3rd International Summer School on

Humour and Laughter:
Theory, Research and Applications

at the University of Edinburgh,
Scotland, UK

Symposium

Tutorial Room 6, Appleton Tower, School of Informatics
19th September 2003, 2.00-5.30pm

Symposium moderators: Willibald Ruch (University of Zurich) & Graeme Ritchie (University of Edinburgh)

Book of Abstracts

START OF SYMPOSIUM (2.00p.m.)

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Elspeth Collins

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===================== Coffee Break =====================

Slot-II: Humour in a political context

Cookie pieces have no calories: Diet Humor – Women's resistance to the diet culture?!
Debbie Iancu-Haddad

Systemics, humour and the social context
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Analysing audience responses to stand-up comedians
Pam Wells

Humour as a critique of society in the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*
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===================== Coffee Break =====================

Slot-III: Humour in a social or group context

A theory of humour as an identification, friend or foe system
John Alexander Hewitt

Teasing in contact encounters
Vally Lytra

When people fall from grace: when and why of *Schadenfreude*
Myrke Nieweg

Humor as a defense mechanism in the Holocaust
Chaya Ostrower

END OF SYMPOSIUM (5:30p.m.)

A pilot study: An examination of the influence of humorous teaching materials on children's creativity in personal and social education

Presenter: Elspeth Collins

Cardiff School of Education, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, UK

This study investigated whether humour when used in its benign and positive form, with relevance, appropriateness and sensitivity, may influence children's creativity. 55 children in the age range 8 - 10 were taught for two lessons of Personal and Social Health Education, one lesson with humorous materials in the form of jokes, and one lesson without the humorous materials. 44 children completed a creative picture of themselves in one lesson and of their imaginary perfect friend in the other lesson. The teaching element lasted for 35 minutes and the creative task for 15 minutes. Three judges (three experienced teachers) judged the creative quality of the children's pictures. Children's evaluations of each lesson were collected using a five item 'lesson enjoyment' questionnaire. Further data was recorded from two discourse groups of ten pupils from each school occurring one week after completion of the second lesson. Analysis of the results revealed a highly significant effect of humour upon children's creativity. Children's lesson evaluation revealed a highly significant effect that they found the humour lesson funnier than the non-humour lesson, and a significant effect that the humour lesson was more enjoyable than the non-humour lesson.

Cookie pieces have no calories: Diet Humor–Women's resistance to the diet culture?

Presenter: Debbie Iancu-Haddad

Ben-Gurion University, Israel

This paper presents my M.A. thesis, which is an ethnographic study of the humor produced and appreciated by young Israeli women who are part of the Israeli diet culture. My theory is that the appearance of diet humor can be seen as resistance to the various ways in which diet culture exerts power over women. I base my assumptions on feminist theories that see the emergence of diet culture as a reaction to the women's movement and on Foucault's theories of power and resistance. The goal of this thesis is to answer the questions: What is 'diet humor'? How does it relate to diet culture? What impact does it have on the everyday lives of young women in Israel? Does the existence of diet humor signify a form of resistance to the prevailing diet culture? To answer these questions I carried out 18 months of participant observation in a Beer-Sheva Weight Watchers group, interviewed its participants and other dieters, and collected examples of diet humor and other diet related items from newspapers, television and the Internet. The humor was analyzed and compared with women's statements of how they felt about dieting. The purpose of this was to see if diet humor actually reflects women's criticism of diet culture. My conclusion is that diet humor closely follows women's feelings and complaints about diet culture. I gauged resistance according to the content and quantity of humor found regarding different aspects of the diet culture. Further analysis of the study will be discussed during my presentation.

A theory of humour as an identification, friend or foe system

Presenter: John Alexander Hewitt

33 Hillyfields, Dunstable, UK

Most observers agree that the biological role of humour originates in group formation and in the group selection aspects of human evolutionary history. Group selection implies group conflict and the role of IFF systems in such conflict will be discussed. Other biological IFF systems will be mentioned. Hardware IFF systems will be described and the coding properties of the transmissions they use compared with those used in humour. Some aspects of humour studies taken from the anthropological literature will be discussed to consider whether humour plays an IFF role in real human cultures.

Keywords: biological function of humour, IFF.

Teasing in contact encounters

Presenter: Vally Lytra

Dept. of Byzantine and Modern Greek, King's College, London, UK

Teasing among peers as a topic for research has received extensive coverage in sociolinguistics (e.g. Eder 1991, 1993; Scarborough Voss 1997; Tholander & Aronsson 2002). Besides the focus on gendered teasing among peers, a significant bias of this line of sociolinguistic research is that it has been primarily concerned with investigating teasing practices in the context of linguistically, culturally, socially and ethnically 'homogeneous' peer groups portrayed as sharing a common set of rules, understandings and linguistic and cultural repertoires. To this end, taking on board Pratt's (1987) call for a 'linguistics of contact', in this paper, I present a micro-analysis of same-sex and mixed-sex teasing between members of a linguistically and culturally mixed peer group (age 10) that is comprised of Greek-speaking monolinguals and Greek-Turkish bilinguals in contact encounters during break-time in a primary school in Athens, Greece.

