

The alteration of the same proverb below suggests that having sex with six partners is even better than only with two:

(94) Sex: Latin for six. Still found in U.S. idiom: "Two's party, three's a crowd, sex is good for you." {Two's company and three's a crowd}

2.5 Procreation and birth control

Conception and birth are regarded rather harshly in some transformations. Here follow two transformations of the proverb "Familiarity breeds contempt":

(95) Familiarity breeds.
(96) Familiarity breeds contempt – and children.

A few other examples are:

(97) O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to conceive! {What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive}
(98) Children should be seen and not had. {Children should be seen and not heard}

It is much better just to be having sex, or even to leave your lover, than to procreate:

(99) Make love, not Irishmen. {Make love, not war}
(100) It is better to have loved and lost than to have to do homework for the kids every night. {It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}

Babies, consequently, are considered to be the result of immature couplings:

(101) An apple a day keeps the doctor away – but babies are the result of green pairs. {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}

Here follows a humorous definition of pregnancy. The example alludes to the stork of folklore that is said to bring babies:

(102) Pregnancy: The calm before the stork. {After the storm comes the calm}

As the following joke suggests, children sometimes know more about sex than their mothers and fathers might imagine:

> A mother tells her little children that the stork brings the babies, to prepare them for the birth of the next child; then kisses them goodnight and leaves them to sleep. The little boy sits up on one elbow and says to his sisters, "I don't care what Mama says, I just can't imagine Daddy fucking a stork!" (Legman 1975: 731–732)

Prior to the 20th century contraception was generally considered a mortal sin by all major branches of Christianity. According to the Church, the primary purpose of sex was procreation. Thus, use of condoms, along with any other forms of artificial birth control was condemned, and is still condemned by the Catholic Church.

Themes of birth control in our examples include condoms, and the contraceptive pill (others, e.g. including oral-genital intercourse, anal eroticism, and masturbation, have already been discussed earlier, in Section 2.4):

(103) A pill in time saves nine months. {A stitch in time saves nine}
(104) A pill a day keeps the stork away. {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}

References to condoms credit them not only with birth control but also with preventing sexually transmitted diseases (discussed later, in Section 2.6):

(105) A condom is the mother of all prevention. {Necessity is the mother of all invention}
(106) A condom a day keeps the doctor away. {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}
(107) Better SAFE SEX than sorry. {Better safe than sorry}

2.6 Miscellaneous

A number of sexual transformations indicate that chastity, or abstinence (which in certain contexts might also be synonymous with virginity) is not particularly praiseworthy these days. The last two are alterations of the proverb "Haste makes waste", all based on employing paronymous punning (based on similarity of spelling of the words "haste" of the original text and *chaste* of the transformations):

(108) Blessed are the pure, for they shall inhibit the earth. {Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth}
(109) Chaste makes waste.
(110) Chaste: Past tense of an unsuccessful chase. Hence, Chased in vain. "Chaste makes waist."

In fact, chastity which once upon a time was considered to be virtue nowadays might be treated as "its own punishment":

(111) Chastity is its own punishment. {Virtue is its own reward}

A number of proverb alterations discuss sexually transmitted diseases (STD), or sexually transmitted infections (STI), also called venereal diseases (VD). Let us name just a few: syphilis, genital warts, HIV leading to AIDS. The anti-proverb below reminds us to be careful while choosing a sexual partner:

(112) There are plenty of fish in the sea...just make sure yours tests HIV negative. {There are plenty of fish in the sea}

Therefore, many anti-proverbs advise the use of condoms, the main purpose of which, along with reducing of the likelihood of pregnancy (discussed earlier, in Section 2.5), is prevention of sexually transmitted diseases

Perhaps with the advent of contraception, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, or treatments such as Sir John Fleming's penicillin, the following modification of the proverb "It's better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all" suggests that sexual activity is worth the risk of infection:

(113) Better to have failed your Wasserman test[13] than never to have loved at all.

Many more examples of sexual anti-proverbs could be considered in the present article but they cannot be presented for reasons of space. Table 1 will help illustrate the general picture of sexuality in 259 proverb alterations. Under each theme all of the topics that appear are listed in order of frequency and the number following each topic indicates the number of anti-proverbs in which it was markedly present. Some parodies treat several thematic categories simultaneously, and thus these examples were assigned to two or more different categories (and thus subcategories under one topic may yield a greater number than the one provided next to the general category, as is the case of marriage).

Table 1. An exhaustive list of sexuality topics, together with the number of occurrences

Section title	Major topics followed by number of occurrences
Sexual intercourse	women reduced to sex objects 43
	sexual intercourse 35
	where the sexual act might take place 15
	kissing 14
	orgasm 12
	erection 8
	men reduced to sex objects 6
	lust 5
	pleasure 4
	foreplay 3
	satisfying one's partner 3
	sperm 3
	ejaculation 2
	excitement 2
	bed noise 1
	hug 1
	losing virginity 1
	"missionary" position 1
	moan 1
	seducing 1
Female and male parts of body	penis 22
	anus 3
	female pubic hair 3
	testicles 3
	vagina 3
	buttocks 2
	breasts 2

13. The Wasserman test is a diagnostic test for syphilis, named after the bacteriologist August Paul von Wasserman (1866–1925).

Section title	**Major topics followed by number of occurrences**
Variety is the spice of life: bigamy and adultery	adultery 22 *adultery is a prohibited form of sexual intercourse 14* *adultery is good and justified 13* *the "product" of adultery is discovered 4* *adultery causes a divorce 3* *ordinary adultery 2* marriage 13 *married life leads to the diminished intensity or disappearance of love and lust 10* *sex with a spouse is a chore 5* *a husband sexually attracted to his wife 1* *monogamy is bad 1* sexual promiscuity 11 two or more sexual relationships at the same time 9 bigamy 6 polygamy 2
Culturally taboo and less accepted erotic pleasures	homosexuality 11 *male homosexuality 7* *homosexuality in general 4* oral-genital intercourse 11 *fellatio 8* *cunnilingus 2* *oral intercourse 1* zoophilia (or bestiality) 8 sexual activities involving three or more people 7 *three-person sexual activity 5* *sexual orgy 2* *group sex 2* masturbation 6 anal intercourse 5 *anal intercourse 3* *anal intercourse between two men 2* bisexuality 5 sadomasochism 3 perversion 1
Procreation and birth control	birth 16 conception 11 condoms 6 pregnancy 5 contraceptive pills 4 artificial insemination 1

Section title	Major topics followed by number of occurrences
Miscellaneous	sexually transmitted disease 9 appearance 8 chastity or abstinence 6 prostitution 5 interracial sex 4 whore 4 brothel 3 impotence 2 pornography, pornographer 2 sexual greediness 2 cheating 1 flirt 1 fluids 1 urine1 hygiene 1 male client in brothel 1 libido 1 menstruation 1 nudity 1 paedophilia 1 playboy 1

3. Summary

The study has focused on one of the main topics that emerge in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, i.e. sexuality. The study has discussed the most common themes appearing in 259 sexual proverb variations. As we have seen, some of the anti-proverbs analysed here contain revealing and serious social comments on sexuality, while other proverb transformations are created merely for the goal of deriving play forms and eliciting laughter. And even if one considers some of the transformations displayed here to be obscene, or vulgar, they, nevertheless, are the proof of human creativity, and thus, like traditional proverbs, must be studied by proverb and humour scholars.

Sigmund Freud ([1905] 1960) points out that the topics one chooses to joke about suggest something about the feelings one suppresses. Avner Ziv and Orit Gadish state,

> By using humor, we can express our sexual (in direct or sublimated forms such as romantic love) and aggressive needs in a socially acceptable way, thus economizing psychic expenditure necessary for inhibition. (Ziv and Gadish 1990: 248)

In his discussion of sexual folklore, Gershon Legman states that

> it concerns some of the most pressing fears and most destructive life problems of the people who tell the jokes and sing the songs. Their sexual humor is a sort of whistling in the dark, like Beaumarchais' Figaro, who "laughs so that he may not cry." They are projecting the endemic sexual fears, and problems, and defeats of their culture – in which there are very few victories for anyone – on certain standard comedy figures and situations, such as cuckoldry, seduction, impotence, homosexuality, castration, and disease, which are obviously not humorous at all. (Legman 1962: 201)

As we have seen from the numerous sexual anti-proverbs quoted and discussed in the study, they respect nobody. Nothing is too holy or sacrosanct to avoid exposure to proverbial ridicule. Sexuality is viewed as one of the most popular topics of Anglo-American anti-proverbs. Sexual anti-proverbs may contain elements not only of funniness, but also of offensiveness, hostility and aggression directed toward various groups (e.g., women, virgins, homosexuals, bisexuals) and various practices which deviate from what is considered to be the norm (e.g., masturbation, sadomasochism, oral-genital intercourse, bestiality, sex orgies). The sensitive and controversial topics of many sexual anti-proverbs discussed in the present study make them "one man's laugh and another man's insult" {One man's meat is another man's poison} –, affirming the truth of what William Shakespeare tells us in "Love's Labour's Lost" (V, 2):

> A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
> Of him that makes it...

Acknowledgements

I owe much gratitude to Marta Dynel and reviewers of my article for their critical comments and suggestions.

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2.2 Conversational humour

Joker in the pack

Towards determining the status of humorous framing in conversations

Marta Dynel

Researchers tend to use the concept of a *play frame, a humorous frame* or *humorous keying* in reference to a peculiar communicative mode within which humorous utterances and exchanges are enclosed. The goal of this chapter is to discuss this postulate, explaining the terms used in reference to the humorous mode and accounting for the relationship between it and the non-humorous mode. The paper opens with a succinct survey of literature introducing the concepts of framing, keying and carnival (together with a few other terms used synonymously), both as originally proposed and in the light of their pertinence to the study of humour. Most significantly, special attention is paid to the nature of the interdependence between humorous and non-humorous frames. It is shown how conversationalists can engage in, and alternate between, the two frames. Of vital importance are the notions of intention and intention recognition, which lie at the heart of playful teasing, sometimes centred on multi-layered humour-orientated deception. The theoretical discussion is illustrated with examples culled from genuine dyadic e-mail exchanges.

1. Introduction

Central to the pragmatics of humour is the way in which humorous units are interwoven into interactions of non-humorous nature and how this can be conceptualised theoretically. The focal question which this contribution attempts to answer concerns the position and objectives of humour, primarily units of *conversational humour* (whether spontaneous or pre-planned), used in otherwise serious communication. Humour is here conceived as intentional and negotiable communicative activity performed in written and spoken conversations (see Chovanec in this volume).

A *conversation* is here understood as a verbal interaction, whether oral or written, between at least two *interlocutors/conversationalists*. For the sake of simplification, the paper assumes by default a communicative *dyad*, i.e. the *speaker* and the *hearer/listener*, who engage in a communicative activity, taking *turns* as the speaker and the hearer. The terms are used also in reference to conversationalists partaking in written interactions (here, via the Internet), regardless of what the conventional meanings of the terms denoting participants suggest, while the dyad could be extended in the case of more participants in the activity (cf. Dynel's second paper in this volume).

This chapter opens with a survey of literature introducing the concepts of framing, keying and carnival, both as originally proposed and in the light of their pertinence to the study of humour in conversations/interactions. More importantly, the second part of the paper addresses the vexing issue of humorous vs. non-humorous framing, with special attention paid to their interdependence. The objective is to show how conversationalists assume, and alternate between, the two frames. Most significantly, it is argued that part of utterances cannot be unequivocally subsumed under either frame, of which the interactants themselves tend to be cognisant. The underlying premise is that, methodological difficulties notwithstanding, the (non)humorous import of an utterance and the subtle distinction between the two frames must invariably be judged in the context of the speaker's intentionally conveyed meaning and the hearer's actual uptake conducive to his/her response.

The theoretical discussion is illustrated with examples of conversational humour taken from written conversations, specifically from genuine Internet interactions. Those were held by two interlocutors, a man and a woman in their early thirties at the outset of their romantic relationship. The conversationalists partook in dyadic e-mail communication, developing topical strands based on turn-taking in consecutive e-mails. Collected in one Word file, the data amounted to over 43 pages of text, approximately 21,000 words. Having learned about the research project on framing in conversation, the woman and then the man willingly agreed to share their correspondence with the author. To ascertain the veracity of interpretations reached by the author, the subjects commented upon the chunks extracted, elaborating on their underlying intentions with the benefit of hindsight.

This paper is predicated on the claim that, to a certain extent, Internet-mediated conversations are reminiscent of spoken interactions (e.g. Danet et al. 1997; Baron 1998, 2000; Crystal 2001; Herring 2007). The differentiating feature will be, however, its *asynchronicity* (Herring 2007), which allows participants more time to provide their answers. Consequently, those may be more carefully thought over. In the case of the e-mails discussed here, asynchronicity promotes their abundance in witty and humorous turns. However, while interlocutors have slightly more time to ponder on what they read and write in response, they have fewer non-verbal cues at their disposal, given the unavailability of prosody and body language.

2. Background concepts

Humour researchers frequently address the issue of a *play frame* or *a humorous frame* (e.g. Fry 1963; Norrick 1993, 2003; Hay 2000, 2001; Everts 2003; Coates 2007; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Partington 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Dynel 2009a, 2009b; Norrick and Bubel 2009) or *humorous keying* (e.g. Kotthoff 1999, 2000, 2006; Holmes 2006; Ardington 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006; Ervin-Tripp and Lampert 2009; Norrick and Bubel 2009) appertaining to a peculiar communicative *mode* typical of humour (Mulkay 1988). These concepts have a more general application, having been initially introduced outside humour studies.

2.1 Frame

Bateson's (1953) seminal work on *frames* is known to have inspired a debate on frames in general and the "play – non-play" distinction in humour research. The notion of framing refers to what "is (or delimits) a class or set of messages (or meaningful actions)" (Bateson 1972: 186). On the whole, literature on frames bifurcates into two approaches, viz. interactional and cognitive (Lee 1997, Tannen and Wallat 1993, Bednarek 2004). Researchers thus distinguish between *interactive frames* and *knowledge frames*, respectively.

Knowledge frames are related to the organisation of knowledge, inclusive of expectations about interactions (for an overview, see Bednarek 2004). Minsky (1974) is credited for having conceived the frame as a cognitive phenomenon, a knowledge structure stored in the mind and guiding people in interactions. A frame is "a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation like being in a certain kind of living room or going to a child's birthday party" (Minsky 1974: 1). This approach is widely adopted in linguistics (Fillmore 1977, 1985; Tannen and Wallat 1993). So conceptualised, frames are synonymous with *schemas* known in artificial intelligence (Schank and Abelson 1977), cognitive psychology (Rumelhart 1975), and linguistic semantics (Chafe 1977; Fillmore 1975, 1976, 1977, 1982).

In humour literature, it is the interactive interpretation of the notion of a frame[1] that is taken into account. Interactive frames of interpretation reverberate in literature within anthropology, sociology, linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics (Bateson 1972; Hymes 1974; Goffman 1974; Gumperz 1977, 1982; Tannen 1993; Ensink and Sauer 2003; Bednarek 2004). The frame can be viewed as an interactive event orientated towards a particular goal and centred on rules and expectations but negotiated and co-constructed by interacting parties. Those have different roles and tasks to

1. This should not be mistaken for Koestler's (1964) use of the *frame* as a matrix of thought, also prevalent in humour research. Koestler postulates oscillation between frames of reference as a method of explaining the workings of humorous phenomena, frequently conceptualised as the incongruity-resolution model (cf. Dynel 2009a).

complete (talk or listen, offend or be offended), but they share one frame. Inspired by Bateson (1953), Goffman (1974: 10) redefines the frame[2] as an organisational unit governing events and individuals' subjective involvement in them to explain how situated meaning is created in interaction. Mutual consent on a practice taking place at a given moment entails interactants' acceptance of rules that guide the practice at hand (Goffman 1974). In Goffman's (1974) view, frames "provide background understanding for events" (Goffman 1974: 22). Frames are then not only social but also cognitive phenomena which are not wilfully engendered but are unconsciously adopted in the course of a communicative process.

> Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of the activity. (Goffman 1974: 247)

Frames are default tools for meaning construction and construal. They help people recognise and organise in meaningful ways chunks of experience, such as a joke, a dream, an act of deception, a theatrical performance, etc. Frames are constituted by verbal and non-verbal interaction, determining and being determined by an activity performed (Tannen and Wallat 1993) and rules obtaining in a frame. The latter are subject to negotiation and change, acting more as guidelines and expectation builders rather than principles (Tannen and Wallat 1987), while frames can be negotiated, meshed and shifted (Ensink 2003). Interlocutors can change frames many times in one speech encounter.

It must be highlighted that framing is an intrinsic property of all social processes, not only those consciously manufactured. Nevertheless, participants in a frame must share the understanding of the activity in which they partake and what meanings are thus communicated (Tannen and Wallat 1993, Ensink and Sauer 2003). This is of crucial importance to humorous frames, since it allows for verbal practices which would be circumscribed in a non-humorous frame.

Bateson (1953) is the first to have used the term "frame" in the sense of a "play activity" vis-à-vis any serious activity performed by humans and animals (monkeys). Bateson (1953, 1972) proposes that actions can be framed as either serious or non-serious, depending on the speaker's underlying intent. His central claim is that the

2. The concept of framing is frequently associated with footing (Hoyle 1993, Ensink and Sauer 2003), which is hardly surprising given that Goffman suggests that "a change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events" (1981: 128). Moreover, Goffman (1981: 128, footnote) considers footing an elaboration of his *Frame analysis* (Goffman 1974). However, footing embraces primarily the speaker's orientation towards different hearers and production method (e.g. spontaneous speech to reading aloud), while a frame embraces all aspects of a situation. Footing is "the alignment of an individual to a particular utterance whether involving a production format, as in the case of a speaker, or solely a participation status, as in the case of the hearer" (Goffman 1981: 227). Footing is then much narrower in scope.

departure point for any playful activity is a metacommunicative message "this is play", which invokes a somewhat paradoxical claim, viz. "actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote" (1972: 180). A humorous frame can be deemed as a superordinate message, i.e. a metamessage, without which the subordinate message cannot be interpreted as being intended by the speaker (Bateson 1972).

The humorous frame captures a number of diversified genres, activities and linguistic categories, such as a comedy, a stand-up performance, a canned joke and the whole gamut of forms under the blanket term "conversational humour" (Kotthoff 1996, 1999, 2006; Coates 2007; Martin 2007; Dynel 2009a, 2009b), which is the focus of attention here. Each of those displays its peculiarity. The term "humorous frame" appears to be the most general and will be used further in the article. However, there are also a number of other concepts, which other humour researchers tend to use practically synonymously.

2.2 Keying

An alternative term for a humorous frame is *humorous keying* or a *humorous key*, a term introduced by Hymes (1972) and by Goffman (1974). According to the former, a key embraces a "tone, manner or spirit in which an act is done" (Hymes 1972: 62). Admittedly, this conceptualisation is what most humour researchers mean when referring to the humorous frame. On the other hand, keying as viewed by Goffman (1974) is a form of transformation (together with *fabrication*) of the frame or framework for evaluating social reality. Keying is a systematic process of frame alteration, bracketed and restricted within time, which participants openly acknowledge. In keying, "participants in the activity are meant to know and to openly acknowledge that a systematic alteration is involved, one that will radically reconstitute what it is for them that is going on" (Goffman 1974: 45). Goffman (1974: 44) defines key or keying as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity, but seen by the participants to be something quite else." Examples of keys include "make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical redoings, and regroundings" (Goffman 1974: 48). Technical redoing is a simulation, for instance of medical training, where no real surgery is performed, while regrounding can be understood as a peculiar motivation for an activity, e.g. kissing as a means of raising money for charity. Goffman's keying may then be viewed as coinciding with a special type of frame, which Ensink (2003) dubs a *transformational frame*. Keying then naturally embraces parodies of events (e.g. of a political debate), or ritualised insults which are not meant to be genuinely offensive.

The second form of transformation is also pertinent to humour occurrence, but this does not appear to have been appreciated in literature. Fabrication is "the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on"

(Goffman 1974: 83). Goffman (1974) conceives frame fabrication as a purposeful effort of the speaker to deceive another conversationalist, i.e. to induce the latter to have a false notion of what is taking place. This leads to a mismatch between interactants' perception of the current frame. According to Goffman, fabrications can be *benign*, such as practical jokes or tactful lies, or *exploitive* ones, conducted in the deceiver's private interests, such as a confidence game. Admittedly, either may be conducive to humorous effects. If it is meant to be benign, the speaker's humour-orientated deception must eventually become overt to the interlocutor, a case in point being utterances based on the garden-path mechanism (cf. Dynel 2009a). By contrast, if the hearer remains oblivious to the speaker's genuine intention and is hence purposefully duped, *put-ons* or *disparagement humour* may arise, which is a potential source of amusement from the perspective of other ratified hearers (cf. Dynel's other paper in this volume).

2.3 Carnival

In literary studies, especially in Eastern European research, another prevalent term is that of *carnival/carnivalesque* proposed by Bakhtin (1984 [1929], 1993 [1941]). This conceptualisation hinges on a comparison between literature and carnivals of popular culture, that is festivals of community, equality and abundance, during which social hierarchies typical of everyday life and language are suppressed, profaned and overturned, bringing to light and contesting dialogic voices that are otherwise drowned. Thus, opposites are reversed (e.g. fools become wise) or mingled (e.g. fact with fantasy, or high culture with the profane). In carnival, thanks to regular conventions being violated or reversed, distinct individual voices flourish and interact, as a result of which genuine dialogue becomes possible. Carnivalesque is a concept which refers specifically to a mode which subverts the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere via humour or chaos. Originally used for literature, the term can be extended in its denotation to cover also interpersonal communication. Consequently, this multifaceted intermingling causes alternative voices to interweave, giving rise to new forms of speech and attributing new meanings to already existing words. This open-endedness and heterogeneousness further yield *dialogism* (Bakhtin 1993, 1981).

In Bakhtin's rich and multifarious output, dialogism is a diversified and poly-functional phenomenon manifesting itself in existence, language, literary interpretation and authoring, inter alia (cf. Holquist 1990). These concepts are further proliferated in literature, with authors employing dialogism to account for any variety, e.g. diversity of views in the media. What is important for linguists is that Bakhtin's utterance (vyskazyvanie) is anchored in the compromise between a particular speaker's meaning and general requirements of language[3]. Hence, Bakhtin deflates the myth of impersonal,

3. This theoretic construct is reminiscent of, but significantly different from, the Saussurean *parole* vs. *langue* distinction, parole being a speaker's product and langue representing the set of rules holding for a language (cf. Holquist 1990).

objective language, pointing out that words entail infinite meanings. Simultaneously, each utterance is not original but dialogic, since it is pivoted on a number of other speakers' intentions and voices that have been heard before (see Holquist 1990). Dialogic language and diversity of discursive modes disrupt uniformity of thought and allow for multiple meanings in words. Therefore, the concept of dialogism tends to be raised in the discussions of parody (e.g. Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997) to capture intertextuality and subversion of ideas addressed. On the other hand, it may also be applied to conversational humour in general. In the light of Bakhtin's dialogic theory, humour can be viewed as a manifestation of *double voicing* (cf. Priego-Valverde 2006, 2009). According to this theory, the speaker's utterance conveys also other voices, whether or not identifiable, and whether real or fictional. Double voicing conflates seriousness and non-seriousness and allows the speaker to dissociate him/herself from the serious content, among others, reducing or cancelling any vexing or subversive meanings (cf. Priego-Valverde 2006, 2009).

Besides the concepts of keying and framing prevalent in literature, as well as carnival, revised above, humorous utterances can also be viewed in the light of *language games* (Wittgenstein 1958), *speech events* (Hymes 1972), *activity types*[4] (Levinson 1992) or *joint activities* (Clark 1996). Admittedly, it is only the last term that seems to have been applied to humour. Based on Levinson's notion of activity types, Clark (1996) proposes the concept of joint activities, which are constructed by at least two participants acting in their respective roles, e.g. the joke-teller and joke-hearer, the teaser and the teasee, etc. Another pertinent term is that of double *layering* of nonserious language (Clark 1996), which captures jokes, with the speaker and hearer pretending that the story told is actually taking place. Also, layering holds for categories of conversational humour, such as teasing hinged on *joint pretence* that the layer-2 speaker is performing a serious communicative act towards the layer-2 hearer. However, it must be appreciated that Clark's (1996) concept is much broader[5] and that not all humour is contingent on pretence.

3. Humorous framing

Following Bateson (1953, 1972), several authors use the concept of a *play frame* or *a humorous frame* (e.g. Fry 1963; Norrick 1993, 2003; Hay 2000, 2001; Everts 2003; Coates 2007; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Partington 2006, 2008a, b; Dynel 2009a, 2009b;

4. However, Levinson (1992: 69) is sceptical about viewing joking as an activity type.

5. This is an umbrella concept embracing three distinct phenomena, i.e. manifestations of humour (e.g. jokes and teasing), fictional discourse, such as movies and stories, as well as tropes, such as irony, understatement or overstatement. Such a conflation of ideas may be considered an unfounded step, inasmuch as the three are significantly different. Nonserious discourse comprises humour, fictional discourse and implicitness couched in rhetorical figures.

Norrick and Bubel 2009) or that of *humorous keying* (e.g. Kotthoff 1999, 2000, 2006; Holmes 2006; Ardington 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006; Ervin-Tripp and Lampert 2009; Norrick and Bubel 2009) in reference to a peculiar communicative *mode* (Mulkay 1988) within which humorous utterances, sometimes developing into humorous exchanges, are prototypically enclosed.

It must also be mentioned that Raskin (1985), together with Attardo (e.g. Raskin and Attardo 1994; Attardo 1994, 2001), resorts to the concept of a non-bona-fine mode. Innumerable authors also follow suit (e.g. Carrell 1997; Lampert and Tripp 2006; Partington 2006, 2008b; Priego-Valverde 2006, 2009), quoting this term, heedless of the methodological burden it carries. It is Raskin's erroneous view on the Gricean model (Grice 1975) that will have led him to the conclusion that humour is at cross purposes with or even violates the Cooperative Principle, allegedly the bona-fide mode, and that an alternative mode of communication must be generated for it (see Dynel 2008b, 2009a). The notion of a humorous mode is essential but should not entail dissociation from the Gricean model. Needless to say, contrary to Raskin's claim about their mutual exclusiveness, humour does subscribe to the Gricean model.

3.1 Contextualisation cues

Humour is often supported by *contextualisation cues* (e.g. Gumperz 1982, 1992), i.e. features of a linguistic form that contribute to "the signaling of contextual presuppositions" (Gumperz 1982: 131), such as gestures, peculiar prosody, facial expressions, code switching, social stylistics, interjections and laughter. Those create humorous keying associated with contextual presuppositions facilitating the hearer's inferential processes (Kotthoff 2007). Based on Goffman's "frames" and Bateson's "metacommunication", "contextualisation" embraces participants' activities which determine (establish, revise and cancel or sustain) aspects of context, such as genre, speech activity, participant roles and relationships (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1976; Gumperz 1982, 1989, 1992; Auer 1992). "Co-occurrence expectations" ingrained in the course of interactions

> enable us to associate styles of speaking with contextual presuppositions. (...) Although they are rarely talked about and tend to be noticed only when things go wrong, without them we would be unable to relate what we hear to previous experience. (Gumperz 1982: 162)

Very often, the speaker signals his/her humorous intention by using adequate nonverbal cues residing in body language, facial expressions or intonation, before, while or after producing a humorous unit, or by uttering introductory utterances, such as "Have you heard the one?", whereby he/she enters a humorous frame and signals that the hearer should follow suit (e.g. Mulkay 1988, Carrell 1997, Norrick 1993, Kotthoff 2007, Coates 2007). This conversational rule holds, with the caveat that introductory verbal cues rarely accompany units of conversational humour, i.e. humorous units other than canned jokes, which are produced more spontaneously, albeit not always being spontaneously created, such as Norrick's (1993) stock conversational witticisms. However, non-verbal cues can accompany spoken conversational humour, emphasising the speaker's jocular intention.

Written conversations, such as e-mail exchanges, are by nature devoid of non-verbal contextualisation cues typical of oral interactions, which guide interlocutors in the interpretation of humorous utterances. *Text-based approximations* of interactional markers, e.g. capitals for shouting and *emoticons* (e.g. Taylor 2009,) seem to be the primary cue, yet they tend to be ambivalent (Graham 2008). For instance, a smiley may mean that the speaker is not being serious or that he/she is smiling happily and subscribes to the propositional content conveyed. Apart from emoticons, there are also linguistic cues, such as "ha" or "ohhh"[6], which are not unequivocal, either.

3.2 Non-humorous/serious vs. humorous frame

The humorous vs. non-humorous frame bifurcation is premised on the idea that hearing the speaker's humorous utterance, the listener recognises that "this is play" (Bateson 1953) and that the speaker does not seriously mean what he/she is uttering/has uttered. The appreciation of humour entails mode adoption, i.e. plunging into the non-serious or fictional frame created by the speaker (cf. Mulkay 1988, Attardo 2001). Heedless of their perspectives and goals, participants must then cooperate to negotiate a frame, which is, as a result, their joint creation (Tannen and Wallat 1993). Humorous communication is a joint activity (Clark 1996) collaboratively rendered by interlocutors (Coates 2007), which entails not necessarily verbal contributions, let alone of equal length, produced by both interlocutors but the hearer's relevant reaction to the humorous utterance made by one speaker.

This serious vs. humorous frame distinction seems to be best typified by a successfully performed canned joke, which is (ideally) a tripartite process, comprising the preface, the telling and the response (Sacks 1978). During the first stage, the speaker communicates his/her intention to tell a joke, possibly verifying the listener's intention to hear it, and thus his/her willingness to co-operate in the joke-telling act. Although the telling of the joke per se is a monologic task (Sacks 1978, Attardo 1994), hearers actively participate in the process (Norrick 1993, Mulkay 1988) and, consequently, in the humorous frame. The telling of a joke is normally followed by a response expressing humour enjoyment (via laughter or smiling), but may also give rise to the hearer's contempt or disgust with the joke. Even more significantly, both joke tellers and hearers "work together to establish and sustain the operation of the humorous mode and to accomplish the proper performance and acknowledgement of the joke" (Mulkay 1988: 61).

As regards the category of conversational humour, a representative type encompassed by a humorous frame is that of *humorous "fantasy" sequence* (Hay 1995), *joint*

6. I should like to thank the reviewer for pointing this out to me.

fantasising (Kotthoff 2007), or *fantasy layering* (Clark 1996), i.e. a coherent fantasy/imaginary scenario created by alternate turns contributed by speakers, frequently entailing augmentation of unreality. Fantasy layering serves as the bedrock for pretence-based humour, where practically no informative content is conveyed, interpersonal effects aside. Needless to say, even if firmly closed in a humorous frame, humour will produce interpersonal consequences, such as solidarity building or a testament to the speaker's wit and intelligence (see e.g. Attardo 1994, Martin 2007).

(1) 1. M: I will tell you something about split attention.[7]
2. W: Shall we test it empirically?
3. M: You will tell me to complete a quiz as you're playing music and pelting me with bread balls, right?
4. W: :DDD Yup, and I will make you catch them like a seal, joyfully clapping your flippers to the rhythm of impending doom.

Prompted by a serious interchange on human cognitive capacity, the two conversationalists engage in the humorous frame by forming a *supportive*, *maximally collaborative* interchange (cf. Edelsky 1981; Coates 1989, 1996; Dynel 2008a, 2009b). In the light of the emergent absurdity, hardly any meaning that spills over into the non-humorous frame can be found in this flight of fancy, save for the interlocutors' global meta-intention of performing playful teasing and testifying to their wit and verbal creativity.

Within the humorous frame, absurdities and impossibilities do not go against the grain (cf. Nash 1985), which is captured by the notion of *local logic* (Ziv 1984). As Mulkay (1988: 26) puts it, "humour involves a kind of controlled nonsense. Judged by the criteria of serious discourse, humour is nonsensical. Nevertheless, the assertions of humorous discourse are always understandable in terms of the special requirements and expectations of the humorous realm." It may even be claimed that "implausibilities are simply ignored because they are characteristic of humour and to be expected in the humorous domain" (Mulkay 1988: 18). On the other hand, humour need not entail absurdity or impossibilities. The frame of humorous communication only allows for, but does not necessitate, peculiar local logic and a suspension of disbelief.

Although the dichotomy between serious and humorous modes is clear in theory, many, if not most, units of conversational humour cannot be classified as belonging solely to either. Most significantly, both jokes and units of conversational humour may be meaningfully interwoven into the ongoing verbal exchange, contributing relevant meanings to the ongoing conversation.

7. In all the examples, "M" stands for "man", whilst "W" stands for "woman". With the exception of the addition of these letters indicating the interlocutors and the deletion of diversified colour fonts (which guided the interlocutors in their diachronic exchange), the extracts are retained in their original form.

3.3 Humorous and non-humorous frames overlapping

Goffman (1981[1979]) espouses a belief that participants in a social encounter do not always change frames but actually embed one within another or "laminate" experience. He also rightly observes that "within one alignment, another can be fully enclosed. In truth, in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another" (Goffman 1981 [1979]: 155). Similarly, Tannen and Wallat (1993) argue that frames may merge. Such claims bear relevance to the alleged dichotomy between humorous and non-humorous frames, for frequently an utterance suffused with humour cannot be unequivocally subsumed under the humorous frame, lying on the border between humorous and serious modes of communication, which holds true especially for categories of conversational humour. Those frequently cannot be dissociated from the serious mode even on the surface textual level, unlike canned jokes or fantasy sequences. The humorous and non-humorous frames can be shifted very fast, with a humorous utterance being followed by a non-humorous response on the part of the second speaker, hitherto the hearer. Moreover, the shift may even take place halfway through one verbalisation. All the same, the distinction between humour and non-humour may transcend linearity, for an entire utterance may be double-framed, being serious in its content and yet suffused with humour in its form.

While it may be argued that the playful frame is conducive to the suspension of truthfulness and to deviation from norms obtaining for serious talk (Lampert and Tripp 2006), a number of researchers (e.g. Mulkay 1988, Kotthoff 2007, Oring 2003, Simpson 2003) rightly postulate that humorous duality allows speakers to convey serious meanings, while appearing to be "only joking". The speaker may convey information, i.e. genuinely ascribe to (some part of) the message, and simultaneously aim to amuse the interlocutor. One may venture to claim that almost any form of humour can carry information relevant to the ongoing interaction, the balance between the two functions being diverse and the informative function being more or less transparent.

(2) The interlocutors have been discussing the issue of drunken driving and its grave consequences.
1. W: Don't drink and drive... take some pot and fly:)
2. M: Probably a similar sensation:)
3. W: Probably... any empirical observations?;)
4. M: Believe it or not but no. That's why I wrote "probably".
5. W: You should have writted "certainly" then.
6. M: Well, the letter d is not beside n;)
7. W: How about "DNA"? There you are!
8. M: OK. I'm not taunting you any more.
9. W: Huh... I've come up with a witty observation and he is back-pedalling!:)

The humorous interaction opens with the woman's quotation of a well-known one-liner (1), on which the man comments, ostensibly moving to the serious frame, as if he were making a commonsensical observation, while the emoticon may suggest that he is "only joking" (2). Further, his conversationalist takes advantage of it, teasingly challenging him and attempting to extract his confession (3), which he duly makes (4). Referring to the man's response, again within the serious frame, the woman makes a typo (5), which becomes the focal point of the man's sarcastic comment (6), whose critical force is mitigated by the emoticon. Owing to the insignificance of the topic, the turn may be viewed as being benevolent and belonging largely to the humorous frame, even if carrying relevant meaning outside it. Staying within the humorous contestive frame, the woman trumps the criticism (7). With recourse to wordplay, she shifts the meaning from the keyboard layout to the positioning of letters in an acronym. Consequently, the man explicitly produces a non-humorous meta-linguistic comment on the preceding exchange, openly admitting to his (allegedly) malevolent intention (8), as if he considers himself to have overdone the playful aggression, to the extent of being offensive. This causes the woman to come up with a critical comment on the interlocutor's withdrawal, whose force is again mitigated by the emoticon. The challenge appears to be another playful jibe, an invitation to stay in the humorous frame typified by contestive teasing in which they have been engaged.

3.3.1 *Non-humorous utterances imbued with humour and purely humorous utterances*

It is here argued that two ideal cases of humorous and non-humorous frames' merging can be discerned, depending on which appears to be the subordinate/dominant one. On the one hand, the speaker may mean primarily to convey non-humorous informative content by dint of humour, such as *colourful language* (Attardo 1994; Partington 2006, 2008a; Dynel 2009b) or *humorous irony* (cf. the introduction to this volume and references therein). In this case, the non-humorous frame is the superordinate one, while humour is added for the sake of generating the hearer's amusement. On the other hand, the humorous frame will be more salient when the speaker wishes to engender humour, simultaneously conveying non-humorous meanings, the balance between the two goals being divergent. To distinguish between humorous forms geared towards either of the two functions, i.e. message relaying vs. entertainment, differentiation is proposed between *non-humorous utterances imbued with humour* and *purely humorous utterances*, as the two poles of a continuum on which humorous instances are placed. This division mirrors Mulkay's (1988) dichotomy between *applied humour*, which carries subversive or supportive meanings enriching the serious content of the interaction, and *pure humour*, which is "taken by the participants to have no implications beyond the realm of the humorous discourse" (Mulkay 1988: 156). Nonetheless, as the two exchanges below show, the division into non-humorous utterances imbued with humour and purely humorous utterances is clear-cut only in theory.

(3) 1. M: I know the word you used. I've checked it with uncle Google.
2. W: How resourceful!:)
3. M: Someone has to be!

4. W: Are you putting me down?
5. M: Probably very much so, but this is nothing new... Besides, this may act as an incentive;)
6. W: As good as it gets I'm afraid. As I grow older, I'm less and less active.
7. M: I don't know if you're teasing but I was just teasing.
8. W: Oh please, obviously. So was I!:)

The interchange opens with the man's colourfully expressed admission of having checked a difficult term used by the woman (1). Rather than admit to having googled a word, the man wittily uses a *creative metaphor* (Dynel 2009c), conceptualising the Internet browser as a reliable close relative. Thereby, he conveys a meaning pertinent to the ongoing discourse, tinting his utterance with humour. This turn, a perfect instance of non-humorous utterance imbued with humour, may also be viewed as an implicit compliment, for the statement implies that his interlocutor uses sophisticated vocabulary with which he is unfamiliar. This is followed by the woman's ostensible compliment (2), viz. mocking rather than genuine praise, triggering the man to produce a slightly *sarcastic* (cf. Dynel 2009b) comment (3) in response. This may be, and is indeed (4), read as an offensive implied meaning (the woman is not resourceful). The next turn (5) is most ambivalent. The man admits to having acted with intent to disparage the conversationalist (as he had done on other occasions), allowing for potential encouragement the utterance may induce in her. The emoticon at the end of the line appears to act as a potential disclaimer signalling that the speaker is not fully committed to the truth of the preceding words (even if he is). The woman replies with a statement that appears to be a genuine non-humorous self-revelation (6), independent from the humorous frame, which she chooses not to see in the previous contribution. As a result, the man moves to the meta-communicative level, admitting to his interpretative uncertainty about the interactant's proposition, and emphasising his humorous intention (7), which is also what the woman admits to (8). On the other hand, neither of them explicitly backtracks on their earlier statements, which is why many turns in the exchange (2–6) linger on the border between humorous and non-humorous frames.

