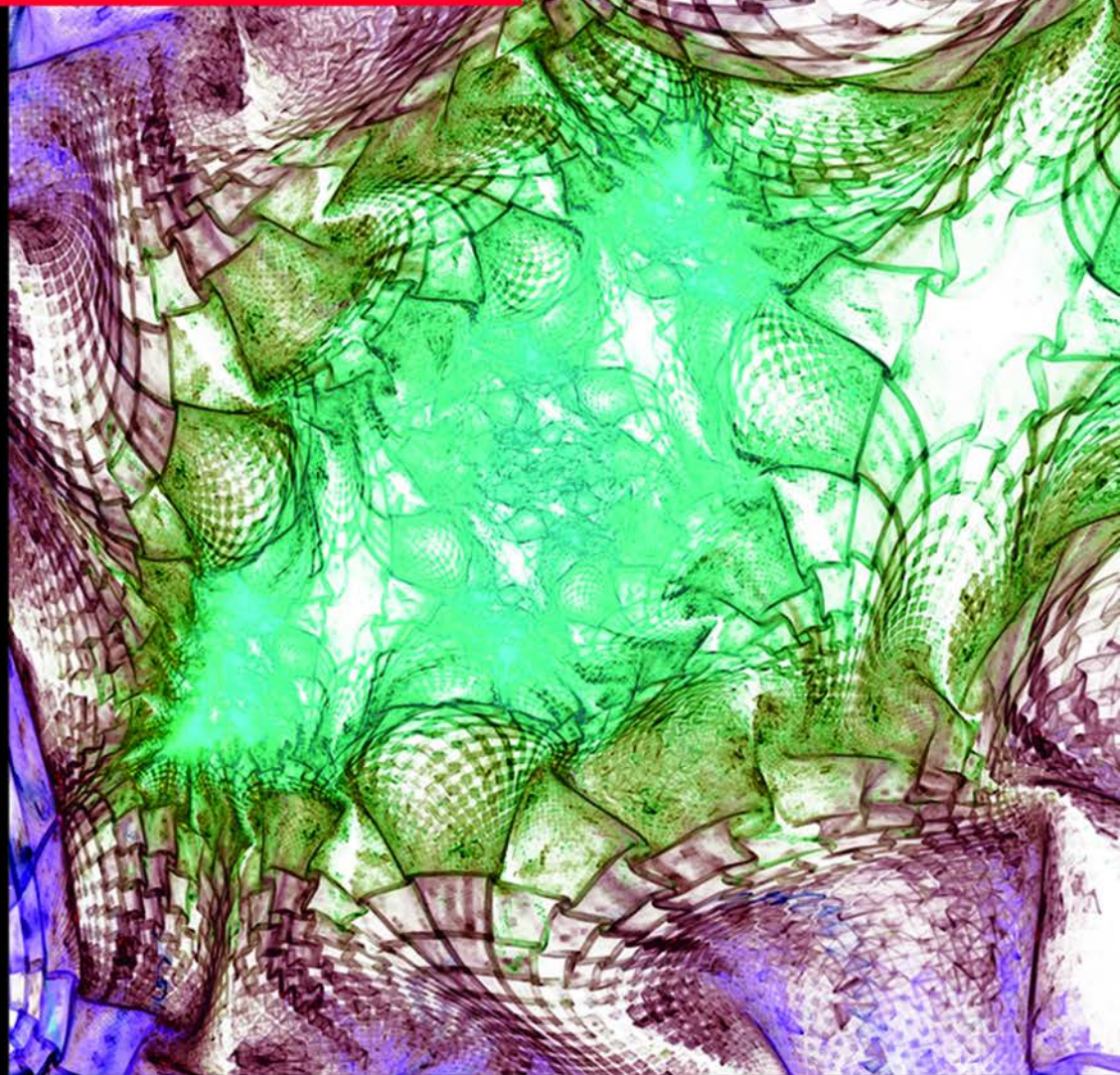




ROUTLEDGE
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The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor

Edited by Salvatore Attardo

“The present *Handbook* testifies to Salvatore Attardo’s lifetime involvement in the linguistic mechanisms of humor and its societal effects. The collection of articles he has gathered here represents at the same time a milestone, a compendium, and a beacon: as a milestone, it marks the advances obtained in humor studies up to and including our times; as a state-of-the-art compendium, it both reveals the ‘state’ of the ‘art’, and details its cutting edges; and as a beacon, it identifies skerries and dangerous currents, while at the same time shining light on the path ahead across the uncharted waters of future study. I highly recommend the work to anybody involved in humor studies: from the interested bystander to the advanced student to the accomplished researcher and teacher—and beyond.”

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Salvatore Attardo is Dean of the College of Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts at Texas A&M University–Commerce, USA. He was Editor-in-Chief of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* for 10 years.

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Contributors

Debra Aarons is a Linguist at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. She is the author of *Jokes and the Linguistic Mind*. Her main areas of interest are linguistic theory, pragmatics, and cognitive science.

Amal Aljared is a Lecturer in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where she teaches English as a foreign language. Her main interests are in structural as well as cognitive linguistics and, more specifically, in areas related to humor research.

Nancy D. Bell is a Professor at Washington State University, USA. Her most recent books include a text on failed humor (*We Are Not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction*) and, with Anne Pomerantz, *Humor in the Classroom: A Guide for Language Teachers and Educational Researchers*.

Derek Bousfield is the Head of Languages, Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. His research interests center around the fusion of pragmatics with stylistics and semiotics. His major works include *Impoliteness in Interaction* and *Impoliteness and Power in Language* (with Miriam Locher). He is working on a monograph with Sam Lerner entitled *Towards a Visual Pragmatics*.

Geert Brône is a Research Professor at the Department of Linguistics of the University of Leuven, Belgium. His research focuses on the development of a cognitive-linguistic approach to multimodality and interactional language use, including humor in interaction, grammar in spoken language, and the relation between eye gaze and gesture in spoken language production and processing.

Chiara Bucaria is a Lecturer in English Language and Translation at the Department of Interpretation and Translation of the University of Bologna, Italy. Her main research interests include the translation of audiovisual products, censorship and textual manipulation, dark and taboo humor.

Christian Burgers is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Science at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He studies the use and effects of metaphor, hyperbole, and irony across discourse domains.

Yu-Chen Chan is Assistant Professor in the Institute of Learning Sciences at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. She has taught neuroscience of learning and humor psychology. Her

current research interests focus on cognitive and affective neuroscience, including humor appreciation deficits in gelotophobes and modulation of working memory function by motivation through humor.

Hsueh-Chih Chen is the Distinguished Professor and the Chairman to the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling of National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan. Focusing on Cognitive Psychology and humor studies, his work investigates humor from cognitive neuroscience to social and cultural influences with various techniques including eye-tracking, EEG, and fMRI.

Delia Chiaro is Professor of English Language and Translation in the Department of Interpreting and Translation at University of Bologna, Italy. She is author and editor of many books including *Translation, Humour and Literature* and *Translation, Humour and the Media*.

Władysław Chłopicki is a Senior Lecturer at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. He is a cognitive linguist, interested in pragmatic and discourse studies, and is firmly engaged in the cross-cultural study of the language of humor. He is a member of the editorial team of the *European Journal of Humour Research*.

Herbert L. Colston is Professor and Chair of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Alberta, Canada. His research investigates figurative language, multimodality, and embodiment in language use and comprehension. His authored books include *Using Figurative Language* and *Interpreting Figurative Meaning*, with Raymond Gibbs.

Ru Huei Dai is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling of National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan. Her research interests include cognitive psychology, humor, and cognitive neuroscience. Her current research agenda is centered on the exploration of neural mechanisms of humor coping in negative emotion-eliciting situations.

Catherine E. Davies is Professor of Linguistics in the Department of English at the University of Alabama, USA. She is an interactional sociolinguist who has always been interested in the way that humor allows people to signal social relationship.

Elisa Gironzetti received her PhD in Spanish Language Teaching from the University of Alicante and now teaches in the Spanish undergraduate and graduate programs at Texas A&M University–Commerce, USA. Her research focuses on humor and Spanish language teaching, and she is currently performing eye-tracking experiments to study the interaction of humor, gaze, and smiling in conversation.