In particular, I probe into how teasing is framed by exploring its initiation, development and closing. I demonstrate how this is achieved through the use of linguistic and cultural resources that are available to interactants from the majority (Greek) and minority (Turkish) languages and cultures, which function as framing devices for teasing. In addition, I explore the 'participation frameworks' developed among interactants, as they navigate different participant positions, and experiment with an array of participant responses to teasing. To explore teasing in contact encounters, I draw on insights from two approaches to discourse, notably interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis. These insights are complemented by ethnographic data regarding the peer group, its resources and linguistic and cultural practices across different settings at school.

Keywords: teasing, contact, participant positions, responses.

The STANDUP (System To Augment Non-speakers Dialogue Using Puns) Project

Presenter: Hisar Maruli Manurung

ICCS, School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh, UK

Evidence suggests that the use of language play such as punning riddles and other jokes is beneficial to the development of a child's communication skills. Language-impaired children often rely on alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) aids. Unfortunately, these aids are often geared towards needs-based communication (e.g., "I need to go to the bathroom"), and hence provide limited opportunity for the child to explore creative and novel use of language, i.e., wordplay, and the telling of jokes. As a result, language-impaired children are inhibited from developing the aforementioned communication skills. We

intend to address this problem by exploring the feasibility of developing software that enables language-impaired children to engage in such wordplay. Starting with existing research on the automated generation of punning riddles, we aim to develop software that allows the generation of such jokes according to user specifications. Special attention will be devoted to the user interface design of this software, so that it will be accessible to children with communication and physical disabilities. Finally, we will test the system by observing and evaluating the use of the software by children.

Keywords: joke generation, computational humour, communicative aids.

When people fall from grace: when and why of *Schadenfreude*

Presenter: Myrke Nieweg

Department of Social Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The aim of this project is to study two main questions. First, when do people experience *Schadenfreude* (pleasure in the misfortune of others)? Second, why do people experience *Schadenfreude*? To answer the first question, two survey studies are being conducted. With help of the autobiographical narratives collected in these studies, taxonomy is made of the situations in which *Schadenfreude* is experienced. Also, in these studies, factors of influence on the experience of Schadenfreude (when, how, how much) are investigated. The second question is answered by conducting four experimental studies. The point of departure in these studies is that someone else's misfortune gives pleasure because of the advantage it provides us with. Someone else's misfortune may be gain for us, as it enhances our position. *Schadenfreude* can be an expression of the need to improve our self-esteem over other people's sufferings. Because this need to improve our self-esteem will be strongest in situations where self-esteem is under threat, we expect that people will experience *Schadenfreude* in mainly these situations.

Keywords: *Schadenfreude*, pleasure at another's misfortune**.**

Humor as a defense mechanism in the Holocaust

Presenter: Chaya Ostrower

Beit Berl, Doar Beit Berl, Israel

The purpose of this study was to investigate and comprehend the types of humor and laughter and the functions they fulfilled in the Holocaust. Two research questions were pursued, namely, 1) what types of humor were used by Jews in the Holocaust, and 2) what functions did humor fulfil for Jews in the Holocaust? Theoretical and practical assumptions concerning the importance of humor and the various functions it fulfils in stressful situations were the starting point for this study. It follows Ziv (1984, 1996), who classifies the functions of humor into five main categories: (a) the aggressive function of humor which includes two types (humor stemming from a sense of superiority, and humor stemming from frustration); (b) the sexual functions of humor; (c) the social functions of humor; (d) the functions of humor as a defense mechanism which contains two types (gallows humor, self humor); and (e) the intellectual functions of humor. Following the content analysis additional types were found. Scatological humor was added to the function of sexual humor. Humor about food was added to the function of defense mechanism.

55 Jewish Holocaust survivors (31 women and 24 men) were studied. The following criteria for interviewee selection were employed: Jews who were teenagers during the Holocaust years; those who were in ghettos and/or concentration camps and/or death camps; and those who used or experienced humor during the Holocaust. The central question in each of the interviews was: "Can you describe, or tell about, humor in the Holocaust?" Humor was defined as: "Anything that made you laugh or smile during the Holocaust".

Keywords: Holocaust, humor.

Systemics, humour and the social context

Presenter: Diana-Elena Popa

"Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, Galati, Romania

In the systemic functional tradition, language is often seen as a form of behaviour, as something that we do with a purpose or, more often with more than one purpose. Humour and language are undoubtedly intertwined. More than that, verbal humour is entirely constituted by language. Thus, humour, like language, is a form of functional behaviour that is related to the social situation in which it occurs, as something done with a purpose in a particular social setting. The aim of this paper is to unravel the nature of the relation between humour, language and social context. Is humour, through language, a kind of guide to the social context? To what extent do lexical choices in the language of humour represent the connection between language, its structure and use, and the social reality in which we live?