(4) 1. M: I wouldn't be able to sit in a cold room. I would be ill instantly.
2. W: The strong sex...:)
3. M: Trust me, it's all about guts, not some immune system:)
4. W: Oh dear! Wouldn't a big cheek ... or four suffice? No, that makes you a woman..:)
[No response follows]
5. W: He hasn't picked up the gauntlet. Knockout!
6. M: I never fight against women;P
7. W: Can you see any woman now?
8. M: I can sense Her presence. (I had her corrected for Her by the editing programme, and I treated this as a sign and chose to keep it;)
9. W: Yup. I also believe that God is a She:)

This conversational strand opens with the man's confession (1), which elicits a sarcastic comment on the woman's part (2), intended as being mildly critical, yet also humorous. The man joins the contestive repartee and attempts to convey meanings concerning the essence of manhood, transcending the humorous frame, although the utterance is grounded in a punning element (3). At this point (4), the woman deploys the idiom used in the previous turn. She produces a pun couched in lexical ambiguity, viz. three meanings of "cheek" ("part of face"/"buttock"/"courage coupled with rudeness"), whereby she wittily comments on the previous turn and continues the gender topic. Although some informative content is conveyed (a rudimentary observation on women's physique), this turn seems to belong primarily to the humorous frame. Receiving no response, admittedly due to the man's lack of comprehension, she contributes an idiomatic comment to sustain the contestive teasing activity (5). All the remaining lines (6–9) within the exchange may carry some information beyond the humorous frame (the man does not struggle physically with women, he got the word "her" corrected, etc.) but are orientated towards the joint activity of contestive, albeit overtly benevolent, teasing, which must be the primary objective of this part of the interaction.

3.3.2 *Communicative goals*

Humour is a resource for accomplishing serious goals and there are a number of underpinning reasons for using it as a rhetorical tool. Deploying humour to convey a non-humorous meaning entitles the speaker to *decommitment* (Kane et al. 1977), i.e. potential retracting of his/her intention via *disclaimers* (Norrick 1993). In essence, all humour tends to entail discursive ambiguity, which allows for any meaning to be retracted, on the "only-joking" pretext (e.g. Kane et al. 1977, Mulkay 1988, Norrick 1993). This strategy can also be used when the speaker did mean to convey the propositional content, yet faced with a response testifying to the recipient's ill feeling, decides to backtrack on the statement.

Whether or not on the grounds of potential decommitment, humour has a cushioning effect and may be used for *mitigation* of intentionally produced aggressive acts. The extensive research on functions of conversational humour bears out that it is used to mitigate the force of acts, such as criticism, reprimand or directives (see e.g. Attardo 1994, Martin 2007). It must be observed that humorous force can underlie an entire utterance which does convey non-humorous meanings (an utterance imbued with humour), or a textual chunk engendering a humorous effect may be attached to a non-humorous chunk or even follow it in a different turn, the two frames being sequentially introduced, as the example below corroborates.

(5) The two have been discussing the issue of a healthy diet and the woman seems to have contradicted herself.

1. M: You should think a moment before you write something. Bite your tongue or finger next time:)
2. W: Honestly, you overdid it!

3. M: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, seriously!
4. W: Well, you deserve to be punished... You may now spend some time playing, but then you should go straight to bed, without supper.
5. M: May I take my teddy bear with me, please?

Having produced a blunt comment on the interlocutor's ineptness, the man instantly tries to remedy the face-threatening situation and completes the turn with a piece of advice couched in humorous wordplay pivoted on deidiomatisation (cf. Dynel 2009a), facilitated by the written mode of communication (1). Notwithstanding this attempt at mitigation, the woman appears to take offence at the man's words (2), which prompts him to emphasise his benevolent intention (3). The first part of the woman's response cannot be unequivocally subsumed under the humorous frame (especially that there is no emoticon present), yet in the remainder of the turn, she transparently enters the humorous frame by partaking in role playing (4). Thereby, she assumes the position of a strict mother punishing her child. The man duly joins the play frame rooted in pretence, accepting the alignment set by his co-participant and performing the role of a child (5). Role playing is a pretence-based game, which can be interpreted as revolving around frame layering. Interlocutors must be aware of framing as joint pretence underpinning their utterances, which cannot be read as belonging to the real-life frame (cf. Gordon 2002, Hoyle 1993).

(6)
1. M: Today, I met a friend from my secondary school. We started off with group meetings and then the group got reduced to individual people.
2. W: An Uzi or arsenic poured into coffee?
3. M: I merely presented my true self:D

In response to the man's serious self-revelation (1), the woman enters the humorous frame. She harbours a suspicion which cannot carry any truthful content, in view of its implausibility (2). The man joins in the humorous frame and deflects the ostensibly aggressive tease by means of a *self-deprecating* remark (e.g. Dynel 2008a and references therein), which may carry partly truthful meaning about him (3). While in this example, the taunt does not appear to affront the hearer, due to the insignificance of the topic or the absurdity of the jibe, the following instance displays a contradictory situation.

(7) The woman wrote about the problems her mother has been experiencing with her new car.
1. M: This is what it's like when you let a woman make car-related decisions.
2. W: Watch it! I mean it!
3. M: The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;)
4. W: ... is what you say when pressed by a woman:)
5. M: Why do you say things that aren't true?;)
6. W: I'm a human being:)
7. M: No, this one's probably gender-related.
8. W: Ha! Not sex-related! I'm as truthful as one can get, then. Thank you!

The exchange starts with the man's serious commentary on gendered issues (1), to the chagrin of the female interlocutor, who takes issue with the statement (2). Rather than drop the topic, the man reasserts his standpoint, albeit using the humorous cue for the cushioning effect (3). Alleviating the situation further, the woman transports the interaction into the humorous realm and redirects the talk to a different gender-related topic, via an utterance carrying little informative content (4). The man engages in ironic (given the emoticon) teasing and pursues the topic of truthfulness, again turning the tables on the interactant (5). The latter teases him back, exploiting the clichéd observation (6), which the man tries to subvert (7), most likely not subscribing to the truthfulness of the proposition (i.e. that only women are mendacious). In the final turn (8), the woman pretends to agree to win the rhetorical battle. Premised on the difference between the concepts of (social) gender and (biological) sex, she seems to teasingly suggest that even if she is a woman, her gender role is that of a man, which is why in the light of the preceding interaction, she cannot feel offended.

As many of the examples above show, a most problematic case of a humorous genre lying on the border between humorous and non-humorous frames is ostensibly *aggressive/contestive teasing* (e.g. Bateson 1972; Drew 1987; Norrick 1993; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Keltner et al. 1998; Partington 2006; Martin 2007; Dynel 2008a and references therein). Teasing is anchored in the speaker's intention to elicit a humorous response in the interlocutor but may also carry non-humorous meaning. Discussing the teasing frame Straehle (1993) uses Bateson's (1972) concept of a metamessage transcending the ostensible meaning of the speaker's utterance. As Straehle puts it,

> "this is play" involves a paradox of message and metamessage: when a "hostile" phrase is cast with a metamessage that signals a frame as "play", the utterance doesn't mean what it would under other circumstances, but conveys participant rapport instead. Thus, though words may denote hostility, we can interpret them as play. (Straehle 1993: 213–214)

An overtly hostile teasing utterance carries, or rather is motivated by, the playful metamessage "this is play", which is why any abrasiveness or aggressiveness should not be treated as being genuinely meant by the speaker (Straehle 1993; cf. Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Dynel 2008a). Drew even proposes:

> Teases are designed to make it very apparent what they are up to – that they are not intended as real or sincere proposals – by being constructed as very obviously exaggerated versions of some action etc.; and/or by being in direct contrast to something they both know or one has just told the other. (Drew 1987: 232)

On the other hand, teasing may carry backgrounded but relevant messages, and it is by no means the case that teases always evince apparent exaggeration. Speakers can resort to teasing as a vehicle for playful mitigation of threatening propositional meaning, e.g. mild criticism, in order not to enforce hostility (Drew 1987). Rightly, several authors argue in favour of examining teases on the strength of responses they solicit (e.g. Drew 1987).

However, at times the response may not testify to how the teasee actually finds the interlocutor's preceding contribution, when the former chooses to hide his/her having taken offence at it. Therefore, central to the present discussion is the notion of intention.

4. Distinguishing frames: The speaker's intentions and the hearer's recognition thereof

Various methodological interpretative difficulties notwithstanding, the (non)humorous import of an utterance and the subtle distinction between the two frames must invariably be judged in the context of *speaker meaning*[8], i.e. an intentionally conveyed meaning (e.g. Grice 1957; Levinson 2000), and the hearer's actual uptake conducive to his/her response (e.g. Clark 1996, Carassa and Colombetti 2009). It is here assumed that the hearer's inferential process is automatically materialised as inferring the speaker's intended meanings, unless the hearer encounters a problem and is at a loss to understand what the speaker has uttered, which is when the hearer starts consciously pondering or questioning the speaker's intentions. This can happen in humorous conversations. Intention recognition is problematic not only from the perspective of a researcher, but also from the vantage point of hearers in a conversation. Because of the overlap between frames coinciding with the speaker's equivocal intentions as considered by the hearer, the speaker very frequently runs the risk of having the playful frame misinterpreted, which may lead to miscommunication, or at least to a need for explication. As Goffman (1974: 7) rightly notes, "on occasion, we may not know whether it is play or the real thing that is occurring." Nonetheless, the hearer cannot be left oblivious to which frame is in force to be able to determine whether the speaker subscribes to the propositions which seem to be conveyed, or whether the latter is "only joking".

> In order to comprehend any utterance, a listener (and a speaker) must know within which frame it is intended: for example, is this joking? Is it fighting? Something intended as a joke but interpreted as an insult (it could of course be both) can trigger a fight. (Tannen and Wallat 1993: 59–60)

What Tannen and Wallat appear to suggest is that a frame intentionally constructed by the speaker must be recognised by the hearer so that miscommunication does not arise. In other words, in a collaborative process of communication, ideally, the hearer recognises the speaker's intention underlying his/her utterance. As Levinson (2000: 29) puts it, "communication involves the inferential recovery of speakers' intentions: it is the recognition by the addressee of the speaker's intention to get the addressee to think such-and-such that essentially constitutes communication." The speaker's (non-) humorous utterance forms a basis for the hearer's inferences, which should

8. No claims are here made on the *reflexiveness* of the speaker's meanings (Grice 1957), which has been hotly debated by researchers over the past few decades.

prototypically be (but may as well not be) compatible with the former's intention. To facilitate the hearer's inferential process, speakers must carefully devise their utterances. Also, Lampert and Tripp aver that

> speakers must be able to gauge when their remarks are less likely to be interpreted as having serious implications and more likely to be taken as a switch to a more playful, paratelic mode of information-processing (Apter 1982). (Lampert and Tripp 2006: 53)

Unequivocal as this may be in theory, real language data adduce evidence that human communication is replete with dubious cases and ambivalent communicative situations, irrespective of the level of familiarity between interlocutors, their mutual knowledge and common ground. The hearer may be at a loss to interpret the speaker's utterance. Even if the hearer does make inferences, his/her interpretation and the speaker's intention are not always compatible (Gibbs 1999). Hence, the speaker frequently runs the risk of having the playful frame misinterpreted (Keltner et al. 1998). Misinterpretation may be conducive to miscommunication or misunderstanding (and thus frequently offence or indignation) on the hearer's part, which may never transpire if he/she does not admit to his/her true feelings. Misreading the speaker's humorous intention is one of the reasons for failed humour (Hay 2001; Bell 2009a, 2009b; Priego-Valverde 2009). On the other hand, interlocutors tend to explicate their intentions when misunderstandings transpire (cf. Gibbs 1999). Moreover, the speaker's intention judged post facto is "open to formulation, denial, opposition, alternative description, or the partialling-out of intent with regard to specific, formulated components of actions" (Edwards 2006: 44). Indeed, the speaker can backtrack on the alleged informative content, whatever his/her original intention may have been, while the hearer can never have full certainty as to whether the speaker has communicated any meanings outside the humorous frame.

Intentionality may actually be the source of humour, depending on multi-layered put-ons. The example below displays the repetitive retracting of an earlier proposition. Playful as it may be by design, repeated withdrawals of earlier meanings confound the hearer, who is incapable of grasping the speaker's communicative intention, which is precisely the latter's overarching intention.

(8)
1. M: Lately, the functioning of my organism has been negatively affected by sleep deprivation.
2. W: What are the repercussions of this intensified psycho-physiological state, in contrast to the blissful happiness you experienced in your youth when you could engage in a three-night swilling session, drink two litres of spirits and go to school, pretending you had no headache at all?
3. M: As regards my secondary school, but for the type of drink, the rest is true.
4. W: Ohhhh, my mental picture of you is shattered.

5. M: Wild years.
6. W: Seriously, each man goes through this stage.
7. M: You're mitigating the previous statement;)
8. W: This one was serious. Seriously, not having a drinking patch testifies against a man's manhood.
9. M: Pheewww;)
10. W: How easily you get duped!:)

The conversation begins in a formal tone, with the man admitting to his poor health (1), on which the woman capitalises to introduce a humorous frame, first assuming a formal tone and then gradually moving away from it and constructing a humorous flight of fancy (2). Rather than referring to the hyperbolised image within the humorous frame instigated by the other party, the man appears to corroborate the truth of the woman's statement, admitting to having abused alcohol (3). In her successive turns, the woman expresses contradictory opinions, voicing her disappointment coupled with mild disapproval (4) and then indicating her acceptance (6, 8) of the man's past actions only to ultimately withdraw the latter, implicitly revealing her intention to deceive him (10). Therefore, that the woman's ostensible approval is enclosed within the humorous frame and is thus meant as a put-on, by means of which she hoodwinks, and pokes fun at, the man. The overt message regardless, the man may be ultimately confounded and left oblivious to the woman's genuine beliefs. Incidentally, an interview held in retrospect revealed that the woman subscribes to both the opinions she conveyed in the humorous and serious frames. The ambivalence of intention is also epitomised by the next example, in which conversationalists operate on meta-communicative level, focusing on each other's underlying intentions.

(9)
1. W: I'd like to discuss one theoretical issue with you.
2. M: Ok, provided I can keep up:)
3. W: Yes, you always can!
4. M: Not entirely true, but nice.
5. W: Oh, he's teasing...
6. M: Not teasing. He really thinks so. And he is right because he's almost always right;)
7. W: Oh this humorous frame! One short utterance, and you are dead serious and jocular, alternating between what you really mean a few times and endlessly changing their labels, so that one never knows what you really mean:)
8. M: Oh come on, you do know what I mean:) All of the above obviously:)

In line 5, i.e. halfway through the interchange orientated towards a serious goal, the woman expresses her doubt as to the veracity of the man's self-deprecating remarks (2, 4), which she reads as fishing for compliments. In this turn, the woman playfully refers to the conversationalist in the third person. In response (6), using the same grammatical pattern and referring to himself in the third person, the man modestly sustains the truth of his earlier turn, but firmly asserts his authority. The rigidity of the statement, together with the emoticon, appears to suggest the speaker's humorous intent, softening the import of the claim, which he may indeed support. The woman's reply (7), couched in a humour-orientated hyperbole, is indicative of the Jakobsonian metalinguistic function of language. She then openly acknowledges the ambivalence and humorousness of the preceding turn and expresses her doubt as regards the message the interactant aimed to relay. Ultimately, the man confirms his assertions, even those ostensibly produced within the humorous frame. Again the straightforward manner of the claim, coupled with the emoticon, tilts the interaction in the humorous direction.

5. Conclusions

This article addressed the interplay between non-humorous mode of communication and humorous frames/keys/carnival. First, a general literature survey was conducted to review the conceptualisations of the focal terms in literature, both as designed originally and as employed in humour studies. The concept of interactive frames was shown as the broadest one, and thus adopted in the remainder of the article.

As posited by Bateson (1953), the backdrop for the dichotomy between humorous and non-humorous frames is that humour need not, and actually will not, carry relevant informative content, inasmuch as it falls under the umbrella of a playful activity. However, it was here argued, in conformity with the abundant research, that many forms of conversational humour do convey meanings pertinent to ongoing conversations. As a matter of fact, non-humorous utterances imbued with humour are formed primarily with a view to conveying meanings, while additionally embracing humorous means of expression meant to amuse the hearer, bear out the speaker's wit, or mitigate imposition on the hearer. Even utterances overtly enclosed in the humorous frame may convey meanings pertinent outside it (e.g. via backgrounded presuppositions), while the speaker can take the liberty of retracting his/her words, irrespective of his/her initial intention.

A (partly) humorous utterance in a conversation can be a joker in the pack, given its ambivalent (non)humorous status. An utterance may be amusing, but its relevant import cannot be determined unequivocally, residing in the speaker's intention and the hearer's understanding of the speaker's meanings, which are subject to negotiation.

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Humour in quasi-conversations

Constructing fun in online sports journalism

Jan Chovanec

The article extends the application of the mechanisms of conversational humour from everyday conversations to written mass media texts. It argues that such an approach is made possible by the dialogic structure of some texts, despite the lack of spontaneity and authenticity that is found in casual conversations and that appears implicit in many definitions of conversational humour. Identifying instances of quasi-conversational verbal exchange in the novel journalistic genre of live text commentary, the article points out that humour in such written texts is achieved cooperatively between different voices present in the text, i.e. the journalist's voice and the authentic voices of selected readers whose emails are cited in the text of the commentary. A close analysis reveals that within the commentary, quasi-conversational segments constitute a special narrative layer that is characterised by its orientation to gossip and which includes frequent elements of humour. After defining the concept of a quasi-conversation and distinguishing between two sets of mechanisms of conversational humour, the article focuses on the interactive mechanisms (retorts, teasing, and banter) that occur in second turns in conversations, i.e. as reactions to previous speakers' turns.

1. Introduction

Studies in conversational humour typically deal with data from real-life conversation as the prototypical kind of interpersonal communication. More recently, there has been an increased focus on fictional conversation, such as television dialogue and other kinds of scripted dialogue. In this article, I use the terms "dialogue" and "dialogic" to describe the situation when a speech event is constituted by different interacting voices, i.e. when more than one (real or fictional) speaker is involved. The expression "dialogue" is formed as directly descriptive of the interactive nature of conversation. It is a relational term that forms a lexical pair together with the term "monologue", with the underlying contrast of singularity v. plurality, i.e. "one" vs. "more than one". That meaning is also indicated by the word's etymology. It is made up of the Greek elements "dia-" (across) and "legein" (speak). In common parlance, however, the expression "dialogue" is used in another sense, namely as the conversation between two, and not more, persons, probably as a result of folk etymology based on the mistaken reading of the original prefix "dia-" (across) as "di-" (two). Dialogue then becomes equated with dyadic communication. Although such a reading is not justified on historical grounds, it is so widespread that it should perhaps be acknowledged as a separate sense of the word. As a relational term, it would then form a lexical set descriptive of the following speech situations: one speaker (monologue), two speakers (dialogue), more than two speakers (polylogue). However, given the complexity of participant frameworks in real-life as well as fictional interactions, such a trichotomous conception might raise further complications for analysis (e.g. what parts of a conversation between several participants should be considered as dialogue vs. polylogue, in view of the fact that some participants occasionally make few (or no) explicit verbal contributions to the verbal exchanges between other co-participants).

Despite the existence of some hybrid forms, including written conversation in the case of synchronous and asynchronous *computer-mediated communication* (CMC), such as online chat and discussion forums, there is a need to distinguish a third type of dialogue-based interpersonal communication, namely *quasi-conversation*. This type of conversation is based on authentic textual contributions from interlocutors. Such contributions are dialogically arranged by a single author, thereby combining both the textual authenticity of natural conversations and the scripted character of fictional dialogues. These criteria are met by *live text commentary* (LTC), a new genre of online journalism that allows for a certain degree of audience involvement. The texts are written, institutional, and made available to mass audiences online in real time. Despite these characteristics, the participatory nature of the media leads to the incorporation of readers' voices in journalistic texts, giving rise to pseudo-dialogical exchanges which are based on real language input and which are reminiscent of real-life conversational interactions.

In general, conversational humour is constructed by means of two mutually related sets of categories: (1) a formal set of devices that are not, in essence, dialogic since they commonly (and perhaps primarily) occur also in non-conversational texts, and (2) a semantic/pragmatic set of mechanisms that are embedded in the very nature of dialogic interaction. The latter include, among others, retorts, teases, banter, and put-downs. The presence of these categories of conversational humour is traced in the interactive type of live text commentaries. Given the quasi-conversational nature of live text commentary, it is hardly surprising to find frequent elements of conversational humour in these written journalistic texts produced for mass audiences.

This study, concerned with the interactional aspects of conversational humour, offers a qualitative analysis of data from the perspective of discourse analysis. Similarly to other papers in this volume (Pullin's and Dynel's), it emphasises how humour serves the social function of establishing a bond in interpersonal, and in this case computer-mediated, communication.

The illustrative material used in this article is based on an extensive collection of live text commentaries (minute-by-minute match reports) from guardian.co.uk; the online version of the British daily newspaper, the *Guardian*. Full texts are available online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/. The data analysed consist of football matches from major international and national tournaments (the 2006 World Cup, the 2008 European Championship, the 2010 World Cup, the Premier League, and the Champions League), published online from 2006 until 2010 and available in the newspaper's archives. Live text commentaries frequently contain minor spelling mistakes. All such typographical mistakes are preserved in this article for the sake of authenticity. Also, since all the sports commentators within the corpus analysed are male, they are referred to with the generic pronoun "he" where a need arises to use the singular form.

1.1 Conversational humour and natural (real-life) conversation

Conversational humour (cf. Dynel 2009) or *humour in interaction* (cf. Norrick and Chiaro 2010) is a phenomenon that has enjoyed relatively close attention, especially over the past two decades. While some scholars deal with numerous linguistic features that underlie conversational joking (Norrick 1993, 1994, 2003), others are concerned with the social functions which humour can have in conversational interactions (e.g. Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Fine and de Soucey 2005, Norrick and Spitz 2008) or the gender-related implications of various aspects of conversational humour (Hay 2000, Kotthoff 2006). In this paper, conversational humour is understood as a range of devices that, in a general sense, aim to construct humorous effects in dialogic interactions, while being distinct from joke-telling (cf. Dynel 2009). The concept is thus broader than "conversational joking", which constitutes only one of the possible realisations of conversational humour.

It seems to be taken for granted that conversational humour is located in "everyday conversation" or "everyday talk" (Norrick 1993, 1994), most typically of the face-to-face kind. Yet, the types of humour identified in such authentic personal interactions are also present in non-authentic (scripted) conversations and even in interactions that need not formally resemble conversations at all. As a result, they need not be limited to the spoken mode, as long as they rely on dialogic structures (quasi-conversations).

Many studies (e.g. Holmes 2006, Kotthoff 2006, Dynel 2008) point out, with various degrees of explicitness, that conversational humour is frequently "joint" or "co-constructed", i.e. a jointly constructed phenomenon occurring among real interlocutors in real time. The humour thus depends on the basic structural prerequisite of conversation, namely the mechanism of turn-taking, which allows the speakers to provide instant verbal reactions to each other. This implies that each actual conversational interaction is unique and non-replicated, as it is meant to be humorous and to achieve its effects within the particular group of the actual participants, although parts of it may be used by the interlocutors on other occasions (cf. repeated retellings of particular jokes, puns, teases, word play, etc. that are recontextualised in other tellings).

Regardless of the possibility of using such discursive templates in several conversations, conversational humour is very much tied to the local situational context shared by the interlocutors, i.e. their "here and now". In this sense, humour "emerges in the situation itself" as well as from "the appropriate cues that make it a laughing matter" (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997: 277). Although the spontaneity of interactions underlies much humour (Hay 2000), spontaneity itself is not to be equated with originality. Clearly, conversational humour can also rely on pre-constructed interactional elements (cf. Dynel 2009: 1285) that may be reused by speakers on several occasions as ready-made segments which may be further adapted to new situations and new listeners.

1.2 Fictional conversation (scripted dialogue)

Before progressing with an analysis of conversational humour in a quasi-conversation, it is necessary to contextualise this type of conversation with respect to fictional (non-authentic, scripted) conversation. The two categories are believed to be sufficiently distinct so as to warrant a terminological and analytical distinction, thereby reflecting the radically different ways in which the two types of conversations approach textual authenticity and authorship. It is held that the role of discourse mode is subsidiary to the authenticity of the textual segments that make up dialogic interactions. In other words, the approach adopted here shows that the spoken mode is not decisive for conversations, which can also be cast in the written form.

As mentioned above, natural conversations are spontaneous and unpremeditated. On the other hand, there are situations where dialogic interactions may give the impression of conversational spontaneity, yet they are not authentic in the sense of naturally occurring language arising from highly specific situations. Thus in drama, films or sitcoms, one is faced with fictional or scripted dialogue that differs significantly from natural conversation (cf. Dynel 2011).

On the level of language, scripted dialogue (also referred to as "constructed dialogue" and even "prefabricated dialogue" by others), tends to use fewer interruptions, overlaps and incomplete utterances that are associated with the authentic conversational engagement of interlocutors in natural talk (cf. Quaglio 2009).

On the level of the processes of production and reception, scripted dialogue reveals the conversational capabilities or the humorous prowess of a single author, rather than the verbal skills of the actual speakers, such as actors on stage or characters in films. In other words, the latter merely voice pre-existing humour that is authored by someone else (cf. also Dynel 2010).

As regards the discourse mode, conversational interactions in scripted dialogue are typically created as "written-to-be-spoken", often existing in a written form that is "artistically interpreted" on various occasions, as is the case of drama. Such conversations are usually carefully rehearsed in advance. They may be staged only once in a preservable form and then made available to mass audiences (as in films and television programmes). Alternatively, scripted dialogue may be re-enacted on repeated occasions to smaller audiences in more immediate situational contexts (as in drama). The decisive criterion is the dialogic structuralisation. Hence, written fictional dialogue also qualifies for inclusion in the category of "fictional conversation".

In addition, since such non-authentic dialogic interactions are intended for non-specific audiences that do not (and cannot) actually enter the frame of the conversational interaction (apart from appreciating the humour by laughing and applauding), they are generally more universal and less tied to specific local contexts. (Stage-based conversational humour in talk shows does, of course, typically react to topical events; similarly, even the more "timeless" fictional works of drama can, for instance, be interpreted and appreciated by audiences against the background of current events or political situations, whereby the original text receives new interpretative dimensions.)

Clearly, fictional conversations, though using many of the strategies of joking and humour encountered in authentic conversations that they strive to imitate, are functionally rather different. Yet, they are crafted in such a way as to create the illusion of a conversational encounter between various interlocutors, an illusion that is tacitly understood and accepted as such by all and that is not to be mistaken for a real conversation that it may strive to recreate. Although the issue of humour in fiction has frequently been studied before (cf. Ermida 2008), the area of non-authentic conversational discourse has enjoyed comparatively less attention (for the analysis of verbal interaction in film discourse, see e.g. Dynel 2010; for scripted dialogue, see Norrick and Spitz 2010).

1.3 From written conversation to quasi-conversation

As mentioned above, authentic and fictional conversations are distinguished, among others, by the different roles of the discursive participants and the importance of local contexts. Yet, there are discursive interactions that stand at the boundary between real-life everyday conversations and scripted dialogue. This concerns the so-called "written conversation" on the one hand and what could be referred to as "quasi-conversation" on the other.

While conversations are, almost by definition, spoken, they can also be cast in the written mode. Most characteristically, this occurs in various kinds of online communication such as synchronous chats (cf. North 2007, who refers to "online conversations") and other types of computer-mediated communication where the interlocutors type their discursive contributions in real time. Textual contributions appear on screen in interlaced sequences that have a dialogic nature and can be analysed in terms of conversation analysis in a manner similar to speakers' turns (cf. Garcia and Jacobs 1999, Stommel 2008).

Where written conversations contain elements of humour, conversational humour becomes transferred from spoken, face-to-face interaction into the written mode of the cyberspace. Such humour is discursively co-constructed in dialogic sequences, yet it may be limited in some ways. For instance, online users may find it impossible to rely on a shared physical context and may lack personal knowledge of other interactants. Clearly, written conversations in synchronous chat differ as regards overlaps and turn-taking since they allow several users to communicate (type) simultaneously (cf. Garcia and Jacobs 1999). Also, posts are produced and transmitted separately, with production carried out in private.

In asynchronous online communication, the construction of conversational humour is similarly dialogic, even though interactants' typed contributions do not immediately follow each other in real time. Despite their separation in time, textual contributions may be automatically arranged into threads and dialogic sequences, resembling written conversations, and can be read as such by interlocutors. Also, interactions remain open, which lends them an element of permanence, as any subsequent newcomer to the discussion can become involved and can contribute his or her comments, even though their postings may not be read by the previous interlocutors.

Online "conversationalists" thus form a very different group. With members dispersed in place and time, the group is forever open to newcomers, who have access to the group's complete discursive history. Group members are held together by their attention to a shared topic. However, regardless of the technical distinctions between the organisation of the interactions in synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication, such asynchronous communication also contains the crucial prerequisite for conversational humour, i.e. the co-construction of the speech event by two or more participants who contribute their turns while reacting to each other.

Even though written conversations contain some highly specific features as regards the circumstances of their production, what they share with prototypical natural conversations is that textual contributions (be they referred to as "turns" or "posts/postings") are authored by users themselves. This, of course, is an evident matter of fact, but it needs to be made explicit when defining particular types of conversations. Written conversations are thus different from not only non-authentic conversations occurring in scripted dialogue, but also quasi-conversations that may be encountered in some mass-media and computer-mediated-communication (CMC) contexts. Consequently, they need to be subsumed as a subtype of real-life conversation.

On the other hand, the notion of a quasi-conversation, as understood in this study, is used to denote a special type of communicative event in which a text (or its part) is constructed using dialogic sequences. This is the case of the interactive type of live text commentary, which contains elements of real interactions (and thus differs from scripted dialogue) that are arranged into quasi-conversational sequences with a dialogic structure. However, since the arrangement is done by the author of the text, who is a professional journalist, and the other participants do not have the freedom to make their posts available to others without the journalist's sanction, this genre differs markedly from both authentic spoken conversation as well as written conversation of both the synchronous and asynchronous kind. It could be stated that a quasi-conversation is partly scripted, yet it draws on authentic language input (spoken or written). Though the dialogic exchange may be constructed rather than natural, the language is real and not fictional. The actual interaction is not face-to-face, it is mediated by technology. In this sense, it is virtual rather than real.

The distinctions between the three types of conversational interactions are illustrated in Table 1. The descriptions are meant to outline the complexity of the types rather than suggest objective and exhaustive definitions. As mentioned above, some hybrid text types may escape straightforward classification. Thus, for instance, the inclusion of "written conversation" as a subtype of "natural conversation" in Table 1 reflects the particular perspective adopted in this article, where the various types of conversations are delimited on the basis of the authenticity and authorship of dialogic exchanges. Other arrangements are, of course, possible. If, for instance, synchrony of time was to be taken as the decisive criterion, then "written conversations" could be subsumed under "quasi-conversations" because they actually allow interlocutors a degree of premeditation before contributing their turns (in the form of posting messages in an asynchronous online chat). Nothing like that is, of course, possible in natural conversation, which calls for instant topical contributions from the temporally co-present interlocutors.

The notion of a "quasi-conversation" is used here to complement the pair of terms "natural/real-life/authentic conversation" and "fictional conversation/scripted dialogue", in order to point out its simulated nature on the one hand and its dependence on real, i.e. non-scripted, input from actual discourse participants on the other (see below). As noted in the table, quasi-conversations can include across-the-frame media interactions, e.g. when 2nd frame participants, such as home audiences, react verbally to 1st frame interactions in the studio (for the concept of 1st and 2nd frame participants, see Fetzer 2002), as well as written/spoken news reports in which authentic text segments are framed into dialogic sequences by a single author.

The idea of a quasi-conversation is based on the distinctions between three types of interactions suggested by Thompson (1995): "face-to-face interaction", "mediated interaction" and "mediated quasi-interaction". As pointed out by Talbot (2007: 84), mediated quasi-interaction is characterised, among others, by the separation of spatial and temporal contexts (cf. their co-presence in naturally occurring conversations), and the orientation towards an indefinite number of potential recipients (unlike face-to-face and mediated interactions, which are aimed at specific others). Although Talbot mentions that mediated quasi-interactions are monologic, which is certainly the case for many instances of communication in the mass media, it is argued here that, thanks to feedback-providing technologies used in modern participatory media, such interactions can also be dialogical. As Cotter (2010: 126) points out, journalistic interactivity then enables linguistic interaction.

Table 1. Types of conversational interactions

Type	**Natural (real-life) conversation**	**Fictional conversation (scripted dialogue)**	**Quasi-conversation**
Authenticity	– Authentic, naturally-occurring – Real interaction – Conversation between real people	– Non-authentic, fictional – Scripted, premeditated – Intended to resemble natural conversation – Conversation between fictional characters	– Authentic text segments – Conversational structuralisation – Scripted (partly) – Based on real interaction(s) – Dialogic interaction between (usually) real people
Characteristics	– Face-to-face or technology-mediated (phone conversations) – Synchrony of time (temporal co-presence of speakers) – Transient (non-preservable, unless recorded)	– Asynchrony of time (authored, performed and received at different times) – Repeatable (typically staged verbatim or with little alteration) – Preservable	– Asynchrony of time (authentic text segments used "when needed") – Preservable
Authorship	– Multiplicity of speakers – Turn-taking	– Single author – Complexity of participant roles (speaker ≠ author) – Little freedom of speakers to air their own beliefs, ideas, etc.	– Single main author – Authentic textual segments authored by other interlocutors (multiplicity of voices) – "Turn-taking" regulated by a "gate-keeper" – Freedom to "take turns" limited
Mode	– Spoken – (Written)	– Written to be spoken – Written/Spoken	– Written – (Spoken)
Examples	– Real-life interactions (face-to-face/mediated interactions) – Online chat conversations, both synchronous and asynchronous	– Television and film dialogue (e.g. sitcoms) – Dialogue in drama – Fictional dialogue (fictional reported speech)	– Across-the-frame media interactions – Live text commentary (of a dialogic kind) – Written/spoken news reports with authentic reported speech (i.e. authentic text segments are framed into dialogic sequences by a single author)

For this reason, the term "quasi-conversation" seems particularly fitting. The phenomenon under analysis is neither fully authentic nor fictional conversation, yet it shares elements of both, namely the reliance on authentic verbal contributions from various interlocutors and authorial intervention in arranging the contributions into a scripted whole. The prefix "quasi" does not imply that these interactions are seen as, in a sense, deficient or deviant from natural/authentic/real-life conversations. It is meant to point out both the difference from, and the affinity with, such conversations, while some linguists use the notion of a "pseudo-dyad" and "pseudo-relationship" to describe "participants in the communicative news 'conversation' between journalist and audience, between the news community and the community of coverage" (Cotter 2010: 128). The prefix "pseudo" could, however, erroneously imply artificiality and unreality. Yet such relationships, dyads and conversations do have a tangible existence, though far from prototypical. Hence, the prefix "quasi" is used in the case of quasi-conversations.

2. Live text commentary as a quasi-conversation

Live text commentary (LTC), as a new genre of journalism, is characterised by the production of a written text in real time, contemporaneous with the events that it describes (cf. Jucker 2006, 2010). This has been enabled by the advent of new technologies, allowing publication of texts online. LTC resembles some other kinds of computer-mediated communication in that the texts are created in an incremental fashion: the text is not made available in its entirety but in the form of individual posts. Each update of the page also offers the possibility for a new post to appear, describing the latest development. Although LTC is particularly suited to describing events that are pre-scheduled, of a limited duration and of interest to the audience in their gradual development as well as their entirety, they are used not only for covering sports events (where they are most frequent) but also social and political events such as parliamentary enquires, presidential inaugurations, etc.

LTC is a hybrid genre. It draws primarily on the model of spoken sports commentary (cf. Crystal and Davy 1969, Ferguson 1982, Müller 2007, Gerhard 2008), translating some of its immediacy into the written mode. As a result, it contains frequent elements associated with orality and the spoken language (cf. Jucker 2006, Pérez-Sabater et al. 2008, Chovanec 2006, 2009b, Jucker 2010), similar to some other kinds of computer-mediated communication (Herring 1996, 1999). In all this, however, LTC does not differ significantly from other kinds of mass media, which broadcast their messages through various channels (print, sound, image, online) to mutually anonymous mass audiences in a very much one-way manner. Typically, feedback and direct interaction are rather limited, though this lack may be compensated for by the increased use of interactivity and casual language.

Depending on the nature of interaction with the readers, several subtypes of LTC can be distinguished. First, there is the informative type of LTC, which does not allow any feedback from the readers: the text is produced solely by the journalist. Second, the informative type of LTC may allow for discussion between readers, typically in the form of asynchronous posts placed under the actual text of the LTC or synchronous chat conversation in a window alongside the main text. Importantly, however, there is no interaction from readers present in the text of the LTC itself in either of these two subtypes.

The third subtype, however, is of an interactive kind, as the audience can send emails to or communicate with the journalist through some other means. In turn, the journalist can include readers' verbal reactions (as well as those of his colleagues', for instance) in the actual text of the LTC and subsequently react to them. As a result, the text ceases to be monologic and becomes open to other voices: monologue gives way to dialogue and journalistic reporting is replaced, in some places, with conversational exchanges. However, they are not real conversations. Rather, they are quasi-conversations in the sense of being based on authentic verbal contributions and liable to a description in conversation analytical terms, but incorporated into the text of the LTC by the journalist himself according to his own will and at his discretion. Unlike natural conversation, which is open to the conversationalists' free and unhindered contributions, LTC is open to only those readers whose contributions the journalist, in his dual role of the gate-keeper and the agenda-setter, deems worthy enough of inclusion (cf. Chovanec 2006, 2008b).

Previous analyses of the interactive type of live text commentary have revealed that the texts are structured on two narrative levels (cf. Chovanec 2009a, 2009b), which co-exist alongside each other with various degrees of interdependence. While the primary layer consists of the more or less factual description and personal evaluation of the extralinguistic events, the secondary layer consists of the quasi-conversational interactions between the journalist and the readers and includes topics and issues that can be quite unrelated to the main subject matter of the primary layer. The latter layer is then referred to as the "gossip layer" in order to point out that the interactions have an essentially social function, similar to informal conversations among friends (cf. Eggins and Slade 1997, Benwell 2001). The existence of the two layers is illustrated in the following example:

(1) a. 18 min Another minute, another chance: this time for Romania. There seems little danger when they win a free-kick the best part of 40-yards out, but Buffon has to be Mensa-smart to save Tamas's piledriver.
20 min "Going to see antiquated rockers The Rolling Stones live is also an over-rated experience," says Dan Garrigan. "Much as I enjoy watching a pensioner make suggestive pelvic thrusts every other second."
21 min Romania hit the post! An inswinging free-kick gets a deflection off Panucci's back and, with Buffon beaten, bounces off the upright.
23 min There's a long delay in play after Rat and Radoi violently clash heads going for the same high ball. God, that was painful. Radoi then leaves the field on a stretcher: after seeing the replays I doubt he'll be back.
25 min From a Romania corner, Buffon makes a textbook take. "You've got Sam Fox's email address?" says Scott Macdonald (and six others – five

men and one female). "I know she's not getting any younger but I wonder if you could pass it on anyway?" Not that Sam Fox, Scott.
26 min Romania sub: Rica on, Goian off. It's a like-for-like switch in the Romanian back four.
27 min Grosso is having a superb game, and is hurting Romania with all his crosses [insert your own tiresome Dracula gag here]. Another one flashes across the six-yard box, narrowly out of reach of both Toni and Del Piero.
29 min "Apparently Romanian cuisine features dishes called caltabosi, a sort of rice pudding and chitterlings and drob, lamb tripe with dock leaves and onions," says Simon Hather. "Doubtless it's as tasty as their football." (Euro 2008: Italy v Romania)

The short extract above consists of eight posts published online during 11 minutes of the game. The posts in minute 20, 25, and 29 contain citations from readers' emails. It is these that make up the secondary layer of narration that is intertwined with the primary layer of game description. A quasi-conversational segment occurs in minute 25, where the journalist complements the citation from a reader's email with his own comment (*Not that Sam Fox, Scott*). The two voices are thus juxtaposed in a pseudo-dialogic way. Thematically, the contributions from the readers develop topics that have been established previously:

(1) b. Meanwhile the first email is in ... "Forget football, and let's talk food," says Devon Mitchell. Right you are. "In your opinion, which country in the group of death offers the best nosh?" It has to be Italy, Devon. French food is one of the most over-rated things in history (along with the Beatles and J.R.R. Tolkien.)
[...]
10 min Italy win a free-kick, about 30 yards out, but Pirlo's dink goes straight to Chivu. "French food, The Beatles and JRR Tolkein overrated?" says Sam Fox. "I never thought I'd have heard my own sentiments so accurately reflected elsewhere. Add the Godfather trilogy to that and I'm happy." (Euro 2008: Italy v Romania)

The example also illustrates the journalist's attempt at conversational, yet not co-constructed, humour within the primary layer of game description: the short extract includes a humorous lexeme (the neologism *Mensa-smart* in minute 18) and polysemy (cf. the multiple meaning of "cross" in *with all his crosses* in minute 27, evoking the Romanian vampire stereotype), which indicate that the humorous frame is not reserved for the secondary layer of interpersonal gossip only.