Phillip Glenn is Professor of Communication Studies and Interim Dean of the School of Communication at Emerson College, USA. He co-edited with Elizabeth Holt *Studies of Laughter in Interaction* and authored *Laughter in Interaction*. He serves on the editorial board of *Research on Language and Social Interaction*.

Annarita Guidi teaches Writing and Linguistics at Roma Tre University, Italy. She is the author of books and articles on verbal humor, Italian as a second language, and reading in a cognitive-linguistic perspective. Her areas of research interest are in semantics-pragmatics, cognitive grammar, rhetoric, and psycholinguistics.

Michael Haugh is Professor in Linguistics in the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Queensland, Australia. His research interests include pragmatics, intercultural communication, and conversation analysis, with a focus to date on analyzing face, (im)politeness, teasing and language play, intention, and implicature in interpersonal interactions.

Elizabeth Holt is Senior Lecturer in English at University of Huddersfield, UK. She co-edited with Phillip Glenn *Studies of Laughter in Interaction*. As well as publishing a number of journal articles on laughter in interaction, she has also published research on reported speech and figures of speech. She co-edited with Rebecca Clift *Reporting Talk: Reported Speech in Interaction*.

Christian F. Hempelmann is Assistant Professor of Computational Linguistics and Director of the Ontological Semantic Technology Lab at Texas A&M University–Commerce, USA. He has been researching and publishing on humor for over 20 years. His main interests are the (computational) semantics of humor, the phonosemantics of puns, and multidisciplinary approaches.

Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes is Tenured Lecturer in English Language and Literature at the University of Vigo, Spain. She specializes in the study of humor in 19th- and 20th-century literature and is co-editor of and contributor to *A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings About Humour and Laughter*.

Yi-Jun Liao received her master's degree in learning sciences from National Tsing Hua University (NTHU), Taiwan. She works as a research assistant in the Institute of Learning Sciences at NTHU. She is responsible for the acquisition and analysis of fMRI data. Her research interests include mathematical problem solving and humor neuroscience.

Belem G. López received her doctorate in psychology and currently holds the Carlos E. Castañeda postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas–Austin, USA. Her work explores long-term cognitive and linguistic effects of prior language brokering experience (i.e., informal translation practice).

Tristan Miller is a postdoctoral researcher at the Ubiquitous Knowledge Processing Lab at Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. His research interests include lexical semantics and computational humor. His popular works on word and language play regularly appear in *Babel: The Language Magazine* and *Word Ways: The Journal of Recreational Linguistics*.

Alan Partington is Associate Professor of English Linguistics at Bologna University, Italy. He currently works principally in the field of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). He authored *The Linguistics of Laughter: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Laughter Talk*.

Penny M. Pexman is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary, Canada. She studies several aspects of language processing in adults and in children, including word recognition, semantic processing, and figurative language understanding.

Barbara Plester is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management and International Business at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her current research explores workplace humor, fun, flow and engagement, transgression, virtual team communication, and social media impacts at work, and her most recent project investigates food rituals in organizations.

Victor Raskin is Distinguished Professor of English and Linguistics at Purdue University, USA. He was the founding editor of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and the first elected President of the International Society for Humor Studies. His most significant humor research publications are *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* and the *Primer of Humor Research*.

Stephanie Schnurr is Associate Professor at the University of Warwick, UK. Her main research area is professional and medical communication with a particular interest in the multiple and strategic uses of humor. She has published widely on these topics, including *Leadership Discourse: Interactions of Humour, Gender and Workplace Culture*.

Maria Shardakova is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic & East European Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, USA. Her research interests center on interlanguage pragmatics, cross-cultural and second-language humor, and second-language pedagogy.

Paul Simpson is Professor and Head of English at Liverpool University, UK. He researches broadly in English language and linguistics, but has particular interests in the language of humor. His books include *On the Discourse of Satire* and he is currently writing a monograph on the pragmatics of irony.

Julia M. Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Computer & Information Technology at Purdue University, USA. She has published a number of papers in artificial intelligence, computational humor, computational semantics, fuzzy logic, information security, and robotic communication and intelligence. She has also served on the editorial boards of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and *European Journal of Humour Research*.

Jürgen Trouvain is a Researcher and Lecturer at the Department of Computational Linguistics and Phonetics at Saarland University, Germany. The focus of his PhD was on tempo variation in speech production. His research interests include non-verbal vocalizations, non-native speech, stylistic variation of speech, and historical aspects of speech communication research.

Khiet P. Truong is an Assistant Professor at Human Media Interaction in the University of Twente, Netherlands. She completed her PhD at TNO (Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research) on automatic emotion recognition in speech and automatic laughter detection. Her research focuses on gaining better understandings of vocal behaviors in human and machine interactions to develop affective and social technology.

Villy Tsakona is Assistant Professor of Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis in the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece. Her research interests involve humorous genres, narratives, political and media discourse as well as literacy theories and applications.

Cheng-Hao Tu is an Assistant Professor in Graduate Institute of Acupuncture Science, China Medical University, Taiwan. His current research interests are to explore the brain neuroplasticity associated with pain chronification and its resilience with analgesic intervention in humans using several non-invasive functional brain imaging techniques including MRI and PET.

Jyotsna Vaid is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Language and Cognition Laboratory at Texas A&M University, USA. She edited *Language Processing in Bilinguals: Psycholinguistic*

Contributors

and Neuropsychological Perspectives and serves as Co-editor of the journal *Writing Systems Research*. Her research examines how multiple language users process and produce jokes, idioms, proverbs, and metaphors across languages.

Margot van Mulken is Full Professor in the Department of Communication and Information Science and Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the Radboud University in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the effects of style and culture in the field of persuasive communication. In particular, she is interested in visual metaphors, puns, irony, and language intensity.

Eric Weitz is Associate Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies and Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning for the School of Drama, Film and Music at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. His publications include *Theatre & Laughter* and the *Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*.

Juanita M. Whalen is Instructor in Psychology at Medicine Hat College, Canada. Her research has included studies of the cognitive and social factors that shape how children and adults use various forms of ironic language.

Francisco Yus is Instructor of Pragmatics at the University of Alicante, Spain. He has specialized in the application of cognitive pragmatics (specifically relevance theory) to several pragmatic phenomena including Internet-mediated communication (*Cyberpragmatics*) and humorous communication (*Humour and Relevance*), as well as the analysis of irony comprehension, among other research interests.

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Introduction

Salvatore Attardo

When I first conceptualized the idea of a *Handbook of Language and Humor*, I found that it was relatively straightforward to make a list of the chapters I would have wanted in such a volume. Some of them were obvious: how could a handbook of language and humor not have a chapter on puns, or irony, or laughter, for example? Other chapters were needed for historical coverage: one would not have a serious coverage of the history of the field without a chapter on Raskin's Semantic-Script Theory, or on the isotopy-based European models. Furthermore, once one starts considering the subfields of linguistics, it becomes obvious one needs a conversation analysis chapter, a variationist chapter, a psycholinguistic chapter, a neurolinguistic chapter, a translation chapter, etc. Other chapters were motivated by advances in the field: computational linguistic treatments of humor have undergone a renaissance, as have cognitive linguistic ones, and, at long last, Relevance-theoretic ones. In a few cases, I exercised editorial judgment, for example, decreeing that a new subfield of Internet and online humor had acquired enough significance to deserve a chapter, as have the field of failed humor, the field of the markers of humor (two chapters: one on humor markers and the more narrowly focused chapter on prosody and humor), and the burgeoning field of politeness and humor (a chapter of its own and a significant discussion in the stylistics chapter). Finally, I wanted to ensure fairly even coverage of the various subfields, which is why we have three chapters in discourse-based humor: conversation analysis, discourse-analysis, and corpus-based or corpus-informed analysis, and two chapters on translation, probably the most frequent linguistically related phenomenon applied to humor.

No handbook is ideal, a concept my editorial team had to remind me of repeatedly during intervention-style virtual conferences. Some chapters that had been planned did not materialize and other directions that might have been explored were left to future work: for example, very little attention has been paid to non-Western scholarship (with exceptions, see Chapter 6 on the isotopy disjunction model). All I can say, is that there are limits to what can go into one book, not to mention the expertise of this editor.