Keywords: systemics, humour, social context.

HaHa. A reading grid for humour and laughter

Presenter: Hugo Stuer

Centre of General Practice, University of Antwerp, Belgium

In western society there is a growing interest for "Humour and Health". Parallel attention is seen in caring disciplines referring to the statement "Laughter is the best medicine". Doctors and nurses trying to implement humour and laughter are confronted by many pitfalls.

> The items can be differentiated into 100 terms spread over a wide landscape of humour qualities.

> The interrelationship between humour and laughter is rather ambivalent: laughter occurs in many circumstances without humour.

> The many efforts to conceptualize humour and/or laughter have not yet come to an end.

As a tool for description, interpretation and intervention, we propose a reading grid with 5 laughter patterns. In a horizontal dimension laughing is extended in 3 fields: (a) the body with the ecstatic laughter leads into biology and medicine; (b) thoughts with the intellectual laughing lead into cognitive stimulation and creativity; and (c) feelings and the releasing laughter lead into Freudian world and emotions.

In a vertical dimension laughing is projected in another field: "the existential", where we see rather a smile and find phenomenology and reflection. The fifth, lateral field shows laughing as an instrument of communication and linguistics referring to empathy and partnership. In general practice, little literature is found on humour and laughter. A planned research project with the proposed reading grid will analyse laughter episodes of videotaped consultations of general practitioners.

Keywords: family medicine, laughter, reading grid.

Use of statistical language recognition in computational humor

Presenter: Julia Taylor

7879 Hedgewood Cir, Mason, OH, USA

Although there is no formal definition of humor, many informal definitions of verbal humor involve ambiguity. If a joke is a short text where a setup has two meanings, and a punch line conflicts with the

obvious meaning of the setup, it is easy to see why detecting ambiguity is very important in generating or understanding a joke.

Being very new to humor research, I would like to attempt to use statistical language recognition to detect ambiguities in short texts, and, using these ambiguities and structure of the text, make a determination whether the text can be called a joke.

History through laughter

Presenter: Matthew Brian Taylor

7879 Hedgewood Cir, Mason, OH, USA

As a professional magician and clown with 26 years of experience in making audiences laugh, 7 years ago I began to research and teach the steps required to add humor to presentations. With my partner John Strauss I formed the Coxcomb Academy of Performing Arts, where we teach the concepts of creating humorous characters based on historical models from diverse sources such as commedia, medieval jesters, and itinerant performers. The Academy's goal is to assist re-enactors from many different time periods to create humorous and enjoyable characters, routines and performances that would appeal to a modern audience. We continually strive to strike a delicate balance between what is strictly historical and necessary for present day entertainment to get laughs in many diverse art forms. As the Coxcomb Academy enters its sixth year of training storytellers, puppeteers, magicians, jesters, and jugglers, we continue to search for new sources and ideas to make history come alive through laughter.

Analysing audience responses to stand-up comedians

Presenter: Pam Wells

Psychology Department, University of York, UK

This pilot study has been designed to analyse comedy performer behaviours and audience responses, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The application of microanalysis techniques to videotaped recordings of stand-up comedy performances can show in detail how audiences respond and in which ways comedians evoke audience laughter. The use of specialist computer software is intended to provide more accurate measures of both performer and audience behaviours than have previously been possible. The process of qualitative coding has included various categories derived from studies of audience applause to political speeches, in order to enable a direct comparison between the affiliative responses of comedy audiences and political audiences.

In a study of 15 political party leaders' keynote speeches to their annual conferences between 1996 and 2000, Bull and Wells (2002) found that approximately two-thirds of all the audience applause was a combination of: (a) synchronous with the end point of the speaker's utterance; (b) invited by the speaker; and (c) in direct response to an utterance containing one or more standard rhetorically-formatted devices. Comparable results have been found in the stand-up comedy material analysed thus far. Preliminary results suggest that stand-up comedians use the same range of standard rhetorical devices identified in political speeches. A number of further rhetorical formats specific to stand-up comedy have also been identified.

Humour as a critique of society in the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*

Presenter: Jane Weston

Department of French, University of Bristol, UK

Charlie Hebdo is a weekly French satirical newspaper that uses a variety of humorous devices to enforce an outspoken critique of French society and political life. It is characterised by the abundant use of cartoons, and a witty yet caustic editorial tone that consistently favours the outspoken expression of opinion over a more neutral style of journalism. In terms of its linguistic register and visual presentation, *Charlie Hebdo* deliberately sets itself in opposition to the more conservative French press such as *Le Figaro* or *Le Monde*, taking a pronouncedly left-wing bias. My contribution very much represents 'work in progress', raising questions regarding the role and effectiveness of humour when used to make an active critique of society. For example, to what extent could the use of political humour be viewed as a means of containing frustrations, providing a relatively harmless means of relief of grievances through laughter? Or can humour be fundamentally subversive and a powerful means of change, with the potential to disrupt established power relations through its ability to point out absurdities?

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