As regards sports journalism, humour is a frequent strategy for communicating factual content (cf. Chovanec 2005a, 2005b). Arguably, this is associated with the function of sports to provide entertainment. Once such ways of constructing humour as punning and word play (especially in headlines) are used, they can function as markers of the domain of "entertainment": the content is entertainment and the style of presentation becomes entertaining as well (cf. Chovanec 2008b). In LTC, humour is present both in the primary layer of game description and in the secondary layer of interpersonal gossip. It is the latter that is of interest here because, thanks to the dialogical structuring of LTC whereby various voices are juxtaposed, the humour can be approached similarly to conversational humour in authentic conversations. This concerns, above all, the incremental development of a single topic which is subject to joking and humorous comments from various interlocutors, who thus jointly push a quasi-conversation forwards in a manner similar to authentic conversations (cf. Norrick 1994, 2003).

3. Conversational humour in live text commentary

As already mentioned, conversational humour is a broad category comprising devices that, in a general sense, aim to construct humorous effects in dialogic interactions. Some studies operate with the notion of "conversational joking" (Norrick 1993, 1994; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997), yet "joking", as the telling of jokes, is only one category of humour that recurs in interpersonal communication, be it real-life conversation, fictional dialogue or quasi-conversation. Without providing any explicit definitions, Norrick (2003) seems to use the two concepts interchangeably, subsuming jokes, anecdotes, wordplay and irony under conversational joking. By contrast, Dynel (2009: 1284) explicitly states that conversational humour is an umbrella term for various semantic and pragmatic types of humour that she locates in "interpersonal communication, whether real-life (everyday conversations or TV programmes) or fictional (film and book dialogues)." The types of humour are quite diverse. Norrick (2003: 1338) points out that

> the flexibility and protean character of conversational joking forms is an integral part of their attraction: joke punchlines turn into wisecracks, witty repartees grow into anecdotes, anecdotes develop into jokes, and so on.

Similarly, Dynel (2009: 1284) warns that any attempt to offer taxonomy of forms would be "quixotic" not only because many categories merge and overlap but also because new ones are proposed by researchers describing various "second-order subtypes of humour". However, she provides a useful list of forms that are often used in conversations and that are distinct from jokes and joke-telling: lexemes and phrasemes, witticisms, stylistic figures, puns, allusions (distortions and quotations), register clashes, retorts, teasing, banter, putdowns, self-denigrating humour, and anecdotes.

It appears that the categories of conversational humour mentioned in various studies fall into two general sets. The first broad set includes formal structures that are not germane solely to conversation, such as word play, punning, humorous lexemes/phrasemes, stylistic figures (similes, metaphors, irony, etc.), allusions, and register clashes. In fact, these are formal devices, often of a rather common type, for creating humorous effects even in monologic texts, e.g. fiction and news headlines (cf. Chovanec 2008b). They are dialogic only in a very general sense, by presupposing the audience and inviting a particular psychological reaction (e.g. amusement).

However, they can be used in interpersonal communication and become the subject matter of conjoint conversational humour, e.g. when interlocutors enter into chains of word play across their turns, try to outdo one another with puns (cf. verbal contests of wit), or react verbally to any of the forms mentioned above. The devices are then jointly developed in conversations.

On a different level, the first set also subsumes jokes and anecdotes and other structurally complete units that do not require the presence of the conversational frame. Just as in the case of the formal devices, jokes and anecdotes can likewise play a role in conversational humour, e.g. when told in reaction to other speakers' turns or in order to jointly develop a topic that is currently under discussion.

By contrast, the second set of devices is more closely tied to the dialogic nature of interpersonal communication. In this sense, the forms are "jointly constructed" because they are more difficult (though not impossible) to conceive of outside conversations, where they are truly at home. This concerns such categories as retorts (Norrick 1993), teasing (Norrick 1993, Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Dynel 2008), banter (Dynel 2008), and putdowns or sarcasm (Norrick 1993, Dynel 2009), which may appear in the literature under somewhat diverse names. It is crucial to note that these devices are inherently interactive. They rely on the existence of a verbal exchange with another interlocutor and are, thus, other-oriented. By contrast, the devices from the first group, i.e. word play, punning and other stylistic figures, may occur in conversation but do not *necessarily* presuppose the existence of a verbal exchange between two or more interlocutors. While they may be other-oriented in their intended effects, their essence is not interactive to such an extent as to make them comparable with retorts, teasing, banter and putdowns.

Let us now illustrate the presence of conversational humour in quasi-conversations constituted by interactive live text commentaries from online versions of newspapers, with selected examples from the second set of devices, i.e. those categories which do require the conversational participation of several interlocutors, since they rely on the turn-taking mechanism as the basic structural unit of conversation.

As already indicated, live text commentaries are reports written by professional journalists for mass audiences, who read the texts online in real time. Humorous quasi-conversational exchanges are located in the secondary layer of narration, which is constituted by readers' emailed contributions incorporated into the text of the commentary by the journalist. Individual posts conventionally open with either an indication of the relevant time or a brief heading summing up the contents of the posting. In the examples below, such headings are retained in their original form, yet are not printed in bold.

3.1 Retorts

Retorts are constituted by responses that react in a quick and witty manner to preceding turns (Norrick 1993). They are fundamentally dialogic since they operate as second turns, being made up of utterances produced by different interlocutors or, in the case of fictional dialogue, the voices of different characters. It has been suggested that a retort forms an adjacency pair with the preceding turn, but the first turn does not project any kind of expectation to be met by the second turn functioning as a retort, in the way, for instance, an answer forms an adjacency pair with a previous question. In fact, retorts typically work in the opposite direction, i.e. violating a possible expectation, which helps in creating the desired humorous effect. Dynel (2009: 1291) notes that "retorts are not expected by the producers of the first pair parts". The fact that an utterance occurs subsequent to another, i.e. always as a second turn, does not entail that the two turns form a fixed adjacency pair.

In the following example, it is precisely the unexpectedness that achieves the humorous effect in the journalist's utterance. From a conversation analytical perspective, the journalist's retort is located within a question-answer adjacency pair. While the reader asks for confirmation of a particular proposition, (i.e. the role of Jack Lemmon as a manager in the team), the journalist does not provide a relevant answer. Instead, he offers a personal opinion, which counts as an answer in that it counters the existential presupposition on which the question is based.

(2) PEEEEEEEEEEEP!!!!!!!!!!! That's it! This tournament is one co-host down. "Is it true that the Swiss manager is actually the famous American actor Jack Lemmon," writes Tim Finnerty. I don't think the Swiss have a manager anymore, Tim. (Euro 2008: Switzerland v Turkey)

There is nothing inherently humorous about an utterance such as "I don't think the Swiss have a manager anymore, Tim". However, humour arises from the author's implication that, given the usual practice in football teams, the lack of success at a sports event usually results in the replacement of the management. The timing of the quasi-conversational dialogic exchange is crucial here. It appears at the very end of a football match when it becomes clear that the Swiss participation in the championship is over. At any other time during the match, the retort could not have been effective because it depends for its humorous effect on the knowledge of the final result. The primary layer of narration, i.e. the factual description of the events, provides a frame for the quasi-conversational exchange between the reader and the journalist.

In quasi-conversations, dialogic interaction need not occur only among the actual participants in a speech event. It can also entail real speakers who are positioned outside of the frame of the interaction and who generate verbal output that is cited by the journalist. Occasionally, fictitious utterances may be ascribed to such real individuals, as well as to entirely fictional characters, thereby turning a quasi-conversation into a scripted dialogue. Again, what is crucial, similarly to fictional conversation, is that there is a juxtaposition of different voices, with one voice reacting to another in a conversational manner. Thus, in the following example, the LTC commentator provides a humorous reaction, i.e. a retort, to the actual words of a TV sports commentator, thereby transgressing the boundaries between the different frames of interactions.

(3) 41 mins Camera cuts to a fairly beautiful French lady in the crowd. As various single men cry inside at what become [sic] of their lives, Clive Tyldesley announces: "some need make-up more than others". Say what you see, Clive. (2006 World Cup Final: Italy v France)

In this retort, the commentator uses a witty remark to criticise his TV colleague for the obvious falsity of his statement. Particularly noteworthy is the way the LTC commentator formulates the retort in the 2nd person, as if directly addressing Clive Tyldesley (cf. the familiar first name address form).

The interaction between the voices thus juxtaposed is often based on mutual conflict. Therefore, it can also be interpreted as a verbal contest, in which originality and creativity score high. Thanks to its embedding within the humorous frame, such interaction serves the function of rapport rather than aggression (cf. Chovanec 2006, Dynel 2008).

3.2 Teasing

Since teasing is a verbal activity that can extend across several turns, it is analytically more precise to refer to a single witty turn as "a tease" (cf. Dynel 2008: 242). Teasing takes a variety of forms directed at the interlocutor, which are meant to be playful rather than aggressive. Dynel (2009: 1293) argues that "producing a tease, the speaker does not mean to be genuinely offensive towards the hearer, challenging the latter jocularly". In other words, the communication remains within the humorous frame and is not intended as a genuine face-threat. The aggression is only ostensible.

An example of a tease can be identified in the following extract:

(4) Shambling prediction [...] If France win we have the most romantic farewell imaginable for Zizou, the greatest ever player since Maradona (personally I think Ronaldinho and Des Lyttle are better but they need to do it over an entire career) [...]
Is Zidane rubbish? [...] People don't put Zidane up with Pele and Maradona, do they"? High in the second tier, but below the Pele/Maradona/Collymore types, seems fair to me.
[...]
51 mins "Are you a fan of the great Forrest team of the mid 90s?" says Richard Beniston. "Two references to Collymore and the mighty Des "Bruno" Lyttle in a minute by minute during the World Cup Final indicates you have some love for Frank Clarke's boys." And the mis-spelling of Frank Clark suggest you don't, Richard. (2006 World Cup: Italy v France)

Here, the tease is a jocular challenge addressed to the reader. What the journalist does is point out the reader's lack of knowledge, which is quite the opposite of what the reader hoped to achieve. The reader decided to pass a remark on the highly incongruous, and thus humorous, combinations of players' names in the journalist's preamble to the match. His insightful comment reveals that he was able to correctly identify the journalist's hints and, perhaps, wished to manifest his "inside" knowledge, proving himself to be a true member of the core group of football fans, readers of the LTC.

The journalist turns the reader into the butt of the humour by means of a comment that is inherently face-threatening. As Norrick (1993: 77, 1994: 423), for instance, observes, drawing attention to another person's error may amount to a personal affront and count as mocking because it is polite to ignore others' mistakes. The humour in the above example is achieved at the reader's expense and for the benefit of other readers. As such, his utterance could count as a putdown rather than a tease, i.e. as a remark that is so abusive and disparaging that it carries "no humour to be appreciated by the butt" (Dynel 2009: 1294).

However, though such an interpretation is possible (and the utterance may indeed be taken as an affront or a putdown by the reader concerned), it is not very likely. This is because the utterance is not out of context; it is placed within a humorous frame that is indicated, first and foremost, by the journalist himself (cf. the beginning of his commentary where he introduces the incongruous combinations "Ronaldinho and Des Lyttle" and "the Pele/Maradona/Collymore types" which cue such a frame). Within the text of the LTC, the humorous frame is also established and maintained by other kinds of verbal humour (word play, punning, joking, and other kinds of conversational humour) as well as non-verbal visual cues (photographs, graphics) and hypertextual links. The audience thus has no doubt that the purpose of the genre is not limited to the informative function. In fact, the primary layer of narration, concerned with information about the sports matches, sometimes becomes a mere background for the secondary layer of narration, within which the identity of the virtual group of LTC readers is articulated through quasi-conversations.

What might then, typically out of context, seem to be a personal affront (as in the comment above), will be understood as a tease rather than a putdown. Such mock aggression forms a part of the customary pattern of behaviour within the group, which, though existing only online in the virtual space of the Internet, shows elements of a shared "joking culture" (cf. Fine and de Soucey 2005). The reader's minor spelling mistake offers a welcome opportunity for the journalist to stage a mock putdown that is not meant to be genuinely aggressive.

Other scholars make a similar conclusion about the importance of context in situations of conversational teasing. Thus Norrick (1994) argues that mocking and sarcasm (which he associates with teasing) are related to aggression towards the hearer, yet he notes that mocking may, depending on context, have a dual nature and need not be automatically associated with aggression:

> Especially in customary joking relationships, sarcasm and mocking can express both aggression and solidarity – aggression in the message, attacking others for their foibles and errors, and solidarity in the metamessage, including others in a playful relationship with increased involvement. (Norrick 1994: 423)

This dual nature is mirrored in more recent studies, e.g. by Dynel (2008) and Haugh (2010), who point out that teasing (and, more specifically, jocular mockery), can be interpreted as face-threatening and/or face-supportive.

3.3 Banter

In natural conversation, banter is defined as the "rapid exchange of humorous lines oriented towards a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk" (Norrick 1993: 29). Dynel (2009) points out that banter is mostly spoken, though it can occur also in instant messaging programmes (such as Skype) that allow for the quick exchange of turns, or what she calls "a longer exchange of repartees" (Dynel 2009: 1293).

The rapid exchange of humorous turns that appears fundamental for spoken banter, however, is not present in live text commentary, because the humorous turns contributed by readers in their emails are textually organised by a journalist. In such a quasi-conversational context, banter seems to be defined less by the rapidity of the exchange of "turns" and more by the adherence to a common theme that is developed repeatedly through humorous lines contributed by various participants, who sometimes try to outwit each other.

Crucially, the humorous comments (equivalent to "turns") need not follow consecutively in a strict linear manner but can be spread across extensive stretches of text because topics within the secondary layer of live text commentaries (as well as in asynchronous CMC) are not subject to instant discussion at a particular point in time. Instead, topics remain open for substantial periods of time. While in a real conversation, we experience the phenomenon of the "drift of topics" (i.e. topics in a linear sequence, with one topic at a time), in live text commentary (and asynchronous CMC), several topics can be developed by the participants simultaneously. This is because the text is not organised along a single linear conversational thread. Rather, it contains multiple threads that simultaneously develop several, often unrelated, topics. The non-linear progression of multiple topics does not appear to affect coherence (cf. Chovanec 2009a). As Garcia and Jacobs (1999: 363) observe in the case of CMC, "the conversation, once produced, [can] be read like a document, and responded to in much the same way." The coherence in such multi-topic non-linear written conversations is encouraged by the permanence of the text, which enables readers to backtrack and access the earlier development of the conversation.

The following example illustrates the situation when humour is constructed jointly by several participants contributing humorous comments on a common topic in a manner similar to banter in real-life conversations.

(5) 7.43pm: "It has just taken me an hour and a half to get home because of all the Man Utd 'fans' (men in shiny new 4x4s wearing shiny new suits) driving to Old Trafford, one of whom rather contemptuously nearly rammed my nine-year-old Yaris, Oliver," squeals Kim Taylor. "Can any regular Old Trafford attendees who are reading please learn to have some consideration for those of us who just want to get home!?" Message conveyed, Kim. Oliver, eh? Do you name all your appliances? My toaster's called Hubert.
[...]
23 mins: This is quite an odd game, much like the first leg. Neither team looks great and Milan have created the most chances yet it is United who have scored and, indeed, look the more likely to score again. "Our son was doing poorly in school a few years ago, and accordingly the x-box that he played incessantly 'disappeared' for a while," reveals Gordon Burns. "We explained that it had gone on a trip with a toaster. Hubert, perhaps? I don't know the x-box's name. Never thought to ask. But the squirrel that lives in our garden is named Clement Greenberg." (Man. United v Milan, 10 March 2010)

This example indicates the common theme in the quasi-conversational interaction, namely people's tendency to give personal names to their inanimate possessions. The topic is indirectly introduced by a reader, Kim Taylor, and responded to by the journalist, who jumps at the chance of making a witty remark about his toaster. Then, 23 minutes later, the topic is further developed by another reader, Gordon Burns, who adds another humorous remark on the topic. Clearly, the initial humour sparks reactions from other readers, who are willing to engage in the humorous frame. The second reader shows his awareness of the humorous frame by pointing out the triviality and absurdity of such a conversation (cf. "I don't know the x-box's name. Never thought to ask. But the squirrel that lives in our garden is named Clement Greenberg.").

The presence of authentic, rather than fictional banter in live text commentary is the result of the incremental process of the text's production as a series of postings appearing online in real time. As a result, it is "emergent discourse", in which humour can be "developed step by step", i.e. in a way similar to what Kotthoff (2006: 290) notes about authentic conversations.

4. Conclusion

The traditional distinction between real-life conversation, on the one hand, and fictional conversation (scripted dialogue), on the other, may not do complete justice to all conversational interactions. The distinction of a mode (spoken vs. written) does not appear to be particularly crucial since one can commonly encounter authentic written conversations, especially in technologically mediated online interactions, as well as spoken fictional conversations, for instance in film and drama. From the perspectives of the authenticity of utterances and their organisation, it is useful to distinguish a third type of conversation, namely the quasi-conversation. Its defining characteristic is the presence of authentic textual segments that are dialogically sequenced by one interlocutor in a scripted manner rather than by individual contributors naturally taking turns in a conversation. Quasi-conversations can be identified in some instances of modern mass media, especially those that allow for a certain degree of audience involvement and participation.

As regards humour research, the existence of quasi-conversations or quasi-conversational stretches in extended texts offers fascinating ground for exploring the nature of the interpersonal interaction and the way humour is co-constructed by interlocutors. The dialogic structuralisation of quasi-conversations enables not only an analysis of such speech events in terms of conversation analysis but also the identification of devices common in conversational humour. As regards the data under analysis, conversational humour is found in texts that are written, public, institutional and disseminated among an anonymous mass audience who have a means of providing instant feedback in real time.

Although this article was limited to a discussion of several categories of conversational and co-constructed humour, the data indicate that humour is omnipresent in live text commentaries covering high-profile sports events from the *Guardian*. Journalists use various humorous forms (word play, punning, stylistic figures, such as metaphors or similes) not only in the primary layer of narration, concerned with game description, but also in the secondary layer of interpersonal gossip (for examples, see Chovanec 2008a). What is more, the quasi-conversational dialogic structuring of the secondary layer, as shown here, allows for the occurrence of a whole range of categories of conversational humour that arise from the turn taking between different speakers. Texts thus contain not only frequent witty responses (i.e. retorts), but also extended sequences of humorous contributions from various readers on a common theme. Such witty contributions resemble conversational banter, though they do not occur in typical rapid exchanges resembling verbal ping-pong but are found scattered over extensive stretches of text. Teasing is relatively common, especially in the form of teases directed by a journalist towards individual readers. Although some teases may border on more aggressive putdowns, they are not genuinely aggressive because the salience of the humorous frame makes it unlikely for actual face-threatening acts to occur. One might suggest that Norrick's (1993) notion of the "customary joking relationship", which exists in some authentic conversations between close friends, could be extended to cover interactions between members of online groups, who enact their virtual identities (cf. Benwell and Stokoe 2006) in other than face-to-face contexts.

In addition to the categories of conversational humour discussed here, live text commentaries contain instances of self-directed humour, which serves to underline the fact that the journalist feels a part of the virtual community. The ability to make fun of himself allows him to sustain the humorous frame in which readers willingly offer themselves to be made butts of his humour. Laughing at others, as well as laughing at oneself, is a part of the entertainment.

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Humour and the integration of new staff in the workplace

An interactional study

Patricia Pullin

This study explores and illustrates the role of humour in integrating new staff in the workplace. Whilst numerous studies have focused on the role of humour in the workplace, humour in relation to integration appears to have received little attention to date. The particular focus of this study is on two aspects of humour and integration. Firstly, ways in which humour can help new staff to find their place in a new working culture and build solidarity with their new colleagues. Secondly, the role of humour is considered in defining boundaries with respect to new responsibilities and tasks. The interplay between politeness, power and solidarity is explored in analysing ways bosses use humour to seek a balance between solidarity and power, and how subordinates may use humour subversively to challenge their superiors. The study is qualitative in nature and the main analytical tool is discourse analysis. This allows fine-grained analysis of audio recorded interactions in meetings within two organisations based in the United Kingdom.

1. Introduction

Humour has been studied in many contexts and using a range of theoretical frameworks (cf. e.g. Attardo 1994, Norrick 2010). Many studies of humour in fields ranging from management, the military, psychology, health and social services have demonstrated that humour serves serious functions and can be related to mental and physical wellbeing, social cohesion and solidarity in the workplace, as well as effective leadership (Abel 2002, Holmes 2007, Morreall 1991, Priest and Swain 2002). In linguistics, a number of studies have analysed humour in general conversation and in the workplace. These include Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997), Coates (1997, 2007) and Hay (2000) on general conversation, and Holmes (2000, 2005, 2006, 2007), Holmes and Marra (2002a, 2002b, 2006), Holmes and Stubbe (2003), Koester (2010), Pullin Stark (2007, 2009) and Rogerson-Revell (2007) on workplace humour. However, little, if any, attention appears to have been given to the use of humour in integrating new staff and building and defining new workplace relationships. The importance of relationships in the workplace has been considered by researchers both in management, including Fletcher (1999), Guirdham (1999), Holden (2002), Wong (2005), and linguistics (Holmes 2000, Holmes 2006), Holmes and Marra (2004), Holmes and Stubbe (2003). Good workplace relations have been shown to increase motivation and hence productivity (Wong 2005).

In this paper, I will explore ways humour functions in integrating new staff in the workforce as they begin to define and develop their *relational identities* with colleagues and superiors (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Tannen and Wallat 1993). Participants involved in the meetings analysed include staff who have recently begun new jobs, in one case in a leadership role. Humour proves to be effective in developing rapport and solidarity amongst all participants, but is also a powerful tool used by leaders in setting limits concerning appropriate behaviour or action. On the other hand, as illustrated in this study, humour can also be used *subversively* to contest power in new working relations, as is the case in one instance in these data (Holmes 2007).

In examining the use of humour in relation to leadership roles, Holmes, Schnurr and Marra (2007: 125) identify two broad categories: "humor oriented to the solidarity dimension of workplace relationships" and "humor oriented to the power dimension of workplace relationships". Humour has been shown to be important in managing power relations in the workplace, in mitigating power and thus increasing solidarity, and in softening face-threatening acts such as directives and criticism (Holmes and Stubbe 2003). It is thus helpful for bosses "finding their way" with new members of staff. Nevertheless, there can be said to be an inherent tension between power and solidarity in the workplace. Power, attributed through role and status in institutional settings, implies controlling others in ensuring that institutional goals are achieved. At the same time, solidarity is essential for the maintenance of social networks (Diamond 1996), which are important for a harmonious and effective working climate.

In striving to achieve a balance between power and solidarity, those in power have a potentially delicate task in building and defining workplace relations with new staff or taking up new leadership positions themselves. New staff need to feel included and become part of a group or team as quickly as possible, for their own well-being, and also so that they can be productive in their new roles. However, they also pose particular challenges for their bosses. Whilst bosses wish to integrate them into the group and support them in carrying out their tasks, new staff are usually on a formal or informal "probationary" period, where their professional ability is being monitored and limits need to be set over areas of responsibility and possible pitfalls to avoid. Those in charge thus have the rather contradictory task of building solidarity and rapport with new employees, whilst also controlling and monitoring them to a certain extent. New bosses also need to develop rapport and mutual respect with their staff in endeavouring to gain acceptance of their "agenda". The data analysed in this paper indicate that humour used by those in power can be an effective tool in dealing with new staff, but also that staff may use humour subversively to contest a leader's agenda.

2. Data and methodology

The data analysed in this paper are drawn from a larger study on language and interpersonal relations in the workplace. This involved the recording of 14 hours of audio data in three workplace settings in the United Kingdom and continental Europe. In this paper, extracts are analysed from a number of meetings in two of these settings in the United Kingdom: a public relations company and a public service organisation responsible for promoting sustainable transport. These contexts have been chosen for this paper as a number of staff had joined the two organisations at the time of recording, whereas there were no new staff in the third organisation. The names of all the participants have been changed to ensure anonymity. Participants in the public relations company all spoke standard English. In the public service office there was a mixture of standard and non-standard English with regional accents, which seemed to contribute to a relaxed and egalitarian atmosphere.

The study is qualitative in nature and data driven. The main analytical tool is discourse analysis, which allows repeated and detailed examination of language in interaction. A number of approaches to the analysis of discourse are encompassed within the term discourse analysis. Pragmatics, which developed from "ordinary language" philosophy, deals with the analysis of utterances in hypothetical contexts, drawing on notions of rational behaviour and involving inferred meaning; it is thus cognitive in approach. Other approaches are interactional and view language in social and cultural terms. The Ethnography of Speech, which stems from anthropology, focuses on the analysis of sequential structures across utterances and involves extensive fieldwork. In contrast, Conversational Analysis, which also looks at organisation and steps within talk, limits its focus to fine-grained analysis of the text itself, arguing that context is not given, but created through talk. Each utterance is viewed as part of a sequence shaped by a prior context, which provides the context for the next utterance. Interactional Sociolinguistics is often said to provide a bridge between these two approaches, in that it combines detailed analysis of talk with consideration of both the immediate and broader contexts. Interactional Sociolinguistics focuses in particular on the way people from different cultures draw on linguistic, social and schematic knowledge in communicating. Both conversation analysts and interactional sociolinguists are concerned with social order, which they see as interactionally accomplished in talk. In my approach to discourse analysis, I draw on a *social constructionist* model of communication, in which communication is seen as "a process which is instrumental in the creation of our social worlds, rather than simply an activity we do within them" (Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 11–12). I feel both the immediate and the broader institutional context is of particular importance in analysing workplace interaction, in particular in relation to situated roles and identities and the ways they are constructed and modified dynamically through interaction.

Audio recorded data and transcriptions allow greater range and precision in analysis than would be possible through simple notetaking. To ensure scientific rigour, the recorded data were triangulated in a number of ways (Miles and Huberman 1994). The researcher was present at all meetings as an observer and took detailed notes during the meetings. Each participant filled out a questionnaire after the meetings, covering relevant biographical information and noting how they felt about the meeting. Interviews were carried out with senior staff in each setting and time was spent with the staff informally outside the meeting rooms. Finally, organisational documents were collected and studied in relation to key areas of focus in the two organisations and the objectives of the meetings.

The theoretical framework is that of *politeness*, drawing on Brown and Levinson's model (1987) and with particular reference to the notions of *solidarity* (Koester 2001), *relational work* or *practice*, and *face* (Holmes and Marra 2004, Fletcher 1999, Locher 2004, 2006; Locher and Watts 2005; Watts et al. 2005). Whilst Brown and Levinson's model of politeness is generally agreed to be one of the most robust models of politeness, it has, nevertheless, been the subject of considerable criticism, notably by Eelen (2001). Eelen (2001: 110) points out that in most theories of politeness, polite behaviour is inherent to the theory itself and whether or not an utterance is perceived as polite or impolite, which depends largely on the hearer's evaluation, remains unquestioned and is indeed unquestionable without modifying the conceptual makeup of the theories. In viewing relational work in terms of appropriate behaviour, rather than politeness, Watts et al. (2005) overcome earlier criticism of politeness theories being biased towards politeness itself. The approach also reflects the fact that relational work involves more than politeness and can cover any behaviour that has an impact on interpersonal relations, be it positive, negative or neutral. Of relevance to this study is also Koester's (2001) conceptualisation of solidarity. Koester (2001: 99) argues that: "expressions of solidarity (...) go beyond politeness, and are indicative of an affective dimension of relational goals". She notes that solidarity strategies include claiming common ground and showing approval. These are also positive politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's model.

A number of researchers have also been critical of Brown and Levinson's notions of *positive* and *negative face*, with positive face addressing needs of respect, for example for professional ability in the workplace, and negative face needs for autonomy (Eelen 2001, Locher and Watts 2005, O'Driscoll 1996, Turner 1996, Watts et al 2005). However, Locher (2004: 322) notes the central importance of facework in relational work and defines relational work as, "the process of shaping relationships in interaction by taking face into consideration." The concepts of positive and negative face continue to be valuable in considering workplace interaction, notably if considered in terms of an inherent need amongst human beings to "belong" in society (positive face), alongside an opposing need for independence (negative face) (O'Driscoll 1996, Scollon and Scollon 1995). Holmes and Marra (2004: 379) note regarding relational practice (RP) and positive politeness that:

> In the workplace context, RP is often appropriately oriented to people's need that their special skills or distinctive expertise be recognized, and it also crucially involves people's need to feel they are valued and important components in a team or a group.

Similarly, in relation to negative politeness strategies, Harris notes:

> Negative politeness strategies (...) serve institutional as well as interpersonal goals, in the sense that by distancing and depersonalising the relationship between participants, they are essential, as Brown and Levinson would maintain, to the avoidance of explicit confrontation and possible communication breakdown in such settings. (Harris 2003: 33)

Holmes and Marra (2004: 377) use the term *relational practice* to encompass a wide range of supportive and collaborative work that helps nurture relationships in the workplace and improve productivity. They include the use of humour, relating to support, the diffusion of tension and "damage control". The definition of humour and its identification in context is clearly of methodological concern. In this study, I follow Holmes' (2000) definition and approach.

> Humorous utterances are those identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic and discoursal clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing at least by some participants. Holmes (2000: 163)

Of interest also is Attardo's (1994: 1) "working definition" of humour as a "competence (...) something that speakers know how to do, without knowing how and what they do." This definition highlights the individual, social and interactive aspect of humour.

Laughter is also an important cue in identifying humour, although not all instances of laughter reflect humour. The importance of laughter relates not only to its confirmation that humour is present, but also underlines the function of humour in building and nurturing relations (Attardo 1994, Jefferson et al. 1987). Laughter can also be a positive factor in building workplace relations as it can lead to bonding. However, a lack of laughter, for example where there is a lack of uptake in attempts at humour, could function as a face threat and indicate a lack of solidarity (Mik-Meyer 2007, Rogerson Revell 2007).

This study focuses on *interactional humour* or *humour in interaction* (Norrick and Chiaro 2010). In the context of professional discourse, the term "interactional" is preferred to "conversational" in that the latter tends to be connected with the private sphere. Interactional humour is often developed collaboratively, nurturing group solidarity (Coates 2007, Holmes and Stubbe 2003). The study does not address the notion of "canned jokes" Norrick (2003) or other aspects of humour such as irony or puns.

3. Analysis: Examples of humour in context

3.1 Humour, solidarity and integration

The first two examples analysed in this section illustrate ways in which humour can function in integrating new staff through drawing on common ground in terms of professional identity and knowledge, thus nurturing positive face and solidarity. Such instances of humour occurred throughout the data. Examples 1 and 2 are drawn from a meeting at the PR company involving three participants, Sally, a senior consultant, who chaired the meeting, Susan, an administrative assistant and Kate, a new account manager. It was Kate's first day in the company. The purpose of the meeting was to brief Kate on an account with one of the local city bus companies that had been having problems with ethnic communities and had mandated the public relations company to help them improve relations with these communities.

(1)	Sally	1	they're already talking to them (..) um the reason they're talking
		2	to them is because there have been issues um (...)
			((there follows an explanation about problems with bus services in an inner city area with violence towards drivers))
		3	this organisation ((a community association)) contacted them to
		4	talk about some of the problems, {right} and they've now set up
		5	dialogue, and they go and talk to them=
	Kate	6	= that's good
	Sally	7	they're setting up forums where they can, they're trying to attract
		8	people from the area to actually work for them which they think
		9	will help with the issues that they've got in the service out
		10	there {em, em} because people (who) know the community
		11	know if (there's) anybody causing trouble {yes} the chances are
		12	they'll know the driver or whoever, so they've actually set that
		13	up of their own accord, so actually that's, so actually that's good
	Kate	14	Yeah
	Sally	15	But what they didn't recognise was that's the model that
		16	they needed to use outside ((laugher)) {yeah} for other
		17	/\
			organisations ((i.e. similar organisations they should work with))
		18	((laughter)) NB 'laughter' indicates a number of participants Participants laughing, whilst 'laughs' refers to one person laughing.

After outlining the problems, in lines 7 and 8, Sally notes action the bus company has already taken in setting up forums in the communities and encouraging people from them to apply for jobs with the company. The source of humour here, outlined by Sally in lines 15–17, is that the company did not realise this was an ideal "model" (line 15), which simply needed to be extended by the PR company. Sally's amused tone and the resulting joint laughter as she points this out functions as a result of common ground between the new member of staff, Kate, and the others, in terms of professional identity as PR specialists. As such, it also helps to build solidarity and integrate Kate as one of the group. In the next example, taken from the same meeting, Kate contributes to the humorous exchange, again based on professional identity and knowledge.

(2)	Sally	1	there are often language barriers and I think that ( )
		2	first need to understand that, let's get a bit more bilingual in
		3	() how they present things, {em} 'cuz actually everything is
		4	they don't have anything that's bilingual {em} at the moment,
		5	obviously things like timetables, community information {yeah}
		6	I think it would be quite vital and I think they've GOT to be seen
		7	to be part of the community.
	Kate	8	<Well I would have thought so> ((laconic/deadpan))
	Sally	9	/\
			Yeah h. ((laughter)) >I know it's like stating the obvious isn't it

In this second example, in lines 1–5, Sally speaks about the need to use other languages and to be present in the community (line 7). In line 8, Kate comes in with a deadpan humorous comment "Well I would have thought so". Her slow delivery underlines the point made by Sally in line 9 that it is "like stating the obvious". Kate's comment causes a lot of laughter. In contributing to the humour on this point, Kate is also nurturing solidarity through common ground, which is likely to function in helping her integration in the group. Hay (2000: 716) argues that: "Whenever you attempt humour and it succeeds, your status within the group is positively affected."

In addition, in both of the above examples there is a "them and us" dichotomy, with the participants in the meeting aligning themselves as specialists in contrast to the clients, who are humorously portrayed as ignorant. Holmes (2000) notes that mild criticism humorously directed at others or "outsiders" can help to reinforce in-group status and "insider" solidarity. Both the notion of common ground based on shared professional knowledge and the "them and us" dichotomy created through the use of humour are likely to help Kate become one of the group and integrate into the company.

The next example, Example 3 below, is drawn from a meeting in the public service office. Six participants were present and the subject of the meeting was the organisation of a publicity campaign to encourage the use of public transport. They are discussing the size of a billboard. Whilst Examples 1 and 2 were based on humour in relation to common ground, Example 3 shows how humour can help in the integration of new staff where there are interpersonal differences between new and existing members of staff.

(3)	Hazel D	1	and how how big would the sign be as well
	Tom	2	uh in feet it would be five foot [by four]
	Hazel D	3	[can you do it] can you do it in meters ((laughter))
	Martin	4	'bout one and a half meters no [nearly two meters]
	Phil	5	[five feet] nearly two meters by about one and a half
	Martin	6	one and three quarter meters (..) about your height
	Tom	7	that's it about as big as you
	Phil	8	and about my girth ((laughter))

The differences between the staff in this meeting are generational and relate to knowledge of metric measures. After joining the European Union in 1973, the United Kingdom began to introduce metric measuring systems, to replace Imperial weights and measures. However, both systems have continued to exist alongside each other to date. The participants' ages indicate how the schooling system has affected their knowledge of the different measuring systems. Hazel D. the new member of staff is under 30, whilst Tom is over 50. Martin, on the other hand, is in his 30s, and Phil in his 40s. Hazel's initial question in line 1 about the size of the sign leads to input from Tom in terms of "feet and inches". It is apparent from Hazel's request in line 3, asking if he can "do it in meters", that she has not learnt the Imperial system. Her use of "can" appears to function in terms of conventional politeness rather than a question relating to his ability to use the metric system. However, her request is met with much laughter, and there is even more in lines 7 and 8, when Tom points to Hazel D. and says "about as big as you" and Phil points to the size of his stomach and refers to his "girth".

This instance of humour helped to avoid an unintentional positive face threat from Hazel as the new member of staff. Her question revealed generational differences and also the ignorance of senior members of staff. The humour and considerable laughter helped to create a relaxed atmosphere, avoid face threats, and contributed to the acceptance of differences between the new member of staff and other staff present in the meeting. As such, humour can be deemed to have functioned effectively in helping Hazel in integrating into her new environment and all participants in recognising and accepting generational differences in a light hearted manner.

Example 4 is also from the meeting in the PR company on the bus company account (cf. Examples 1 and 2). Here, the participants are discussing telephone calls that have to be made to local organisations as part of their mandate. Humour is subtly used by the most powerful member of the group both to indicate to the new member of staff, Kate, that they have a culture of "chipping in", whatever their position in the hierarchy, whilst also protecting her face.

(4)	Susan	1	I'm not sure how many exactly are on the list but I
		2	presume if we uh did about ten a day (..) I don't know well
		3	between me and Lil perhaps.
	Sally	4	Oh I mean I uh we can all help actually it's not
	Susan	5	there
	Sally	6	[rocket science it's not challenging]
	Susan	7	[no you just go oh hello who's your chief] executive
		8	{yeah} please ((mocking tone))
	Sally	9	>Kate's Kate's made her first phone call<
		10	[I think she's ()]
	Kate	11	[I have, I'm ready] ((laughter))
	Susan	12	oh really () ((laughter))
	Sally	13	yeah >I don't mind making those calls cus actually nobody

14 challenges you do they, it's like you can be anybody
15 you like ((jocular tone)) it's quite nice< um (..)
16 >but it's easy if we all chip in um as and when
17 we can do them< {yeah}

In lines 1–3, Susan raises the question of how to deal with a large number of telephone calls that have to be made to organisations as part of the mandate, suggesting that she and another member of the support staff, Lil, could deal with the task over a period of time. She may also be hinting that some help would be appreciated. Whether or not this is the case, in line 4, Sally spontaneously offers to help, on behalf of herself and the other executive staff, which certainly includes Kate, as she is present.

In offering to help Susan with what is clearly a repetitive task, Sarah is mitigating her power by reducing the hierarchical difference between them, and thus boosting solidarity with a junior member of staff, whose support and co-operation are essential. With regard to Kate, the new member of staff, she may also be giving an example to follow, and an initiation into the company's culture, or "the way we do things here", reflecting values such as solidarity and an egalitarian approach. However, her involvement of Kate may risk threatening Kate's positive face, as the task could be perceived as trivial and thus demeaning, given Kate's managerial status in her new job. The task will clearly take up Kate's time, impinging on her autonomy and could also act as a negative face threat. Sarah's use of humour and the way she packages the job as easy and fun, and by implication, a relief from more serious and challenging tasks Kate may later have to deal with, contribute to lessening this risk. However, it could be viewed as slightly manipulative. Sally says in lines 4 and 6, "it's not (...) rocket science it's not challenging", making further reference in lines 13–16 and to the fact that no one "challenges you", "you can be anybody you like", and that the job is "nice" and "easy if we all chip in".