The authors of the chapters are undisputed experts on the subject and wherever possible, the leading specialists in their respective fields, often the founders of that tradition, or the main interpreter thereof. I also recruited a couple of emerging scholars when I thought they could shed a new and interesting perspective on a given area.

Very little guidance was given to the authors who wrote their chapters in complete independence. My only requirement, besides the much-hated length of the chapter, was the organization in four parts: an introductory historical perspective section, a discussion of the “core” issues of the field, a discussion of the methodology and a sample analysis, and finally a “new debates” section that would point at the developments of the fields, the new directions that we may expect to see emerge in the near future. When appropriate, I waived even this minor requirement. When a chapter might have been expected to overlap with other chapters (for example, the discourse chapters, which overlap multiply, or the chapter on irony, which may overlap with most chapters), I worked with the authors to ensure minimal and non-disruptive overlaps. Needless to say, some overlapping in coverage among the chapters is to be expected and even a positive feature. I distributed among the authors that requested it the list of chapters, so that they too may determine if overlaps were to be expected and to what extent. In some cases, the authors of different chapters chose to engage in significant discussion among themselves and re-organized the division of contents of the chapters. I also deliberately abstained from intervening in these discussions, limiting my input to ensuring coverage of all relevant topics.

Not only were the authors given complete independence on coverage within their area, but each chapter may have its own methodological and theoretical stance. This is usually stated explicitly in the opening section of the text, but is generally apparent throughout the treatments. Thus for example, the relevance theoretic chapter is concerned mostly with the contributions of that school to the field, rather than with the field at large. The conversation analysis (CA) chapter opens with a clear and thought provoking rejection of the category of “humor,” at least as a first approach to a text. We could probably argue that CA and, say the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) belong to different paradigms (Glenn and Holt do not use this term). These differences are the sign of the existing subdisciplinary differences that coexist, often uneasily, within the discipline of linguistics. I hasten to add that I intend here “linguistics” as inclusive of “applied linguistics.” More discussion of the subfields of linguistics and their connections to humor research can be found in Chapter 5 in this volume, which I co-authored with Raskin.

This is not to say that as the editor I renounced attempts at cross-disciplinary fertilization. As is well known, humor studies is an intensely interdisciplinary field and so it would be absurd not to encourage the diverse areas of linguistics to interact with one another. Whenever the authors of the contributions suggested interdisciplinary comparisons or applied ideas from one area to the other, I encouraged these ideas, although I cannot say I always approved of them. I left entire control of the contents of the chapters of the handbook to the authors themselves, provided basic representativeness was assured, of course. As Raskin and I took it upon ourselves to outline some interdisciplinary venues in our co-authored chapter, I felt that my point of view was already sufficiently represented in the handbook.

Generally speaking, the cohesiveness of the handbook chapters is remarkable. Virtually every chapter could have quoted most of the other chapters. Several chapters would benefit from parallel readings. For example Haugh’s “Teasing” chapter overlaps nicely with Shardakova’s “Politeness, Teasing, and Humor,” which in turns overlaps with Simpson and Bousfield’s chapter, “Humor and Stylistics.” Burgers and van Mulken’s “Humor Markers,” focused on irony, dovetails with Gironzetti’s “Prosodic and Multimodal Markers of Humor,” focused on humor at large. Glenn and Holt’s, Schnurr and Plester’s, and Partington’s chapters on Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Corpus-Assisted Studies also form humor research answer to the God-father trilogy.

Sadly, the initial project included two chapters that failed to materialize, due to personal problems of the authors who had to withdraw from the project or could not work within the time frame. Chapters on humorous metaphors and cross-cultural humor suffered that fate.

I ended up writing the chapter on Gricean pragmatics and humor myself after two authors pulled out, for personal reasons.

Now that the project is complete, it is interesting to look at the 35 chapters in this handbook. Two considerations come to mind: first, 35 years ago, when I started researching humor, one could not have assembled a handbook of Language and Humor. There simply was not a critical mass of scholarship to warrant such an endeavor. When 10 years later I published my first book, which quixotically attempted to review all linguistic scholarship on humor, the fact that it was a more or less reasonable goal meant that, while the field had taken off, it was still small enough to be encompassed in one volume. Today, almost each of the chapters in the handbook quotes *several* books on the topic and the emerging fields merely one or two. Second, with the usual exception of psychology, no other discipline in humor studies has reached this level of maturity. Humor is now an accepted topic of inquiry in most of not all areas of linguistics. This is good news for the field of Language and Humor.

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An Overview of Humor Theory

Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes

Perhaps the first thing to be said when giving a diachronic description of the field of humor studies is that the term “humor” in itself is a very modern one. In fact, taken in the broadly inclusive sense it has today, it dates no further back than the 20th century. Before this, its semantic charge was not only different, but also far more restricted than that which we currently give it. Derived from the classical use of the term to refer to those peculiar or dominant elements in a person that determine their character (choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, or sanguine), it evolved through Ben Jonson’s early 17th-century adaptation of the concept as a basis for comic characterization in terms of which an extravagant or affected emphasis on personal peculiarities made an individual subject to ridicule. The word, as used in this sense, became increasingly popular during the 18th and early 19th centuries, when it came to refer to a Romantic concept of the comic based on individual eccentricity and completely devoid of the critical intent that we normally associate with this genre nowadays. Previous to the connection thus established between the comic and the “humorous,” texts on the subject refer to a variety of terms such as *laughter*, *wit*, *comedy*, *raillery*, *jesting*, *scorn*, *ridicule*, *mirth*, or *the risible*, which are used to refer to different manifestations of the phenomenon and, more importantly for our purposes, to different attitudes and approaches to it.

Much has been written on the subject of humor (or laughter, wit, etc.) over the ages, some of it in the form of lengthy essays, other as passing comments embedded in pieces on other subjects. But in all the maze of opinion, speculation, philosophizing, description, and prescription, some of it very repetitive, various lines of interest are visible. The first of these, predominant through the ages from Plato and Aristotle down to the end of the 19th century, is the question of the moral and social acceptability of comedy and the comic, encompassed, for reasons that we will see, in what is known as the Superiority Theory. Those writers concerned with this line of inquiry are interested in the object of laughter, in what, or rather who, we laugh at, in the attitudes of those who laugh, and in laughter’s good or evil, aristocratic or plebeian nature. Most seem to feel, though with varying degrees of intensity, that laughter is potentially disruptive, vulgar, and even sinful and that it is therefore necessary to restrain and control it.

Many philosophers and writers on laughter are forced to admit, however, that it does have its beneficial aspects, because it banishes sadness and boredom, puts the individual in an optimistic mood and, in general, lightens the load of everyday living. The positive physiological and

psychological effects of laughter are studied in the Release or Relief Theory of Humor, developed mainly from the 19th century onwards, but already insinuated in classical writers and, some time later, by such 16th- and 17th-century authors as Laurent Joubert and Descartes.

Very often complementary to these lines of thought is an interest in analyzing what types of laughter are socially and morally acceptable and in studying what sort of mechanisms, apart from ridicule and derision, may be used to cause amusement. This line of thinking, originally followed by classical writers in treatises on rhetoric and poetics designed to furnish the individual with elegant, tasteful ways of gaining the attention and good will of an audience by means of wit, is that which has been most fertile for contemporary theories of humor. This approach, known as the Incongruity Theory, shifts the perspective from the emotional angle of derision, envy and malice to a cognitive view of humor and its analysis.

The three streams of comment and theory about humor overlap into each other at many points and in the works of many authors, but, because each corresponds to a different angle of approach to the same object of study, it soon becomes obvious that they must be taken as essentially complementary. Furthermore, each historical period has its own predominant approach to the subject, though this does not necessarily mean that other approaches are completely ignored.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each dedicated to one of the three theories and organized internally following chronological criteria.

