

8th Humor Research Conference 2018

Multidisciplinarity

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Schedule

Friday, February 16, 2018

- 16:00 – 16:45 **Registration**
- 16:45 – 17:00 **Opening words** (Salvatore Attardo)
- 17:00 – 18:00 **Keynote Presentation – Interview with Haj Ross** (Salvatore Attardo)
- 18:30 *Informal dinner and drinks at Tokyo Express*

Saturday, February 17, 2018

- 9:30 – 10:00 *Poster set-up and coffee break*
- 10:00 – 12:00 **Session 1**
1. “Il y a des cons partout”: when French people co-construct humor against others (Béatrice Priego-Valverde)
 - 2.-3. A Descriptive Analysis of Playboy Magazine Jokes 1959-2004 (Smith, Tawnya; Brooks, Thomas; Henley, Tracy; Attardo, Salvatore)
 4. Humor as a Form of Resistance: Analysis of Humor from Slavery to Scholarship (Sheila Bustillos)
- 12:00 – 13:00 *Lunch at Lion's Mane Cafe*
- 13:00 – 15:00 **Session 2**
5. Metalinguistic reflections on jokes in children and adolescents of two different social environments (Karina Hess Zimmermann)
 6. Humor as a Mitigating Strategy in Error Treatment Sequences in EFL Classrooms (Hilal Ergül)
 7. On the prosody of punchlines (Mark Campana)
 8. Akbar's Poetry: Prophecy vs Legacy (Talmeez Burney)
- 15:00 – 15:30 **Poster presentation & coffee break**
- 15:30 - 17:00 **Session 3**
9. The Dark Matter Theory of Humor (Salvatore Attardo)
 10. When Humor Fails (Lisa Reed)
 11. What's the opposite of shit? (Christian Hempelmann)
- 17:00 - 17:30 **Closing remarks and raffle** (Shelby Miller and Salvatore Attardo)
- 18:30 *Dinner at Luigi's Italian Cafe*

Abstracts
(in alphabetical order)

Akoto, Miriam; *Texas A&M University—Commerce*; Miriam.Akoto@tamuc.edu

Teaching Language through Puns: An Action Research Project on Beginner Level French Students
(poster)

Over the past 20 years, research in intercultural and interlanguage (IL) pragmatics has grown rapidly. However, work in L2 humor is still underway due to the common difficulties that even advanced L2 users have in understanding and creating humor (Vega, 1990). At present, though, the empirical evidence for the effects of humor on learning is divergent; some results showing an improvement in learning as a result of instructional humor while others finding no correlation between the two (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, 2012; Martin, Preiss, Gayle, & Allen, 2006). Still, according to Bell and Pomerantz (2016), although humor might not facilitate additional language learning, the role of language play seems to be more promising. They define language play as “any manipulation of language that is done in a non-serious manner for either public or private enjoyment” (p. ix) and call for the use of language play in FL classrooms as a means of constructing “new possibilities for identity, critique prevailing norms and reconfigure particular relations of power” (p. xi). No wonder, Cook (2000) rightly sums it up by arguing that language play should be regarded as “both a means and an end of language learning” (p. 204). This poster will present the work of an action research project in progress that aims to identify areas in which language play, specifically puns, can be integrated into the FL classroom to serve as a pedagogical tool in motivating L2 learners to produce authentic language. The participants are students from French 131 and 132. Puns obtained from various forms such as French comic strips, Ads, theatre, music, poems, etc. will be used taking into the learners’ proficiency levels as well as background knowledge. Students will then interpret the puns and identify the punchline (what makes it funny) while learning new vocabulary at the same time.

Banas, John A., Dunbar, Norah, Rodriguez, Dariela, & Liu, Shr-Jie (2011). A review of humor in educational settings: Four decades of research. *Communication Education*, 60(1), 115-144.

Bell, Nancy, & Pomerantz, Anne (2016). *Humor in the classroom: a guide for language teachers and educational researchers*. New York, New York: Routledge.