The humour with regard to Kate begins in line 9, Sarah draws Kate into the frame, saying in rapid speech "Kate's Kate's made her first phone call", almost as if she is ironically *teasing* her over her "achievement" in this. Again, with overlapping speech in line 11, Kate confirms: "I have, I'm ready", entering into the spirit of the exchange and thus showing that she is or will be "one of them". They then all laugh. Adelsward (1989) argues that laughter can act as an invitation to participate, by joining the experience and adopting a particular perspective and that it reduces distance between interactants. Such uses of humour, or language play, can be considered to be "inclusive" Attardo (1994: 324), and instances of humour involving new members of staff, could also function as a kind of test or *rite de passage*, as only staff willing and able to take part will fit into their new environment (Norrick 2003).

Humour in this example is enacted in a "play frame". Tannen and Wallat (1993) note that the term "frame" was introduced by Bateson (1972), who argued that actions could be framed as "serious" or "play". Talk as play, in this case teasing, is signalled by linguistic and paralinguistic features conveying a humorous tone. Play frames are typically co-constructed (Coates 2007, Holmes 2006). They are characterised by overlap and enthusiasm, as one turn flows into the next, each speaker building harmoniously on the previous speaker's turn. Play frames are frequent in general conversation, but also occur in the workplace as the humour is developed together over a number of turns. This can lead to bonding (Coates 2007, Holmes 2006). In this way, in line 7, Susan picks up on Sarah's allusion to rocket science, taking on a humorous "telephone voice" and imitating what she says in such cases. The speakers' talk overlaps as they enter into this playful use of language, indicating their in-tuneness (Davies 2003). For its success, the new member of staff has to participate actively, as Kate does here, and this, in turn, is likely to help in her integration into the group. Davies (2003: 1368) argues that:

> A play frame can only be sustained if all conversational participants collaborate in sustaining it. This inevitably makes such talk solidary, since co-participants collaborate not only in sustaining a particular topic but also in sustaining a particular way of talking. Successful collaboration arises from shared understandings and shared perspectives, and is a strong demonstration of intuneness.

Example 4 illustrates the way collaborative humour enacted with new members of staff can contribute to building relations and solidarity, whilst also protecting face.

The examples analysed in this section show the multifunctional nature of humour and the ways in which humour can create understanding and solidarity on an interpersonal and professional level between new and existing staff, help to avoid face threats, and initiate staff into corporate working styles. In the next section, the interaction between humour, power and solidarity are examined, notably in relation to boundaries and face.

3.2 Humour, power and boundaries

Power is inherent to the workplace (Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Holmes, Schnurr and Marra 2007) and the exercise of power can be linked to both relational practice and face. Indeed, Locher (2004: 3) argues that:

> The exercise of power is assumed to occur in and around relationships (...) This means that power also reflects a degree of solidarity between interactants. (...) one may show restraint in the way power is exercised, taking the addressee's face into consideration and thus indicating some degree of solidarity as well.

Examples 5 and 6 below exemplify the strategic use of humour in an attempt to achieve a balance between power and solidarity in working with new staff, and illustrate the importance of facework in laying foundations for sound working relations. Uses of humour involving directives or criticism were frequent in the data and the examples were thus chosen for their representativeness.

Example 5 is taken from a meeting in the PR company between Ken, one of the PR company's Directors, and Rose, a new account manager. It is her second day and Ken is briefing her on accounts she will be managing. In Example 5, Ken is giving Rose instructions on dealing with a photo shoot for a catering company.

(5)	Ken	1	it would be quite nice to get them all eating bagels
		2	{em} {em} or something like that again we
		3	don't actually have their mouths open cuz if you ever
		4	take photography with mouths open in looks AWFUL {R laughs}
		5	I learnt cuz I used to do Royal visits () in my former
		6	in a former job I used to have to uh organise media
		7	media visits for like all the Royalty {em} and um one
		8	thing that you told journalists to DO {em} was never
		9	to take photographs of people whilst they were eating
		10	{okay} in fact
	Rose	11	yeah see a [gaping mouth]
	Ken	12	[it looks really it looks yeah]
		13	it looks [crap]

After his initial suggestion in line 1 that the clients be photographed eating bagels, Ken quickly moves on to an implicit warning to Rose of a pitfall she should avoid, i.e. that the clients should not be actually eating the bagels as this could result in unflattering photos. His exaggerated stress on the word "awful" brings in a note of humour and lightens the tone. He further softens the directive and reduces potential face threat to Rose by referring to his past experience in dealing with the Royal Family (lines 5 to 8). Humour often overlaps with small talk and sharing such personal, although work-related anecdotes can help to create an informal atmosphere and reduce distance between the speakers. Rose's comment about the "gaping mouth" in line 11 also produced smiles and appears to reflect her involvement and wish to show that they are on common ground, hence reinforcing her image as an experienced professional and supporting her integration.

However, it appears from the data in further such directives concerning potential pitfalls that from Ken's point of view, Rose still has to prove her professional ability. The PR staff were working under considerable pressure, both in terms of time and money and there seemed to be little room for error. Hay (2000) notes the boundary setting function of humour in that it allows those in power to set limits regarding behaviour or action, whilst also softening the impact of directives or criticism and protecting face. The potential face threat involved here relates firstly to Rose's professional ability, i.e. positive face, in that Ken may be stating the obvious to her, given that she has considerable experience, and secondly to negative face, in that by telling her what not to do, albeit indirectly, he is curtailing her autonomy.

Ken's role means that he has a responsibility to prevent errors. As he does not know Rose, this makes his task delicate, given that there is a danger of underestimating her level of knowledge and experience and being too controlling. Humour allows Ken to soften face threats and hence build solidarity and rapport with Rose, which are essential foundations of a productive working relationship. Whether Rose perceived the instructions as face threatening cannot be determined, but both participants completed data feedback forms with positive comments on how they felt the meeting went.

Example 6 below also illustrates the role of humour in setting boundaries concerning tasks and responsibilities. The meeting is in the public service office and is chaired by Tom, who has been appointed leader of a newly formed team dealing with traffic and safety in schools. Of the six participants, Tom had previously worked with Hazel B., also a senior member of staff. Hazel D. is again the latest member to the join the team, along with two other members of staff and a "visitor" from another section. Although the team members had not worked together previously, they know each other as they had all worked for the organisation before changing units to join this team.

The subject being discussed at this point was communication with the Area Travel Plan Co-ordinator or other senior level staff within the organisation.

(6)	Tom	1	any communications with the Area Travel Plan Co-ordinator ()
		2	whose name is Rob uh {H} Rob H any communications to Rob H
		3	or anybody uh say at senior level within the () like the
		4	Chief Officers any communications like that could you discuss
		5	them with Hazel before you actually make contact=
	Hazel B	6	=just uh=
	Tom	7	=we're not saying you can't make contact we're saying
		8	{yeah} can you please make sure Hazel or I know what
		9	you're going to say before you do it
	Hazel B	10	it could be that we've already said the same thing or=
	Tom	11	=or we've said something different ((laughs lightly)) you know
		12	or we don't want to say something for a particular reason at
		13	particular time or it might be better to leave it to another time

Tom had made it clear earlier in the meeting that the staff would be able to work autonomously. However, he was concerned about potential communication problems and sets clear limitations to communication with senior staff in lines 1–5, noting in lines 4 and 5 "could you discuss them with Hazel before you actually make contact". The modal verb "could" helps to soften the directive and the use of humour later in the excerpt helps mitigate this fairly direct use of power. The question of autonomy and the equal need for boundaries is reiterated in lines 7–9, probably showing Tom's awareness of the threat to both positive face, in that the directive could show a lack of trust in the new team members' professional ability, and to negative face in limiting their autonomy.

In line 10 Hazel B explains one of the reasons for the directive, "it could be that we've already said the same thing". This is then picked up by Tom in line 11"or we've said something different". This produced some laughter in the group and Tom later explained to me that there had been such mix ups in the past and the group were aware of this, hence the uptake as humour. Tom's concern was to prevent such incidents occurring again as they could clearly appear unprofessional. His use of humour appeared to function in giving his directive a human face and thus nurturing solidarity with his new team. At the same time, clear boundaries were set in terms of what should and should not be done.

In Examples 5 and 6, humour is seen to be a useful management tool for leaders in negotiating boundaries with new staff regarding their duties. Humour functions in such cases in mitigating power and protecting face, and thus also nurturing solidarity and helping in the smooth integration of new staff by pre-empting pitfalls. The next section also deals with humour and leadership, but deals with data in which new staff use humour subversively to challenge their superiors.

3.3 Subversive humour

This section deals with subversive humour, i.e. humour used by subordinates to challenge or contest the authority of those in power. Whilst power is generally linked to role and status, it is also a dynamic phenomenon as subordinates have subversive power (Diamond 1996, Holmes, Schnurr and Marra 2007, Norrick and Spitz 2008). Analysis of the data show how subversive or contestive humour (Holmes and Marra 2002b), which is used to challenge the positions and identities of others, can result in jointly achieved realignment of individual and relational identities in relation to power (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Tannen and Wallat 1993). Indeed, Norrick and Spitz (2008) underline the dynamic and interactive nature of power:

> Social power (...) is not a static entity, nor can it be located as a property of the individual. Rather it is an emergent reality that is mutually and dynamically achieved by participants in and through social action.

This is illustrated in the data below when the new team leader's leadership skills are jestingly questioned by subordinates using humour as a subtle tool of subversion. This necessitates openness on his part and flexibility in his working style.

Examples 7 and 8 below are also from the first team meeting for staff dealing with traffic and safety in schools (cf. Example 6). In these examples another new member of the team, Shoba, is actively involved in the humorous exchanges when members of the group tease the new team leader about his management skills.

Analysis of the data here illustrate ways in which humour can function in subtly exploring, testing and challenging boundaries in terms of power and hierarchy (Hay 2000; Holmes and Stubbe 2003), showing the dynamic nature of power. Holmes and Marra (2002a) differentiate between *supportive* and *contestive* humour. Whilst supportive humour builds positively on the arguments and opinions of others, contestive humour "challenges, disagrees with or undermines the propositions or arguments put forward in earlier contributions" (Holmes and Marra 2002a: 1687).

In Examples 7 and 8 below, humour is used contestively, although not aggressively, by the group towards Tom, their new leader, with the result that group solidarity and rapport is built, to some extent, at his expense. Drawing on Tannen (1993), in relation to the concept of frames, Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) argue that realignment between participants is in constant flux, being continually negotiated. They argue that negotiation of relational identity takes place both "with others and *through* others" (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997: 282), linking this notably with teasing, which is used by the participants in this meeting. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) state that identity is not only displayed, but also created in interaction, and that whilst joking and teasing can weaken relations, successful negotiations based on teasing can result in bonding. Eggins and Slade (1997: 167) also argue that humour is a linguistic resource that "constructs meaning through difference" and that the differences are social, "enacting conflicts, tensions and contradictions in the social world".

(7)	Tom	1	I'm not going to make today too complicated I just wanna
		2	run over a couple of things that's all and in in my sort
		3	of um naivity I assumed everybody would look at the
		4	minutes of the previous meeting and that you'd print them
		5	off but I we'll get that done now ()=
	?1	6	/ \ Tom this is not good MANAGEMENT [practice here]
	Tom	7	[I know it's really bad actually I'm]
	?1	8	you're supposed to be I mean although you did give us
		9	you did put the responsibility on to us () to come in on a
		10	Wednesday after the bank holiday not to be prepared is ()
	Tom	11	no I know () ((laughter))
	?2	12	fantastic you know
	?3	13	but n'er mind it's our it's um partly our fault as well cuz
		14	we've not been organised (..)
			((The unidentified speakers 1, 2 and 3 are all female.))

Early in the meeting it turns out that none of the participants have read the minutes of the previous meeting, which Tom had sent to them electronically ahead of time, nor have they brought them to the meeting. It is perfectly acceptable for Tom to expect the team to have read the minutes of the last meeting, particularly as this is the first meeting for the new team. However, Tom's allusion to this in lines 2–5, leads one of the participants to tease him about his management skills. Hay (2000) remarks that speakers may use humour to defend themselves before others expose a weakness. In this case, the weakness has been exposed, but the humorous criticism of Tom's management skills in line 6, "this is not good MANAGEMENT practice here" appears to function in defending the group's lack of preparation and thus protecting their positive face. It is certainly not a valid criticism as it is the participants who are at fault and the "this" in line 6 remains vague in terms of what exactly refers to.

Hay (2000: 720–721) notes that teasing can function in two ways: as antagonism, or to express solidarity and rapport. Clearly, this will depend on the context and the relationships between the interlocutors, but as teasing contains an element of criticism (Attardo 1994), it may also be risky in terms of being perceived as a face threat, particularly when addressed to a superior. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997: 279) conceptualise teasing on a continuum, ranging from "bonding to nipping to biting" and note that the boundaries are not always clear. Indeed, in writing on jocular insults, Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 119) point out that:

> Directed upwards they [jocular insults] are slightly risky and, however jocular, there is an underlying contestive component to the message. In such cases, humour functions to license the challenge from subordinate to superior.

When, in line 6, the speaker teasingly says to Tom "Tom this is not good MANAGEMENT practice", stressing the word management and using a rise-fall intonation pattern, she shows she is teasing, which renders the criticism acceptable as it is framed as "play". However, Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 126) note that such humour can also mask a "covert challenge to what is perceived as an overly 'managerial' style". Similarly, Holmes and Marra (2002b: 83), state that "In formal meetings, humor provides an acceptable means by which subordinates may challenge or criticise their superiors."

When Tom refers to the fact that no one has read the minutes, in lines 2–5, saying "in my naivity I assumed everybody would look at the minutes of the previous meeting and that you'd print them off" and adds "but I we'll get that done now", the phrase "in my naivity" along with the value laden word "assumed" could be perceived as face threatening to the group, as it seems to imply that he thought they would be more efficient. Tom's tone and overall approach was very open and non critical, but this may not have been the best way to start with a new group. The ensuing teasing about his management skills may therefore be in reaction to a perceived threat to positive face.

Tom later expressed concern to me about the importance of the first meeting being successful and of setting the right tone for future work. Ethnographic details are also of relevance here. At the outset, the new team members seemed to adopt a more relaxed stance than Tom. Whilst he was dressed in a suit and tie and had his tea in a cup and saucer, the others were dressed casually and had their drinks in mugs. The teasing may, therefore, have been a means of indicating indirectly that the group did not wish the team culture to be too formal and serious. If this was the case, subversive humour was a subtle means of conveying the message. Kotthoff (2003) has shown that teasing performs important functions amongst friends in informal talk. She characterises "playful biting" as a means of communicating and dealing with differences of opinion, whilst maintaining socially acceptable behaviour. Holmes and Marra

(2002b: 83) also argue that subversive humour can "express a group's skepticism or discomfort with expectations".

The humour continues as speaker 1 adds in line 8 to say "you're supposed to be", and although she does not finish her utterance, she appears to imply that Tom is supposed to be in charge, or in control. The "supposed to", seems to hark back to Tom's (poor) management skills, implying jestingly that he is not fulfilling his role. This instance of humour may again be interpreted as functioning in protecting the group's face.

The humour is further developed in lines 8–10, as whilst Speaker 1 says that Tom had given them the responsibility to prepare for the meeting, she then alludes to the "bank holiday" saying "to come in on a Wednesday after the bank holiday not to be prepared is". Her joking tone implies that she is about to use hyperbole and say ironically that it is unacceptable or disgraceful. However, before she finishes speaking, Tom responds with "no I know", showing empathy and indirectly indicating that they will manage to work out a *modus vivendi*. Then in line12, another speaker finishes her colleague's utterance about not being prepared with "fantastic you know", probably echoing many of the group members' feelings, and possibly suggesting that there is more to life than work.

Tom's reaction to the humorous jibes was good humored, but he also appears to cede his power to the group. In line 7, his response to the initial teasing about his management style is humorously self-deprecating: "I know it's really bad". However, by responding in the way he does, he also mitigates his power. Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 113–114) remark that self-deprecating humour can contribute to team collegiality where modesty is appreciated and helps to de-emphasise status and power differences between participants. In this exchange, with its joint construction of meaning, solidarity is amongst the floor, perhaps reflecting the group as a consolidated force against Tom.

However, in lines 13 and 14, another speaker (speaker 3) smoothes over the problem with the words "n'er mind' and suggests "it's um partly our fault as well cuz we've not been organised" This person is clearly a "peace maker", showing the ability to see different points of view and be self-critical, whilst also downplaying differences and problems. Whilst the world "partly" does not represent reality, she does admit "we've not been organised", which may help to take the edge off the group's critical teasing of Tom.

Humour, in this excerpt, is clearly multifunctional. One interesting and subtle function appears to be in the group and Chair beginning to define working relations, as humour exposes aspects of their identities and challenges the power inherent in Tom's role. The data analysed here exemplify the way power is negotiated interactively and how subversive humour can contribute to implicit criticism of those in power and affect the balance of power from the bottom up, rather than top down as in earlier examples analysed in this paper.

Both identity and power are seen to be negotiated through contestive or subversive humour in Example 7. The end result may not have been what the new team leader intended to achieve, but it seemed to have resulted in solidarity and implicitly defined mutually acceptable working relations in terms of the way power is to be exercised. The next example, Example 8, occurs later in the same meeting and also illustrates subversive uses of humour. In this example, the group are discussing training.

(8)	Tom	1	I think training's very valuable from the point of view of
		2	keeping people interested stimulated you know
		3	broadening your sort of and of course it's good for you
		4	because it makes you more marketable you know in
		5	every area
		6	future jobs ((laughter))
			((several people comment on this although their comments are inaudible because of the laughter))
	Tom	7	well you know I mean you know if that's the way I
		8	think about it anyway ((further laughter)) so um so
		9	can I ask you to to get a file
			((there then follows some talk about training that has already been completed and Tom then raises the question of forthcoming training))
		10	UM you've got your training in September uh well it is
		11	September later this month is [it in?]
			((several people respond at once at this point))
		12	in two weeks now yeah
	Shobha	13	() on a jolly to London ((loudly in a joking tone))
			[((everyone speaks at once))]
	Tom	14	a jolly ah training will not be referred to as jollies
			((laughter)) ((further simultaneous talk))
	Hazel D	15	we stay in a really nice hotel
			[((simultaneous comments – unclear))]
	Tom	16	[it's the hotel () Continental]
	Hazel D	17	do the ((*)) the ((*)) arrange it all and and pay for it
		18	everything
	Hazel B	19	for the school travel plan advisor
	Tom	20	yeah and it's [very]
	Shobha	21	[wow] why don't you come as a spectator
			((raucous laughter and comments))
	Tom	22	I wanted to come as something I couldn't think of what
		23	though perhaps it's supervisory () ((laughter))
			*name of organisation

In this excerpt, Shobha's witty quips lead to much appreciative laughter, which may in part be as some of the humour is again at Tom's expense. Holmes and Marra (2002b: 82) note that "Short witty quips and pithy ironic comments are excellent vehicles for subversion." In line 6, Shobha picks up on Tom's comment that training makes staff more marketable and remarks brightly, "future jobs". Shobha's style of humour is characterised by quick and irreverent irony. The irony in this instance is that staff do tend to get better jobs after their employers invest in training, but as head of a new team, this would not be what Tom would wish. The quip produces much laughter and further laughter follows as Tom tries to explain his viewpoint.

When the group have identified the date and venue for the training, Shobha again intervenes in line 13, in a loud joking tone, saying: "on a jolly to London". This implies that they are going on a mini-holiday rather than undertaking a work-related trip. Everyone then speaks at once, but when the noise dies down, Tom says in a dead-pan voice, in line14, "a jolly ah training will not be referred to as jollies". This response produces further mutual laughter and is followed by more simultaneous talk, reflecting the level of animation in the group. Tom's mock serious response reduces the distance between himself and the group and also shows that he is certainly not an authoritarian boss, but nevertheless subtly reminds the group that he is the boss.

Hazel D., in serious vein, then raises the question of the "nice hotel" they will be staying in, and in line 20 Tom comments, "yeah and it's very". Presumably he was going to make a positive comment, but before he can finish his utterance Shobha overlaps with him in line 21, saying "wow why don't you come as a spectator". Presumably as the boss, he does not need the training, but the idea of his attending seems to underline the "jolly" aspect of the trip in that it would be a pity to miss out on the fun; it also functions once again in making Tom the butt of the joke and as such may undermine his authority. Tom's response, however, is also clever: "I wanted to come as something I couldn't think of what though perhaps supervisory". Here, with the word "supervisory" he humorously reasserts his identity and role as boss, suggesting indirectly and ironically that they may need supervision. Once again further laughter ensues. The allusion to supervision may also hark back to the question of the minutes at the beginning of the meeting.

The sequence is also an example of colleagues "doing collegiality" (Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 111), whereby they develop a humorous sequence for mutual amusement. The collaborative nature of their humour is reflected in overlapping speech and the way Tom picks up Shobha's lexis and grammatical forms, with "jolly" in lines 13 and 14, and the verb "come" in lines 21 and 22. The nouns "spectator" and "supervisory" contrast in meaning, but also seem to parallel each other as they both begin with "s". These linguistic aspects help to bind the speakers' turns together (Coates 2007), whilst the raucous laughter signals the involvement and indeed enjoyment of all present. Such interpersonal involvement is clearly likely to lead to bonding and solidarity, thus helping the team members and their leader to integrate in the new team. In Example 7, humour from the floor functioned in the implicit challenge of working style and the setting of limits in terms of approach to work and control of the group. As in Example 7, humour in this example derives from the floor and Tom is its butt. In this case, Tom used humour in response to humour in skilfully reasserting his power and identity as team leader.

In a study of leadership styles, including uses of humour in meetings, Holmes et al. (2007) compared approaches to humour by two team leaders, who had worked with the same team. While the first team leader's style was considered egalitarian, the second's was classed as more authoritarian. Interestingly, the first allowed a free flow of humour initiated by team members. She allowed her staff to "play", taking part in this herself and enjoying it. On the other hand, the second chair tended to control turn taking and curtail humour by directing speakers back to transactional talk. Not surprisingly, the staff said they preferred the management style of the first team leader. Other studies have also shown links between effective leaders and their ability to "do humour" (Priest and Swain 2002). Tom's accommodation to his team's emergent style of humour and the shaping of the group's relational identities is likely to have been in the interest of the team in terms of integrating the new members and developing good working relations.

4. Conclusion

Humour can be seen to play an important role in the workplace. In this paper, I have analysed data from two workplace settings in which new members of staff were starting jobs. Humour was examined firstly in terms of the ways it can help to build solidarity amongst existing and new colleagues, secondly, with regard to its use by bosses in setting boundaries, and finally concerning uses of subversive humour by staff to implicitly contest their boss's management style and expectations.

The data suggest humour based on common ground in terms of professional knowledge can be effective in nurturing solidarity between existing and new staff. When new staff participate in collaborative instances of humour this may also lead to bonding. Humour may also be used to initiate staff indirectly into approaches to work, for example, as illustrated in the data, concerning an egalitarian culture with regard to taking on duties. Humour was also seen to introduce a light note, protecting face and overcoming differences and potential faux pas.

As a management tool, the use of humour by bosses was shown to be helpful in mitigating power and, notably, in issuing directives concerning boundaries and thus pre-empting pitfalls, whilst also protecting subordinates' face. On the other hand, subordinates were seen to use humour subversively, which allowed them to indirectly contest their new team leader's approach and style, possibly resulting in concessions on his part. Humour can thus be an important tool in integrating new staff, both for the staff themselves and management.

Whilst this study is limited in scope, it is hoped it will provide a contribution to the field of humour research in exploring the role of humour and its importance in the integration of new staff in the workplace. A possible focus of future research would be the study of teams over a longer period of time, considering the role of humour and its impact on group interaction and balances of power with the advent of new staff.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

?	Rising intonation (final sentence)
.	Falling intonation (sentence-final)
/\	Rising and falling intonational contours
,	Continuing intonation (final clause, 'more to come', lists)
TEXT	Stress (syllable or word)
(0.6)	Pause (tenths of a second)
(..)	Pauses of one-half second or less
(...)	Pause of more than half a second
<text>	Spoken slowly
>text<	Spoken rapidly
:	Lengthened syllable (ha:rd)
-	Word cutoff (abrupt self-termination, because speaker stops speaking or another interrupts
=	Latched talk (lack of temporal gap between two speakers – typically used at end of 1st speaker's line and at beginning of next speaker's utterance)
{ }	Backchannel {S:OK}
[ ]	Overlapping speech We missed the callback [again, I really am] [Oh okay,] that's all right.
°text°	Text spoken softly
TEXT	Longer utterances spoken loudly
H	Clearly audible breathing (general breath sounds)
.h .hhh	In-breath (.h = inhalation – .hhh longer inhalation
h hhh	Out-breath (as above)
((behavior))	Transcriber's comments (e.g. whispers, coughing, laughter)
( )	Unclear or intelligible speech (unclear/questionable words appear within the parentheses)

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PART 3

Forms of humour in public discourse

Parody in the light of the incongruity-resolution model

The case of political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus

Maciej Kaczorowski

Although the incongruity-resolution model proposed by Suls (1972, 1983) was devised to account only for humour present in canned jokes and captioned cartoons, it is generally accepted that it can also work for other forms of humour (Dynel 2008, 2009). This article aims at specifying how the model can be applied to the analysis of parody. It will be argued that in the case of this form of humour, incongruity appears and is resolved on the conceptual level between the original script, i.e. "a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of action that defines a well-known situation" (Schank and Abelson 1977: 41) and another script serving as its humorous distortion. The postulate will be supported with examples of parody from political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus discussed in the context of different verbal and non-verbal incongruity manifestations. This paper then presents pragma-cognitive processes underlying the communication of parody, in the form of political sketches, to mass audiences.

1. Parody

Although the concept of *parody* has been present in the European culture for more than twenty centuries, there is little agreement among scholars, predominantly represented by literary experts, as to what the term actually encompasses. In fact, the only aspect that does not arouse much controversy is its origin. Many authors (e.g. Hutcheon 1985, Rose 1993, Dentith 2000) point to Aristotle as the one who first used the term *parodia* to name a short mock-heroic poem. It needs to be stressed, however, that for ancient writers, the literary genre did not necessarily have to employ criticism aimed at another text (or way of writing), but frequently only exploited it for comic purposes (Dentith 2000). Such an understanding stands in marked contrast to the modern non-academic reading of the term, according to which parody, by definition, carries the property of ridiculing the parodied person, object or phenomenon

(Dentith 2000). As will be shown in the following paragraphs, the difference between the two interpretations is also reflected in the modern scholarly approaches to parody as it constitutes one of the most important conceptual dividing lines between them.

It seems reasonable to begin with another discrepancy emerging from literature on parody, namely that concerning the scope of human activities it is present in. In many works, especially those published in the first half of the 20th century and earlier, parody is treated as a literary genre or technique (Rose 1979). This might be due to the impact of the ancient approach to the phenomenon and the strong tradition of written parodies, such as ancient comedies by Aristophanes, Cervantes' "Don Quixote", and Fielding's "Shamela" to mention but a few. In several more recent publications (e.g. Hutcheon 1985, Rose 1993) parody is no longer confined to literature but becomes an artistic or even meta-artistic form. Also, Hutcheon (1985) provides relevant examples of parodies in music and painting. Yet, the account of parody as restricted to art seems far from adequate, since it still neglects the cases of parody present in every-day non-artistic discourse as if they were non-existent or not worthy of attention. An improvement in this respect is offered by Dentith (2000: 9), who, albeit primarily interested in literary specimens of parody, broadens the definition by stating that parody "includes any cultural practice". Similar specification is made by Rosen-Knill and Henry (1997), who rightly propose that parody is a form of human behaviour, and not necessarily a verbal one. Still, given the long-standing tradition that views it as a work of art and the fact that it frequently exploits well-established and widely recognisable behavioural patterns, parody indeed might be seen as giving far more fertile ground for humour in public discourse (for instance stand-up performances and televised programmes) than for humour in every-day interaction. Its potential in this respect is used in the case study presented in Section 5, which centres on artistic, or at least quasi-artistic, pre-prepared material intended for a wide audience.

Irrespective of its scope, parodic activity is a communicative phenomenon, which lends itself to pragmatic investigation. It invariably requires a person who performs it, as well as a person who is exposed to it and tries to attribute meaning to it. For the sake of terminological clarity, the former participant will be here referred to as "the parodist" or "the producer," whereas the latter will be called "the recipient."

Another bone of contention among scholars is whether the critical potential, which parody is often believed to have, is inherent in it or not. As some (Hutcheon 1985, Rose 1993) report, the debate on this point may have stemmed from the ambiguity of the ancient prefix "para" in the ancient Greek word for parody, as the prefix can imply either opposition or contiguity. From this imprecision, as Hutcheon (1985) and Rose (1993) reason, it follows that parody need not subvert a property of the parodied by means of criticism, mockery or ridicule, but can also be neutral or even express appreciation, sympathy and respect towards the parodied entity. The extended view, however, seems to introduce slight terminological confusion, because it appears to equate parody with allusion, which is somewhat counter-commonsensical and, more importantly, contradicts the widely accepted assumption that parody is "a more restricted form ... than allusion" (Hutcheon 1985: 50).

The broad view also seems to have serious repercussions for yet another aspect of parody, namely its humorousness. If one accepts that parody is, in fact, just a way of making different kinds of references to the object of parody, one will also have to accept that humour does not have to result from it. This is exactly the point that Hutcheon (1985) makes in her work. Dentith (2000) offers a more moderate solution, stating that parody "need not be funny, yet it works better if it is, because laughter, even of derision, helps it secure its point"[1] (Dentith 2000: 37). Rosen-Knill and Henry (1997), on the other hand, list humour as a necessary element of any parodic act. Given the fact that humour occupies a focal position in the present work, it is this view that is lent support.

As Rose (1993) rightly observes, parody is also often defined by means of presenting its relation to other phenomena such as, for example, *burlesque*, *irony* or *satire*. Since all the above are conceptualised differently by authors, terminological chaos is not infrequent. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) notice that it is as easy to find sources which define parody as a kind of burlesque as it is to find ones according to which burlesque is a form of parody. For the sake of clarity, a brief and very general comparison of the aforementioned concepts with parody will be attempted. Burlesque, for example, differs from parody in that it does not need to involve imitation and is a term strictly connected with literature and theatre (Dentith 2000). Irony uses one code to communicate a message, whereas parody uses two, viz. the parodist's and that of the parodied (Rose 1979). As a consequence, the message communicated via irony can concern any contextually relevant party or thing, while in the case of parody, it has to be directed at the party whose code is incorporated. Finally, satire seems the broadest term of all since it denotes any action aimed at ridiculing a particular vice present in a society in order to help eradicate it (Hutcheon 1985). For this purpose it can, but it obviously does not have to, employ both parody and irony.

In conclusion, there is a vast array of approaches to parody available in literature. The approaches typically differ from one another in a number of facets, such as:

- the type of activity that may involve parody
- the critical aspect of parody
- the comic aspect of parody
- the place of parody vis-à-vis similar concepts

For the purpose of this work, a view of parody similar to the one proposed by Rossen-Knill and Henry (1997) will be adopted. In this view, parody is an intentional form of behaviour which shows purposefully altered imitation of a party aimed at criticising

1. Dentith (2000) does not distinguish between humorousness, funniness and laughter, treating the terms as synonyms. However, the three are not always mutually dependent (see e.g. Attardo 1994, Dynel 2009).

the party or ideas related to the party in a humorous way. Needless to say, the imitation can be performed verbally or non-verbally.

2. Scripts

Scripts[2], together with *plans* and *goals*, are part of a theory of human understanding conceived by Schank and Abelson (1977). The theory, as they specify, incorporates ideas not only from linguistics but also from artificial intelligence psychology. According to its main assumption, understanding depends on knowledge, which means that we can only make sense of those events that we have directly or indirectly experienced and about which we store information in our memory. The comprehension of any novel experience takes place via comparison with the already possessed knowledge, which can be either general or specific. The former embraces all the data concerning the way the world functions and helps us interpret what we encounter. The latter, on the other hand, is a collection of detailed information about particular events such as, for example, going to the theatre.

Scripts belong to the domain of specific knowledge, as they show proper sequences of events for a specific familiar situation. The sequences are believed to be "predetermined and stereotyped" (Schank and Abelson 1977: 41). Obviously, each script is also associated with roles people typically perform in a given context. What is more, scripts are subjective constructs, inasmuch as they provide insight into a situation only from the point of view of a particular actor, e.g. a customer in a restaurant. They are also flexible in the sense that they allow for a number of slightly different scenarios called *tracks* (Schank and Abelson 1977: 40) and do not necessitate the actual occurrence of all prototypical stages.

Schank and Abelson (1977) differentiate between three types of scripts, namely *situational*, *personal* and *instrumental*. Situational scripts, e.g. a restaurant script or a theatre script, describe a situation, its participants and the way they are expected to behave. Personal scripts contain all the actions a person takes or is willing to take to achieve their own goals, which are typically unconnected with the role the person is supposed to perform in a particular context, for instance humiliating a spouse in a restaurant in front of other customers. Unlike the situational script, which is part of the knowledge shared by all the parties united in a situation, the personal script is initially known only to its actor and may remain undisclosed. The last type of script, the instrumental one, appears to be a hazy category. Even Schank and Abelson (1977: 65) themselves admit at one point that it has much in common with the situational script. It is only different in that it typically involves a single participant, requires all the scripted activities to happen exactly in the prescribed order and does not rely that heavily on pre-existing knowledge. According to Schank and Abelson (1977: 65)

2. Scripts are seen here as distinct from those proposed by Raskin (1985), for those exhibit a number of methodological problems (Dynel 2009)

the descriptions of such actions as lighting a cigarette, starting a car, or frying an egg make classic examples of instrumental scripts. An important point is that more than one script, whether of the same kind or of different types, can be invoked at a time.

Scripts, irrespective of their type, are activated by *headers* (Schank and Abelson 1977: 48). Although the authors provide no explicit definition of this notion, it may be inferred that a header is any element of the script logically emerging from a given situation. What is advanced, however, is taxonomy of headers, i.e. Precondition Headers (PH), Instrumental Headers (IH), Locale Headers (LH) and Internal Conceptualisation Headers (ICH). The PH involves reasons and purposes associated with a script, e.g. serious illness could invoke a hospital script. The IH provides a context which serves as an instrument whereby a scripted situation can be entered. A relevant example in this case would be using public transport to get to school to activate a school script. The LH activates a script by giving relevant spatial details, e.g. a name of a nightclub. The last category seems to embrace all the elements of a script that cannot be classified as members of the previous groups.

3. The incongruity-resolution model

Although Suls (1972, 1983) is widely believed to be the author of the *incongruity-resolution* (IR) theory of humour, there were several earlier proposals aimed at explaining humour by means of incongruity-related ideas. In many reviews of literature on humour (e.g. Keith-Spiegel 1972, Attardo 1994, Forabosco 2008, Dynel 2009) the name of James Beattie, a Scottish philosopher and writer, opens the section devoted to incongruity theories, thanks to his observation that "Laughter seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage" (Beattie 1971[1776]: 318. This statement, though very general, clearly influenced many contemporary proposals and still seems to be valid. Obviously, in his work, Beattie 1971[1776] went far beyond it, distinguishing a few ways in which incongruous elements can be combined and specifying that all the combinations hinge on covert similarities that have to be discovered for humour to emerge. Other significant early contributions include the works by Kant (1911 [1790]) and Schopenhauer (1886 [1819]), who put forward the idea of defeated expectations as a laughter-arousing factor and argued that incongruity should always be sought between an object and the idea it promotes.

While generally confirming the major points from the early postulates, the IR model as conceived by Suls (1972, 1983) offers several important improvements and can be considered the first consistent, well-developed and largely watertight proposal of the kind. According to it, humour processing boasts two stages. In the initial stage, the recipient encounters incongruity, which stems from the dissonance between their expectations about the final part of the humorous text and its actual ending. In the second phase, the recipient makes an attempt to find a "cognitive rule" (Suls 1972: 82) that will resolve the incongruity. By resolution Suls (1972) means finding an interpretation that will enable one to consider the incongruous elements in some sense well-matched. It is from the discovery of such an experience that humour ensues. If the recipient fails to notice any harmony between the incongruous parts, he/she is unable to fully appreciate the humorous stimulus and may feel baffled or frustrated. Suls (1972) analyses the following riddle in order to show that his proposal works in practice for canned jokes and captioned cartoons: "One prostitute said to another, 'Can you lend me ten dollars until I get back on my back?'" (Suls 1972: 83), arguing that here incongruity is rooted in the creative reformulation of the idiomatic phrase "to get back on one's feet" which is probably what the recipient at first expects. As the phrase proves to have a slightly altered (incongruous) form, the recipient begins the sense-seeking process. The process can be successfully completed as long as the recipient takes into account the position in which much of the work in the profession has to take place and is able to link this piece of information with the peculiar reformulation of the idiom.

As Dynel (2009) points out, although Suls' theory holds a considerably strong position in the academic world, there, quite understandably, have been numerous attempts to both enhance and criticise it. The critical voices ranged from complete rejection on the grounds that incongruity is an epiphenomenon and not the cause of humour (Veale 2004) to challenging only one of its aspects such as the necessary and sufficient status of the resolution stage (e.g. Rothbart 1976). As regards enhancements, a plausible postulate is made by Forabosco (2008), who states that incongruous elements are never fully reconciled, since full reconciliation would call humour processing to a halt, thereby impeding its appreciation. This view is further developed by Dynel (2009), who is of the opinion that it is the oscillation between the partially preserved incongruous elements that is directly responsible for the humorous effect. In the light of its goal, this paper, will also take issue with the limited applicability of the model proposed by Suls (1972).

4. Parody, scripts and the IR model

It is postulated here that scripts and the IR model can be successfully transplanted to the field of parody analysis. Since parody has to involve a considerable degree of imitation of its butt in a particular situation, it might be argued that it relies, to a certain extent, on an original script for that situation, from the point of view of a participant other than the butt. At one point, however, the script needs to be diverted from in order to signal to the recipient that he/she is not presented with pure imitative action, but with a case of parody. The diversion provokes incongruity, which occurs between the prototypical script and the script used for the sake of parody. Having encountered the incongruity, the recipient commences processing aimed at rendering it sensible (but not removing it). The recipient examines the incongruity between the script and its actual realisation. It is at the stage of examination that the act is classified as parody aimed at the imitated party and humour inherent in it is recognised and enjoyed. This model of parody processing can be illustrated by the following schema:

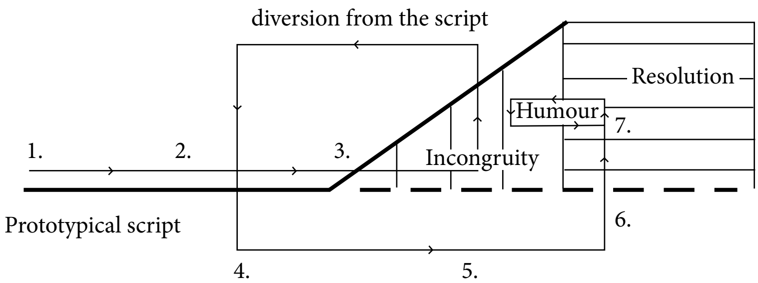

Figure 1. Parody processing (version 1)

1. The recipient identifies headers. A relevant script is activated. A set of expectations as to the scripted situation is created.
2. The recipient processes a sequence of incoming information, having his/her expectations confirmed (the situation develops in accordance with the original script).
3. The recipient encounters a divergent header, which provokes incongruity (the recipient has his/her expectations disconfirmed).
4. The recipient reconsiders the meaning of the already processed data in the light of the emerging incongruity, thus attempting to ascertain why the scenario unfolds in a non-standard way.
5. The recipient realises that the encountered situation is a case of parody.
6. The recipient finds logic in the incongruous input, thus resolving the incongruity.
7. The recipient oscillates between the prototypical script and its parodic realisation. Humour is recognised. The recipient experiences cognitive pleasure.