The Dangers of Humor: Superiority and Disparagement Theories

The earliest surviving texts on what we now call humor belong to Classical (Greek) Antiquity and are seminal for later ideas on the subject. There is no surviving work from this time that deals exclusively, or even very extensively, with the topic, so the information that has come down to us derives from writings on other subjects, like Plato's *Republic*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*, or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics*, and *Rhetoric*. From them we can see that one of the principal attitudes (though not the only one) towards laughter at that time was that of suspicion, wariness, and condemnation. Basing their comments on comedy as a theatrical genre, Greek thinkers seem to have been essentially distrustful of laughter, especially if it was excessive and derisive. In that case, they believed it became vulgar. They tended, therefore, from the evidence we can gather, to stress the dangers of laughter and preach for its restriction rather than to study it in any sort of detail. Both Plato and Aristotle condemned the ridicule and derision often implicit in it, and associated humor with vice, offense, vulgarity, and foolishness, so that they declared it unworthy of virtuous, free people, as well as of the elevated matters that should, ideally, concern the upper classes. Comic acting, therefore, should be left to the lower classes, because comedy is a genre related to socially and ethically inferior characters involved in ignoble action (a concept that was perpetuated in classical theatre). According to Plato, laughter is an emotion, and therefore irrational, falling into the category of those elements that must be restrained by Reason. In his view, the laughable person thinks himself or herself superior (richer, better-looking, or cleverer) than s/he really is, which makes them ridiculous. Laughing at them, however, involves a certain malice and malice is harmful and thence wrong. Superiority, therefore, in this earliest of formulations, lies in the conceited and overestimated self-image of the object of laughter, which renders the latter ridiculous (*Philebus*, p. 48a–50b. 4th century BC). Later, Aristotle changed this, defining comedy as “an imitation of men worse than the average” and equating the ridiculous with the ugly, by which he meant “a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others” (*Poetics*, pg. 5. 4th century BC; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galiñanes, 2009, p. 77).

Both Aristotle himself and other classical authors like Demetrius (3rd century BC), Cicero (1st century BC), or Quintilian (1st century AD), though interested in the possibilities of wit as

a rhetorical device to win the attention and good will of an audience, were nevertheless highly critical of the excesses of certain types of laughter and extremely careful to make a distinction between the coarse sort of humor that raises laughs by buffoonery, coarse language and imperfection, physical or spiritual, and the more genteel type, based on wordplay, incongruity, surprise, etc., which raises a controlled smile and is suitable for a refined and cultivated elite. As was mentioned earlier with respect to comedy as a literary genre, therefore, those early thinkers interested in the subject saw in laughter and its appreciation a marker of social class.

Despite their condemnation of certain types of laughter, however, the attitude of these classical authors was relatively enlightened compared with that which comes across from the very scarce writings on the subject of early Christianity. As Figueroa-Dorrego says, the Christian religion had an important influence in the study of humor “not because the Scriptures or the early Christian Church promoted any systematic analysis of this phenomenon, but because they rejected it and held it back for centuries” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 49)—for about 1,000 years, in fact. The general attitude to humor of the Church echoed the most rotund condemnations of earlier writers. With its fundamentalist aspirations to control of its members and its insistence on the acceptance of earthly hardship in return for the promise of heavenly bliss, the Christian Church found laughter very dangerous. To quote Figueroa-Dorrego again,

for Christian thinkers laughter was too associated with the body, and the strict regulation of the body was a central issue in their ascetic approach to life on earth . . . Moreover, humorous laughter was too allied to relativism, subversion, chaos and relax to fit into the agenda of the Church, fully committed to ensuring complete authority in society, very often through the discourse of fear.

(Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 50)

The key texts of Christianity contain very few references to laughter. Those in the Old Testament refer to derisive, scornful laughter. Ironically, in most of these instances it is God himself who laughs and this laughter shows His superiority and omnipotence over mankind, and is connected with punishment and wrath. In the New Testament, where references to laughter are even fewer, the phenomenon continues to be related to scorn, but also to “filthiness” and “foolish talking,” which are “not convenient” (Ephesians 5:4; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 151). Later comments, found in the works of the early theologians of Christianity known as the Church Fathers (Clement of Alexandria, 3rd century AD, Basil of Caesarea, 4th century AD, John Chrysostom and Jerome, in the 4th or 5th century AD), are equally damning and far more explicit: though laughter is natural to man, and moderate laughter (the smile) can be acceptable, immoderate laughter is related to insult and derision, to the ridiculous and foolish and must be kept in check, for it “gives birth to foul discourse, and foul discourse to actions still more foul” in a sequence that may even lead to slaughter and murder (*The Homilies on the Statues to the People of Antioch*, XV; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 157). The general attitude of the Church, in fact, is well summarized in the following passage, also taken from Chrysostom:

Christ discourses to us much of mourning, and blesses them that mourn, and pronounces them that laugh wretched. For this is not the theatre for laughter, neither did we come together for this intent, that we may give way to immoderate mirth, but that we may groan, and by this groaning inherit a kingdom.

(Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 158)

The social and cultural life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages was dominated by the Church, as was, to some extent, its political life, so what little was written about laughter and humor in this period continued to be influenced by Church authorities, and its tenor was very similar to that already described. The rise of Monasticism brought with it a life in theory dominated by self-denial, obedience, silence, humility, reverence of God and hard work, and frivolity, foolishness, and vulgarity, and therefore laughter were totally banned. The connection between the laughable and the bodily was emphasized in a context in which monks and nuns were supposed to focus on spiritual matters, and one of the questions most debated in sermons, and even in academic contexts, was whether Jesus had ever laughed or not, the official line being, of course, the negative one. It was not, in fact, until the Renaissance that a renewed, more positive interest in laughter and humor arose, but this new period was marked, as we shall see, by a different emphasis that relegates the “dangers” and threats that beset the laugher to a secondary position.

Not until the Protestant Reformation did attitudes to laughter and humor become as negative as those we have seen thus far. In England, from the building of the first “play houses” in London in 1576 and 1577, a great deal of what was written on humor and laughter took the form, once more, of diatribes against the characteristics of comedy as a theatrical genre. “Comedy,” in this sense of the word, was seen as immoral, filthy, and sinful in itself, but it was also considered to provide occasion for sin and immorality, because it led youth into idleness and provided the locus and occasion for prostitution and a multitude of other sins. Representative of this line of thought are Philip Stubbes (*The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583) and William Prynne (*Histrio-Matrix: The Players’ Scourge or Actors Tragedie*, 1633). More influential in terms of humor theory, however, are René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes. Descartes (*The Passions of the Soul*, 1649) is a good example of a complex, multilateral approach to laughter, because he was concerned with describing its physiological manifestations and analyzing its causes. However, he also laid some emphasis on the element of scorn present in laughter, and seemed conscious of the harm that can be done to an individual through derision if it is used maliciously, but he pointed out that when used with such moderation as to be merely “modest bantering,” it can be “useful in reproofing vices by making them appear ridiculous” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 292), thus suggesting that laughter might act as a means of social control, an idea that would be taken up and developed in subsequent versions of the Superiority Theory.

It was Thomas Hobbes (*Of Human Nature*, 1650; *Leviathan*, 1651), however, who crystallized all the reasons for distrust of laughter into one potent statement that linked together all those comments that connected humor with the perception of obscenity or of other people’s misfortunes, and that was to cause much debate in subsequent discussions of laughter and humor. Although he recognized that there must be an element of incongruity and surprise present in humor, and linked these with the wit of “jests,” he concentrated on the elements of scorn and ridicule present in laughter when he said that:

Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those *Grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men.

(1651; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 294)

The 18th and 19th centuries constituted, as Michael Billig says, a golden age for the philosophy of humor (2005, p. 57). This was a period marked by an increasing acceptance of the

connection of laughter with good humor and even benevolence, and a predominant interest in explanations of the phenomenon based on incongruity and manifested as socially acceptable “wit.” However, a consciousness of the dangers of coarse laughter and of its function as a marker of social status continued to exist, as we may see in the injunctions on the subject of Lord Chesterfield to his son:

Frequent and loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill manners; it is the manner in which the mob express their silly joy at silly things; and they call it being merry. . . . It is low buffoonery or silly accidents that always excite laughter; and that is what people of sense and breeding should show themselves above.

(1748; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 426)

Hobbes’s account of laughter, which became the classic statement of superiority theory, was widely discussed and frequently defended during the period. Hegel, for example, believed that laughter is little more than “an expression of self-satisfied shrewdness” (*Aesthetics*, 1835; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 498); Alexander Bain maintained that “not in physical defects alone, but in everything where a man can achieve a stroke of superiority, in surpassing or discomfiting a rival, is the disposition to laughter apparent” (*The Emotions and the Will*, 1859; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 522); and Hazlitt (*Lectures on the Comic Writers of Great Britain*, 1818) gave a lengthy list of objects liable to incite laughter, ranging from a “bottle nose in a caricature,” “a stuffed figure of an alderman in a pantomime, through the dress of foreigners” to someone “dressed in the height of fashion, or quite out of it,” and ended up by saying:

We laugh to show our satisfaction with ourselves, or our contempt for those around us, or to conceal our envy, or our ignorance. We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise, at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy and affectation.

(Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, pp. 475–476)

A short time later, Baudelaire took this attitude to laughter to an extreme, and amplified the moral concern with self-glorifying humor of Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes, by characterizing laughter as the most reliable indication of the satanic spirit in man (*On the Essence of Laughter*, 1855; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, pp. 508–514).

Particularly fertile for the development of 20th-century offshoots to superiority theory was Henri Bergson’s famous essay, “*Le Rire*” (1900). This work is of special interest because, like Descartes’s, it relates laughter with social factors, though in a new way. Bergson saw laughter as “always the laughter of a group” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 576). Its natural environment, he said, is society. Therefore, it has a social function, responds to certain exigencies of social life, and has a social meaning. Its main function is to keep people under control because, given the fact that nobody likes to be laughed at, it prevents them from deviating too radically from what is deemed socially to be normal, proper, and decent. According to Bergson, “we may . . . admit as a general rule that it is the faults of others that make us laugh, provided we add that they make us laugh by reason of their *unsociability* rather than of their *immorality*.” In his view, therefore, laughter is “a sort of *social gesture*. By the fear which it inspires, it restrains eccentricity” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 582), its function being “to intimidate by humiliating” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 623).

Almost contemporary with “*Le Rire*” was *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* by Sigmund Freud (1905), who gave laughter and humor an important place in psychic life. Freud said that although most jokes are hostile, it is not simply a question of our laughing at the infirmities of

others, but rather that this laughter is a means of liberating those primary instincts of aggression that civilization and society have forced the human being to repress. Jokes allow us to exploit those weak and ridiculous aspects of our enemies that we could not otherwise bring forward openly or consciously; they help us to evade “restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible” (1991, p. 149). Through them we make our enemy small, inferior, despicable, or simply comic, and achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him.

These intuitions about the hostility present in many manifestations of humor have been amply elaborated on in more recent years. Humor researchers, now predominantly psychologists and sociologists rather than philosophers and men of letters as in the past, have accepted the basic premise that humor is a social mechanism with definite social functions such as consensus, conflict, and control, and have converged to study empirically joking, the specific circumstances in which it occurs, and its effects. A glance at the contents of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* reveals an abundance of articles with titles such as “Humor’s Role in Married Life,” “Humor and Social Distance in Elementary School Children,” or “Group Differences in the Appreciation of Feminist Humor,” to name but a few at random. The hypothesis, initially stated by Plato and Aristotle, that we laugh at the infirmities and ridiculous aspects of our fellow beings was partially refuted in the 1960s and ’70s by several authors who demonstrated that this is not altogether true, but rather that “something is humorous to the extent that it enhances an object of affection and/or disparages an object of repulsion” and that “it is unhumorous to the extent that it does the opposite” (La Fave, 1972, p. 198).

Humor, then, according to Social-Behavioral theories, is largely a question of reference groups and “affective disposition,” as formulated by Zillmann:

Mirth, then, is said to vary proportionally with the negativeness of the affective disposition toward the disparaged party, and with the positiveness of the affective disposition toward the disparaging party, and jointly so.

(1983, p. 92)

This being so, humor and its appreciation are very largely judged to be a question of social allegiance and identification, because it is nowadays generally recognized that the scope and degree of mutual understanding in humor varies directly with the degree to which the participants share their social backgrounds. This is why laughter is often limited by national frontiers and the passage of time.

Psycho-physiological Approaches: Release Theory

A connection was first established between humor and health by the classical writers. Aristotle, Cicero and Pliny the Younger (ca. 100 AD) all considered that, if subordinated to the ideals of refined and moderate behavior, laughter can provide pleasure and relaxation. This line of thought was, of course, passed over completely by early Christianity, though Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*, 3rd century AD) and Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, 13th century AD) both attributed—albeit grudgingly—a certain positive psychological and physiological effect to laughter. This concession had very much to do with the theory of “humors,” established by Hippocrates in the 4th century BC, according to which the sanguine type was optimistic, cheerful and a lover of fun and pleasure, a notion that led many doctors of Antiquity and in the Middle Ages to believe that purified blood made people joyful and prone to laughter, thus reinforcing a relationship between laughter and purity of blood (in the purely physical sense, of course). Later on, in the 17th century, Ben Jonson, inspired by classical and neo-classical theories of comedy

as a literary genre, re-established the connection between the humors and laughter in a slightly different way by using the concept of *humor* as a peculiar or dominant quality that forms the basis of a person's character. For Jonson, when a person's humor is very exaggerated or extravagant, and especially if it is affected or artificial, it becomes a very appropriate subject for ridicule, constituting not a mere quirk, but an evil moral condition that occurs when the appetites gain ascendancy over the Reason. Thus Jonson saw comedy as a social corrective, because it exposes follies and vices to laughter and ridicule. The relation thus established between humor and personal eccentricity would be developed and elaborated on, both in theory and in practice, by Romanticism,

In 1579, Laurent Joubert (*Treatise on Laughter*, Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, pp. 258–277), while subscribing to both Disparagement and Incongruity theories of laughter, described the physical action of laughing in a fashion very reminiscent of certain later authors:

Laughter is a movement caused by the jubilant mind and the unequal agitation of the heart, which draws back the mouth and the lips, and shakes the diaphragm and the pectoral parts with impetuosity and broken-up sound, though all of which is expressed a feeling over an ugly thing unworthy of pity. . . . This is caused principally by an effusion of humors, but also aided by other accidents, all depending on the agitation of the diaphragm and chest. These parts are agitated by the unequal movement of the heart, which dilates and contracts in turn, but more the former than the latter.

(Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 276)

In *The Passions of the Soul* (1649; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 290), René Descartes gave a very similar description of the physical aspects of laughter, and more than a century later Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Judgement*, 1790), subscribing fully to the Incongruity theory of laughter, wrote that this expression of amusement begins as the play of ideas in the mind and results in “the furtherance of the vital bodily processes, the affection that moves the intestines and the diaphragm, in a word, the feeling of health (which without such inducements one does not feel) that makes up the gratification felt by us” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 433). As the mind is caught up in the deceptions of a jest, it is put through “a rapidly alternating tension and relaxation,” which is then repeated by the body in movements that are “beneficial to health” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 435). And Kant came to a conclusion that is seminal for Release theory when he wrote that “laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 433).

Kant's definition was taken up by Herbert Spencer (*The Physiology of Laughter*, 1860; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, pp. 523–529). Stating his premises in a more “scientific” manner, Spencer said that our emotions are, or at least in our nervous system take the form of, nervous energy. There is an intimate connection between nervous energy and our motor system, in such a way that nervous energy tends to produce muscular motion, and, indeed, when it rises to a certain intensity, does so, producing action. In this way, fear produces movements of escape, anger produces physical aggression, and so on. In the case of laughter, what happens is that feelings are built up that are then seen to be inappropriate, so that emotion is changed from strong to weak, and the excess energy thus produced is liberated in a series of muscular movements (laughter) which do not lead to any sort of action, but that serve only to release nervous energy, in much the same way as the opening of a safety valve does in a steam pipe. Thus for Spencer, as for Kant, laughter is a benevolent force that always produces equilibrium within an individual by allowing for the overflow of excess energy.

The idea of laughter as a release of excess energy, and the notion that this energy is created by the building up of an emotion that is then seen to be unwarranted, was taken up by many authors after Spencer and treated in different ways. Freud, among others, used it in the last part of his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* to analyze the nature of humor, as distinct from that of jokes and comedy:

The conditions for [humor's] appearance are given if there is a situation in which, according to our usual habits, we should be tempted to release a distressing affect and if motives then operate upon us which suppress that affect *in statu nascendi*. . . . The pleasure of humor, if this is so, comes about . . . at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur; it arises from an *economy in the expenditure of affect*.