Cook, G. (2000). *Language play, language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Attardo, Salvatore; *Texas A&M University-Commerce*; salvatore.attardo@tamuc.edu

The Dark Matter Theory of Humor

In this paper I review various metaphors underlying theories of humor, beginning with the ancient theory of humors, and including the hydraulic theory (Freud), the mechanical theory (Bergson), the geometrical theory (Koestler/Paulos), the computer theory (Hurley), and quantum theory (Gabora & Kitto). All these metaphors describe variously the fundamental concept of incongruity between two entities. I digress briefly to address the relationship between play theory (Bateson) and the benign violation theory (McGraw & Warren). Here the fundamental idea is the non-seriousness of the humor event. After some ecumenical discussion of the heuristic value of metaphor in science, I propose a generalization that the source metaphors are not chosen randomly but aggrandize their target. I therefore claim the title of Dark

Matter Theory of Humor on the basis that, whenever physicists will explain it, there will probably be an opposition between two entities (at the very least dark vs. visible matter) and the concept of incongruity can be mapped on it, as it can be mapped on any pair of opposed concepts. I conclude the paper by ruining the joke and explaining that I do not really have a Dark Matter theory of anything and that the entire exercise was meant to demonstrate the vacuity of such mappings, after detailed non-metaphorical or less metaphorical explanations of a concept have been presented.

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Akbar's Poetry: Prophecy vs Legacy

Akbar Alahabadi's ability to blend English words and terms into his native Urdu makes his poetry both humorous and impactful. Additionally, his dexterity as a poet led the whole field of Urdu poetry into new topics. As a result, his poetic skills and language use have shaped several contours of Urdu poetry. Even though his poetry is based on nineteenth and twentieth century colonial oppression in the South Asian subcontinent, Akbar's reader never feels like the work is outdated or clichéd. As an ardent resister of colonial rule and Victorian social norms, his poetic predictions have gained a prophetic status and still maintain relevance in the cultural and political contexts of third world countries.

The frequent use of English words such as college, bill, lamp, pipe, miss, canary, cherry, clock, watch and collector are used in an interesting new way in his works. They hold a different meaning when he uses them. Being an Urdu poet and an avid reader of English classical literature, he was able to apply the grammatical rules of Farsi and Urdu onto the English proper nouns he utilized, such as those referring to John Milton, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill to name a few.

This paper will explore Akbar's humorous poetic expressions, his use of English words, and the social and political upheaval of the subcontinent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Key words: Gazette, rail, pipe, college, nature, miss, cherry, policy, piano, judge, canary, park.

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Humor as a Form of Resistance: Analysis of Humor from Slavery to Scholarship

In an unlikely location to discover humor, this paper exposes uses of humor in the works of an American, female social justice author: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. Cooper wrote *A Voice from the South* and many other works exploring African American women's oppression in the United States. Raised in the U.S. slavery system in the 1800s, Cooper was educated by her slave owners and earned the opportunity to teach and pursue post-secondary degrees. I suggest that Cooper did not write about humor or the use of humor in scholarly writing, but employed oppositional, subversive humor from her past experiences in slavery to incorporate slavery humor tactics within her activist scholarly writing to promote social change. Cooper appropriates humor tactics used during slavery as a form of resistance and survival in her scholarship.

Using humor to discuss difficult subjects is a powerful tool Cooper applies to discuss the politics faced in the personal lives of many, mainly women—more specifically African American women. Her indirect applications of humor encourage us to do the internal work necessary to confront hegemonic institutions, yet warns us not to take ourselves so seriously or we will miss building alliances with others. Textual analyses of several of Cooper’s texts, humor theories, and African American humor studies provide support for this argument. This paper will highlight Cooper’s use of humor, while specifically noting how uses of humor aid in our approach to personal and political change.

Key words: humor, humor and slavery, humor studies, slavery, women and gender studies

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On the Prosody of Punchlines

A good punchline makes for a good joke. The lead-up can be cleverly established, but the punchline must be perfect, both mnemonically and poetically. This paper deals with aspects of the latter, in particular the metrical structure, or ‘counting’ of prosodic units. It is argued that a certain aesthetic exists in English, and that the success of a punchline depends in part on how closely it approximates this form.

The audience of a joke is in a unique position to anticipate a punchline. Even when they are unaware that one is coming, however, they know the turn will end. In both cases, the audience needs help in the ‘final run’, either to assemble the mnemonic pieces (and laugh), or prepare to take the floor. Research on stance-taking (by this author) has shown that stance-final utterances—where the speaker “sums up” their position—often conform to this aesthetic. On this view then, punchlines constitute a special case of stance-final utterances.