Quite obviously, the duration of each stage is not set and may vary depending on a number of factors, such as the type of parodic behaviour, the knowledge the recipient has or his/her processing abilities.

The model, however, is only applicable on condition that the recipient is not already aware that the behaviour he/she encounters is going to be parody, which is probably mostly true with respect to spontaneous conversational humour. In the case of artistic practice that can be accessed many times by multiple recipients, there is typically some information available as to what can be expected. Therefore, the recipient usually approaches artefacts, such as parodic sketches, already equipped with the knowledge that they are going to exhibit characteristics of parody. The knowledge, however, does not exempt the recipient from resolving the encountered incongruity. Nor does the knowledge affect the humorousness (an objective criterion) of the parodic artefact, though it may have some effect on the degree of funniness perceived, i.e. the individual perception of a stimulus as humorous (cf. Carrell 1997, Dynel 2009). This is because an individual will actually expect parodic incongruities to emerge.

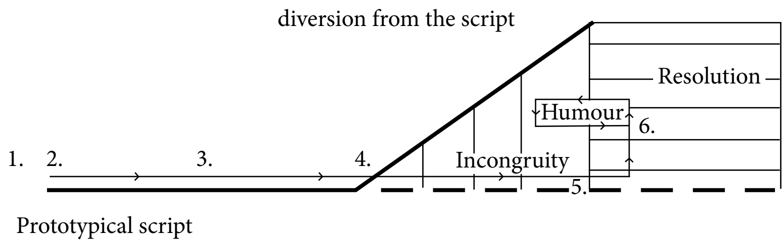

Figure 2. Parody processing (version 2)

1. The recipient knows about the parodic nature of the incoming input.
2. The recipient identifies headers if necessary. A relevant script is activated if necessary.
3. The recipient processes the incoming information, comparing it with the activated script and awaiting diversions.
4. The recipient encounters a diversion from the original script, which provokes incongruity.
5. The recipient finds logic in the incongruous state of affairs, thus resolving the incongruity
6. The recipient oscillates between the prototypical script and its parodic realisation. Humour is recognised. The recipient experiences cognitive pleasure.

It also needs to be underlined that seldom is parody confronted in the form of separate, self-contained units of humour, as is the case of canned jokes and one-liners. Commonly, it comes in sets of separable but similarly structured instances of parody, each of which is processed individually and therefore can be analysed individually. The sets are typically longer and more complex pieces of behaviour and take the form of sketches, books or pieces of music, although they are present in everyday conversations, as well.

In such cases, assuming, of course, that the recipient does not enjoy any knowledge as to the parodic character of the whole form, the processing of its first segment follows the pattern presented in Fig. 1. This pattern is, however, no longer pertinent to the subsequent segments since, having been familiarised with the introductory instance of parody, the recipient has already recognised the form as parodic and, as a result, will expect other of its parts to be parodic, as well. Thus, the processing of the subsequent segments is devoid of the classification stage and reflects the pattern sketched in Fig. 2. Whenever the situation remains unchanged, the processing of the subsequent segments may also be lacking in the header and script identification stage. If, on the other hand, the recipient is aware that a film he/she is going to see, or a book he/she is going to read, is parodic, all the constituent instances of parody undergo the second version of parody processing.

Conceivably, there might be circumstances in which the above principles do not fully apply. Whether they do or not may depend, for example, on the degree of homogeneity of a chosen complex form. If a film is parodic only at the beginning and at the end, the instance of parody introducing the final section might be approached from a local perspective, i.e. be treated like the first segment in a sequence and processed in accordance with the first pattern.

Regardless of the context-dependent patterns it takes into account, this model inherently aims to explain human cognitive processing in communicative situations, trying to specify how the recipient interprets parodic input. This should be seen as immediately relevant to the domain of pragmatics, which embraces the study of communicative processes with the use of cognitive models. Although the proposed model is designed to work universally, its applicability will be demonstrated below only for a specific kind of recipients, namely viewers responding to televised instances of parody which are part of carefully prepared sketches for mass audiences.

5. Case study

In the next few sections of the paper, an attempt will be made to apply the postulates presented above to the analysis of excerpts from selected sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus, a famous British comedy group. The selection is limited to political sketches, i.e. those that either show politicians or are about politicians or politics. All the collected data (15 sketches, see the Appendix) come from the TV series written and acted out by the members of Monty Python's Flying Circus first broadcast on BBC One in the years 1969–1974, while sketches coming from the feature films authored by the group, like *The Meaning of Life* or *Life of Brian,* are ignored.

In order to demonstrate how the parody processing model works in practice, an example sketch, "Post-box Ceremony", will be analysed below in detail. As humour processing will largely follow the same schema, the focus in the analytical paragraphs will be on the way in which particular incongruity manifestations work, not on the inferential stages.

5.1 Parody processing model in practice ("Post-box Ceremony")

To ensure that both versions of the model are exploited, an assumption is made that the recipient has no previous knowledge as to the parodic character of the sketch.

The first scene of the sketch shows a group of people getting out of a van and clambering onto a small red portable podium decorated with colourful bunting. The characters are formally-dressed. One of them is attired in a way indicating he is the Lord Mayor of a British city. Soon, another character, a middle-aged man wearing a suit, comes to the front and starts speaking into the microphone.

The above circumstances seem definite enough to be identified by the recipient as headers activating a script of a political event. Having activated the script, the recipient expects the speaking character to announce a major success of the local authorities, mentioning people behind it and awaiting enthusiastic cheers from the audience (Stage 1). For a moment, the scenario evolves in accordance with his/her expectations as the official begins his address by saying, "We are here to witness the opening of..." (Stage 2).[3] Soon, however, the expectations are disconfirmed as the recipient realises that it is merely a new post office box that will be opened. This piece of information is clearly a divergent header, which provokes incongruity (Stage 3). Thus, the recipient commences the sense-seeking process, reconsidering the past incidents with the new information in mind (Stage 4) and arriving at a conclusion that the presented event is not a genuine political event but a case of parody (Stage 5). Having established this fact, he/she attempts to determine the exact meaning of the parodic act and, most probably, concludes that the video criticises politicians for the tendency to exaggerate their achievements, thus solving the incongruity (Stage 6). The incongruity, however, does not fully disappear, as it is the oscillation between the prototypical script and its humorous realisation that is the source of humorousness and cognitive pleasure for the recipient (Stage 7).

As the sketch unfolds, the recipient processes the incoming information according to the second version of the model, since he/she has already classified it as parodic (Stage 1). Given that this particular sketch presents a largely homogenous situation, the recipient is also exempt from identifying the headers and the script anew (Stage 2). What he/she does then is await another diversion from the prototypical development (Stage 3), which he/she encounters when the speaking character begins to repeat the word box with undue emphasis (Stage 4). Trying to ascertain why the pronunciation of the word is emphatic, the recipient probably reaches a conclusion that it is the pompous, trenchant style politicians use while speaking in public that is ridiculed (Stage 5). As in the case of the first diversion, the recipient enjoys the humorous potential of the encountered situation, oscillating between the standard script and its novel realisation.

"Post-box Ceremony" features two more incongruous headers. Having finished his address in English, the speaking official chooses to switch the code and continue in French, which is out of place as the context of the situation is clearly British. The other divergent header follows the same pattern as the speaker ends his talk in German. The processing of these elements obviously proceeds according to the second version of the model.

3. Obviously, it is difficult to establish an objective and definite border between the stages, as the amount of information necessary to trigger a script is very much recipient-dependant (see Section 4).

5.2 Prototypical script for a political event

As parody demands a considerable degree of familiarity with the characteristics of the behaviour of its object, such characteristics have to be provided as a reference point. Since the present analysis makes use of scripts as basic elements of human knowledge, relevant facts will be presented in the form of a script for a political event from the point of view of an average observer, in most cases a television viewer. Obviously, the term "political event" encompasses a few different subgenres ranging from election speeches and party broadcasts, news bulletins and reports, to interviews and debates, all of which follow slightly different tracks. This necessitates creating an umbrella script, which will be attempted below.

As Schank and Abelson (1977) stipulate, the central element of each script is a set of sequenced actions whose order is parallel to what typically happens in real-life situations. Such a list can be, of course, formed for a political event, but it will probably not prove too informative, since the event is not particularly dynamic and usually involves only such actions as:

1. The appearance of a politician/politicians or a person/people in one way or another connected with politics in a formal situation.
2. A considerable degree of talk on a given subject.
3. The disappearance of the parties, as specified in 1.

Thus, with respect to political events, it seems more reasonable to define a script in terms of the entities in attendance and their features rather than actions. Such an entity-based script can boast the following elements:

A. SITUATION TYPE: formal
B. ROLES: politicians, journalists, experts
   a. POSITION and MOVEMENT: sitting behind a table, or standing, frequently behind a lectern; moderate body language, e.g. hand gesturing
C. b. DRESS CODE: formally dressed
   c. TOOLS: using diagrams, charts and other graphics
D. LANGUAGE: formal and sometimes specialised language
   a. TONE: serious
   b. THEME: political, social, economic, or environmental issues, typically of national or international importance

The above could be thought of as headers, i.e. script activating devices, and will serve as a basis against which incongruities will be defined and categorised in the following two sections.

5.3 Manifestations of incongruity

The next two sections are devoted to the way incongruity is manifested in the parodic material. The collected examples are classified along two criteria. First, they are labelled as either verbal or non-verbal and then classified according to the type of incongruity present. The criterion on which the incongruity subclasses are formed is the central element of the prototypical script the incongruity concerns. It should be noted that only a selection of examples belonging to each class can be provided in this qualitative study.

Some commentary is also provided as to how each resolution can proceed. The interpretation should, however, be considered only an example, since in many cases there might be several ways of ascribing sense to the presented material.

5.4 Incongruity manifested non-verbally

This section will include those examples of incongruity which emerge as a result of departures from the political script in behaviour other than verbal, i.e. not relying on the use of language understood as a system of communication in speech and writing used by people[4].

The first main subcategory here concerns participants that are commonly associated with political events and have already been exemplified in the prototypical script under ROLES. Obviously, the list is not (and is not meant to be) exhaustive and it is possible to find other parties participating in political events as long as their presence seems relevant. This is clearly not the case when a cricketer appears in a political context to voice his opinion on an issue dissociated from cricket. His appearance, therefore, can be considered incongruous. Similar reasoning can be conducted with respect to other unexpected participants that have been included in the material, namely "wombats" and a "small patch of brown liquid". The former is also incongruous as it is not human, while, [+human] feature is required in the context. The latter is not only [–human], but also [–animate], which seems to strengthen the perception of incongruity.

Even if a given individual has all the required features to be a legitimate participant of a political event, he/she may still project behaviour that proves ill-suited. The behaviour detected in the data concerns DRESS CODE, POSITION and MOVEMENT as well as TOOLS. As to the first subcategory, such examples as the appearance of politicians dressed as clowns, candidates in drag or a candidate in a huge cube with only legs sticking out can be found in Monty Python's sketches. These depart from the prototypical script in the sense that by no widely accepted standards can they be considered formal attire. The second subcategory boasts the following three script departures: a "silly gait", "dancing during a political broadcast" and "falling through the floor and reading a political broadcast while swinging (also upside-down) on a rope in a

4. Gestures do not count as language and, therefore, will be analysed under this category.

hole in the ground", which are far more dynamic than the usual controlled behaviour of politicians. Also, the instruments used by experts in the analysed sketches challenged common knowledge as to what device may be used to help clarify a given point, as among the ones that appeared in the data there were honkers, squeakers, whistles, pistols, and signs with words. A separate case is that of using a "swingometer", i.e. a machine designed to indicate swings in political sympathies, whose applicability in the analysis of election results does not seem that unreasonable at first sight, but proves so later on when it is used to obscure, rather than clarify, statistical data.

There are also instances of incongruities manifested non-verbally via paralinguistic cues. Thus politicians express themselves via whining, singing and popping mouth, instead of resorting to traditional rhetoric.

Finally, there are incongruities with ordinary human behaviour. This subgroup is different from the previous one, inasmuch as its representatives are less context-dependent and would probably have similar humorous potential in many other situations, not necessarily political. Here, the examples, all verging on slapstick, include "a journalist emitting smoke", "a journalist knocking a bee out of his ear" and "a minister's secretary spilling coffee".

5.5 Incongruity manifested verbally

The second main category is incongruity manifested verbally, i.e. expressed by means of language. Here, the incongruities are related not only to the participants and their behaviour, but also to the characteristics of political discourse and political activity. With respect to political discourse, the examples fall into five major groups, which will now be described

A. INCONGRUITY WITH THE FEASIBILITY OF ACTIONS PRESENTED IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

(1) In your plan, "A Better Britain For Us", you claimed that you would build 88,000 million, billion houses a year in the Greater London area alone. In fact, you've built only three in the last fifteen years. Are you a bit disappointed with this result?

The main assumption behind the creation of this category is that a piece of political discourse such as a campaign promise has to contain a considerable degree of viability. Example (1) can be deemed incongruous with such an assumption as it violates any sensible expectations as to how many houses are needed and therefore should be built by the use of hyperbolic numeral "88 million, billion". To reinforce the hyperbolic effect there are temporal ("a year") and spatial ("in the greater London area alone") constraints imposed upon the activity. Finally, the promised number is contrasted with the ostensibly factual, which is also differently restricted with respect to the time allotted, thereby providing a critical comment on the empty nature of promises made by politicians.

B. INCONGRUITY WITH THE PUBLIC CHARACTER OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

(2) Can I butt in at this point and say this is in fact the very first time I've appeared on television.
(3) Well, I've just heard from Luton that my auntie's ill, er, possibly, possibly gastro-enteritis

Examples (2) and (3) can be seen as incongruous, as they include private information that is highly unlikely to come as part of a political debate, which is generally focused on matters of public interest. In addition, they are in no way related to the ongoing discussion. In the case of Example (3) the physiological aspect of the aunt's illness also comes into play.

C. INCONGRUITY WITH THE (OSTENSIBLE) MEANINGFULNESS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

(4) Gentlemen, our MP saw the PM this AM and the PM wants more LSD from the PIB by tomorrow AM or PM at the latest. I told the PM's PPS that AM was NBG so tomorrow PM it is for the PM nem. con.
(5) Now, the fiscal deficit with regard to the monetary balance, the current financial year excluding invisible exports, but adjusted of course for seasonal variations and the incremental statistics of the fiscal and revenue arrangements for the forthcoming annual budgetary period terminating in April.

In Examples (4) and (5), incongruity arises because the contributions come over as very complex to process or even hardly meaningful. In that sense, they differ from typical political discourse, which, as it is here assumed, should at least make the impression of carrying meaning decipherable to voters. In the case of (4), the process of deciphering may prove difficult due to the accumulation of acronyms. However, if it comes to a successful end, another incongruity will be detected. This incongruity pivots on the register clash between NBG, apparently standing for "no bloody good", and the formal character of the political discourse in general, as well as with the connotations of sophistication and erudition evoked, for example, by the abbreviation "nem. con.", which is a short form from a Latin phrase meaning "without objection". By the same token, Example (5) is incongruous owing to the accumulation of specialised language, whose amount clearly exceeds what an average recipient could easily digest.

D. INCONGRUITY WITH THE SOCIAL CORRECTNESS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

SEXUALITY

(6) I would tax the nude in my bed. No – not tax. What is the word? Oh – "welcome". Replying, the Shadow Minister said he could no longer deny the rumours, but he and the Dachshund were very happy.

PHYSIOLOGY

(7) Good Lord, you're not suggesting we should tax... thingy? Poo poo's?
No.
Thank God for that. Excuse me for a moment. (*leaves*)

NATIONAL HOSTILITY

(8) Today saw the appointment of a new head of Allied Bomber Command – Air Chief Marshal Sir Vincent "Kill the Japs" Forster.

All the incongruities under category D occur because of the taboo undertone present, which in itself may be seen as improper, and hence incongruous, in many domains of human activity, but is particularly striking here due to the political correctness factor. The collected examples fall into three thematic subgroups, namely that concerning SEXUALITY, PHYSIOLOGY and NATIONAL HOSTILITY, though it could be argued that (7) is a border case and should be placed between the first two. Additionally, with respect to Example (6) a claim can be ventured that it is also incongruous, since it makes reference to a sexual abbreviation, which is in itself incongruous with what is commonly believed to be normal.

E. INCONGRUITY WITH THE ABSTRACTNESS OF TERMINOLOGY

(9) Well, it's 29% up over six hundred feet but it's a little bit soft around the edges about...

Finally, the last category pertaining in some sense to political discourse is E. The example quoted under it can be viewed as internally incongruous due to its synaesthetic quality. The quality emerges when a number (29%), after all an abstract concept, is described by means of features indicative of a concrete object, namely the tactile impression its texture makes.

As in the case of incongruity manifested non-verbally, several examples relate to the participants and their properties can be detected. Some examples (e.g. 10) hinge on the same mechanism and prove incongruous because of the non-human quality of the participants.

F. INCONGRUITY WITH THE HUMANNESS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

(10) The Minister of Technology (cut to photograph of minister with a wombat on his shoulder) met the three Russian leaders (Russian leaders again all with wombats on their shoulders) today to discuss a £4 million airliner deal....none of them were indigenous to Australia, carried their young in pouches, or ate any of those yummy Eucalyptus leaves. Yum Yum.

Other instances (11) challenge the expectation as to the expertness of the parties present. This is realised by means of filling the list of experts on the Norwegian issue by people whose only relation to it manifested itself in the paronymic or metathetic similarity of their names to the names associated with the country such as "Norway", "fiords", or "Oslo". Also, a far-fetched connection is established by means of the alleged spatial closeness between Wick and Norway, which was made into a sufficient reason for the inclusion of Wick's Mayor in the debate on Norway.

G. INCONGRUITY WITH THE EXPERTNESS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

(11) Highlights of that broadcast will be discussed later by Lord George-Brown, ex-Foreign Secretary, Mr Sven Olafson, the ex-Norwegian Minister of Finance, Sir Charles Ollendorff, ex-Chairman of the Norwegian Trades Council, Mr Hamish McLavell, the Mayor of Wick, the nearest large town to Norway, Mrs Betty Norday, whose name sounds remarkably like Norway, Mr Brian Waynor, whose name is an anagram of Norway, Mr and Mrs Ford, whose name sounds like Fiord, of which there are a lot in Norway, Ron and Christine Boslo...

There is also an example involving another case of incongruity with the way people function in general. This time it deals with the expectations people have about human names, e.g.

H. INCONGRUITY WITH PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING HUMAN NAMES

(12) Fin- tim- lim- bim- whin- bim- lim- bus- stop- F'tang- F'tang- Olè- Biscuit-barrel

The last major group of examples belongs to the domain of political activity in general. Some examples are incongruous with its large-scale character, which is clearly not something that the aforementioned opening of a new post box represents. Still, it seems to be significant because of the complexity of the situation, which is reflected in the elaborate syntax and the repetition of the word "box" in (13).

I. INCONGRUITY WITH THE LARGE-SCALE CHARACTER OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY

(13) We are here today to witness the opening of a new box to replace the box which used to stand at the corner of Ulverston Road and Sandwood Crescent. Owing to the road-widening programme carried out by the Borough Council, the Ulverston Road box was removed, leaving the wall box in Esher Road as the only box for the Ulverston Road area. This new box will enable the people of the Ulverston Road area to post letters, post-cards and small packages without recourse to the Esher Road box or to the box outside the post office at Turner's Parade which many people used to use, but which has now been discontinued owing to the opening of this box and also the re-organisation of box distribution throughout the whole area, which comes into force with the opening of new boxes at the Wyatt Road Post Office in July.

The last recognisable group falls under INCONGRUITY WITH THE TRADITIONAL AREAS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY. The areas are commonly parallel to the most important fields of human activity requiring unified legal regulations and control such as trade, education, health service etc. This, however, cannot be said of the activities, such as "being frightened by any kind of farm machinery" or "stealing packets of bandages from the self-service counter at Timothy Whites and selling them again at a considerable profit".

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the two-staged incongruity-resolution model, as proposed by Suls (1972, 1983), appears to be relevant to parody. The incongruity stage takes place when the prototypical script exploited in parodic behaviour is altered. It is followed by resolution in which the recipient compares the abnormal input with his/her knowledge and tries to make sense of it, but does not remove completely the incongruity. It is then that he/she is able to approach the input once again from a meta-perspective (Forabosco 2008) and experience humour. The realisation that the input is an instance of parody may also happen in the final stage. Typically, however, the recipient knows in advance that the input is going to be parodic.

The above postulate served as a useful tool in the analysis of parody present in political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus. The results of the analysis can be summarised by stating that the instances of parody displayed incongruity that manifested itself both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal manifestations concerned primarily selected features of political discourse, people that partake in political events, and the scope of political activity. Occasionally their effect was strengthened by the use of linguistic and rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, paronymy, accumulation of specialised language, etc. Non-verbal manifestations of parodic incongruity were almost solely focused on the behaviour of people involved in politics, particularly on the way they speak, dress and gesticulate.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Marta Dynel for her encouragement, constructive comments and helpful suggestions, which proved invaluable in writing this paper.

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Appendix: Titles of sketches used in the analysis:

1. Election night special
2. Face the press
3. How far can a minister fall?
4. Mr Hilter
5. News for gibbons
6. News for parrots
7. News for wombats
8. Political party broadcast
9. Political party broadcast on behalf of the Norwegian Party
10. Post-box ceremony
11. Spectrum – talking about things
12. Tax on thingy
13. The minister for not listening to people
14. The ministry of silly walks
15. Today in parliament

"I'll be there for you!"
On participation-based sitcom humour

Marta Dynel

The paramount objective of this article is to tease out the workings of participation-based humour in film discourse. The departure point is an extension of the dyadic model of communication in the context of fictional media discourse. Differentiation is thus made between hearer types at the inter-character level, which subscribes to a participation framework typical of everyday interactions. Secondly, the film viewer, the hearer at the second communicative level, is conceptualised as a distinct hearer type, namely the recipient. Most importantly, it is shown that sitcom humour, devised by the collective sender (the film crew) to be appreciated by the recipient, tends to be based on participation phenomena, which are frequently non-humorous from the perspective of (some or all) fictional participants. Therefore, a few humorous mechanisms specific to film discourse of sitcoms are elucidated. The paper is illustrated with examples from the famous TV comedy series entitled "Friends".

1. Introduction

Comedies and sitcoms are prevalent artefacts of popular culture, which deserve to be discussed by humour researchers. Indeed, besides ample non-scholarly literature on sitcoms, academic publications can also be found. However, while socio-cultural monographs and collected volumes abound (e.g. Horton 1991; Marc 1997; Wagg 1998; Spangler 2003; Charney 2005; Dalton and Linder 2005; Trueth 2005; Mills 2005, 2009), linguistic works on sitcom discourse are rather scarce (e.g. Gray 2006, Quaglio 2009).

Various research strands are pursued on the basis of fictional comedy discourse, frequently not accounting for humorous phenomena per se, such as fictional identity construction or stereotyping (e.g. Bubel and Spitz 2006, Sienkiewicz and Marx 2009, Senzani 2010, Artiles 2010), or (audiovisual) translation studies (e.g. Pelsmaekers and van Besien 2002, Bucaria 2008, Chiaro 2010). Relatively little linguistic research has been done into the workings of humour in the discourse of comedies and sitcoms (but see Apter 1982, Palmer 1987, Neale and Krutnik 1990, Dynel 2010a).

The present paper aims to investigate the intrinsic characteristics of humour dependent on the participation framework specific to *film discourse*. The term "film discourse" is used in reference to characters' utterances (together with their non-verbal communication) materialised in films, series and serials (all subsumed under the notion "film", despite differences between them, which shows also in terms "film viewer" or "film production crew") via monologues, dialogues and polylogues (see Chovanec in this volume), which are the collaborative work of the whole film production crew. Most importantly, some new light is shed on sitcom humour, which is designed especially for the film viewer. The latter is conceptualised as a superior type of listener to characters' utterances.

This chapter is thus grounded in the *pragmatics of interaction* and presents a new participation framework, specifically the diversity of listener types. Also, focusing on fictional film discourse, it subscribes to pragmatic media studies, offering a novel contribution to the discussion on humour types in film discourse. Rather than merely testify to the recurrence of humour categories typical of everyday talk in fictional interactions, the paper argues in favour of a range of humour categories arising (sometimes exclusively) from the film viewer's perspective and being facilitated by the participatory phenomena peculiar to sitcoms.

The article opens with a presentation of a participation framework holding in the case of film discourse, which centres on two levels of communication. Secondly, a list of sitcom humour mechanisms is presented, with focus on those anchored in participation phenomena specific to the discourse of sitcoms. The discussion is based on examples cited from "Friends", the popular American sitcom.

2. Participants in film discourse

The canonical *dyadic* model is predicated on the default assumption of the single production end and the single reception end. However, as evidenced by empirical conversational data, human communication tends to be much more complex, transcending dialogic interactions. Several authors have observed the need to distinguish more *participant* roles (Hymes 1972, 1974; Goffman 1981; Bell 1984, 1991; Thomas 1986; Levinson 1988; Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992; Clark 1996; Verschueren 1999; Dynel 2010b). Moreover, the dyadic model fails to capture not only casual conversations but also television discourse (cf. Scannell 1991, O'Keeffe 2006, Lorenzo-Dus 2009). A new classification of participants, specifically hearers, is proposed here for fictional interactions of films, based on a critical overview of other participation frameworks (see Dynel 2010b, 2011a).

A framework holding for mediated fictional interactions must take account of two *communicative levels* on which film discourse inherently operates, i.e. the *inter-character/characters' (communicative) level* and the *recipient's level* (Dynel 2010a, 2011a, 2011b). The inter-character level entails fictional characters' monologues, dialogues and polylogues, which are further subject to the audience's interpretation on the recipient's level. Also, the structure of film discourse capitalises on *two layers*, viz. the *fictional layer*, which rests on the *collective sender's layer*. In other words, a film, series or serial, which presents a plot revolving around fictional characters' interactions, is the product of the film crew (directors, scriptwriters, editors, actors, etc.), dubbed the *collective sender*, who are responsible for communicating meanings to the film viewer.

The mediated aspect aside, fictional characters' conversations exhibit the same participation framework as that which underlies everyday interactions (Dynel 2010a, 2010b). The same participant roles can be distinguished in everyday communication and in fictional conversations held by characters. On the other hand, several participatory phenomena may be regarded as being peculiar to film discourse. Those help generate special communicative effects for the film viewer, such as humour, which is the present topic of investigation.

The typology of participants endorsed here assumes as an analytic unit a *turn*, defined as a stream of speech of varied length terminated by a pause and/or another interactant's verbal contribution. However, sometimes a turn may be rendered as a non-verbal signal. Also, a turn usually coincides with an *utterance*, but there are also cases of the speaker's turn conflating separate utterances directed to distinct hearers. Participants keep changing roles as their conversation develops, according to *turn-taking* procedures (cf. e.g. Argyle 1969, Yngve 1970, Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Sacks et al. 1974), while one role may be simultaneously performed by a number of individuals.

The *participant* is an individual who takes part in a given turn (not necessarily the whole interaction), either as the *speaker* or as the *hearer/listener*. By contrast, the *nonparticipant* is someone who cannot glean meanings communicated verbally or non-verbally, who is not within earshot (and/or out of sight) or is in the vicinity of interacting participants but is entirely oblivious to an utterance or a non-verbally conveyed message. It must be highlighted that the terms which denote participants and which seem to privilege the auditory channel are used technically and do capture non-verbal communication, which accompanies or even substitutes utterances.

Ratified participants, also called *interlocutors*, *conversationalists* or *interactants*, include the speaker, a participant whose turn is in progress (Goodwin 1981), and *ratified hearers*, i.e. the *addressee,* and unaddressed ratified hearer, i.e. the *third party*. The addressee is a hearer to whom the speaker overtly directs a given utterance, usually (but not always) indicating this by dint of verbal signals (e.g. second person pronouns) and non-verbal cues (e.g. gaze). The third party is a ratified listener to whom an utterance is not addressed but is, nonetheless, directed without any such cues. Therefore, the third party is fully entitled to listen to it and make inferences, according to the speaker's communicative intention. Among hearers/listeners, there are also *unratified hearers*, i.e. *overhearers*, to whom the speaker does not wish to communicate any meanings and who are divided into *bystanders* and *eavesdroppers*. The speaker, and usually (but not always) ratified hearers, are cognisant of a bystander's presence (or at least, his/her being in earshot) and capacity to listen, while they are oblivious to an eavesdropper's listening, which can sometimes be tantamount to a stealthy activity (see Dynel 2010b; for different models, see Goffman 1981; Bell 1984, 1991; Thomas 1986; Levinson 1988; Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992; Clark 1996; Verschueren 1999). The participation framework can be summarised as follows:

1. Ratified participants = interlocutors/conversationalists/interactants
   - **A.** speaker
   - **B.** ratified hearers/listeners
     - **a.** addressee
     - **b.** third party
2. Unratified participants = unratified hearers/overhearers
     - **a.** bystander
     - **b.** eavesdropper

While at the *inter-character level* (Dynel 2010a, 2010b, 2011a), fictional interactants perform roles reminiscent of those recurrent in real-life conversations (albeit sometimes differently exploited), a distinct hearer category must be postulated to capture film viewers, given their distinctive characteristics consequent upon two communicative levels peculiar to film discourse.

Literature displays a prevailing tendency to call viewers of TV programmes, i.e. listeners to media talk, *overhearers* or *overhearing audiences*, who are, nonetheless, ratified, being the primary receivers of broadcast talk. Similarly, film viewers are also conceived as overhearers but are simultaneously acknowledged as being ratified recipients, for whom fictional interactions are designed (Kozloff 2000; Bubel 2006, 2008; Richardson 2010). To avoid the ambivalent parlance, which oxymoronically suggests an unratified status of a ratified participant, a different term is used here in reference to the film viewer, namely the *recipient* (Dynel 2010a, 2011a, 2011b). The term is proposed as a theoretical construct, rather than be used in the ordinary sense of the word, as done by lay language users or even media researchers who do not concentrate on hearer roles. Additionally, although the focus here is on the recipient's listening to film discourse, it must be appreciated that verbal interactions on the screen are also watched. The term "recipient", endorsed primarily as a hearer category, is not counter-intuitive when applied also to visual communication.

On the second communicative level, utterances comprising film discourse are communicated to recipients. Although recipients witness conversations carried out by unknowing fictional conversationalists, i.e. characters, their participation is planned within the collective sender's layer, determining in various respects how these unknowing characters interact on the screen. To reformulate, characters' interactions interpreted by recipients are products of the whole production team, who convey meanings especially for recipients' benefit. On the other hand, it is not the case that recipients consciously interact with the collective sender. Viewers willingly forget about the production layer and become preoccupied with characters' communication (Dynel 2010a, 2011a, 2011b).

Meanings emerging from characters' discourse must be made available to recipients so that they can make inferences, as intended by the collective sender. This is encompassed by the concept of *recipient design* (Dynel 2011a, 2011b; cf. Sacks et al. 1974), also known in literature as *audience design* (Bell 1984, 1991; Clark and Carlson 1982) or *overhearer's design* (Bubel 2008), accounting for communicative strategies adjusted to the needs of listeners to a chosen discourse type. The recipient does design is here understood as a set of discursive (as well as cinematographic) techniques enabling the target viewer's interpretative processes and arrival at meanings, in accordance with the collective sender's plan. In the case of comedies and sitcoms, the primary goal the film crew has is to induce humorous responses in recipients.

A special type of the recipient is the *metarecipient*. This is an informed viewer who watches a film/series/serial from a privileged position, analysing film discourse consciously and, frequently, making more insightful observations about meanings conveyed and methods employed to achieve this end. The metarecipient, rather than merely enjoying a film/series/serial as a regular recipient, will interpret chosen aspects of discourse or cinematographic techniques, for instance appreciating the means by which certain communicative effects are engendered. Admittedly, the distinction between the two categories is not clear-cut, for seasoned film zealots may also grow to appreciate recurrent cinematographic techniques. For the purpose of the present study, however, the role of the metarecipient is assigned to a humour researcher, who not only acknowledges humour arising from sitcom discourse, albeit not necessarily its funniness (cf. Carrell 1997), but also accounts for its mechanisms, which a regular recipient need not (and, most likely, will not) consciously recognise.

3. Sitcom humour reliant on participation phenomena

As already stated, the same categorisation of roles is applicable to everyday interactions and fictional interactions at the inter-character level. Nevertheless, certain participatory strategies peculiar to sitcom interactions can be observed, given that role assignment and other interactional strategies may be geared towards humorous effects. The analysis, conducted from a metarecipient's perspective, addresses several humorous phenomena which the viewer can appreciate from his privileged vantage point. Humour arises thanks to the peculiar features of fictional discourse contingent on two communicative levels and layers. It must be stressed that the analysis presents ideal inferential paths followed by a model viewer, who construes meanings and perceives humour, as intended by the collective sender (and as indicated by canned laughter).

The examples testify to the fact that sitcom humour directed at the recipient may be dependent on characters' participant roles and participatory phenomena. Also, the humour categories distinguished appear to be specific to film discourse, for they are meant to be appreciated by an outside observer, i.e. the recipient, while they do not necessarily constitute humorous phenomena from characters' perspective. Needless to say, there are also many manifestations of sitcom humour which do not capitalise directly on the participation framework, and which could be classified as humour in interaction or conversational humour. In addition, no attempt is made at explaining how humour works according to widely recognised theories, such as the incongruity-resolution model or superiority theories. Their unquestionable applicability notwithstanding, attention is paid only to how the collective sender facilitates participation-based humour emergence from the recipient's point of view.

The foundations of participation-based humour in sitcoms (and other comedies) are presented on the basis of examples taken from "Friends", a famous American sitcom filmed and originally aired for ten seasons between 1994 and 2004. Having instantly proved a great success, the sitcom has been syndicated all around the world and sold on DVD for the past fifteen years. The sketchy plot revolves around the lives of six friends: three men (Ross, Chandler and Joey) and three women (Monica, Phoebe and Rachel), who experience numerous problems in their private and professional lives in the space of 10 years. Each episode is created by two groups of script writers (showing no permanent membership), one responsible for developments in the plot, and the other in charge of keeping the script suffused with humorous instances. It is worth mentioning that "Friends" shows little cinematic artistry, which manifests itself in simple pictures and rather slow-paced editing, which contributes to viewers' illusion of reality. However, as the analysis aims to corroborate, the discursive humorous effects for the sitcom viewer's benefit are carefully planned by the collective sender.

Based on a corpus of over 500 participation-based humour instances, generated by the author on the basis of all ten seasons of "Friends", seven categories capturing the most prevalent phenomena are distinguished with a view to adducing evidence in favour of the ratified and privileged status of the recipient. It should also be emphasised that the analysis addresses only those humorous mechanisms specific to sitcom discourse which capitalise on characters' participation framework. For reasons of space, not all of the substrategies under the main types can be discussed. The global categories presented are by no means proposed as an exhaustive taxonomy. It cannot be ruled out that further investigation of other comedies and sitcoms might yield more participant-based humorous phenomena besides the seven types addressed below.

The examples are largely based on transcripts compiled by fans (at http://www.friendscafe.org/scripts and http://www.friendstranscripts.tk/, both last accessed on 1st December 2010). Each instance is preceded by a description of necessary context, and the most significant non-verbal signals are presented. For the sake of clarity, in the case of complex facial expressions indicating the characters' attitudes and feelings, only the emerging emotions are stated, as observed by the authors of the transcripts (not the author of the present paper, although her interpretations do coincide with those made by the fans, testifying to the unequivocal non-verbal presentation of meanings on the screen). Finally, the speakers' turns are numbered. This pertains also to non-verbal turns which stand in lieu of the speakers' verbalisations.

3.1 Recipients' participation in a character's self-talk

Self-talk (Goffman 1981) is talk directed to oneself, as if the speaker were simultaneously the addressee. It is generally circumscribed by rules of social behaviour and is frowned upon, since it is associated with the speaker's mental problems. However, self-talk may be fully controlled and intentional, e.g. when one is rehearsing a presentation. Most significantly, in film discourse, a character's self-talk of either type is planned by the collective sender and offers humorous effects for the recipient. Humour is sometimes associated also with the interpersonal impact of uncontrolled self-talk on the inter-character communicative level.

(1) (All the friends, i.e. Monica, Rachel, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler and Ross, are sitting in Central Perk, talking about Ross's hapless marriage to a lesbian.)
1. Chandler: Sometimes I wish I was a lesbian...
2. Monica, Rachel, Phoebe, Joey and Ross stare at him, shocked.
3. Chandler: Did I say that out loud?

Season 1, Episode 1

In this instance, the pensive speaker unintentionally verbalises his compromising thoughts (1), which he realises (3) thanks to his interlocutors' non-verbal reaction (2). This verbalisation, which the speaker does not mean to utter, cannot be regarded as intentional humour towards the collective addressee or third party. Chandler does not ratify any hearers in this turn, which is why they may be conceived as bystanders to it, i.e. overhearers of whose presence the speaker is aware, but whom he neglects. They seem to be flabbergasted, rather than amused, by the compromising admission. One may venture to claim that the speaker's revelation is too far-fetched to be tenable in real-life discourse, where it would most likely be deemed as the speaker's pretended lack of self-control presented for the sake of the ratified hearers' amusement. Both Chandler's self-talk and the other characters' response constitute humorous stimuli to be appreciated by the recipient.

That self-talk in film discourse is orientated towards the recipient is also transparent in the case of controlled monologuing performed by the speaker, with no hearer present at the inter-character level.

(2) (In this episode, Joey has given his pieces of furniture names. Rosita, the armchair, is broken. Chandler comes into the room, looking for Joey.)
1. Chandler: Joey! Joe!
   (Chandler realises that he's not here and starts investigating. He picks up the bag of chips.)
2. Chandler (talks aloud): Full bag. (He picks up the beer.) Beer's still cold. Something terrible must've happened here! (He seems to decide it's not that important and sits down on Rosita. Its back falls off, causing him to flip over.) Oh no-no-no-no-no-no! (He runs over to Stevie, the TV set.)
3. Chandler: Stevie, I was never here! (Runs out.)

Season 7, Episode 13

Initially the speaker talks to the addressee (1), who appears to be absent. Having ascertained that he is alone, the speaker engages in controlled talking to himself (2), as if he is giving a running commentary on what he can see and infer. This bizarre monologuing can only be explained on the grounds that it belongs to film discourse devised for the sake of recipients' understanding of the ongoing situation, as well as their amusement connected with the peculiar nature of the talk. In everyday communication, such a monologue could hardly be uttered, for there would seem to be no rational motivation for it. Moreover, the speaker's last utterance (3) is addressed to an inanimate object, which, in real-life circumstances, would provoke doubts as to the speaker's sanity, unless uttered to convey a message (e.g. of a humorous or persuasive nature) to a human hearer, i.e. the third party. Here, however, the speaker's attribution of hearing and inferential capacity to the inanimate object serves solely to amuse the recipient.

The next example displays another application of controlled self-talk, also geared towards entertaining the recipient.