(1991, p. 293)

This Relief Theory, in a form very similar to that described by Spencer and Freud, was adopted and adapted in the 20th century by many humanistically inclined students of humor and comedy. Many of them were strongly influenced by the criticism applied to tragedy, and therefore employed classical versions of catharsis as seen through the prism of Spencerean and Freudian theory, to come up with notions such as Elder Olson's "katastasis," by which the emotion of laughter is defined as:

a relaxation, or, as Aristotle would say, a *katastasis* of concern due to a manifest absurdity of the grounds for concern. And we may distinguish three things involved: (1) the apparent or anticipated sequence of circumstances (agent, act, etc.); (2) the factors of apparent seriousness (good or evil of a certain magnitude, etc. . . .); and (3) a real circumstance manifesting the absurdity of attributing (2) to (1).

(1968, p. 16)

Other authors have defended various slightly different forms of the theory, combining Spencer's views with the Freudian concept of laughter as relief from specific inhibitions or repressions as applied by him to aggressive jokes. Among them was Arthur Koestler (1964/1989), who spoke about "safety-valve theory," which assumed some excess of emotions, such as anger, sexual desire, apprehension, pride and so on, needing an outlet to keep them under control. These passions, which might have driven the individual to take action to satisfy them, are deflated and deflected through laughter, which incapacitates a person for action and at the same time leaves him/her pleausurably relieved.

Scientific psychological research slightly altered the tendency descending from Spencer and Freud and, under the auspices of Daniel E. Berlyne, focused on the concept of arousal rather than release. Freud and Spencer spoke about the building up of tension, but were chiefly interested in how it was released on seeing itself unjustified. Berlyne, on the other hand, was more interested in how and in what conditions tension may be built up for laughter to be produced. (1960) According to him "slight and transitory jumps in arousal [excitement or activation] become pleasurable as a consequence of the drop in arousal that quickly terminate them" (1960, p. 199). He concluded that positive hedonic value can arise either from some condition that raises arousal only moderately (an "arousal boost"), or from a sequence of conditions generating an uncomfortable state of heightened arousal that is subsequently reversed (an "arousal jag"). Speaking of jokes, he says that there are many that fit the latter, producing a phase of discomfort, puzzlement, "tension," or even fright, which is then rapidly resolved (1972, pp. 56–57). Berlyne's position was later modified by M.K. Rothbart et al. (1977), who argued that arousal

increases of any size will be accompanied by pleasurable affect only when they are associated with the subject's judgment that the situation is a "safe" or non-threatening one, because the experience of high-intensity stimulation may lead to immediate avoidance; indeed, if the conditions are very pressing, a person does not remain in a threatening situation long enough to make a judgment anyway as to whether it is safe or not. This led other researchers to point out that, for humor to be taken as such, a specific frame of mind must exist. Freud had already established that one of the conditions necessary for humorous laughter is "a generally cheerful mood, in which one is inclined to laugh," and an "expectation of the comic" (1991, p. 282). Elder Olson also talked about the need to be in an appropriate frame of mind in order to appreciate humor, and more modern, psychological lines of research (McGhee, 1972; Rothbart et al., 1977; Suls, 1977) emphasized the importance of a playful or non-serious mood in most humor situations.

It has been argued that Relief Theory is a theory of laughter rather than specifically a theory of humor or comedy, because all this talk of the building up and release of tension, "arousal jags," and so on, suggests the hysterical laughter often attendant on the happy outcome of a difficult situation. However, though its application to verbal humor is not always apparent, it does account for the intuition, taken up by later theorists, that humor appreciation requires the pre-existence of a propitious frame of mind.

Cognitive-Perceptual Approaches: Incongruity Theory

As I said earlier, the way in which we laugh and what we laugh at was, until fairly recently, considered an indicator of education, sensibility, and, in short, social class, and from as far back as Aristotle, thinkers have made an effort to analyze and define what other factors, apart from ridicule and derision, contribute to amusement. And I use the term "amusement" here, as distinct from laughter, quite deliberately, for the cognitive approach of Incongruity Theory deals with contrived "wit" rather than with the more accidental or incidental laughter occasioned by situation or personal characteristics; it deals (according to many past theorists) with the smile rather than with laughter. And it does so initially from the essentially pragmatic perspective of using amusement with specific aims, as is indicated by the type of works in which we first find this angle: Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, Demetrius's *De Elocutione* (ca. 3rd century BC), Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Officiis*, or Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. Indeed, Aristotle, whose comments were seminal for later developments in the field, considered that making one's listeners laugh is a good way to gain their attention and good will (positive identification) and is useful in controversy as a way of disarming one's opponent.

Aristotle, therefore, and those later classical writers mentioned, went to considerable lengths to study the mechanisms and define those (linguistic) devices that can be used to produce laughter: homonyms, synonyms, an unconventional use of language, impossible hyperboles and exaggeration in general, punning, irony, ambiguity, unexpected turns, drawing strange resemblances or dissimilarities, comparisons and metaphors, etc. Some of them (Aristotle, Cicero) referred to the importance of surprise, or of deceiving expectations and also, more specifically, to incongruity (Demetrius, Cicero) and the importance of brevity (Quintilian). All of them, however, though aware of the rhetorical usefulness of wit and of the social and psychological uses of conviviality, drew a line between the boorish humor of buffoons and the low comedy that attracted the rabble and the acceptable, tactful, polished wit of the educated, urbane elite.

This elitist concept of "high" culture as opposed to the "popular" one was taken up again by the Renaissance, which re-discovered classical culture and turned it not only into a fundamental reference, but also, in itself, into one of the most important means of attaining that sophisticated elitist cultural status sought after by the aristocracy and the clergy. In this context Renaissance

humanists interested in laughter returned to Cicero and Quintilian's writings on rhetoric and oratory. Thus Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* (1553) concentrated on analyzing what things may cause laughter different from the derisive sort, and they hit, in fact, on many characteristics that would be repeatedly mentioned and analyzed in subsequent literature on the subject.

Though preceded by a new period of predominantly negative attitudes to laughter, as we saw earlier, this interest in the social aspects and possibilities of wit was renewed in the 18th century, when the subject was frequently dealt with in parallel to contemporary discussions on taste and politeness. Writers and thinkers like the Earl of Shaftesbury or Lord Chesterfield were again interested in defining relatively refined forms of laughter and a "polite" concept of humor in line with the "justness of thought and style, refinement in manners, good breeding and politeness of every kind" that the Earl of Shaftesbury (*A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to My Lord Sommers*, 1708; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 371) saw as the mark of the individual that lives in a free society. Malicious laughter was increasingly rejected and, in view of this, a great many writers made a real effort to define the various aspects of the laughable or "ludicrous" and what causes it, tending in general to attribute the laughable to incongruity, seen under various guises.

Some authors, such as Joseph Addison (*The Spectator*, 1711), Alexander Bain (*The Emotions and the Will*, 1859), Jean Paul Richter (*School for Aesthetics*, 1813), and George Eliot (*German Wit*, 1856), among others, saw incongruity as the perception and discovery of relations between ideas or things that at first sight appear totally unconnected, but always on condition, as Sydney Smith pointed out, that "it must be . . . things which are never brought together in the common events of life, and in which the mind has discovered relations by its own subtlety and quickness" (1804; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 439). For others, such as Francis Hutcheson (*Reflections Upon Laughter*, 1725) and William Hazlitt (*Lectures on the Comic Writers of Great Britain*, 1818), incongruity implied finding differences in apparently similar concepts, or between expectations and outcomes, while yet other writers—Corbyn Morris (*An Essay on Wit*, etc., 1744), Coleridge (*A Lecture on Wit and Humor*, 1818), or James Sully (*Ridicule and Truth*, 1877)—accepted both possibilities. Some writers formulated their concept of incongruity in terms very similar to those accepted today. Richter, for example, defined the ridiculous as based on incongruity, but said that the latter lies in the fact that we attribute to another person a knowledge and motivation that seem logical from our point of view, but that are contradictory to what that other person actually does, so that his acts seem nonsensical and ludicrous and cause our laughter (1813; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes 2009, p. 450). Arthur Schopenhauer (*The World as Will and Idea*, 1883)—and later Freud (1991, pp. 49–51)—anticipated Victor Raskin's script-switch theory (1985) by saying that we organize our perceptions under what he called "abstract concepts" which frequently lump different things under the same label, so that we often refer to very diverse objects by the same word. The ludicrous arises, according to him, when we are struck by a clash between our initial conceptual interpretation of a word and our perception of another "real" interpretation as activated by the context in which we find it (1883; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 487). Bergson said a situation was comic "when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time" (1900; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 600), and gave the notion of incongruity a social dimension by defining it, in the context of his view of the "wideawake adaptability and the living pliability" (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 578) necessary in social life as "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 585).