The aesthetic is a capsule-like structure with two parts, each consisting of four units: syllables, tonics, or morae. The first part functions as a measure against which the second is compared. A simple case would be complete repetition as in “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.” Pitch change marks the line between the two parts—first rising, then falling. The metrical pattern of the first part anticipates a similar one in the second. It is exactly here, however, that variations occur that lead to unexpected (and forceful) endings.

METRICAL SOUND MODELS

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone” | [x ¹ x ² x ³ x ⁴ x ¹ x ² xx ³ X ⁴] |
| (2) “You have to hear it in order to understand it” | [x ¹ x ² x ³ xx ⁴ xxx ¹ xx ²³ Xx ⁴] |
| (3) “If it were up to me, I’d tell him to take a break!” | [x ¹ xx ² x ³ xx ⁴ x ¹ xx ² (x) xx ³ X ⁴] |
| (4) “I couldn’t have put it any other way” | [x ¹ xx ² x ³ xx ⁴ xx ¹ xx ² x: ³⁴] |
| (5) “It takes a man to suffer ignorance and smile” | [x ¹ x ² x ³ x ⁴ x ¹ xx ² xxx ³ xX ⁴] |

[STING, *Englishman in New York*]

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Humor as a Mitigating Strategy in Error Treatment Sequences in EFL Classrooms

This paper investigates how EFL teachers use humor as a mitigating strategy as part of their corrective moves in adult classrooms. Oral corrective feedback (OCF), or teacher responses to L2 speech errors, are Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). Multiple studies have investigated feedback as an FTA (e.g. Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011) and found that mitigating strategies were crucial during teacher feedback. Since humor is a well-known form of mitigation (Brown & Levinson, 1987), teachers may use it to weaken the face-threatening properties of oral corrective feedback. The data used in this study comes from a private language school in Turkey. Using qualitative methodology, this paper will discuss examples of OCF with humor and how the humor helps mitigate the FTA.

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What's the Opposite of Shit?

The Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH; Raskin 1985) postulates script opposition (script oppositeness and script overlap) as the necessary and sufficient condition for a text to be humor-carrying.

The nature of the semantic oppositeness relation, as not centrally a linguistic question, was left vague in the SSTH as x vs. $\neg x$ (non- x). This has been one of the main, if usually misdirected, criticisms of the theory, e.g., Mulkay (1988), Wirth (1999: section 8.2), Brock (2004: chapter 3), Ritchie (2003: chapter 6). The present paper will report on a pilot study that is exploring the semantics of one of the most prominent oppositenesses, that of scatological humor. The aim is to determine what “non-shit” is in a corpus of jokes (e.g., Legman 1975, chapter 15; Dundes 1989; Internet) in the hope that this particular “non-“ may reveal the nature of general humorous “non-“.

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Metalinguistic reflections on jokes in children and adolescents of two different social environments

Metalinguistic reflection on humor has been associated with academic achievement, reading abilities, leadership and creativity (Ashkenazi & Ravid 1998; Nippold, 2004). The development of metalinguistic reflection is an important part of later language acquisition (Gombert, 1992; Hess, 2010) and has been directly related to social environment (Hess, 2010, 2011a, 2011b). Therefore, the present study analyzes metalinguistic reflections of children and adolescents that belong to two different social environments (determined by the type of school they attend) on two types of jokes: verbal and referential. Verbal jokes present a lexical marker (generally a word or syntactic structure) that entails at least two meanings. Referential jokes are based exclusively on the meaning of the text without reference to linguistic items. Participants in the study were 42 children and adolescents from two social environments (public vs. private school, total: 84 participants) pertaining to 2nd, 5th and 8th Grades (14 participants per group) from the city of Querétaro, México. They were presented with one referential joke, two verbal jokes, and two non-jokes and asked to determine whether each text were a joke or not and to explain their reasoning. Results revealed differences between grades in the students' ability to identify jokes, and in the reasoning given. A comparison between social environments showed that participants of the private school were more able to distinguish jokes from non-jokes and provided more metalinguistic reflections. Results confirm that metalinguistic reflection on humor continues its development during the school years and that social environment plays an important role in it.

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“Il y a des cons partout”: when French people co-construct humor against others

The present study focuses on humorous utterances produced against foreign cultures by French participants in conversations.