(3) (Chandler is talking to his manager, Mr. Franklin.)
1. Mr. Franklin: But we really do need to find someone up here. The work is starting to pile up. I've got a stack of documents on my desk this high. (Holds his hand at shoulder level.)
2. Chandler: You know what you should do, just toss them in the shredder and claim you never got them.
3. Mr. Franklin: (laughs) That's a good one. (Walks away.)
4. Chandler (aloud to himself): What does a guy have to do to be taken seriously around here?!

Season 8, Episode 5

Having finished a short conversation with his manager (1–3), Chandler produces a turn (4) the former can no longer hear, being thus a non-participant. Although the speaker knows that there is no hearer in the vicinity, he does make the commentary aloud. This is clearly a discursive strategy employed by the collective sender to provide amusement for the recipient. As a result, the latter appreciates the import of Chandler's earlier utterance, which its addressee must have (mis)interpreted as playful teasing not carrying any meaning outside the humorous mode (cf. Dynel's other paper in this volume). Consequently, the recipient recognises humour stemming from the misunderstanding between the characters, as well as Chandler's negligent attitude to work.

A mechanism similar to self-talk is inner monologue, which not only has no addressee at the inter-character level but also is not even uttered.

3.2 Recipients' participation in a character's inner monologue

Interestingly, due to the *voice-over* effect, film discourse has the capacity to exploit speakers' (in a technical sense) *inner/internal monologues*, which allows the viewer to appreciate "inner thoughts of a character who is shown silently musing" (Goffman

1981: 83). Therefore, there is no hearer on the inter-character level, and the only listener to a non-verbalised thought is the recipient.

(4) (Initially reluctant to indulge in what he considers a feminine activity, Chandler is now lying in a bubble bath. "Only Time" is playing in the background.)

1. Chandler (thinking): All right, this isn't so bad. I like the flower smell! (He looks confused.) Which is okay, because I've got my boat. (He looks content.)

Season 8, Episode 13

Owing to the voice-over, the recipient has an opportunity to discover Chandler's inner thoughts. Their humour emerges from the rationalisation he deploys to assert his masculinity (for, stereotypically, a man is not supposed to revel in a soapy bath or a flowery smell), simultaneously betraying his puerility (because he plays with a plastic boat as if he were a small boy).

Moreover, the nature of film discourse allows one character's thoughts and another's utterances to be entwined.

(5) (Due to a black-out, Chandler is trapped inside an ATM vestibule, together with a beautiful woman.)

1. Chandler (thinking): Oh my God, it's that Victoria's Secret model. Something... something Goodacre.
2. Jill (on phone): Hi Mom, it's Jill.
3. Chandler (thinking): She's right, it's Jill. Jill Goodacre. (He nods.) Oh my God. I am trapped in an ATM vestibule with Jill Goodacre! (pause) Is it a vestibule? Maybe it's an atrium. Oh, yeah, that is the part to focus on, you idiot!
4. Jill (on phone): Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just stuck at the bank, in an ATM vestibule.
5. Chandler (thinking): Jill says vestibule... I'm going with vestibule.
6. Jill (on phone): I'm fine. No, I'm not alone... I don't know, some guy.
7. Chandler (thinking): Oh! Some guy. Some guy. "Hey Jill, I saw you with some guy last night. Yes, he was some guy". (As he is thinking, Chandler is smiling proudly and swaggering across the vestibule on bent knees with his index fingers stretched as if he were dancing, which Jill finds annoying and turns round.)

Season 1, Episode 7

Jill's utterances (2, 4, 6) which she addresses to her mother, the hearer on the other end of the line, and to which Chandler is a bystander are interwoven into, and affect, Chandler's inner monologue (1, 3, 5, 7). A humorous effect develops from the vantage point of the viewer, who can appreciate Chandler's unspoken thoughts and a number of effects consequent upon them. First of all, Chandler concurs with the woman (3) when she has said her name (2), as if she could be wrong. Transparently, the woman's self-introduction is produced with a view to exerting a humorous effect upon the recipient, since it gives rise to Chandler's musings, whilst in a real-life situation, a daughter will not normally need to introduce herself to her mother, who naturally recognises her offspring's voice (even if she calls from an unknown number). Also, the humour originates in Chandler's indecisiveness as regards the right term to call the place where he has found himself (3), which is insignificant and should be dismissed as irrelevant, given the thrilling situation. However, after a moment, he again agrees (5) with the import of Jill's utterance (4). Most importantly, humour to be appreciated by the recipient emerges from Chandler's uninhibited non-verbal communication (7), which the bystander cannot but observe, even if she is not privy to his thoughts. Thus, she must consider the speaker's behaviour to be most uncanny.

3.3 Recipients' participation in characters' consecutive interactions

Sitcom humour tends to rest on recipients' broader perspective and more extensive knowledge of interactions in comparison to (some or all) characters', because the latter do not participate in all of the relevant conversations. Consecutive encounters are presented to viewers one after another. Therefore, they interpret each in the light of information they have gleaned in earlier interactions. Such information constitutes their background knowledge (vis-à-vis the characters' ignorance), which promotes humour occurrence.

The example below exhibits the recipient's knowledge, coinciding with one interlocutor's inside information, garnered on the basis of earlier conversations in which the latter has taken part.

(6) (Chandler confronts Joey and Ross, knowing that each of them is dating the same girl, which he has gathered on the basis of his earlier face-to-face conversations with each of them.)

1. Chandler: Hi! How'd it go?
2. Ross: Oh great! We're going out again Saturday. But I just found she's also seeing some other guy.
3. Chandler: (seems to be shocked) Really?! Joe? What would you do if you were in Ross's situation?
4. Joey: Well, I sort of am. I mean yeah, I'm dating this girl who's also seeing another guy. But, I don't know, I'm not too worried about it.
5. Ross: Well you shouldn't be. Believe me I wouldn't want to be the guy who's up against you. (Chandler laughs.) I mean that doofus is going to lose!
6. Chandler: So this is nice! I wish I didn't have to go, believe me! But unfortunately I have to. (He gets up and Joey moves over next to Ross.) Oh uh, by the way, what's the name the girl you're dating?
7. Joey and Ross: Kristen Lang.

8. Chandler: Bye! (Exits.)
Season 7, Episode 17

When the interaction starts, the recipient has knowledge similar to Chandler's as regards the woman his current conversationalists are dating. Having witnessed his private conversations with each of the other two interlocutors, the viewer can appreciate the humorous ramifications of some of the turns, namely Chandler's malice (3, 6) and the irony of fate originating from Joey and Ross's utterances (4, 5). As a result of Chandler's spiteful utterances, his two interactants are ridiculed and denigrated, even though they do not appreciate this, oblivious to the fact that they are dating the same woman. They only realise that this is the case when Chandler addresses a question (6) to both of them, meaning to elicit the same answer from both and put them ill at ease. The whole disparaging interaction is geared towards entertaining the recipient.

The privileged status of the recipient manifests itself also in interactions pivoted on characters' manipulating, and lying to, one another.

(7) (A costume party is taking place at Monica and Chandler's. Chandler, dressed up as a pink rabbit, and Ross, in an unidentified costume, are trying to arm wrestle. Neither wants to quit and lose face in front of his wife or girlfriend, respectively. The women cannot hear the men talk but are in the room, watching.)

1. Chandler: God, I'm exhausted.
2. Ross: Look this is starting to look really bad for me. Okay? Mona, Mona's standing right over there. (Looks behind him.) Oh God, she's talking to Joey! You gotta let me win!
3. Chandler: No way! If anything you've gotta let me win! My wife thinks I'm a wimp!
4. Ross: Hey, at least you have a wife! I-I keep getting divorces and knocking people up! And I'm dressed as doody.
5. Chandler: You're Spudnik.
6. Ross: Come on, who are we kidding? I'm doody. Please? She's watching.
7. Chandler: Fine. (He lets Ross win.) Oh no!
8. Ross: (celebrating) Oh yeah!
9. Mona: (clapping) Yay! My hero!
   (Later Scene. Monica and Chandler's, Chandler and Monica are standing in the kitchen.)
10. Monica: Look, I wanted to tell I'm – I'm sorry you lost.
11. Chandler: Listen, I've got a secret for you. I let him win.
12. Monica: (laughs) Is that a secret or a lie.
13. Chandler: No, I let him win – Ross!
    (Ross approaches.)
14. Ross: Yeah?
15. Chandler: Would you tell her I let you win please?

16. Ross: (with exaggeration indicating irony) Oh. Yeah. Uh Chandler let me win. No, Chandler's really strong. Oh my arm is so sore. Oh nurse! (He waddles over to Mona, dressed up as a nurse.)
17. Chandler: I am strong! I'll show you! (He sits down at the table.)
18. Monica: Chandler please!

Season 8, Episode 6

Based on the dyadic interaction between Ross and Chandler (1–8), the viewer learns that neither feels like continuing to wrestle but both want to impress their partners, who are in sight but are non-participants in the two men's communicative verbal exchange. The two interlocutors thus pretend that they are genuinely trying to win, thus deceiving the two women. Besides finding this pretence humorous, the viewer derives pleasure from the contest of self-deprecating remarks (3–4), whereby the two interlocutors aim to coax each other into giving in. Eventually, one of the non-participants, Mona, is led to believe in her partner's genuine victory (7–8), which the recipient knows to be untrue. Humour in this scene is then facilitated by the recipient's bird's eye view on the current participatory status of the four characters, notably the two women's non-participation and their resultant ignorance (see Section 3.4 below), as well as the deception occurring at the end of the interaction when the two non-participants have joined in.

In the second conversation between Monica and Chandler (10–13), to which Ross is also invited (13, 15), Chandler attempts to deceive Monica (13, 16). Even if Chandler's utterance (13) is not technically a lie, given that he earlier gave up voluntarily, it is meant to convince her that he had the strength to struggle further, which he expects to be confirmed by Ross, based on the assumption of masculine solidarity. The latter, however, puts paid to Chandler's plan by producing an ostensibly ironic utterance based on overt exaggeration (16), which disparages Chandler and falsely implies his own genuine victory. The addressee of the utterance (Monica) perceives the irony underlying the overtly overdone confirmation, as do the recipients and the third party, i.e. Chandler, both of whom also see its mendacity. However, Monica's response (18) indicates that she has taken the false implicature as the truth, assuming that Ross won hands down. The recipients' privileged perspective affords humour emerging from their appreciation of all these complex communicative processes centred on deception and lying to the female hearers, hitherto the non-participants.

As this example bears out, another advantage recipients enjoy is their access to all parallel exchanges and awareness of all participants', as well as non-participants', presence, irrespective of each character's purview.

3.4 Recipients' participation in simultaneous interactions

Recipients' broader perspective may also be consequent upon their participation in simultaneous conversations, most often held by distinct groups of interlocutors, although sometimes one character may engage in more than one interaction simultaneously, or rather, alternately (see Example 13). Viewers have in their purview distinct participation groups interacting in different locations, or interactions which are dependent on one another. Two (or more) contemporaneous interactions are partitioned into chunks and presented to the viewer consecutively. In the case of many chunks, recipients alternate between the interactions a few times[1]. Consequently, the viewer may partake in full interactions or take cognisance only of chosen snatches of conversations, as designed by the collective sender.

(8) (Waiting for a visiting professor, Ross has been talking to Monica and Chandler in Central Perk. A very attractive woman by the name of Charlie appears. Ross rushes to her, leaving Monica and Chandler on the couch, a few metres away from where he greets Charlie.)

1. Ross: Hi, hi, I'm Ross Geller.
2. Charlie: Oh, hi. I'm professor Wealer.
3. Ross: Oh, oh, that's, that's, that's nice.
4. Charlie: It's a... It's good to meet you! Thank you so much for taking the time out to show me around.
5. Ross: Oh, no, it's no big deal, I mean, if I weren't doing this I'd just, you know, be at the gym working out.
6. Monica: (to Chandler) Is he gonna introduce us?
7. Chandler: (to Monica) No, I think we're just blurry shapes to him now.
8. Charlie: And, by the way, I really enjoyed your paper on the connection between geographic isolation and rapid mutagenesis.
9. Ross: Oh, ha, I wrote that in one minute.
10. Monica: (to Chandler) Twenty bucks says they're married within the month.
11. Ross: (hitting Monica with his suitcase) (to Charlie) We should probably get going, you know, we got a lot of ground to cover.

Season 9, Episode 20

On seeing an attractive female researcher, Ross opens an interchange with her, having cut short his conversation with two friends and left them, thereby assigning the role of bystanders to them. The two interlocutors alternate between the roles of the speaker and the addressee as if no other parties were present (1–5). After this snatch of conversation is presented, Ross and Charlie's interaction proceeds but recedes to the background, while the focus is on the bystanders, now the other pair of conversationalists, who address each other (6, 7). The two interactions running parallel further interweave,

1. A similar strategy is employed in the juxtaposition of incompatible accounts of "what really happened" provided by different speakers, or intertwining characters' different perspectives on one event, whether consecutively or alternately. In either case, these ploys are conducive to humorous incongruities thanks to disparities in the recounted scenarios (cf. "Coupling" season 1).

with Ross and Charlie conversing heedless of anybody present (8, 9, 11), and Monica and Chandler talking about the two (10). The recipients' position, as planned by the collective sender, grants them access to chosen utterances consecutively, rather than simultaneously (which would lead to overlapping, and hence incomprehensible, utterances), so that they can arrive at all the meanings and appreciate the humour arising from one dyad's neglecting the other.

Rather than act as bystanders to interlocutors' conversation, participants may also be eavesdroppers. As the next example indicates, interactions may thus run parallel, with one participation group being oblivious to the other. The recipient, however, gains insight into both interactions alternately.

(9) (In the living room, Rachel and Ross are discussing Ross's unfaithfulness. When the two had split up, Ross had a sexual intercourse with a stranger. The remaining four friends are in Monica's bedroom, eavesdropping.)

(The living room)
1. Rachel: Was she good?
(Monica's bedroom)
2. Joey: Don't answer that.
(The living room)
3. Rachel: Come on Ross! You said you wanted to talk about it, let's talk about it!! How was she?
4. Ross: She was...
(Monica's bedroom)
5. Joey: Awful! Horrible!
6. Chandler: She was not good. Not good.
7. Joey: She was nothing compared to you.
(The living room)
8. Ross: She, she was different.
(Monica's bedroom)
9. Joey: Ewwwww!
10. Chandler: Uh-oh.

Season 3, Episode 16

In this scene, thanks to fast location shifts designed by the collective sender, the viewer witnesses an interaction between the two interlocutors (1, 3, 4, 8) and their eavesdroppers, two of whom also assume the speaking role and comment upon the dyadic talk they listen in on from a different room (2, 5–7, 9, 10). From the viewer's point of view, the interaction entails six participants, four of whom are not ratified from Rachel and Ross's perspective. The humour here stems primarily from the turns produced by the speakers, who are alternatingly hearers engaged in eavesdropping on the dyadic interaction. These turns act as suggestions (2, 5–7) or evaluative remarks (9, 10) directed to the addressee who cannot hear them. It should be noted that the strategy of entwining the role of the eavesdroppers who also assume the speaking role is a skilful strategy of alleviating tension of a dialogue on a grave topic, which does not belong in, or at least is not typical of, humorous sitcom discourse, yet is necessary for the development of the plot.

3.5 Recipients' recognition of overhearers

As Example (9) demonstrated, the viewer may derive pleasure from interactions entailing eavesdroppers, of whose presence (some of) the ratified interlocutors are not cognisant. On the whole, overhearers, both bystanders and eavesdroppers, occurring in film discourse are peculiar in the sense that the viewer is usually conscious of their presence and can appreciate its ramifications. Granted the frequency of its occurrence, the viewer's recognition of overhearers should be distinguished as a separate strategy employed in sitcoms.

(10) (Monica, Chandler and Joey are eating breakfast at Monica and Chandler's. Joey is intent on not meeting Rachel.)

1. Joey: (hearing Rachel and jumping up with his plate) Oh God! That's Rachel!
2. Monica: Joey, you have to talk to her!
3. Joey: No-no, I can't! I can't! Not after the other night, it's just it's...too weird, okay? Don't tell her I'm here!
   (Turns to run to the bathroom and his bagel falls off the plate onto the floor.) Don't eat that! (Runs to the bathroom as Rachel enters.)
4. Rachel: Hey!
5. Chandler: Hey!
6. Monica: Hey Rachel!
7. Rachel: Is Joey here?
8. Chandler: I don't see him. (To Monica) Do you see him?
9. Monica: I don't see him. Hey! Maybe he's in the sugar bowl! (Opens the sugar bowl) Joey? Nope! (Closes the sugar bowl and they both laugh.)
10. Rachel: Well, at least you make each other laugh.

Season 8, Episode 17

Having terminated his talk with the other two conversationalists and hidden in the bathroom (3), Joey can (most likely) overhear the interaction between the three interlocutors (2–10). Joey's presence, overt to two and covert to one of them, is the springboard for the humour in the conversation. Oblivious to the presence of anybody else but her two conversationalists, Rachel must perceive the latter's behaviour as most uncanny. The couple, on the other hand, behave strangely (which is the collective sender's means of fostering a humorous effect for the recipient's benefit) owing to the presence of the bystander, which is not to be recognised by Rachel. They address each other (8, 9) and one of them addresses also the allegedly absent party (9), who is actually the bystander from their perspective. From Rachel's point of view, which the recipient can take into account, Joey comes over as an eavesdropper. Interestingly enough, Monica and Chandler's inept concealment and disguisement are not meant to disadvantage the bystander, but the ratified participant, whom they wish to deceive. Surprisingly, despite their phoney performance, they appear to succeed, for Rachel perceives it as being orientated to humour, which she does not find funny, yet does not suspect the presence of an overhearer.

The next example shows another way of capitalising on the eavesdropper's role in the sitcom.

(11) (Joey is teaching Ross how to flirt. They engage in a man – woman role play.)
1. Joey: Well if you can't talk dirty to me, how're you going to talk dirty to her? Now tell me you want to caress my butt!
2. Ross: OK, turn around. (Joey looks taken aback.) I just don't want you staring at me when I'm doing this.
3. Joey: (turning around) Alright, alright. I'm around. Go ahead.
4. Ross: Ahem... I want.... OK, I want to... feel your... hot, soft skin with my lips.
5. Joey: There you go! Keep going. Keep going!
6. Ross: I, er...
(At this point, Chandler walks into the living room from his bedroom. Ross and Joey both have their backs to him, so they do not notice him. Chandler watches quietly.)
7. Ross: I want to take my tongue... and...
8. Ross: ....and....
9. Joey: Say it... say it!
10. Ross: ...run it all over your body until you're... trembling with... with...
(Chandler leans back against the wall and Ross and Joey hear him. Ross and Joey both notice at the same time. They slowly stop, and then very slowly turn around to see Chandler staring at them.)
11. Chandler: (smiling)....with??
Season 1, Episode 15

Witnessing the sexually loaded role play (1–6), the recipient may initially perceive its humour based on the awkwardness Ross seems to be experiencing. The humorous potential of the conversation is boosted by the eavesdropper's arrival. This is because the recipient realises that Chandler has no knowledge of the two interlocutors' underlying motivation. Thus, conceiving of the preposterousness of the situation from Chandler's viewpoint, the recipient takes even more pleasure in the scene. Once the eavesdropper accidentally discloses his presence, yet another humorous stimulus emerges, admittedly because the viewer takes heed of the feeling of humiliation nurtured by the two participants in the role play.

3.6 Attitude of concealment or disguisement towards recipients

Sometimes meanings are kept covert from recipients, or information provided invites them to make misguided inferences. In such cases, the underpinning goal on the collective sender's part may be springing a humorous surprise on viewers.

One of the strategies of achieving this is keeping the recipient unaware of a participant in an interaction.

(12) (For two seconds, the camera shows Rachel and Ross sitting close to each other and Joey sitting in an armchair a few metres away, preoccupied with something. Then the camera focuses on Rachel and Ross conversing about relationships.)

1. Rachel: I mean, do you think there are people who go through life never having that kind of...
2. Ross: Probably. But you know, I'll tell you something. Passion is way overrated.
3. Rachel: Yeah right.
4. Ross: It is. Eventually, it kind of... burns out. But hopefully, what you're left with is trust, and security, and... well, in the case of my ex-wife, lesbianism. So, you know, for all of those people who miss out on that passion... thing, there's all that other good stuff.
5. Rachel: (sigh) OK.
6. Ross: But, um... I don't think that's going to be you.
7. Rachel: You don't.
8. Ross: Uh-uh. See, I see.... big passion in your future.
9. Rachel: Really?
10. Ross: Mmmm.
11. Rachel: You do?
12. Ross: I do.
13. Rachel: Oh Ross, you're so great.
    (Rachel gets up, playfully rubs his head, and leaves. Ross gets up, pleased with himself.)
14. Joey: It's never gonna happen.

Season 1, Episode 7

Paying careful attention at the beginning of the scene, recipients may notice three individuals present in the room. However, thanks to the camera work and the focus on only two conversationalists, recipients most likely forget about the bystander or treat him as a non-participant, who does not listen to the ongoing conversation. In other words, as this dyadic interaction develops (1–13), recipients have no reason to believe that Joey is another participant, until, at the very end of the scene, he marks his presence by assuming the speaking role and indirectly admits to having listened to the two conversationalists (14). It is at this stage that viewers realise that the two interlocutors must have been cognisant of the bystander, assuming the attitude of indifference to him. While the whole dialogue between Rachel and Ross is non-humorous, this final disparaging comment addressed to Ross acts as a humorous punchline, not only because of its bluntness but also because it catches viewers by surprise, shedding new light on the preceding part of the interaction, which hitherto will have appeared to be private. Viewers may then find themselves having been led up the garden path.

Concealment need not be combined with deceiving the viewer, who may simply not be privy to the speaker's utterance. Whilst the import of speakers' utterances in telephone conversations is frequently available to the viewer (thanks to shifts in location, audibility of the voice on the other "invisible" end, or skilful construction of one interlocutor's turns so that it brings out the meanings of inaudible utterances of the other speaker), speakers' utterances may initially be kept secret for the sake of a humorous surprise.

(13) (Joey has got a part in a movie. He's sitting with Monica and Phoebe in Central Perk.)

1. Joey: Oh, it's this big budget period movie about these three Italian brothers who come to... (Joey's cell phone rings.)
2. Estelle: (Shown in her office, talking on the phone) Joey! It's Estelle! I just talked to the casting people; they loved you!
3. Joey: (To Monica and Phoebe, keeping the phone to his chest) They loved me!
4. Estelle: Yeah, they wanna see you again tomorrow.
5. Joey: (On the phone) Oh my God!
6. Estelle: There's just one thing. Do you have a problem with full frontal nudity?
7. Joey: (On the phone) Are you kidding me? I never rent a movie without it! (Listens) Oh. (Listens) Uh, okay uh let me call you back. (He hangs up.)
8. Phoebe: What's the matter?
9. Joey: They want me to be totally naked in the movie!

Season 7, Episode 1

Joey participates in two interactions in the scene, by referring to his two addressees present in the room (1, 3, 9), and by talking on the phone (5, 7). It is noteworthy that when addressing his interlocutor on the phone, Joey treats the two women present in the room as bystanders, to whom he is indifferent. On the other hand, whenever he addresses them, his utterances are, most likely, inaudible to the interactant on the phone, who is thus a non-participant in these turns (1, 3, 9). The viewer has access to almost all the utterances, inclusive of those produced by Estelle (2, 4, 6), who is not in the cafeteria, but is shown as working in her office, thanks to location shifts. This facilitates the viewer's construal of meanings conveyed by the interlocutor on the other end of the line. Nonetheless, a few of Estelle's utterances are inaudible to the recipient, while only Joey's reactions are presented (7) so as to guarantee that a humorous effect should arise when he relays the news to the two bystanders to his telephone conversation (9). Although the recipient can gather the general import of Estelle's utterance, on the strength of her earlier turn (6), Joey's revelation, together with his indignation, gives rise to a humorous surprise.

3.7 Speakers' peculiar assigning of hearer roles

Interactional positioning of interlocutors in fictional discourse may be used for humorous purposes acknowledged by recipients, which brings to focus their privileged status. Sitcom humour may then be associated with characters' peculiar assignment of hearer roles. One case discussed earlier (Example 2) displays the speaker's address to an inanimate object, while another (Example 8) exhibits the speaker's negligence of bystanders, who have earlier been his interlocutors.

Additionally, sitcom humour frequently operates on ratified participants' being treated as if they were bystanders or non-participants. A common humorous phenomenon is genuinely disparaging, frequently witty, humour which speakers produce as if they are unconcerned with the denigrated hearer's feelings (Dynel 2010a).

(14) (All friends are present at Monica and Chandler's, together with Jill, Rachel's sister.)

1. Rachel: Oh yeah, sorry. Wait honey, so what did you do that made dad cut you off?
2. Jill: Okay, I bought a boat.
3. Monica: You bought a boat?
4. Jill: Yeah but it wasn't for me, it was for a friend.
5. Chandler (to Monica): Boy did we make friends with the wrong sister!
6. Rachel glares at him.

Season 6, Episode 13

Listening to the conversation held by Rachel and her sister (1–4), Monica and Chandler perform the role of bystanders. When Chandler assumes the speaking role and addresses his utterance to Monica (5), he is aware that it will be audible to the other two parties present, recognising them as potential bystanders to his utterance and teasing one of them. Admittedly, he may actually want them to listen, ratifying them as the collective third party, on the understanding that his teasing comment, whether or not meant to be genuinely hurtful, may be regarded as an offensive jibe. Irrespective of Chandler's intentions, Rachel's non-verbal response (6) appears to indicate that she does not interpret the utterance as being playful at all. All this promotes a humorous effect for the recipient, who may take pleasure not only in Chandler's comment as such but also in Rachel's discontent.

The second example testifies to humour pivoted on turn-taking strategies, specifically frequent changes of address.

(15) (Ross and Mona, his new girlfriend, are sitting on the couch in Ross's apartment. Dr Green, Rachel's father, bursts in, having learnt his daughter is pregnant with Ross's child.)

1. Dr. Green: You think you can knock up my daughter and then not marry her?! I'm gonna kill you!!
2. Ross: You know this is actually not a great time for me.
3. Dr. Green: So? Come on! Explain yourself Geller! First you get my Rachel pregnant!
4. Mona: You got Rachel pregnant?!
5. Ross: Who did?!
6. Dr. Green: You did!
7. Ross: Yes. Yes, yes I did. (To Mona) But-but it was, it was just a one night thing. It meant nothing.
8. Dr. Green: Oh? Really? That's what my daughter means to you? Nothing?
9. Ross: No! No sir umm, she means a lot to me. I mean, I care—I-I love Rachel.
10. Mona: What?!
11. Ross: (to Mona) Oh but not that way. I mean...I mean I'm not in love with her. I love her like a, like a friend.
12. Dr. Green: Oh really? That's how you treat a friend? You get her in trouble and then refuse to marry her?
13. Ross: (to Dr. Green) Hey! I offered to marry her!
14. Mona: Wh...?
15. Ross: (To Mona) But I didn't want to.
16. Dr. Green: Well why not? So you can spend your time with this tramp?!
17. Mona: Tramp?!
18. Ross: I'm sorry. Dr. Green, Mona. Mona, Dr. Green.

Season 8, Episode 8

Humour in the interaction of the three participants revolves around the fact that assuming the speaking role, Ross (7, 9, 11, 13, 15) keeps alternating between two ratified hearers who change in their roles of addressees and third parties. In each of his utterances, Ross tries to mitigate the content of his preceding utterance which was directed primarily to the other addressee and which the neglected third party must have found unpalatable, as transpires on the basis of their responses (5, 10, 14 vs. 8, 12, 16). The punchline in the interaction comes with Ross's attempt to introduce the two interlocutors to each other, as though they had just met and had not participated in the conversation with him.

4. Summary and final comments

The paper championed a new classification of hearer categories typical of film discourse, contesting the existing proposals. Specifically, it was argued that film discourse operates on two levels, which necessitate a bifurcation of hearers into two major types, i.e. those at the inter-character level and film viewers. At the inter-character level, hearers display roles reminiscent of those recurrent in real-life conversations, whereas the viewer must be conceptualised as a separate category of a ratified participant, namely the recipient. The recipient is the primary listener to film discourse. The notion of recipient design conflates a number of discursive and cinematic strategies employed by the collective sender to facilitate the viewer's comprehension processes and appreciation of film discourse.

Based on examples from "Friends", it was shown that some sitcom humour available to the recipient may be heavily dependent on the participation framework operating at the inter-character level. Several participation-based strategies fostering humorous effects were distinguished on the strength of the data collected, namely: characters' self-talk and inner monologues; recipients' awareness of distinct interactions, either consecutive or simultaneous; recipients' recognition of overhearers (bystanders or eavesdroppers); attitudes of concealment and disguisement towards recipients; as well as peculiar assignment of hearer roles. The application of such (and other) participation-based strategies and the resulting emergence of humour testifies to the recipient's ratified status and extraordinary privileges guaranteed by the collective sender.

Even though characters do not direct their utterances to viewers, film discourse (utterances at the inter-character level) and sitcom humour reliant on it are devised by the collective sender for recipients' benefit. Alluding to the song by the Rembrandts, which opens each episode of "Friends", it may be stated that the characters and their humorous interactions are there for us, the viewers of the sitcom.

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“Losers, poltroons and nudniks” in Woody Allen’s *Mere Anarchy*

A linguistic approach to comic failure

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This article presents a pragmatic approach to humorous literature. Specifically, it focuses on the linguistic ways in which Woody Allen renders the broad theme of failure in his *Mere Anarchy* collection of short stories (2007), simultaneously engendering humour and providing amusement for his readers. The paper covers the following aspects: a summary of the thematic variations on failure in the short stories; a reflection about the character correlates around the central motif of the “loser” in the collection; a review of the concepts of linguistic humour and incongruity; and a textual analysis of the script oppositions underlying such stylistic devices as simile, understatement, and irony. The article thus aims to show that human failure and unhappiness can be successfully turned into humorous material and that Allen manages to blur the frontier between tragedy and comedy thanks to his linguistic expertise.

1. Introduction

Allen’s latest collection of short stories, *Mere Anarchy* (2007), is a keen reminder not only that human failure and disgrace can have comic potential, but also that laughter is often immune to compassion and moral correctness. The heroes in these frantic urban tales are quintessential losers who tell first-person stories of misadventure and disaster, in a successful combination of situational (“de re”) and linguistic (“de dicto”) humour. By experiencing a variety of negative emotions, ranging from humiliation to deceit, through frustration and loss, the protagonists illustrate the gap existing between attempt and achievement, or between dream and delusion, all the while making us laugh. Allen’s secret, it seems, lies in language, namely in the semantic and stylistic mechanisms that convey comic incongruity.

This article aims at analysing these mechanisms and at discussing how Allen’s language succeeds in communicating humour and in turning potentially tragic situations into comic ones. In order to achieve these goals, I will begin by discussing the themes of the stories, which are variations on failure from different perspectives and to different degrees, and then the characters, which are by extension, to use a phrase which Allen employs in one of the stories, "an array of losers of every description" (2007: 10). I will then cover the notions of comic incongruity and script opposition and examine a few illustrative cases in the texts under focus. Next, I will analyse the stylistic strategies which Allen uses to convey comic incongruity by focusing on simile, understatement and irony. At the same time, I will sketch a semantic analysis of the oppositions underlying these figures of speech.

It should be added that the present approach is pragmatics-oriented in that the notions of comic incongruity and script opposition, as put forth by I-R models and SSTH respectively (namely, the Incongruity-Resolution paradigm and Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour), are actually about communication of humour. In fact, resolving the discrepancy between incongruous textual elements in Allen's short stories, as in other comic literary works, involves working out the sender-recipient axis, with its intersection between the humorous intention on the part of the writer and the reader's capacity to decode it successfully. This author-reader interaction is, obviously, different from other types of humorous practice, like stand-up comedy or face-to-face conversational joking (which imply the co-presence of the two communicative parties), but it requires similar forms of cognitive achievement from the participants. Accordingly, this article tries to show that the study of humour in literature calls for a pragmatic methodology, lest the author-reader interface, albeit detached in terms of time and place, be overlooked.

2. Thematic variations on failure

The range of themes to be found in Allen's collection, varied as it is, is unmistakably failure-oriented. Most of them evolve around the systematically unfulfilled wish for money or, alternatively, the wish for success, fame and recognition. Never is there any wish, say, for love or interpersonal fulfilment. The desire that Allen portrays is, therefore, materialistic and selfish, which is the first step to making the readers distance themselves from the doomed fate of the characters. Within this frame, and despite the refreshing variety of plots and situations, some recurrent sub-themes can be traced.

A major sub-theme is taking and being second choice, which involves aspirant artists' unacknowledged "brilliance". Would-be writers, would-be actors, would-be stars – all of them proud of themselves but on the dole – are forced to compromise their self-proclaimed genius to make ends meet. A good example of this is "This Nib for Hire", a story about second-rate writing jobs in "novelisation", which means turning cinema blockbusters into cheap paperbacks. Along the same lines, "Glory Hallelujah, Sold" tells the tale of a "psalm scrivener" (Allen 2007: 75), that is, a writer of prayers for cash that gets into trouble when his prayers are not answered. Likewise, "Tandoori Ransom" is about a substitute actor with prima-donna dreams. It takes place in distant

India, where a film crew is shooting, and where the hero is mistakenly kidnapped for the star, ending up having his body "diagrammed on a chart" (Allen 2007: 21) by a roomful of frenzied fanatics.

Another sub-theme is the shallow dilemmas of the rich. Even though most of the stories picture people in need of a few extra dollars, some focus on well-off characters, who nevertheless also end up losing their pride and honour, for instance, or... their money. In "Nanny Dearest", Allen tells us the only-too-frequent story of a Park Avenue nanny who threatens to publish her employers' memoirs, in which she refers to her boss as a "witless boor wearing a toupee" and to his wife as a "portly ice queen with tapioca thighs" (Allen 2007: 59). Manhattan high society is also the topic of "The Rejection", a story about a couple who cannot get their three-year-old accepted into one of the best Upper-East-Side preschools, because in the tests he was "tentative with blocks". More dramatic still is the plot in "Attention Geniuses: Cash Only", where Dr Skeezix Feebleman, a shrink owning two Ferraris, dreams of the financial gains Dr Gachet's free treatment of Van Gogh must have earned him, and accepts to treat a lunatic composer in exchange for songs, eventually going bankrupt. Big money is also present in "Calisthenics, Poison Ivy, Final Cut" – an epistolary story about greed, or, about wanting too much and getting too little. It reproduces the initially polite but later ferocious letters exchanged between the parents of an adolescent, whose experimental movie is bought by Miramax, and the owners of the summer film camp where the movie was made, both of whom want to pocket the profit alone.

Conning and deceit are another lavish sub-theme in Allen's stories. The very first one, whose telling title is nothing but "To Err is Human – To Float Divine", is about a man who is tricked into taking a course in supernatural powers, ranging from levitation to translocation through omniscience, so as to foretell the lottery. Tricksters are also present in "How Deadly Your Taste Buds, My Sweet", which reports on auction bidding for a fake rare white truffle and the fix into which a ravishing blonde lures a private-eye. In "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Fragrant", a vain American is persuaded to visit a posh British tailor on Savile Road, specialising in high-tech/gadget suits, the problem being that they either set on fire or send their wearers ricocheting. The ultimate charlatan can be seen in "Sing, You Sacher Tortes", a story about a theatre manager specialising in colossal failures who succeeds in getting credulous acquaintances of his to foot the bill. But it is perhaps in "On a Bad Day You Can See Forever" that lying and cheating are best rendered. It is about getting a house redone while living in it – with the daily company of the workers, whose lesser fake excuse for constant delays is getting dengue fever in Machu Picchu.

No matter how desperate the characters' situations may become, the important point to bear in mind is that the stories never have a truly bad ending. Nobody dies, for a start, or gets into really serious trouble. Instead, characters somehow manage to "save their neck", as the phrase goes, in extremis. True enough, they always fail whatever their intention/dream/purpose initially was, but their failure is by no means tragic. And the fact that most stories are first-person narratives also confirms that they are tales of survival, which *is* after all a form of success. But, as we shall see, it is language that signals the humorous mode, which accordingly leads to a comic resolution.

3. The loser type and other character correlates

The figure of the loser, a person who is regularly unsuccessful, is the quintessential character in Allen's fictional world. His stories are peopled mostly by men (female characters are usually cast in supporting roles) struggling to be someone in a frantic, competitive, ruthless New York, while systematically confronting all sorts of threats, risks and pressures. Around these comically doomed protagonists whirls a range of other characters, equally in distress. There is a passage in the first story of Allen's collection where he describes the people gathering at the Sublime Ascension Centre, a supernatural power facility run by a decadent clairvoyant named Galaxie Sunstroke, in a way that might well apply to the gallery of characters in the stories themselves.

(1) As far as I could discern, the compound was awash with losers of every description: poltroons and nudniks, actresses who guided their each move by the planets, the overweight, a man who had been involved in some kind of taxidermy scandal, a midget in denial. (Allen 2007: 10)

The explicit reference to "losers" is indeed telling as to the human material Allen caricatures, but the diversity of losers, as well as the degree of failure, differs considerably from story to story. There are working-class and uneducated losers, like a night watchman at a wax museum and a private detective, and there are middle-class, college educated ones, like Dr Feebleman, the psychiatrist who makes the mistake of accepting original songs of dubious quality as therapy payment (Allen 2007: 117), and Benno Duckworth, a former poetry editor of a *Dry Heaves: A Journal of Opinion* and present author of a volume on anapestic dimeter (Allen 2007: 31). They can be poor, like the wannabe actor taking a humiliating job as lighting double to Harvey Afflatus, and aspirant writers who go around on the verge of starvation, like Flanders Mealworm (Allen 2007:35). But they can also be wealthy, like Winston Snell and Monroe B Varnishke, Manhattan upper-class big shots, or Harvey Bidnick, friend to Dr Diverticulinsky, the Birdwings and the Offals (Allen 2007: 59). The characters' psychological portrait also varies a great deal. Some are gullible low-profile citizens dreaming about the numbers of New York State Lottery, whereas others are arrogant and pretentious pseudo-intellectuals and artists who compare themselves to Dostoyevsky (Allen 2007: 35), or think they have been "graced by the gods with (…) vivid and abundant gifts for the arts" (Allen 2007: 13).

Despite their variety, all the characters share the characteristic of falling victim to some trickster or another, or just to the circumstances of fate. Within the sham scheme format, examples of charlatans are legion. For instance, Mr Binky Peplum, a self-proclaimed "postmodern" tailor (Allen 2007: 31), tries to sell fabrics that reject odours, garments that are mood elevators and suits that recharge the customer's cellular phones, only to send them to intensive care. E Coli Biggs, a film producer who stays incognito in luxury hotels with secretaries-cum-masseuses clad in garter belts, does justice to his bacterial name: he is the ultimate parasite, a conman, escaping at the last minute from whatever imbroglio he concocts under yet another alias (Allen 2007: 43). Another perfect swindler is Max Arbogast, a building contractor whose deadlines "keep receding like a six-pack in the desert" and whose alibis "rival *The Arabian Nights*" (Allen 2007: 113). One final example of a trickster is Wolf Silverglide, a music producer resembling "a ferret in gabardine" (Allen 2007: 124), who publishes the songs written by a psychiatric patient as a form of payment to his shrink, Dr Feebleman. The affair ends disgracefully:

(2) Silverglide folded his extravaganza like a deck chair and blew town photon-fast, leaving me to deal with the avalanche of plagiary suits that poured in. (Allen 2007: 124)

There are also outright criminals in Allen's gallery, like murderers and child abusers, as is the case of Veerappan, the leader of an Indian gang, a "legendary brigand, quick to slaughter" (Allen 2007: 19), and a nanny – a "Swedish woman resembling Stanley Ketchel" – who was caught bouncing her employers' son "horizontally across her shoulders in what wrestlers call the Argentine backbreaker" (Allen 2007: 57). But most other secondary characters are just inoffensive liars, like Reg Millipede, who claims to be "vice-president in charge of customer relations for one of the biggest charnel houses on the Isle of Wight" (Allen 2007: 26), or Galaxie Sunstroke, the psychic, who, "oddly unomniscient for a creature of her reputed majesty", asks the hero what he does for a living (Allen 2007: 9).