Whatever the version of incongruity given, this factor was usually recognized as necessary but not sufficient to cause laughter. In the early 18th century, in fact, the connection between incongruity-based wit and laughter was not necessarily at all clear. Indeed, wit is sometimes described as similar to simile and metaphor, though the two latter are “slower” in their effect than wit because they are more accurate and complete (Corbyn Morris, 1744; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 413). We also find in the literature of the period frequent references to “grave wit.” So, what other ingredients are necessary to make incongruity funny? Some authors, such as Sidney Smith (1804), emphasized the idea that the incongruity must be a novel one; others, following the same line of thought, stressed that an element of suddenness or surprise is indispensable (Kant, Smith, Schopenhauer, Coleridge) and that the new conjunction of ideas cannot be useful, beautiful or sublime, nor can it excite “high passions” such as anger or pity (Sidney Smith), or any sense of danger or pain (Coleridge), and Herbert Spencer said that only “descending” incongruity can cause laughter, because “laughter naturally results only when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small”; “ascending” incongruity, produced “when after something very insignificant there arises without anticipation something very great” (1860; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 529), causes wonder, as happens in the case of poetic metaphor or simile. Charles Darwin (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872; Figueroa-Dorrego & Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, p. 532), like Freud, specified that “the mind must be in a pleasureable condition” for incongruity to be perceived as funny, and the latter also mentioned brevity as a necessary condition for the success of jokes.

Thinking and research on the role of incongruity in what we find humorous was one of the main lines taken up in the 20th century, and certainly that which has proved most fertile for contemporary linguistic theories. Pursued by thinkers such as Arthur Koestler (1964/1989), Paul Jerry Suls (1972; 1977), McGhee (1972; 1977), and Thomas Shultz (1976), among others, the theory changed slightly, and incongruity alone was no longer considered sufficient to make something funny. Instead, humor appreciation was conceptualized as a two-stage process involving the discovery of an incongruity followed by the resolution of that incongruity by the application of a different cognitive rule. This resolution is what separates humor from what otherwise would be simply nonsense. Suls (1972) compared the information-processing strategies used in dealing with a joke or cartoon to those used in the process of reading normal, non-humorous material. The chain of input, prediction, confirmation/disconfirmation, readjustment to new input, etc., is the same, but what happens in a joke, which is normally a simple narrative structure, requiring little readjustment on the part of the receiver, is that there comes a point, usually at the end, where the listener’s expectations are abruptly disconfirmed without the possibility, because this is the termination of the joke, that later text will be read in to reconcile the incongruity. At this point, the receiver engages in what Suls called “problem solving” to find how the ending (i.e., the “punch line”) follows from the main body of the joke.

In explaining how this task is carried out, Koestler coined the term “bisociation,” which became pivotal to the theory. The pattern underlying the appreciation of jokes, he explained, is the perception of an entity (either a situation or an idea) in two “frames of reference” or “wave-lengths” or “associative contexts.” When the idea or situation is perceived in two frames, it is “bisociated,” i.e., linked to two associative contexts, which normally are incompatible (Koestler, 1964/1989, p. 35).

This explanation was taken up in various ways by other authors such as Keith-Spiegel (1972), or Avner Ziv (1984) who emphasized, once more, the importance of the element of surprise in a joke. Indeed, the unexpected, located in the “punch line,” was established as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the humor experience. The punch line itself, thus defined as a

high-powered selection factor that distinguishes humor from non-humor, because it contains a shift from one level of abstraction to another, was also given considerable attention. Avner Ziv stressed that it should be short, and should constitute “a point of climax that is quickly over,” no matter how lengthy the lead-up (1984, pp. 90–91), and John Morreall described the effects of the punch line as a sudden psychological change that takes place too fast for us to assimilate into our experience in the way we can assimilate other psychological changes and that is a function of the amount of change (“the difference between the earlier stage and the latter”) and the time over which the change takes place (1983, pp. 48–49). For a sudden change, therefore, there must be a relatively large difference between the two states, and the time separating them must be relatively short.

Conclusion: Victor Raskin

As may be appreciated from what I have written, each new version of humor theory tends to be layered on and over-reach previous ones; each historical period builds on, but also adds new insights to the theories received from previous ones. This is particularly so in the 20th century, when interest in the subject became “scientific” in the hands of psychologists, sociologists, and ultimately, linguists. Indeed, one of the most interesting accounts of incongruity and its resolution, both because it encompasses many aspects of past theory in a way that is both satisfactory and convincing and because it has turned out to be seminal for the linguistic theories set out and explored in the rest of this volume, is that given by Victor Raskin (1985). Founded on script-based semantics, it sets out to “determine and formulate the necessary and sufficient conditions for [a] text to be funny” (1985, p. 47) and establishes that

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the following conditions are justified:

- i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
- ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite.

(1985, p. 99)

Raskin’s formulation subsumes many previous theories: by virtue of its reference to scripts (culturally/socially acquired), the theory embraces the social basis of humor appreciation pointed to by social-behavioral theorists. We are also reminded of superiority theory by some of the “script-oppositeness relations” listed by Raskin to develop his formulation (goodness-related scripts/badness-related scripts, high-stature-related scripts/low-stature-related scripts, etc.), while the notion of “scripts” in itself ties in with the formulations of incongruity given by Richter and Schopenhauer in the 19th century. Like many proponents of Relief Theory, Raskin lays stress on the fact that the appreciation of jokes necessitates a frame of mind receptive to humor. Also, what he calls the “script-switch trigger,” which causes the receiver of a joke to become aware of the opposite scripts involved (creating “arousal boost” and “arousal jag”) is, of course, the “punch line” of 20th-century incongruity theory, while the “trigger” and its effects remind us of Suls’s “problem solving” and Koestler’s “bisociation.”

Because of all these (and more) parallelisms and connections, therefore, and in spite of its new linguistic orientation, Raskin’s script-based theory is particularly interesting to the historian of humor theory, who will surely find equally rich material for thought and research in tracing the sources that underlie the recent linguistic theories set out in this volume.

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Humor Universals

Annarita Guidi

This chapter focuses on the universal language correlates of a semantic-pragmatic pattern that is here assumed as a humor universal, i.e., the Script Opposition (Raskin, 1985). After a discussion on the main research issues in human sciences, three dimensions for the study of humor universals are proposed, and some possible research paths are considered. A comparative analysis of puns is proposed as an example of empirical verification of humor universals. A first reason of this choice is the importance of humor universals testability: at the present time humor language universals, e.g., pun mechanisms, are the only ones that have undergone a systematic verification. This state of the art is related to the cluster of variables (e.g., situation, social and cultural background knowledge, attitudes) that sciences must take into account when dealing with humor.

Besides, the pun is here seen as a *prototype* of verbal humor. Puns are clearly identifiable as a means of humor production (Oring, 2011),¹ and share with other types (e.g., non-verbal humor phenomena) the same semantic-pragmatic pattern. As remarked by Morton (2014), relativism is sometimes used to deny the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons (whose pioneers come from the anthropological field); yet,

while many anthropologists might agree that the content of humor is invariably culturally specific [. . .] Douglas's abstract definition of humor as a play on form [. . .] depends fundamentally on a universal cultural account of humor as bisociation [. . .] the standard example of bisociation in humor is punning, which depends on the phonemic structure of particular languages, yet can be performed in all of them.

(pp. 46–47)

Within the linguistics application to Humor Research, the necessity for cross-cultural analyses has been asserted (Attardo, 1996; 2008). Universals in linguistics have been discussed by Greenberg (1966/2005) and represent an important issue within the generative perspective; some related ideas, such as the relationship between language structure and *use* (e.g., frequency, Zipf, 1935), have been recently reconsidered in cross-linguistic analysis (Bybee, 2006; 2010). These studies address the fact that some phenomena, pertaining to different levels of the language system (e.g., phonology, morphology), can be present in all languages. A basic aspect is

thus the analysis of data in a cross-linguistic/*cultural* perspective; the empirical grounds make universals, since the publication of Greenberg's work, concrete and accessible (Haspelmath, 2005). Formulation of universals should assure their testability; at present time, "the empirical work of testing the predictions on a representative sample of the world's languages remains to be done" (pp. x–xi).