Analyzing successful humorous utterances, the different target(s) and the shared cultural knowledge on which humor is based will be identified (e.g. stereotypes against foreigners, knowledge of French culture). Then, a major attention will be paid on the ways the two participants build on the previous humorous utterance in order to create a humorous co-construction. The hypothesis underlying this study is that both participants' interventions are equally necessary but different and complementary: *if the hearer's positive reaction is necessary for humor to succeed (by laughing or more, by playing along), this reaction has to be ratified by the humorous speaker in order to be able to speak of co-construction of humor.*

The positive reactions to the humorous utterances will be analyzed through a *Conversational Analysis* and an *Interactional Linguistics* frameworks, using the notions of “*convergence*” (Guardiola & Bertrand, 2013), “*alignment*” and “*affiliation*” (Stivers, 2008). Thus, in line with Guardiola and Bertrand (2013) who consider that convergence implies the necessary presence of both alignment and affiliation as defined by Stivers (2008), this study will show that, even in the case of successful humor, the positive reactions can be seen as a continuum, from a minimal convergence to a maximal one leading to the co-construction of humor.

This study is based on one corpus, CID, (*Corpus of Interactional Data*), (Bertrand et al., 2008), constituted by 8 French conversations, audio and video recorded in the anechoic room of the Language and Speech Laboratory (LPL), in Aix-en Provence, France. For the present study, three conversations will be analyzed.

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When Humor Fails

Over the past decade, linguists have uncovered and cultivated an untapped area of the linguistic study of humor: Failed humor. Humor itself has only recently been studied as a serious linguistic topic, as serious as any other type of interaction. However, Attardo (2008a, 2008b) outlines philosophical treatments of humor that can be traced from the classical period and followed through the development of Western thought. Linguistic study of humor is generally a twentieth-century phenomenon, and failed humor study is in its infancy. Bell (2015) identifies two main categories of humor gone wrong. It is either not appreciated or not comprehended. Researchers, including Bell, have begun to introduce finer distinctions in these two categories. Bell also works with applied linguistic studies of humor in second language acquisition. Others have begun to look at failed humor and its intersections with gender, the workplace, and cross-cultural contexts. Broadening failed humor study to multiple disciplines may reveal further insights. Finally, studying humor as a dynamic phenomenon rather than state in a state of successful/failed may yield pragmatic benefits. By examining the contrasting side of humor, that is, failed humor, we can shed light on how humor works, illuminating the study of both successful humor, socio-pragmatics, and linguistics as a whole.

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A Descriptive Analysis of Playboy Magazine Jokes 1959-2004

Playboy magazine has been the source for considerable research, including on such topics as sexuality and the social portrayal of gender dynamics. Using some of the best known and most respected cartoonists in the industry, the many cartoons used in each issue have been data for a diverse set of researchers. For example, Bradley, Boles, and Jones (1979) analyzed *Playboy* cartoons with respect to the

portrayal of prostitutes, showing that the “glamor” associated with sex for sale decreased over time. Similarly, Matacin and Burger (1987) considered the topic of sexual coercion, whereas Dines-Levy (1990) used *Playboy* cartoons to explore the interactions between age, gender, and power in relationships. Malamuth and Spinner (1980) studied *Playboy* cartoons in terms of sexual violence, finding an increase in frequency over time for the years 1973 to 1977; however, Scott and Cuvelier (1987) showed no increase over a larger, 30-year, sample (1954 to 1983).

Perhaps surprisingly, far less research has been done using the page of jokes found in each issue of *Playboy*. Modern computational linguistic analyses typically require a large corpus from which evolving patterns in language can be detected. This study reports on such an analysis, as well as a more psychologically descriptive consideration of joke content.

The present study aims to provide a comprehensive computational linguistic analysis, as well as a descriptive content analysis of *Playboy* jokes. Such computer analyses (e.g., Arslan, Hempelmann, Ferrante, Attardo & Sirakov, 2013) have proven powerful tools for illuminating the psycholinguistic evolution of words and phrases within language, given an ample corpus. The corpus for the present study was collected from *Playboy* issues spanning 45 years (from 1959 to 2004). All jokes (mean jokes per issue was 11.11) from the April, October, and December issues were transcribed into files amenable to computational analysis, as well as for descriptive content (e.g., subject of the joke, target of the joke, form of the joke [narrative, pun, etc.]) coding by human raters.

Initial linguistic analysis focused on word frequency and concordance patterns found in the corpus for each year and then in larger compiled 45 year corpus. Using Laurence Anthony’s (2017). AntConc (Version 3.5.0), analysis indicated possible shifts in gender lemma usage over time and a lower than predicted frequency of sexual lemma.

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