Whatever the relationships these secondary characters establish with the protagonists in the stories, the fact is that the latter fall victim to the former's manipulation and dishonesty, and also to their own ingenuity, ambition or bad luck. As a result, every plan, strategy, or scheme they devise systematically fails. A good sum-up of this dynamic of failure is the passage where a group of would-be actors tries to help a colleague double, kidnapped for mistake in India.

(3) When news of my plight appeared as a filler in the rear pages of *Backstage*, a group of politically active extras deemed it an outrage and swore to hold a midnight vigil but could not jimmy loose sufficient capital to purchase the required candles. (Allen 2007: 21)

So far, the plots and the characters I have reviewed illustrate a type of humour that is usually called "situational". Indeed, some of the situations just described might well be played, say, in silent films, or in mime routines, exactly because they are non-linguistic, or, to use Cicero's (1948) terminology, "de re". The house renovation sequence, for instance, with the owners taking boiling showers that make them look like lobsters, could well be pantomimed.

But "linguistic", or "de dicto", humour is also a lavish source of comicality in Allen's collection. What is more, I claim that it is in language that the potentially tragic material of the plots is comically harboured. The characters' names, for one thing, are safe comic hints, and so is the assortment of figures of speech which are used to convey comic incongruity. But it is the principle of semantic opposition, detectable in lexical items or extended lexical sequences, that pervades through *Mere Anarchy*, giving it an unmistakably humorous flavour. Next I offer a few general remarks on the incongruous nature of linguistic humour.

4. Linguistic humour and incongruity

As most theories of linguistic humour acknowledge, *incongruity* is the key to comic effect. In other words, a discrepancy between two meanings which overlap, and corresponding surprise, is what establishes the humorous nature of an utterance. Before I analyse the expression of this principle in Allen's collection, a brief historical preamble is called for.

The relationship between laughter (a poor predecessor of the term "humour", whose lexical appearance dates only from the 18th century, cf. Escarpit 1960:3), incongruity and surprise was, not surprisingly, first remarked by Aristotle (1959) in *Rhetoric* (3.11), where he states:

> "Novelties of expression" arise when there is an element of surprise, and (...) the thing turns out contrary to what we were expecting, like the jokes found in comic writers, produced by deceptive alterations in words, and by unexpected words in verse, where the listener anticipates one thing and hears another.

Forerunners of the incongruity theory of humour can also be found in Latin Antiquity, with Cicero (1948) and Quintilian (2006), again from the "laughter" point of view (on the need for a theoretical distinction between the terms "laughter" and "humour", see e.g. Levine 1969: 1, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1974: 14, Lewis 1989: 8). The former author claims that "when we are expecting to hear a particular phrase, and something different is uttered (...) our own mistake even makes us laugh ourselves (*De Oratore*, II. lxiii.255). And the latter asserts in *Institutio Oratoria*: "The adaptation to one thing of a circumstance which usually applies to something else [is] a type of jest which we may regard as being an ingenious form of fiction" (cf. VI-iii, 61).

The element of surprise is also present in some interesting writings by Renaissance authors. In De Ridiculis (1550), Madius echoes Cicero's distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* humour, establishing surprise (*admiratio*) as one of comedy's driving forces (Attardo 1994). Along similar lines, Giangiorgio Trissino (1562) defends, in Aristotle's vein, that the comic effect derives from the audience's frustrated expectations.

In the 18th century, two authors rescue the theory of incongruity from oblivion. In 1776, James Beattie elaborates on the notion of humorous incongruity as follows:

"Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage." And Kant states, "The joke must always contain something that may deceive" (1790: 238). Schopenhauer (1818: 59) takes up the idea, claiming that laughter "results from the suddenly perceived incongruity between a concept and the real objects."

In the 20th century, three important names help to establish the incongruity theory of humour. The first is Bergson (1978 [1900]: 74), who defines the humorous situation as follows: "A situation is always comic whenever it simultaneously belongs to two absolutely independent series of events that hide two different sets of meanings." Freud (1905: 365) introduces an important distinction between funniness and strangeness: "The comic phenomenon results from contrasting representations, yes, but only insofar as they give rise to a comic effect and not to a strange one." And Koestler (1964) propounds what is known as "bisociation theory", according to which humour involves a semantic displacement, be it from a metaphorical to a literal dimension (cf. 1964: 36), or from a current, "dominant", signification to a previously neglected aspect of the whole (1964: 91). Whatever the case, Koestler (1964: 93) claims, humour is to be achieved through the "ability to break away from the stereotyped routines of thought", which often takes the shape of a "feat of mental acrobatics".

Yet another influential approach to incongruity in humour is Suls's (1972, 1983), whose "incongruity resolution" model manages to overthrow Koestler's (1964) hitherto dominant notion of bisociation (on a discussion of Suls's impact, see Dynel 2009). Instead of regarding incongruity as merely an oscillation between two juxtaposed matrices, Suls defends that there must be a resolution, or problem-solving, process whereby one signification is substituted for another. In other words, there must be a sudden shift, or "an abrupt transfer of the train of thought from one matrix to another governed by a different logic or rule" (Suls 1972: 95, Dynel 2009: 61). This two-stage framework, identifying the incongruity plus solving it, allows for the incongruity to become "congruous", so to speak, and to become meaningful within the realm of the joke.

No matter how decisive these contributions may have been to the comprehension of the humorous phenomenon, the explanation of its strictly linguistic nature was to be supplied by Raskin, who in 1985 put forth what quickly became an established semantic theory of humour. Up till then, only scattered and unsystematic contributions to the understanding of verbal humour were available. According to Raskin, two premises are necessary and sufficient for humour to occur in a given text: a) there have to be two opposing scripts; and b) the scripts have to overlap, partially or completely. By *script* he means "a large chunk of information surrounding a word or evoked by it" (Raskin 1985: 81). The impact which Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) has had on the analysis of linguistic humour is so great that ever since only small additions have proven effective (e.g. Attardo and Raskin 1991), while the bulk of the original theory has remained valid and operative.

Strange though it may sound, Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) openly denies affiliation with incongruity-based models, on the grounds that not all script oppositions can be mechanically classified as incongruities (though simple negation and contradiction admittedly can), and that the SSTH and the GTVH make no use of arousal-resolution elements, as most incongruity-based approaches do. Furthermore, the GTVH is claimed to gain nothing from being equated with the incongruity paradigm, because it is "much better defined, developed, and explicated than a regular incongruity-based theory" (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 331; on a discussion, see Dynel 2009). However, in my view, the SSTH is by and large incongruity-informed, as it propounds an opposition between two (partially or completely) overlapping scripts which is unexpected and causes surprise and perplexity. Now, this is the way incongruities work, whether or not they are resolved. Therefore, I suggest we take the following discussion of Allen's script oppositions in light of the incongruity paradigm, which allows us to identify the concomitance of contrastive frames of reference.

The linguistic humour in Allen's collection is indeed, to a great extent, based on lexically evoked semantic oppositions which overlap and cause surprise. A look at the stories will unveil a large number of examples illustrating this strategy, a sample of which is given next.

5. Script oppositions in *Mere Anarchy*

As they constitute the very essence of comicality, occurrences of script oppositions are so numerous in Allen's collection that we cannot but cover a small number. All of them can be read, in lexical terms, as instances of *antonymy*, i.e., as an inherently incompatible binary contrast, which implies that "male", for instance, entails "not female" (cf. Murphy 2003). Let it be noted, however, that some cases are "local antonyms", which, as Raskin puts it, are "two linguistic entities whose meanings are opposite only within a particular discourse and solely for the purposes of this discourse" (Raskin 1985:108). In stylistic terms, on the other hand, the oppositions can be read as instances of *antithesis*, a rhetorical device which I regard as the quintessential incongruity operator. In other words, it is as if antithesis were the leading figure in a stylistic approach to a comic literary text, absorbing or merging into all the others. In the next section, we shall see that similes, understatements and ironies also exhibit an underlying antithetical architecture.

An interesting script opposition emerges in the introductory story, when the hero is going through a "tsunami of junk mail" and reads ads regarding psychic advice of various sorts:

(4) Naturally, at the end of all these trips to the centre of the soul, a small emolument to cover stamps and any other expenses the guru may have incurred in another life is in order. (Allen 2007: 4)

The antithesis is here established between a reference to the soul and another to petty earthly worries. If we were to apply script theory to this extract, we would have two opposing scripts that overlap, namely SPIRIT VS. MATTER. The same semantic opposition between the spiritual and the material and mundane can be found further on in the same story, when Max Endorphine is telling the hero all about his success in Vegas ever since he acquired supernatural powers:

(5) If I'm ever unsure about a nag or whether to hit or stick at blackjack, there's this tiny consortium of angels I tap into. I mean, just 'cause someone's got wings and is made of ectoplasm don't mean they can't handicap. (Allen 2007: 8)

The soul is also under focus in another story, where an unemployed writer, Hamish Specter, takes a job as a writer of prayers, after reading an ad that specified "No atheists please". He reflects:

(6) Skeptic that I was as an adolescent, I had recently come to believe in a Supreme Being after thumbing through a Victoria's Secret catalogue. (Allen 2007: 74)

The script opposition in this extract is between SOUL and BODY or, more drastically, between SACRED and PROFANE, and it is the incongruity of the combination that produces humour. When Specter meets Moe Bottomfeeder, the Prayer Jockey, the following dialogue takes place:

(7) – "What can I do for you?"
– "I saw your ad", I wheezed. "In *The Voice*. Right under the Vassar coeds who specialise in body rubs."
– "Right, right," Bottomfeeder said, licking his fingers. "So, you want to be a psalm scrivener... Any experience?"
– "I did do a TV pilot called *Nun For Me, Thanks*, about some devout sisters in a convent who build a neutron bomb." (Allen 2007: 75)

The passage reveals two antithetical situations: an advertisement for prayers being placed next to one for erotic massage; and pious nuns building a mass deadly weapon. In script analysis terms, there are two overlapping oppositions, respectively: SOUL vs. BODY (or SACRED VS. PROFANE) again in the first case, and GOOD VS. EVIL in the second.

The topic of finding neutral information published contiguously to more personal and private one is also explored in the passage where Flanders Mealworm, the writer on the dole, receives a call from E Coli Biggs. The exchange that follows places the IDENTITY script against the SCATOLOGY one, establishing an antithetical opposition between PUBLIC and PRIVATE:

(8) – "Where did you get my number?" I inquired. "It's unlisted."
– "From the Internet. It's there alongside the x-rays of your colonoscopy." (Allen 2007: 36)

Humorous script oppositions can be found where least expected, such as in secondary passages or in introductory links to the action moments. The following extract establishes an opposition between using a paper shredder and organising data alphabetically:

(9) As I was carefully filling the new postal arrivals alphabetically in the paper shredder...I noticed there was an unsolicited little journal (...) (Allen 2007: 3)

The incongruity in the extract obviously springs from the absurd alphabetical procedure used to get rid of junk mail, which one uses when storing information, and not when disposing of it (on the absurd, see e.g. Feinberg 1978, Wilson 1979, Dolitsky 1983, Purdie 1993). Script-wise, there is an overlapping opposition between, say, GARBAGE and STORAGE.

The antithesis between NIMBLENESS and CLUMSINESS, or between COMPETENCE and INEPTNESS, is present in the side-splitting story where the cinema double is abducted. The actual kidnapping moment, which is also a perfect illustration of the topic of failure, is rendered as follows:

(10) As the martial arts were part of my acting background, I suddenly snapped to the ground and uncoiled, sending forth a lightning-power kick, which fortunately for my abductors hit air and caused me to fall directly into the open trunk of a waiting Plymouth, where the door was promptly locked. (Allen 2007: 18)

(11) Using deep-breathing exercises I had mastered in acting class, I managed to retain my composure for at least eight seconds before emitting a medley of bloodcurdling bleats and hyperventilated into oblivion. (Allen 2007: 19)

Perhaps the best example of a humorous script opposition in Allen's collection is an existential one. In "Sing, You Sacher Tortes", Fabian Wunch, the perfect shyster, expresses a hilarious solution to the worst fear in a human being's LIFE: DEATH. The antithesis is blatant, and so is a parallel script opposition between TRIUMPH (explicitly phrased) and FAILURE (death's ultimate synonym). The passage takes place when Wunch, trying to convince the narrator to help him finance another of his Broadway flops, reports on the plot to be staged (an intricate and farfetched tale gathering all the major intellectual figures in Vienna at the *belle époque*), and says:

(12) "Freud unblocks Mahler so he can write again and as a result Mahler triumphs over his lifelong fear of death."
"How does Mahler triumph over his lifelong fear of death?" I asked.
"By dying. I figured it out – it's really the only way." (Allen 2007: 104)

6. Stylistic devices conveying comic incongruity

If we look at the generous array of rhetorical devices Allen uses in his collection, we will realise that they spring from semantic oppositions that can be handled in script theory terms. Indeed, the employment of figures of speech aims either at introducing a new script opposition and corresponding incongruity effect, or at reinforcing an existing opposition in a certain narrative passage. For want of space, we shall concentrate on three figures of speech only: simile, understatement and irony.

6.1 Simile

Similes are an abundant source of humour in Allen's "Mere Anarchy". Strictly speaking, they are words or phrases that establish a comparison using the connectives "as" or "like". But other syntactic formulations are also possible, such as the use of the verb "resemble" or the adjective "comparable". More often than not, similes in Allen's stories occur in combination with other devices, like antithesis or hyperbole. They lend themselves to a script opposition analysis, since the comparisons they set up can be read as contrasts. Indeed, as Ross (1998: 35) claims, similes can be classed as "apparent contradictions" and as a type of "semantic incongruity", insofar as the image they evoke "is bizarre or awkwardly incongruous".

The story about the shrink that goes bankrupt starts with a hilarious reference to jogging as a health risk and not as a health enhancer, combined with a historical simile, which sets an opposition between HEALTH and DISEASE:

(13) Jogging along Fifth Avenue last summer as part of a fitness program designed to reduce my life expectancy *to that of a nineteenth-century coal miner*, I paused at an outdoor café ... to renovate my flagging respiratory system with a chilled screwdriver. [Italics mine, henceforth] (Allen 2007: 117)

The next sentence boasts another simile, which alludes to one of the Disney films and establishes an incongruity between the ADROITNESS vs. CLUMSINESS scripts:

(14) Orange juice being well up on my prescribed regimen, I quaffed several rounds and upon rising managed to execute a series of corybantic figures, *not unlike the infant Bambi taking his first steps.* (Allen 2007: 117)

An obviously incongruous humorous simile is used in a physics-inspired little story, "Strung out", where an office clerk compares himself to Einstein, only to add a small correction:

(15) The big bang, black holes and the primordial soup turn up every Tuesday in the science section of the Times, and as a result my grasp of general relativity and quantum mechanics now equal Einstein's – Einstein Moomjy, that is, the rug seller. (Allen 2007: 127)

Obviously, the script opposition underlying the simile is between KNOWLEDGE and IGNORANCE, while there is another humorous contrast set between the important questions of the universe, which transcend the layman, and the limited and accessible reality of a section in a paper, let alone of rug selling.

The story about the fraudulent building contractor who leads the narrator and his wife to bankruptcy and madness has a range of humorous similes, one of which sets a script opposition between HONESTY and DISHONESTY:

(16) I discovered that a series of tax shelters structured to maximise my earnings had begun to strike the IRS as curiously *similar to those of Al Capone.* (Allen 2007: 123)

In the same passage, when the narrator gathers the courage to complain about the budget inflation, the contractor attributes the fault to him, in what can be regarded as a script opposition between COMPLAINT and ACCUSATION. The simile is combined with a hyperbole, insofar as the narrator implicitly compares his domestic cost overruns with nothing less than the German inflation of the 20's. In this case, the linguistic formulation of the simile is remote, since it lacks an explicit comparative particle, but it expresses a comparison, nonetheless.

(17) When I confronted Arbogast with my disenchantment over cost overruns *that were challenging the German inflation of the 1920s*, he laid it off to my "psychotic demand for change orders." (Allen 2007: 114)

Later that night, hearing a sound downstairs, the narrator gets out of bed and, stepping on his glasses, bolts face-first into an expensive porphyry dolphin Arbogast had bought. The slapstick passage, a universal laughter stimulant, contains yet another humorous simile, all the while setting a parallel opposition between DEXTERITY and CLUMSINESS. Also, it should be noted that the simile precedes a comparison which also reports on the effects of the unfortunate fall (i.e. the idea that it causes the protagonist to lose visual accuracy and almost faint). It should be added that the Arthur Rank logo features a man hitting a huge gong, whereas the Aurora Borealis stands for a massive vision of the stars in the sky, of which one supposedly gets to have a clear view when receiving a heavy blow:

(18) The blow caused my middle ear to ring *like the Arthur Rank logo* and rewarded me as well with an unimpeded view of the Aurora Borealis. (Allen 2007: 115)

The story closes under utter failure in the form of bankruptcy, owing not only to Arbogast's expenditure, but also to the building inspectors' safety violation charges, which the court sanctions. The extract contains a simile which signals the switch from the VICTIM to the OFFENDER scripts:

(19) I also have some dim recall of sitting before a judge who sat glowering *like an El Greco cardinal* as he mulched me to the tune of many zeroes. (Allen 2007: 115)

But the most exaggerated and farfetched similes in Allen's collection are perhaps to be found in the story about the theatrical production of *Fun de Siècle* (note the pun on "fin de siècle"). Here is a sample, taken from the beginning of the story, just as the narrator runs into that "peerless purveyor of schlock Fabian Wunch" (Allen 2007: 99). After each quote, next, I suggest an underlying script opposition.

(20) Bald, cheroot-sucking, and *as phlegmatic as the Wall of China*, Wunch is a producer of the old school... (Allen 2007: 99) [HUMAN VS. NON-HUMAN]

(21) Given the consistency and dimensions of his exaltation of flops, it has remained a puzzle *on a par with string theory* how he manages to raise money for each fresh theatrical holocaust. (Allen 2007: 99) [SCIENTIFIC VS. MUNDANE]

(22) Hence, when a beefy arm in a Sy Syms suit curled itself around my shoulder blades, (...) I could feel the wallet in my pocket instinctively clenching *like an endangered abalone*. (Allen 2007: 99) [ANIMATE VS. INANIMATE]

(23) "(...) I got an undiscovered genius mints hit songs *like the Japs roll off Toyotas.* Right now the kid walks dogs for a living (...)" (Allen 2007: 100) [ARTISTIC/CREATIVE VS. TECHNICAL/MECHANICAL]

6.2 Understatement

The stylistic device whereby events and circumstances are made to seem less important, impressive or serious than they really are is a plentiful one in Allen's writing. According to Nash (1985: 152), *understatement* is a form of sarcasm, notably the use of a "pro-code" which understates a certain claim. The notion captures humour which, unlike irony, does not contradict what is meant, but says it in a restrained, understated, way. For instance, "Tom is lazy" may be sarcastically put as "Tom does not believe in hard work" [pro-code]. Understatement is yet another strategy Allen employs to set overlapping semantic oppositions and thus establish comic incongruity.

The story about the cinema double's ransom begins with the hero taking a plane to India, in which the VIOLENT TURBULENCE script is understated (the phrase "light chop" hardly describes it) and followed by a hyperbolic simile:

(24) The trip was uneventful save for some "light chop", which caused the passengers to ricochet off the cabin wall like boiled atoms. (Allen 2007: 16)

During his long abduction predicament, the narrator never fails to trust his colleagues' efforts to rescue him, up until the following moment:

(25) After five days of no response, however, in which Veerappan's spies told him the writer had reworked the script and the film was now being pulled up stakes and relocated in Auckland, *I began to feel uneasy*. (Allen 2007: 21)

The adjective "uneasy" obviously understates the legitimate despair anyone would feel under such extreme circumstances, and it is humorous qua dislocated and insufficient. In script analysis, the opposition is between TERROR and UNEASINESS.

The story about the shrink who receives "sheet songs" (note yet another pun) in exchange for therapy has a few hilarious understatements, whose comicality lies in the fact that the narrator does not seem to notice that he made a very bad deal. For a few months, Dr Feebleman's "faith in [Pepkin's] genius abides undiminished" (Allen 2007: 120), and he receives "over a kilo of songs" – but no "suggestion of the green and crinkly" (Allen 2007: 122). At a certain point he finally concedes:

(26) That not a single music maven I visited could find a molecule of promise in a hot cabaret number like "Make with the Hormones" or the sublime ballad "Early Alzheimer's" has given me *fleeting intimations that Pepkin may not be the next Irving Berlin*. (Allen 2007: 122)

The blatant understatement puts forth a comic script opposition between EXCELLENCE and WORTHLESSNESS, which pervades through the story. Later on in the text, Feebleman finally manages to stage a few of Pepkin's songs, with the help of a fraudulent producer, Silverglide. Here is what follows:

(27) The show opened with *mixed* notices. *The Poultryman's Journal* enjoyed it, as did *Cigar Magazine*. The dailies, along with *Time* and *Newsweek*, were *more reserved*, forming a consensus best summed up by the critic who called it "a black hole of imbecility." (Allen 2007: 124)

Once again, Feebleman fails to report objectively on the critics' opinions, which are overwhelmingly negative, and instead he mentions two ridiculously anonymous publications to counterbalance them. The use of the adjective "mixed" instead of, say, "near-consensual", and "reserved" instead of "devastating" are two obvious signs of understatement.

A similar adjectival hitch is present in the story about the clerk with philosophical worries, who says:

(28) Because the concept of up and down is relative, the elevator I got went to the roof, where it was very *difficult* to hail a taxi. (Allen 2007: 128)

"Difficult" is hardly the adjective one would choose to describe such a situation, in which "impossible" or "unthinkable" or "farfetched" would be more adequate alternatives.

One last example of understatement is used in the first story, in which Galaxie Sunstroke, the psychic, asks the narrator what he does for a living. He answers:

(29) "Night watchman at a wax museum", I replied, "but it's not as fulfilling as it sounds." (Allen 2007: 9)

Obviously, saying that such a job "sounds fulfilling" is humorous because it is implausible. Actually, the understatement conceals a script opposition between FRUSTRATION and FULFILMENT, or an incongruity between BOREDOM VS. EXCITEMENT.

6.3 Irony

The debate around irony and its relation with humour is too intricate for us to tackle in this limited space (but see Ermida 2008). Suffice it to say that irony is a trope based on the employment of a "counter-code" (cf. Nash 1985: 152), as opposed to sarcasm or understatement, which are based on the use of a "pro-code", "a set of lexical forms that are blatantly equivalent to the 'maternal proposition' in terms of denotation" (Nash 1985: 152). In traditional rhetoric, irony also consists in saying the opposite of what the orator means. On the other hand, the pragmatic tradition established by Grice (1975) views irony as an infringement of the first maxim of quality which stipulates that the speaker should always tell the truth so as to obey the Cooperative Principle. By flouting the maxim, Grice adds, the speaker is conveying an implicature aimed at providing additional, non-literal, effects. Humorous communication typically illustrates this particular mechanism of maxim flouting and non-literality. In Allen's "Mere Anarchy" (like elsewhere in his work, cf. Ermida 2005), the use of irony can be read not only as a case of Gricean implicature, but also as yet another strategy to convey comic incongruity, and as such it deserves our attention here.

Let us again begin by looking at "Tandoori Ransom". The lighting double to Afflatus is told that there is no room for him with the film crew on the charter flight to India, the reason being that the leading lady made a last-minute decision to bring her rottweiler along. He reports on the situation by using an adverb and an adjective that are exactly the opposite of what one might expect to hear given the negative – or, rather, utterly unfair – circumstances. The incongruity of their use is therefore comic, while the corresponding irony is obvious. In script analysis terms, the irony sets an opposition between GOOD FORTUNE VS. MISFORTUNE, and FASCINATION VS. REPULSION:

(30) *Fortunately* there was room for me aboard a return flight carrying a convention of beggars, and though I couldn't parse a word of Urdu I was *fascinated* as they compared afflictions and examined one another's bowls. (Allen 2007: 16)

Further on in the same story, when the situation becomes critical (i.e. when the abductors find out their mistake and realise that the actor they kidnapped is not the "movie idol" they had in mind), Veerappan, the gang leader, insults the protagonist in a very significant way, saying that he is "the type that drives a cab or works at an answering service waiting for that one big break that never comes" (Allen 2007: 20). Besides the fact that nowhere else in the story is the definition for failure given in such eloquent tones, the typically American cultural references are absurd qua dislocated, and therefore comic. Script-wise, the opposition here is clearly between SUCCESS and FAILURE. The protagonist reacts in the following way:

(31) "Now, wait a minute", I *yelled*, despite eight inches of black masking tape across my mouth, but before I could *really warm up to my theme* I received a wallop in the sconce with a *huqqa*. I held my tongue as Veerappan segued into his peroration. All the crass bunglers were to be decapitated, he decreed *benevolently*. (Allen 2007: 20)

Several occurrences of irony enrich this passage. To begin with, "yell" is hardly the verb to use when the subject has eight inches if tape over his mouth. Secondly, such a start is actually a non-start, a point from which no "warming up to the theme" is possible, since the theme was never really introduced. Finally, decreeing decapitation is not a benevolent attitude at all. In short, what is meant is the exact opposite of what is said.

The Broadway producer story also contains interesting occurrences of irony. The following passage, a particularly rich one, since it also exhibits two amusing similes and a hyperbole, has a crucial ironical adjective that renders the situation all the more comical. The narrator has just bumped into Wunch, who immediately seizes him and begins his usual exploitation attempts:

(32) Were I a squid, this preamble alone would have been more than enough to trigger the ejaculation of black ink, and yet before I could scream for the riot police I found myself sucked up and flip-screened crosstown to a *modest* French restaurant, where, for as little as two hundred and fifty dollars per person, one could eat like Ivan Denisovich. (Allen 2007: 100)

"Modest" is definitely not an accurate description for a restaurant that charges such a sum for a meal. The underlying script opposition in this passage is, therefore, between MODESTY and LUXURY. After the ordeal of listening to Wunch's plot, the narrator ends his tale with a patently false statement regarding an alleged theatre superstition. Indeed, no superstition, theatrical or otherwise, is phrased ever so accurately as to exactly fit the situation in hand: in this case, the image of Kafka sprinkling sand and dancing on the stage is precisely what Wunch fantasises for the play he wants the narrator to finance. In script terms, KAFKA-THE-NIHILIST is in direct opposition to, say, KAFKA-THE-DANCER, which amounts to expressing a script contrast between EXISTENTIAL ANGST and MUNDANE PLEASURE:

(33) As far as me backing up *Fun de Siècle*, there's an old theatre superstition that any show in which Franz Kafka sprinkles sand on the stage and does a soft-shoe is just too big a risk. (Allen 2007: 106)

The story about the psychiatric patient who pays his shrink by writing songs also contains a few hilarious ironies, one of which can be found when Dr Feebleman, after six months of treatment and, as mentioned above, a "kilo of songs", elaborates on the brilliance of his patient's creations:

(34) One is a *sophisticated* bauble called "If You'll be My Puma in Yuma I'll Be Your Stork in New York". It's best crooned, and is replete with *clever* double entendres. (Allen 2007: 121)

Once again, the adjectives "sophisticated" and "clever" are not, at least judging by the lyrics, a good assessment of the song in question. As is the case with all previous extracts under analysis, the passage is humorous because of its incongruity. Besides, the irony establishes a semantic opposition between two sets of scripts that overlap: on the one hand, SOPHISTICATION and CLEVERNESS, on the other, respectively, PRIMITIVENESS and STUPIDITY. Exactly the same oppositions are present in yet another occurrence of irony, regarding another of Pepkin's songs, in which the adjective "magnificent" does not fit a description of such an aesthetic product:

(35) The best number was a torch song called "Italics mine", which boasted the *magnificent* lyric "You're fine, like rare wine, I *love you* (italics mine)".
(Allen 2007: 124)

7. Conclusion

In retrospect, the present analysis of *Mere Anarch*y provides lavish evidence of Allen's linguistic expertise in achieving comic effect. I could have mentioned many other examples to illustrate the generous range of rhetorical strategies he employs to convey, and reinforce, humorous incongruity. Still, the ones I did examine confirm my initial claim that the humour in *Mere Anarchy* is not only situational ("de re") but also, and especially, linguistic ("de dicto"). No matter how depressing the characters' situation may become, Allen narrates their troubles with such lively comicality that the reader never shares a sense of pathos. In fact, although the heroes suffer an array of negative emotions, from frustration through delusion to loss, their predicaments are systematically rendered in a comic light.

As this article shows, the fact that most situations are exaggerated and, at times, downright absurd does not alone explain the flawless humour in the stories. Neither does the fact that the characters' plight is most of the time caused by selfish greed and ambition, which makes the readers detach themselves from their tragedy-prone fate and read it in a disparaging light which allows for comic pleasure. Rather, Allen's humorous expertise seems, as initially ventured, to be, first and foremost, linguistic. The semantic organisation of the texts, based on a combination of script oppositeness and overlap, is blended with a proficient use of stylistic devices which signal, and enhance, comic incongruity. In a nutshell, it is language that is responsible for turning a latently poignant plot material into a few good, uncompassionate, laughs.

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Notes on humour and persuasion in advertising and legal discourse

Giovannantonio Forabosco

The notion of persuasion in the public sphere is a recurrent topic in pragmatic studies, which necessarily draw on findings from social and cognitive psychology. The paper addresses the vexing issue of the interdependence between humour and persuasion, with special attention being paid to advertising discourse and court discourse. A paradoxical situation can be observed regarding the prevalence of humorous advertisements and contradictory data about the effectiveness of humour as a persuasive device. Empirical studies have failed to obtain conclusive results about the persuasive power of humour. A specific shift of perspective in research approach is here advanced in order to unravel the intricacies of the matter. Moreover, referring to rhetorical and socio-psychological postulates, the paper aims to explain a few mechanisms underlying humour deployed as a persuasive weapon in court. The hypotheses put forward here are based on scholarly literature on persuasion and real-life language material, which sheds light on practitioners' persuasive practices.

1. Introduction

In an apocalyptic scenario dominated by a devastating plague, is there possibly any place for a humorous attitude? On the dark background of Florence in agony, Boccaccio highlights one of the most positive functions of humour, a protective shield against the worst attacks on the physical and mental well-being.

> Altri, in contraria opinion tratti, affermavano il bere assai e il godere e l'andar cantando a torno e sollazzando e il sodisfare d'ogni cosa all'appetito che si potesse e di ciò che avveniva ridersi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male: e così come il dicevano il mettevano in opera a lor potere...
> Others, the bias of whose minds was in the opposite direction, maintained, that to drink freely, frequent places of public resort, and take their pleasure with song and revel, sparing to satisfy no appetite, and to laugh and mock at no event, was the sovereign remedy for so great an evil: and that which they affirmed they also put in practice...

> (The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio faithfully translated by J.M. Rigg, 2 Vols. London: The Navarre Society, 1921, first printed 1903) (First Day, Introduction, 021)

By the same token, one year after September Eleven, The San Francisco Chronicle featured an article entitled "Humor helped us heal" (Daniel Kurtzman, September 8, 2002).

We can have little doubts about the beneficial qualities of humour not only as a means to amuse and to be amused but also as a resource which can be helpful in accomplishing many important goals (e.g. Gulotta et al. 2001). Research has pointed out how humour can have a role in preventing diseases, though with some caveats (for a review, see Martin 2007). Coping with stress, managing anxieties and depressions in psychotherapy are also some areas in which humour has proved its beneficial potential. Among the most recent experiments, in controlled settings, humour has emerged as an effective means to alleviate pain experienced by hospitalised children, and also to allow them to face surgical interventions (Vagnoli et al. 2005).

There are, of course, also some problematic functions in which humour may be exploited. Putdown jokes, racist jokes, jokes aiming at sexual harassment, cruel sarcasm, are only some examples of a disputable use of humour which can even make the targeted people feel humiliated and miserable. In recent years, a key term to designate a problematic area connected with humour has become that of *gelotophobia*, the fear of being laughed at (see Ruch 2009). This term introduces a pathological dimension in which joking and teasing may not generate shared playful enjoyment but, on the contrary, discomfort and suffering (see also Forabosco 1998 for the psychopathogical implications of humour).In general, it may be claimed that the dark shadows in humour are in minority, and people can in everyday life fully appreciate the bright side of this fascinating phenomenon.

The relationship between humour and persuasion is a widely debated issue. For some, that humour possesses a persuasive power would be an additional asset. For others, it would be a dubiously positive quality, if not a drawback.

The main goal of this essay is to explore humour in the context of its persuasive potential in advertising and legal discourse used in the court of law, two genres of public discourse. The notion of persuasion and the persuasive function of humour are frequently discussed in pragmatic research on language use (especially in political discourse and advertising). However, the central mechanisms of humorous persuasion can only be fully appreciated on the strength of multidisciplinary studies. Thus, drawing on different postulates and empirical observations on various humour forms, this chapter sheds new light on the pragmatics of humour as a means of persuasion, both in theory and in practice. The aim is to show why/when humour in persuasive discourse is not merely a pragmatic (theoretical) construct but primarily a pragmatic (practical) tool.

2. Humour and advertising

The ambivalent impression that the relationship between humour and persuasion seems to induce may be better understood if we consider a specific area, such as that of advertising. One may take into account the different connotations of the words "humour" and "advertising", of which *persuasion* is a crucial component. A few positive terms, including "information" and "choice", are also sometimes associated with "advertising", but others are of a less positive nature, such as "manipulation" or "hidden persuasion". Humour, on the other hand, is characterised by a more favourable connotative status. With humour we normally associate a long list of positive features.

Humour and persuasion seem to be distant, if not incompatible, concepts. Nevertheless, humour is pervasive in the contemporary advertising world. Regarding persuasion, however, a paradoxical situation may be observed. Huge sums of money are invested in humorous advertisements, but data resulting from research on the persuasive effect of humour disprove its persuasive potential (Gruner 1978, Unger 1996, Gulas and Weinberger 2006, Pedrini 2006, Beard 2007, Dynel 2009a). Although there are many aspects of humour that can be listed to support a claim about its influential effect in advertising (for an analysis, see Dynel 2009a), the issue is far from being settled when data collected by empirical research are taken into account. To quote but one research, Pedrini (2006) found that in a social communication campaign against smoking, a humorous advertisement not only had less persuasive effect than that of a fear arousing one, but also caused a decrease in the number of subjects who expressed their intention to quit smoking. Pedrini explains this result with the concept of "risk seeking behavior" among youngsters. But the question about humour and its persuasive power appears clearly open to a complex discussion.

Many aspects should be taken into consideration when investigating the conditions which affect the persuasive potential of humour (see Alden et al. 2000, Carraro et al. 2004, Cline et al. 2003, Furnham et al. 1999, Graby 2001, Monnot 1981, Roma 1997, Dynel 2009a, Ying and Jing 2010). The most obvious of them is the quality of humour. Wordplay is, for instance, frequently used, but it is a double edged sword, because puns often run risk of not being well accepted; whereas a witty combination of words can be immensely successful. Other elements taken into account include different types of humour in relation to different types of products (functional versus expressive, for instance), the target (or audience), or the media employed. These are important parameters to be considered, although the most crucial one is likely to be the capability of humour to attract and keep our attention. After all, the word "advertising" comes from the Latin "ad-verto" which means to turn toward, to direct one's attention to.

Much research on TV commercials has been devoted to study what happens after a humorous stimulus has been received by an audience. Of no less interest to researchers would be studying what happens in the very first few seconds. Many viewers simply divert cognitively from commercials (and often, physically walk away, returning when the commercial time is over). A humorous advertisement or commercial can be attractive enough to capture and captivate viewers. This can be accomplished with a creative and original advertisement, while humour is a privileged resource to this end. Professionals designing high quality, highly expensive advertising campaigns for the Super Bowl event seem to be well aware of this. In 2010, eight out of ten ads were of a humorous nature[1].

The formula regulating a working relationship between advertising and humour may be described as the confluence of factors which establish three parties' syntony, involving brand, audience, and humour. Admittedly, one could hardly sell ice cubes in Alaska, or tell sex jokes to nuns. In ideal conditions, one can deliver an adequately structured humorous message to the target audience.

One of the parameters describing a link between advertising and humour is *similarity* in language. Both employ a variety of rhetorical devices, such as metaphors or paronomasia, to an extent that only poetry may possibly exceed (cf. Dynel 2009a). Consider this advertisement:

> Having escaped the slave Shem from his master Hapu, the weaver, this one invites all the good citizens of Thebes to find him. He's an hittite, five-foot high, of healthy complexion and brown eyes; who returns him to the store of Hapu, the weaver, *where are woven the most beautiful fabrics to the pleasure of each one,* will be given a piece of gold.

This is said to be the most ancient advertisement in the western world. It is about 3000 years old, and it is reported in the papyrus XVI found in the Egyptian town of Thebes, and kept in the British London Museum. The advertisement is almost incidentally placed within a larger text which also might be equated to an advertisement, promising as it does a reward to whom will return an escaped slave to his master. Even if there is no trace of humour here, one may say that the rhetorical device employed, the superlative "the most beautiful fabrics", is akin with the hyperbole, or the exaggeration, which is a very frequent and typical of humorous texts.

The second parameter can be identified as *contiguity*. There is a dividing line between an advertising text and a humorous text, but they are adjacent. In the fifties, a very popular television broadcast in Italy was "Carosello", a series of advertisements where the rule was that there had to be a short story, and afterwards a commercial. In most cases, the two parts were related neither in structure nor in content (in the first part, the brand, or the product, was not even to be mentioned).

The third parameter is *continuity*. The text as a whole can be perceived as humorous. For instance, in Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale" (1611), Autolycus sings: "Come, buy of me, come buy, come buy, buy, lads, or else your lasses cry: come buy". Repetition (on the verge of obsession) and rhyming are elements describing the presence of

1. Chuck Tomkovick and Rama Yelkur, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; AdForum; Adland (www.commercial-archive.com), http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/02/02/business/media/20090202-business-superbowlads.html, last accessed 10th September 2010.

humour. But that this is not the final parameter is suggested by the fact that we might remove the words “or else your lasses cry”, losing the main humorous effect, but still keeping the basic advertising intent and function.

The fourth parameter, the most important one, is that of *integration*. Humour and advertising form a unitary, integrated text. The evidence of the integration is that it is not possible to remove humour without disrupting the message itself. In a slogan: “With cruises the price they are, you can’t afford... to make the wrong decision.” (Fred Olsen Lines), a witty effect stems from the unexpected ending (“them” would be the obvious complementation of the clause), which generates a reframing leading to the conclusion that the right decision is to go on a cruise with the advertised lines, based on the garden-path effect (for an extensive analysis of humorous garden paths, see Dynel 2009b). The message is structured as a compound and no piece can be taken away without distorting it. It is interesting to note, however, that the persuasive effect does not rely on this witty message alone. Also, in the same advertisement, serious considerations are offered and people’s testimonials explain why they have enjoyed their cruises. The ad was published in the middle ‘70s, and at that time the role of humour in advertising was open to discussion. Ogilvy, for instance, in 1963, stated that humour “sells poorly”, before changing his mind 20 years later (Ogilvy, 1983).

Another example is an advertisement of Jaguar, published in 2010, which says: “We believe it’s the best four door coupe in the world. If it’s not, there are now more than 50 awards we’d better give back” This is a clever reasoning ad absurdum that one may appreciate or not, but it works as an integrated message, which is narratively structured as a two-stage joke (Suls 1972, Forabosco 1992) comprising a set up and an incongruous ending, which promote an incongruity resolution (the *cognitive rule* implies that the awards are well deserved).

In line with the integrative dimension, a further parameter may be established, i.e. *full integration*. This is accomplished when the brand, or the product, appears as an (almost) indistinguishable part of the message. Good audio-video (textual-iconic) examples are many of the commercials presented at the Super Bowl, which were mentioned earlier. A claim may be ventured that all 2010 ads are in line with this parameter.

Full integration is of importance not only to give salience to the brand but also, in particular, to control a collateral negative effect which the humour ingredient may induce. Summarising the findings of relevant research, Martin (2007: 105) notes that “humor may enhance memory for the humorous material but diminish memory for other information contained in a lecture or advertisement”.

Full integration also deals with other problems often raised, such as attention which might be focused on the humorous part, and not on the brand. If no clear-cut distinction is perceivable between the humorous and the advertising components, it is less likely that an individual’s attention would be unfocused, split or diverted. Once the message is processed as a compound text, it is also more probable that one’s positive feelings promoted by an amusing ad will be transferred to the brand, potentially transforming appreciation into motivation to take action. Directions for future research may regard a more detailed definition of when and how a full integration parameter is at work.

In this perspective, useful suggestions come from the study of humorous advertisements already performed in terms of Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script Opposition Theory, also applied to visual material (Allen 1988). A promising development may also come from investigations which consider ads as humorous short stories. They can be examined on the basis of theoretical models, such as those employed by Attardo (2001) in his linear analysis (see the concepts of punch lines and jab lines, stacks, strands, etc.), and by Ermida (2008) with her horizontal and vertical configuration. In particular, interesting is the concept of suprascript, which helps to explore serial advertisements, that is ads of the same brand, with the same main characters, similar scripts and different short stories, all linked by a suprascript; the coffee brand Lavazza in Italy, with its advertisements located in a imaginative Paradise, and the animal-based advertisements of Budweiser in the United States are only two of many examples.

3. Humour in court

Advertising is not the only area where persuasion and humour have a multifaceted relationship. The general observation being that wherever persuasion is involved, humour may come into the picture. To prove this statement, let's take into consideration a very different environment, that of a courtroom.

> Suavis autem est et vehementer saepe utilis jocus et facetia; quae, etiam si alia omnia tradi arte possunt, naturae sunt propria certe neque ullam artem desiderant. (Cicero, De Oratore)
> Jesting too and shafts of wit are agreeable and often highly effective: but these, even if all else can be taught by art, are assuredly the endowment of nature and in no need of art. (translation by W.W. Sutton)

Cicero states that jokes and witty remarks are nice and useful. Furthermore he claims that humour cannot be learnt and taught. Interestingly enough, he contradicts himself giving precious pieces of advice on how to create humour and how and when to use it in forensic argumentation, that is for *persuasion*.

Humour and the legal, judiciary world are connected in many, different ways. First of all, at least in order of popularity and visibility, there is the vast array of jokes poking fun at lawyers (Galanter 2008) which are studied from many perspectives, those of ethnic humour and of social psychology, above all. In addition, there are the legal issues dealing with situations in which humour is a matter of defamation, sexual harassment, offences, etc. This is a particular and notable case in which humour itself needs to be analysed and evaluated in order to persuade the court that it is, or it is not, "just a joke" (for an extensive discussion see Little 2009, forthcoming).

Attention is here mainly focused on humour as a relevant communication device in forensic argumentation (Hobbs 2007, Gulotta 2010). In a courtroom the scene is normally more than serious, often tragic. For instance, in January 1998 a young woman and a young man were brutally murdered and buried in a forest. Their bodies were found only six years later, and the suspected murderers were prosecuted. These are the basic elements of a dark story which shocked the country and received ample media coverage. The murderers were called "the beasts of Satan", a denomination which refers to an underworld of black rituals, demoniac symbols, and the worshipping of the Devil. It would seem completely out of place to think that any kind of humour might ever be found in connection with this story. However, an analysis of the final argumentation presented by the lawyer of one of the defendants pointed out that up to nineteen instances in the text could be variously considered to be of a humorous nature (Forabosco 2009).

Some may be considered jab-lines aiming at introducing some levity even in a very dramatic context, performing the acceptable, if not necessary, function of allowing the parties involved to take a few refreshing breaths in a suffocating atmosphere. Others are witty remarks meant to make certain points of the speech more convincing.

As an example, it may be of some interest to focus on one particular passage which reveals how humour may have a key role in forensic argumentation. The defendant was accused not only of having taken part in the murders, but also of being a leader of the satanic sect. What happened was that the lawyer made an observation which ridiculed his client. This may sound against any logic, considering that in normal conditions a lawyer tries to cast the best possible light on his client, making him appear a reliable and responsible person. This point may be explained by the difference between a tactic and a strategy. It is said that in war, a tactic means to conquer a hill to gain a possible territorial advantage, whereas a strategy may require letting the opponents conquer the hill, trap them, and win the war. The defendant said at a certain point of the infamous evening: "I'm not digging, sorry, I must be back early; otherwise my mother will get angry with me..." In the lawyer's words: "Now, are we talking of the head of a satanic gang who must be at home early because he is afraid that his mother would scold him?" The lawyer's humorous utterance shows an incongruity between the defendant's being a leader of a gang, and being an obedient child. Hence, his higher degree of responsibility for a misdeed sounds implausible and illogical.

Moving on to a lighter tone, there is an anecdote (Feroci 1935), a classic for Italian lawyers, that clearly illustrates how not only a humorous tone, but also a specific humour technique, may help to face an otherwise difficult situation, and sound persuasive. In the episode, the technique of *reversal* is employed, which is among the most typical devices used to create a humorous effect, and to obtain a significantly new perception of reality. A lawyer of great fame was invited to a trial occurring in a small town. Because of his great professional capacity and eloquence, the local lawyer, his court opponent, was very anxious about the court proceedings. However, the latter found a way to gain some advantage by addressing the court as follows:

> When in a home there is someone suffering a minor disturbance, you just ask the pharmacist for advice. When the patient has a fever, you call a doctor. It is only when the case is desperate that you call in a celebrity. This is how it is in the present case: obviously enough the counterpart has believed its cause to be desperate, and called my illustrious opponent for assistance. (Feroci 1935: 102)

The use of humour in forensic communication may also testify to an advanced stage of a speaker's professional development. The debate in a courtroom may become tense and conflictual. Objections, criticisms may turn into real and severe attacks. Vincenzo De Michele refers (*personal communication*) that, in his professional experience as a lawyer, to an accusation from his counterpart of him being mendacious or incorrect, he would, in the past, react in a resented and aggressive way. Then he found that it was preferable and more effective to reply in a humorous mode. For instance, in a note to the Judge (Giudice per l'Udienza Preliminare), he wrote:

> Notoriously, I am a liar and the PM [Public Prosecutor], in the courtroom, practically said that my nose gets longer and longer [Pinocchio's way]. Obviously, I am not concerned with this deformity, as I believe that only those regarding the soul are of relevance. Therefore, it is not in my favour that I am addressing you the following request, nor in order to certify my virtue as a liar, which is anyway of importance to me.

The communicational device here employed is well aimed because through this self-deprecating formula, a sarcastic statement is actually addressed to the opponent. The lawyer seems to be poking fun at himself, while he is declaring that what the opponent has stated cannot be taken seriously, thus trying to discredit him. Interestingly, in this rhetoric-argumentative mechanism, an ancient suggestion is revitalised. Among the reasons why an orator (if competent) should resort to humour and induce laughter, Cicero included:

> ...vel quod frangit adversarium, quod impedit, quod elevat, quod deterret, quod refutat... (*Marco Tullio Cicerone, De Oratore*)
> ... and it shatters or obstructs or makes light of an opponent, or alarms or repulses him... (translation by W.W. Sutton)

4. Theoretical models on persuasion (and humour)

From the perspective of the "new Rhetoric", Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in their *Treatise on Argumentation* (1969 [1958]) discussed the difference between *persuading* and *convincing*. They noted that for those who are focused on the final effect of influencing people and on having the latter act in an intended way, persuading is preferable to convincing, because the latter is only the first step leading to action. By contrast, for those who are preoccupied with the rational aspect of a person's assent, convincing is better than persuading. Also, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969 [1958]) consideration is for the role played by the audience, universal or particular. This appears quite clearly defined if the distinction between *demonstration* and *argumentation* is taken into account. In line with Aristotle, it is stated that a demonstration starts with axioms that are true independently from the audience's agreement, and so is also the conclusion stemming from the premises. It is like saying that what is true is such for a universal audience. Instead, an argumentation takes its move from premises which the audience might accept or not, or accept to a certain degree. It follows that the conclusion is a probable one, and it is perceived as being more or less convincing to a particular individual, or individuals. In their words, "argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques that induce or increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 4).

Humour can be considered, among many other things, a tool of argumentation which also aims at a "mind's adherence". It may also be added that, together with the mind, other psychological dimensions are involved. To this purpose, both rational (cognitive) and non rational (emotional-affective) means are employed in proportions which may vary greatly.

On the part of the persuaded subject, the persuasive effect of a message may be strengthened or weakened according to different ways of processing. Many factors may intervene, depending on distinct general variables, such as personality traits (the type and degree of an individual's sense of humour, among them), previous experiences, pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, etc. One theoretical framework which helps to understand the differential effects of a message as regards persuasiveness is the well-known *Elaboration Likelihood Model* advanced by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). According to this model, two main routes may be followed while processing a message: a *central* one and a *peripheral* one. The *central route* implies personal involvement, established beliefs about the topic and, in particular, an active elaboration by the receiver. Persuasion is more likely to be achieved if logical, rationally convincing, argumentations are presented. The *peripheral route* relies more on moods and emotions, catch phrases, the affective dimension (also towards the source). In general, the receiver is less involved, and less willing to deal with difficult information, or to invest time and attention, *cognitive saving* being one basic reason. Decisions are often based on easily available and superficial heuristics, such as "if it is advertised, it costs more", or "if it costs more, it must be of a better quality".

Humour is more typically processed via the peripheral route (Lyttle 2001), in particular producing a positive mood, favouring a positive perception of the source, and distracting the recipient's attention (preventing counter-arguments). It is interesting to note that the latter mechanism was mentioned by Freud (1905) when he observed that the *jokework* is a bribe/distraction offered to the censorship to permit a tendentious content to be freely expressed. Diverting the subject's (or the censorship's) attention allows the message to do its job (be it advertising or expressing sexual needs).

It should, however, be noted that in some cases, the two routes are followed in synergy. This is what happens with a possibly strategic use of humour, which is immediately relevant to the non-humorous content. For example, argumentation based on ridiculing the client in the above mentioned trial appeals both to affective-emotional reactions, and to a rational evaluation of the facts.

5. Caveats and applications

As to the application of humour for the sake of persuasion, some talented people are able to spontaneously handle it in a refined and efficient way. For others, more commonly, experience and training may help to avoid embarrassing situations and to improve their performance. When humour is at stake, complexity is normality.

If a lawyer produces in court a witty remark, a judge may take it in three different ways. Firstly, he may simply ignore it as being irrelevant. Secondly, he may be disturbed or annoyed, perceiving the remark as aiming at distracting him from something more serious or considering it stealthy ingratiation. In this case, the witty remark not only fails but it may also backfire. The third possibility is that the judge appreciates the remark. What the outcome will actually be typically depends on the interaction of three basic factors: firstly, the judge's personality and experience, and consequent attitudes towards humour in general, and the use of humour in a courtroom; secondly, how the source is perceived (whether the lawyer is considered to be a reliable, serious professional, or he is known for being cunning and tricky); thirdly, the quality of the humour employed, for it makes a difference whether or not the remark is clever, appropriate or even relevant to the argumentation.

Research (LaFave 1972, Gruner 1978, Priest and Swain 2002) suggests that the respondents' reaction to a politician who is used to telling jokes in public is based on many variables. Among them, a crucial one is a person's pre-existing attitude towards the politician. If he is considered to be a positive figure, a man who acts in the interest of the people, a reliable person, it is likely that an individual's comment (said or implied) would be: "Isn't he witty and nice?" By contrast, if a politician is believed to be a negative figure, who mainly acts in his own interest, fooling the crowd like a charlatan, the likely reaction would be: "Isn't he shrewd and evil?" As for undecided people, their reactions are indeterminate. What matters is that, as a rule, telling jokes (bad or good jokes) should not be influential in evaluating, either positively or negatively, political actions and figures. The exception is a joke, or a witticism, which is appropriate to the situation, and does help the parties involved to face conflicts or problematic issues. In a similar vein, satirical jokes and cartoons, to the extent that they help one to keep abreast of political events, as well as in other areas of life, may be of great help to keep an alert, critical mind.

All in all, we may say that humour has no magic powers with regards to persuasion, be it visible or hidden. But it is a resource with many highly positive qualities which, if adequately exploited, can serve different purposes, hopefully honest. It is, I believe, what happens when you tell a joke in order to ingratiate yourself with a potential partner in a courtship situation, which, by all means, is a form of honest and worthwhile humorous self-advertising.

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Comic takeover or comic makeover?

Notes on humour-translating, translation and (un)translatability

Delia Chiaro

Academic writings on humour and translation have principally pivoted around the pragma-linguistic aspects of transfer from source to target language/s (e.g. Chiaro; Delabastita; Vandaele). However, rather than exploring the choices, strategies and devices involved in interlingual translation, the present study sets out to examine the main difficulties involved concerning the translation of humour in terms of the basics of transfer of humorous materials such as jokes and more general humorous discourse that may occur in books and films, as well as other forms of public discourse. Additionally, this essay gives an overview of linguistic and cultural barriers that sometimes impede its translation and suggests the notion of diverse "senses of humour" possibly reflected in the lexis of distinct languages. Finally, it will discuss how the act of translation itself is used for humorous means. Overall, the article testifies to the pragmatic nature of several lingua-cultural constraints and issues central to the translation of humour.

1. Introduction

The pragmatics of communication and issues pertaining to translation go hand in hand. Any instance of verbally expressed humour, be it a joke, a witty aside or an ironic remark will, by default, involve the need for successful communication. Thus, if such instances of wordplay are to be translated, the necessity for communicative success is, in a sense, doubled, as the utterance and/or text in question has to grapple with a series of lingua-cultural constraints, thus rendering translation an issue that is fundamentally of a pragmatic nature. Whether we consider ordinary conversational humour, a written text such as an advertisement, a video-clip on the internet or a part of film discourse, whenever translation is involved, there will be an underlying implication of a variety of pragmatic rules, sometimes typical also of non-humorous communication. The translation of verbal humour is therefore of particular interest not only because of the lingua-cultural constraints that it involves, but also for its possible pragmatic side-effects.

Much has been written about the impossibility of translating humorous discourse, on how jokes do not travel, on how humour is culture-specific and on how, as far as laughter is concerned, we would appear to laugh mostly at what is familiar. Yet despite the unfeasibility of translating it, humorous discourse is indeed translated. From Aristophanes to Shakespeare, from Boccaccio to Joyce, and from Rossini to Woody Allen and beyond, the verbal play of the cultural giants of western culture has undeniably been translated, as have those belonging to other traditions (Chafe 2007, Ziv 1988, Davis 2006, Liao 1999, Panday 2000).Yet instinctively we all know that there is more than just a grain of truth in this "impossibility of translation" hypothesis. In effect, while, on the one hand, what I would like to label "high" humour has been regularly translated – namely humour occurring in literature, theatre, opera, art house cinema and the like – along with that which occurs in the mass of globalised television products such as advertisements and sitcoms, we must surely recognise that the loss in humorous force that occurs in transfer from Source to Target humour can often be immeasurable. Of course, all translation is problematic and all translated products seem to suffer from a sort of inferiority complex with regard to the original source from which they derive, but it would appear that translated humour may well suffer more than most.

Humour and translation is an area that has attracted quite a large amount of attention, especially with regards to the issue of its (un)translatability (e.g. Laurian 1989, Pisek 1996). As has been argued by Chiaro (2005), for a long time much literature on the subject had remained anecdotal in nature but since the dawn and subsequent growth of the discipline of Humour Studies in the mid-seventies, with humour itself being taken seriously in academia, especially within the sub-disciplines of health, psychology and linguistics, together with the concurrent birth of Translation Studies, matters concerning verbal humour in translation have undergone a certain revival in terms of scholarship (e.g. Delabastita 1996, 1997; Vandaele 2002; Chiaro 2010).

Vandaele likens research in humour and translation to a "vast, disorienting, dangerous [...] ocean" in which "both sailors and swimmers appear to be equipped with amateurish tentative maps rather than proper maps supplied by cartographers, and consequently tend to lose their way" (2002: 149). How true. Attempting to translate a joke, a gag, or any type of verbal language that is humorous in intent, is rather like trying to solve a Rubik cube, as soon as all the squares on one surface are aligned to form a single solid colour, the squares on the other sides run askew. Similarly, the translator of humorous discourse faces a series of elements that are beyond his or her control. But then, of course the need arises to distinguish between the difficulty of actually *translating* humour from that connected with examining the *product* of translation (Vandaele 2002). Furthermore, if to this state of affairs we add the fact that scholars are yet to decide upon a single and universal definition of humour itself (Ruch 1988), we can begin to understand what a complicated area the amalgamation of humour and translation actually is. Perhaps, the fact that the combination of humour and translation is such an extremely complex and problematic area of study could well suggest that scholars have preferred not to concern themselves with it.

Bearing these issues in mind, this chapter will begin with an outline of the main difficulties involved concerning the translation of humour firstly in terms of the basics of transfer of humorous materials where I will examine stock occurrences of verbal humour such as jokes that may occur in conversation, but I will also investigate instances of humour translation pertaining to more general humorous discourse that may occur in "public" environments such as in books, on the Internet, and especially in films. I will then briefly broach the subject of "humour words" related to national styles of humour and possible differences in sense of humour across cultures. Finally I shall briefly explore the concept of translation itself as a humorous device.

2. Humour and translation

2.1 Translating humour: Problems and solutions

In one sense, the issue of humour and translation is a purely academic one. Joking and jokes naturally occur quite abundantly in conversation (see Norrick 1993) but presumably – or at least hopefully – in conversations in which all participants speak the same language. Indeed, instances of verbally expressed humour surely also do occur in bi- and/or multi-linguistic settings, however, literature on what happens when verbal humour occurs in mixed-language conversation is quite scarce, thus most examples hereafter refer to humour occurring in modes outside naturally occurring conversation, in more "public" contexts such as literature, the Internet and film.

A quick glance at the literature regarding translation will reveal a tendency to couch issues in problematic terms. The need to translate a text (translating) is seen as a problem in search of a solution to be found in the form of an adequate translation. Owing to the fact that all languages are different, formal equivalence (i.e. an exact match of phonological, lexico-grammatical and syntactic features) between Source and Target text is naturally impossible to achieve – suffice it to consider word order differences between languages. And it is this inherent inadequacy that lies at the root of the "problem-solution" metaphor. Humour makes translational matters worse, firstly because humorous discourse is notoriously constructed through extreme exploitations of the linguistic options available in a given language while the likelihood that different languages will be able to make use of exactly the same options for humorous purposes is unlikely (for a series of taxonomies exemplifying options available to the humorist see, for example, Attardo 1994, Ritchie 2004, Alexander 1997, Nash 1994, Redfern 1984). Secondly, humorous discourse relies on implicit encyclopaedic knowledge that must be shared between addresser and addressee, between perpetrator and recipient. Yet, the translation of humour not only needs to take into account both linguistic and socio-cultural awareness, but it also needs to embrace the issue of culture-specific "comic dimensions" (Chiaro 2005) that may well be as much of a problem (if not more so) than those pertaining to the merely lingua-cultural. What is it that makes Morcambe and Wise funny in the UK? What do Germans love about "Dinner for One", a sketch that is virtually unknown in the UK but is watched by thousands of Germans each New Years' Eve?[1]

2.1.1 *Language specificity and translation*

(1) Q. What has four legs and flies?
A. A dead horse.

(2) Q. What did the big strawberry say to the little strawberry?
A. Don't get into a jam.

All three riddles respond positively to Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour framework in that in each example, two perfectly overlapping and yet simultaneously opposing scripts create the incongruity necessary for verbal humour. Needless to say, their translations would require Target texts that display overlap and opposition too. However, it would be very difficult, (if not impossible) to find the same linguistic flexibility present in the items contained in the Source riddles in other languages that would result in translated versions that could be considered equivalent either formally and/or content-wise. In other words, the morphology of both Source and Target languages would need to be capable of creating plurals of nouns and verbal inflections in an identical way (as in the exploitation of the duplicity created by the "s" in Example 1); possess similar homonyms (Example 2) and analogous verbs that also happen to double up as nouns (Example 1). Clearly what is required is a degree of equivalence between Source and Target preferably reflecting what Popovič labelled the "invariant core" namely some quintessential element present in the original transferred to the Target (1976). In other words Target language riddles about horses (animals), jam (fruit) and garden attire (horticulture), even if they do not respect identical ambiguity/incongruity would be perfectly adequate functional equivalents. For example, an acceptable Italian version of 2 could be:

(3) Cosa dice l'arancia grande a quella piccola mentre fa i compiti? Non ti spremere troppo
(Back translation: What did the big orange say to the little orange doing his homework? Don't think too hard. (literally Don't squeeze yourself too hard.)[2]

1. "Dinner for One" is a short sketch originating in the theatre and recorded in the 1960s in black and white for German television. A simple sketch regarding a butler (Freddie Frinton) serving the lady of the house and numerous inexistent guests as both get progressively drunker and then retire to bed has become a traditional cult programme watched on New Years' Eve across Germany.

2. I would like to thank Alessandro Morgagni for this translation.

No strawberries, no jam but an invariant core consisting of talking fruits, albeit of a different variety than those in the source riddle, couched within the question answer joke format. However, language is only half the problem.

2.1.2 *Culture specificity and translation*

Verbal humour is frequently based on shared socio-cultural knowledge between sender and recipient. Thus "Mummy Mummy" jokes, for example, represent a type of verbal humour that should present few, if any, translational problems in a world in which human meat is not for consumption and it is not the norm for children to play with corpses.

(4) "Mummy, Mummy, I don't like Daddy!"
"Then leave him on the side of the plate and eat your vegetables!"

(5) "Mummy, Mummy, can I play with Grandma?"
"No Dear, you've dug her up twice already this week."

More commonly, verbal humour may be based on a more restrictive variety of world knowledge.

(6) "Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm Cliff Richard."
"You're a shadow of your former self."

(7) "Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm Mike Yarwood."
"Funny, you don't give me that impression."

Examples 6 and 7 are surely incomprehensible to anyone not cognizant of UK culture. The now elderly pop-singer Cliff Richard, began his career in the 1950s with a backing group called The Shadows and Mike Yarwood is a well known impressionist and comedian. However, it would be rather naive to consider these riddles as merely culture-specific. While they do indeed play upon features of the personalities in question, they also exploit idiomatic expressions. Thus, translations need to negotiate both the culture-specificity of two personalities who are little known beyond the UK with the need to match them with a linguistic item that recalls an element pertaining to them in some way. Naturally, here too, a functional translation is always possible. In Example 6 an ageing pop star from the Target Culture can replace Cliff Richard, and Italy just happens to have sixties pop star Little Tony, who not only had a heart attack and recovered, but was also famous for the song "Un cuore matto" (Literally "a crazy heart"):

(8) "Dottore, Dottore, continuo a pensare di essere Little Tony"
"Ma lei è matto! e il suo cuore non è da meno"
(Back translation: "Doctor, Doctor, I think I'm Little Tony!"
"You must be crazy, and so is your heart.")[3]

3. I would like to thank Andrea Alvisi for this translation.

According to Cicero (1965), "there are two types of wit, one employed upon facts, the other upon words [...] people are particularly amused whenever laughter is excited by the union of the two" (De Oratore II LIX and II LXI) and it is exactly this lingua-cultural mix which creates most difficulties of all, both in translation and in cross-cultural comprehension. And let us not forget that translation is not only *interlingual* in nature (i.e. between different languages), but also *intralingual* (Jakobson 1959) i.e. the re-formulation of a message in the same language. *Davies* (2010) explores jokes couched in different varieties of English (e.g. Scottish English, Irish English etc.) that require some kind of gloss if they are to be understood by Standard English speakers. Thus, if the issue of translating the jokes we have looked at so far is simply theoretical – in the sense that people do not normally go around translating jokes, as we tend to use jokes in conversation and we all normally converse with people who share our own language – we now come across instances in which translation of some sort is mandatory. Although, in theory the Scots and the English speak the same language, they are divided by a series of lexico-grammatical differences which require explicitation for the non-Scotsperson.

Such "misunderstanding" is more evident when the two languages in question are not simply two varieties of the same language, but two totally different languages. In a study of humour in bilingual, cross-cultural couples Chiaro (2009: 222) reports how the attempts of an American woman to pun in Hebrew were taken as "mistakes" rather than jokes by her acquired Israeli family and how an Irishwoman attempting to joke in Italian found that "it's hard [humour] to translate. Sometimes jokes don't come out well in the other language." Other respondents in the same study underscored the need to translate jokes they made, or others made, and how complicated translation was. In fact, the word "translation" emerged frequently, implying that when they joke verbally, couples perceive that they mentally translate before speaking. Clearly there is interdependence between translation and pragmatics.

Similarly, in the public sphere of television, the "Top Ten" feature in David Letterman's "Late Show" is based on ten humorous verbal gags usually based on a current events and it is patently clear that sharing the same language does not automatically mean that non-US audiences will understand them – let alone find them funny. "Top Tens" include "Top Ten Things Overheard At Rush Limbaugh's Wedding", "Top Ten Things I Want To Do As Miss USA", "Top Ten Ways BP Can Improve Its Image", etc.

(9) Top Ten Things Overheard At Rush Limbaugh's Wedding
1. Did he just eat the whole cake?
2. It's ironic that a guy named "Rush" takes 20 minutes to walk down the aisle
3. Oh crap. I'm sitting next to Ann Coulter
4. I missed the bridal bouquet, but I hope to catch the prenup
5. Oh crap. I'm sitting next to Sean Hannity
6. They have a tent in case it rains. No wait, those are Rush's pants
7. Oh crap. I'm sitting next to Bill O'Reilly

8. Do you take this woman to be your future ex-wife?
9. Mrs. Palin, please, enough with the celebratory gunfire
10. Is this my fourth of fifth wedding?
    (http://www.cbs.com/late_night/late_show/top_ten/, retrieved July 2010)

Bucaria (2007) discusses the difficulty of translating and subtitling this feature of the show into another language, but it is equally difficult for a Brit to understand the references. Like all else verbal humour changes in time and place and although the verbal code is more or less the same on both sides of the Atlantic, the cultural references to personalities (Bill O'Reilly, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity, Rush) and procedures ("prenup") are quite dissimilar. Chiaro (1992) discusses the joke:

(10) British Rail announced today that tea was going up 20p a slice.

With British Rail being defunct since 2000, this joke would now require serious updating, although it is quite dubious whether hot beverages on sale in railway restaurant cars in the UK today are particularly fresh and appetising.

2.1.3 *Cross-cultural universals*

Davies (1998) has published extensively on the common denominators inherent in jokes across cultures and has clearly demonstrated that all cultures make use of an underdog that is the butt of stupidity jokes, (e.g. the Irishman in England, the Belgian in France, the Pole in the USA etc.) as well as a tight-fisted skinflint (Jews, Scots, Genoese etc.). Women (mother-in-laws, naïve brides, ugly wives, spinsters and blondes), homosexuals, Jews, the disabled, etc. also crop up as the butts of jokes the world over. Similarly, jokes about politics and the establishment, religion and so-called "dirty jokes" on the subject of sex also abound everywhere. Furthermore, from cowardly Italians to sadistic Germans, fun is also made of national stereotypes.

Even in purely visual terms national stereotypes are by no means uncommon as a source of humour on stage and screen. In the cartoon feature "Neapolitan Mouse" (William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, USA, 1954) starring Tom and Jerry, the duo are in Naples where they come across a round-bellied and swarthy moustachioed, local mouse. The episode is set in the backstreets of Naples to the sound of mandolins playing "Santa Lucia". Needless to say their Neapolitan friend has many mafia-style wiseguys as friends. Disney's "Lady and the Tramp" (Clyde Geronimi and Wilfred Jackson, USA, 1955) features a restaurant scene in which the two dogs sit at a table covered with a red and white chequered tablecloth and eat spaghetti served by a large Italian waiter. Like the Neapolitan mouse the waiter is plump, sports a black moustache and a mandolin provides the background music. In "Beauty and the Beast" (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, USA, 1991), the French candlestick named Lumière is not only connoted by his accent but also through his sexual prowess which he is keen to display at every opportunity behind a screen with the curvaceous feather duster, Babette, who is, predictably, also French. On the other hand, the teapot, Mrs Potts, is of course British, together with the stiff-upper-lipped clock, Cogsworth, who has an annoying fixation for being punctual.

(11) Heaven is where the engineers are German, the cooks are French, the lovers are Italian, the police are British and everything is run by the Swiss. Hell is where the engineers are French, the cooks are British, the lovers are Swiss, the police are German and everything is run by the Italians.

Five European nations appear in a single tongue-in-cheek joke, each displaying the clichés for which they have become renowned.

2.2 Defining humour

Nothing is inherently humorous and any serious discussion regarding the notion of humour should avoid any attempt at defining it in terms of a stable concept (Ruch 1988). However, we do know that humour is directly linked to our emotions and to the fact that what someone may or may not consider being humorous will depend largely on their personality coupled with how they are feeling at that certain moment in time. The appreciation of a joke, a funny story or some slapstick is inevitably going to depend on our personality and the mood we are in. Furthermore, the fuzziness of the term humour is further complicated by the huge number of "humour words." A glance at a Thesaurus will quickly reveal many words that are directly related to humour, often with much overlap, e.g. "comedy", "wit", "jocularity", etc., not to mention words that express different types of humour such as "irony", "sarcasm", "mockery" and so on. As Goldberg (1982: 204) states, "Those individual differences that are the most significant in the daily transactions of persons with each other will eventually become encoded into their language. The more important such a difference is, the more people will notice it and wish to talk of it. With the result that eventually they will invent a word for it." Sampling the domain of humour and humourlessness, Ruch (1992) compiled lists of German humour-type nouns (e.g., wit, cynic, grump), verbs (e.g., to tease, to joke) and adjectives (e.g., funny, witty, cynical) that were then used to map the field of humour. These words do not necessarily have one-to-one equivalents in other languages. Does this suggest that the concept of sense of humour differs from culture to culture?

We know instinctively that humour is linked to the notions of funniness and amusement which in turn are linked to laughter and smiling. English has two separate terms "funny" and "amusing" which are not strictly synonymous. Yet the closest Italian equivalent for "funny" is probably the word "divertente", which is actually more "amusing" that "funny". The closest German equivalent to "funny" is the word "Lustig" which, rather like the Italian "divertente" also means "amusing". On the other hand, German has the word "Komische" that literally means "it tastes funny". In other words, humour is clearly perceived with diverse nuances from language to language. However, just as the same comic stimuli are not humorous to all individuals, it is equally unlikely that they will be just as funny across all cultures. In other words, before tackling the technicalities involved in interlingual translation, we need to bear in mind that first and foremost, humour is a cultural thing. Empirical research on cross-cultural humour is lacking. While sociological research has revealed similarities in joke forms across cultures (Davies 1998), personality research has examined the concept of "sense of humour" and suggests that it varies individually in terms of personal state and trait as does the concept of gelatophobia (fear of laughter/laughing) cross-culturally (Ruch 1998).

Certainly the concept of a "British sense of humour" exists in the collective imaginary, but whether it does in reality is yet to be demonstrated. For example, in English literature, it would certainly be difficult to think of a writer who had not been humorous in his/her work. Furthermore, verbal humour is rife in newspaper headlines (Bucaria 2004), advertisements (Gulas and Weinberger 2010), greeting cards, speeches at weddings, public lectures, etc. Yet, the rules of where and when it is appropriate to laugh and smile openly can differ greatly from culture to culture. In Western countries, verbal humour is certainly an ice-breaker, a social paste and something people desire in their friends and partners. Having a sense of humour is considered to be a positive attribute in a person, but what about elsewhere?

2.3 Identifying humour

However, one thing is recognising something as being humorous in intent, another is appreciating it and finding it funny. In everyday conversation, for example, there are a series of familiar pragmatic ploys which speakers adopt before telling a joke such as "Have you heard the one about?" and there are many lexical, syntactic and semantic signals inherent to jokes in all cultures. If in England someone embarks upon a story about an Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman, we can be reasonably certain that he/she is not being serious and that the Irishman in the story will do something incongruous at the punch line. However, not all humour is framed within the joke form. Attardo (2001) coins the term "jab lines" to refer to humorous elements that are fully incorporated within texts in such a way that they do not disturb the narrative flow. In fact, much work on verbal humour had focussed on the joke form, but in effect, it is likely that most verbal humour occurs outside the classic joke frame. Suffice it to consider quips in conversation or simply humorous narrative. A classic jab line is merely a kind of quip, a good line, namely a witty, quick-witted, sharp comment typically delivered with perfect timing or else a line that springs upon the reader in the midst of serious written narrative. Jab lines are usually self-referential, or a reference to an indistinct worldwide culture with none of the linguistic or cultural specificity more typical of the joke form proper. Above all, a jab is normally lacking in a dedicated narrative framework. Whether such humour is easily identified as such is highly debateable. If it were, then people would never be puzzled by irony and we would always be certain that our interlocutor's perlocutionary purposes are (or are not) *bona fide*. Translators and translations have to come to terms with and deal with the possibility of not recognising a humorous stimulus.

But what about appreciation of humour? Do we all find the same things funny? Certainly, as personality research shows, sense of humour depends on the variables of state and trait, yet over and above that, as we saw above, there are several universals in what is considered to be funny. Many humorous stimuli, however, remain culture-dependent. And what is a translator to do if faced with humour she does not appreciate, humour that may be hurtful to her in some way?

3. Translation as a source of humour

3.1. Mistranslation

Possibly the most famous example of translation, or rather mistranslation, as a source of humour was produced by US President John F. Kennedy in a speech that he delivered in Berlin in 1963 during the Cold War in which he declared "Ich bin ein Berliner". Naturally what he wanted to say was that he was a citizen of Berlin, that he understood the citizens' feelings, that he was "one of them". However, by inserting the indefinite article, "ein", what he actually said was "I am a jam doughnut".

The Internet is full of lesser known examples of accidental mistranslations in which we, who know better, laugh at the person who made a cross-linguistic faux-pas.

(12) Sign in a hotel in Acapulco: The manager has personally passed all the water served here.
(13) Sign in a Paris shop: Dresses for street walking.

In global advertising, copy writers need to be especially careful in their wording of products they are promoting and it is crucial for texts not to cause offence or to shock the public in any way as this might compromise the success of a product on the market. For example, Ikea famously discontinued a workbench called "Fartfull" ("speedy" in Swedish) and Pepsi Cola withdrew its "Come alive with Pepsi" ads in China where the slogan roughly translates as "Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead!". More recently, Starbuck's posters in Germany that read "Enjoy your summer Latte!" were also withdrawn because the word "Latte" is German slang for "erection". Finally, "Ass Glue" is a brand of glue sold in China; "My Fanny" a brand of Japanese toilet paper and "Shitto" a well known Ghanian pepper sauce.

What we are actually doing here is laughing at the person who has accidentally made the mistake. Freudian slips? Possibly, but cross-language jokes proper, i.e. deliberate at attempts at creating jokes exploiting two languages often simply emulate mistranslation. In other words much verbal humour, outside the joke framework can be seen as a sort of "accidental-but-on-purpose" comic device (Chiaro 1992).

3.2 Bilingual puns, translation and interference

3.2.1 *Bilingual wordplay*

(14) Q. Why do French people have only one egg for breakfast?
A. Because one egg's un oeuf. (enough)

(15) Q. According to Freud what comes between fear and sex?
A. Fünf.

Example 14 plays on the French/English homophony of "un oeuf" with "enough: and Example 15 on the German/English homophony of "vier, sechs" with the items "fear" and "sex". According to Delabastita (1996) these two examples classify as bilingual puns. However, not all jokes/wordplay containing more than one language can be classified as bilingual.

3.2.2 *Translation-based monolingual Target Language VEH*

Films recreate situations that reflect, or try to reflect, reality. Thus, conversations in films are attempts to emulate real life conversations and translation based cross-talk has become a cinematic topos. In Claude Kaplisch's "L'Auberge espagnole" we find an example of a translation-based pun, funny only in one of the languages concerned – in this case English. English student Wendy answers the phone to her flat mate's mother:

(16)	Wendy:	"Xavier nest pas là... il va revnir cé soir...".
	Mère:	Oui, mais vers quelle heure?
	Wendy:	I'm sorry, I don't understand French je ne comprends pas le français.
	Mère:	Bon ben. Dites-lui de téléphoner à sa mère.
	Wendy:	Oh?
	Mère:	Sa maman
	Wendy:	Maman! Okay, I will tell him!
	Mère:	Bon. C'est sûr, hein?
	Wendy:	Xavier is gone to school, okay?
	Mère:	Ah, oui, bien sûr. Il est à la fac!
	Wendy:	What!?
	Mère:	La fac!
	Wendy	"La fuck"!?
	Mère:	Yes! After fac, he can telephone maman.
	Alessandro:	Wendy! Relax, eh!

Clearly Wendy misunderstands the French word "fac" for "fuck". Although the joke is only a joke in English, because English is so widely understood, in effect it is probably funny internationally.

3.2.3 *Interference-based monolingual Target Language VEH*

This following type of play is based on the transfer of the articulatory habits of one group of people onto another. To illustrate this category I shall borrow an example from Delabastita (1996: 167)

(17) American First Lady: "When do you have elections?"
Japanese ambassador: (Visibly embarrassed) "Before bleakfast"

And it is the "l"/"r" confusion frequently made by the Japanese which is found in the well known scene in *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola) in which a Japanese prostitute asks Bob to "rip her stockings".

(18)	Woman:	"My stockings, lip them! (laughs) Lip my stockings! Yes prease. Lip them!"
	Bob:	"What?"
	Woman::	"Lip them, he! Lip my stockings."
	Bob:	"Hey, Lip them, lip them, what?"
	Woman:	"Lip them, like this, lip them"
	Bob	"Rip them?
	Woman:	"Lip, Yes.
	Bob	"You want me to rip your stockings?..."
	Woman:	"Yes rip my stockings prease!"
	Bob:	"Rip your stockings, you want me to rip your stockings all right"
	Woman:	"Prease, prease, prease!"
	Bob	"I'm gonna rip your stockings and you tell Mr Kazuzu, you know, we had a blast..."

However, I would like to argue that the comic effect is not only conveyed at the level of utterance, but also, if not more so, at the level of "scene". Bob (Bill Murray) is tired and has no intention of having sex with the Japanese lady and his intonation, gestures and facial expressions are what really render the scene funny – more so than the stereotypical linguistic interference of rip/lip. The woman is rollicking around on the floor and Bob is sitting on the edge of his bed looking bored until he simply throws his arms up in the air totally speechless and exasperated.

4. Conclusions

This essay has provided a brief overview of humour and issues regarding its translation. I have examined linguistic and cultural barriers that sometimes impede its translation and suggested the possibility of the existence of diverse "senses of humour" possibly reflected in the lexis of diverse languages. Finally, I briefly looked at translation itself as a humorous device. Clearly, humour, culture and translation is a fascinating area that opens several avenues for future research.

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