A program of research initiatives is included in a contribution (Evans & Levinson, 2009; Levinson & Evans, 2010)² where language universality and diversity are considered in terms of cognitive constraints; the premises of such a model can be taken into account also in disciplines other than linguistics. Recurrent patterns across languages/cultures are seen as stable solutions satisfying multiple design constraints that reflect cultural-historical factors and the characteristics of human cognition. For example, it is assumed that languages can recruit their sound systems from fine phonetic details that vary in almost unlimited ways; thus, languages can systematically differ in arbitrarily fine phonetic detail. As a consequence, analyses should start from a set of universal phonetic resources organized by the cognitive system; cultures would differ in the way they classify and use such resources.

Historical Perspective

The universality of humor is maintained by influential scholars within psychology, anthropology, and sociology. As argued by Apte (1985) and Lefcourt (2001), humor is a universal aspect of human experience, occurring in all cultures and virtually all individuals throughout the world. Edmonson (1952, p. 6) highlights "the assemblage of observed regularities in behavioral sequences leading to laughter" as a crucial feature of humor. Not only are humor and laughter considered universal; according to Berlyne (1969) humor and play are strictly related, while Martin (2007) argues that all forms of humor seem to originate in a basic play structure.

Laughter (one of the least understood human behaviors) and smiling (the most frequent facial response to humor: Ruch, 1993) are considered universal expressive patterns in the sense that they are *innate* (Ruch & Ekman, 2001); laughter is supposed to be present before human beings develop speech. At the same time, the difficulty of determining the universality of humor on the base of laughter is assumed (Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1977). From the psychological perspective, it is clear that laughing or smiling in response to humor not always corresponds to humor appreciation or enjoyment (Frank & Ekman, 1993); across cultures, the functions and meanings of such expressive-communicative social signals significantly vary (i.e., humans from different cultures smile in situations involving both negative and positive emotion, such as embarrassment, surprise, discomfort), to the extent that no universal facial expressions of enjoyment have been recognized (LeBarre, 1947; Mead, 1975).

Also functions of humor are hypothesized to be universal, and classified into two macro-categories: social management (e.g., reinforcing social relationships, remedying of embarrassing or unpleasant situations, gaining attention, pointing out the violation of rules: Nilsen, 1983; Norrick, 1984) and defunctionalization (Long & Graesser, 1988). The first is strictly related to the functional explanation of humor proposed by the pioneer studies in anthropology (Parsons & Beals, 1934; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; 1949; Hammond, 1964)—that is, social control, or humor as the deterrent/punishment for socially deviant behaviors. The latter mainly concerns the social play in which language is used for humorous purposes. In cross-cultural psychology, humor is approached as a universal in terms of its effects on health; the focus is thus on the factors supporting/banning humor (Kruger, 1996; Lefcourt, 2001; Dean, 2003). In terms of social functions, another important element related to the universality of humor is the "joking

relationship,” whose widespread existence is documented by various research (Apte, 1985); such codified relationships are aimed to maintain social harmony.

At a more general level, humor is considered a universal, partly natural and partly acquired, mode of *communication* (see the concept of non-bona-fide communication: Raskin, 1985); that is, a *use* of language for purposes (or functions: Jakobson, 1960) other, or further, than sharing information, intentions, judgments, orders, requests, etc. Humor is a human-specific dimension found throughout all of recorded history; no cultural group has ever been discovered that was devoid of a sense of humor (Chiaro, 2010): “responding to humor is part of human behavior [. . .] other parts of which comprise such important social and psychological manifestations of homo sapiens as language, morality, logic, faith, etc.” (Raskin, 1985, p. 2). Thus, also in terms of language, humor *per se* is a universal: “humor, like communicating and instructing, is one of a small number of pervasive and universal language functions” (Bergen & Binsted, 2004, p. 79).

Even though humor is universal to humankind (Monro, 1963; Berlyne, 1969; Sternthal & Craig, 1973), the type of humor expressed and/or appreciated may vary considerably across cultures. The specific features (e.g., targets, contents) of humor in different social and ethnic groups are the core issue of ethnic humor studies that highlight the most salient elements, norms, values, and systems of relationships of a culture and its worldview (Davies, 1986; 2014; Ziv, 1988; Lincoln, 1993; Mbangwana, 1993; Fry, 1997; Al-Khatib, 1999). On the other hand, cross-culturally spread taboos (e.g., sex, obscenity) are considered common subjects of humor (Berger, 1999). A trans-cultural nature is also attributed to the character of the fool (Radin, 1956) that can be found in the Amerindian cultures (e.g., Inca courts) as well as the African ceremonies and the Japanese theatre. Concerning humor preferences and appreciation, some cross-cultural and cross-national studies have been conducted (Morain, 1991; Nevo et al., 2001), with different results. Humor is, thus, something present in some form in all human groups and, at the same time, it is recognized as a culturally and historically contingent construct (Fine, 1983; Boskin, 1987; Hall et al., 1993; Purcell et al., 2010). Different cultures view humor in different ways (Alford & Alford, 1981).

As a consequence, a first question is related to what can be considered as universal in humor. Schmitz (2002), on the base of Long and Graesser (1988), divides humor into three categories: universal, culture-based, and linguistic. Universal humor is often equated to non-verbal humor (e.g., slapsticks: Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2013) as well as to humorous expressions not related to linguistic features or cultural elements (Jabbari & Ravizi, 2012). Because “what seems to have been lost on most researchers is that beyond this reference to the surface form of (part of) the text, verbal and referential humor share the same deep semantic and pragmatic mechanisms” (Attardo, 1996, p. 1), universality should be considered for verbal as well as non-verbal forms of humor. Moreover, cultural differences are not exclusively humor-related (i.e., non-native speakers should know the same things in order to understand a joke vs. a political debate on the Watergate affair: Attardo, 1994, p. 212).

Therefore, in the search for, and empirical verification of, humor universals it seems important to focus on basic, shared cognitive patterns and elements, as is suggested by the six Knowledge Resources of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). A further reason for setting humor universals research in the cognitive framework is the fact that some humor phenomena, such as jokes and comedy, appear to be easily borrowed from culture to culture (Mintz, 1983); cultural modifications in joke translation often consist of replacement of personal names, brands, etc. (Shifman et al., 2014). This perspective is also important for applied research, as the issue of general humor mechanisms are related—indeed,

the “appeal” of humor as a universal communicative technique (Unger, 1996; Beard, 2005) and the construction of models (e.g., taxonomies) for the analysis of cross-cultural humor-based advertising (Crawford & Gregory, 2015).

We can approach the concept of humor universal through three comparative dimensions: (1) conceptual features (e.g., ambiguity); (2) phenomena (e.g., jokes, irony, dialect humor³); and (3) aspects of phenomena (i.e., irony factors—ways in which joke texts are arranged and mechanisms of humor understanding/appreciation). With respect to such issues, within the frameworks of cultural anthropology, ethnography, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and sociology, some scholars came to very similar conclusions, though they were not yet supported by a huge cross-linguistic/cultural base of empirical data.

1. Related to such conclusions is the cluster of conceptual features identified by human sciences as cross-cultural constants. Through synchronic and diachronic analyses of literary and communicative practices, themes, functions, and constraints, cross-cultural features of humor have been recognized in ambivalence (Bakhtin, 1979), unexpected, overturning, lowering or degradation, violation of norms, highlighting/penalization of a deviant behavior. Morton (2014) refers to universal structural properties through the notion of anti-structure, i.e., “the state of being betwixt and between (liminality) [...] formal contradiction [...] reversals and inversions to subvert rules and regulations” (pp. 46–47). A dialectic of perspectives (recurrent elements vs. non-reducibility of language- and culture-specific elements—e.g., the “non-exportable” nature of humor (Eco, 1981) emerges from these studies. Although the features just listed are not humor-specific, at the same time, such features are present through different combinations and declinations, in texts and contexts that have been analyzed since the last half of the twentieth century (Guidi, 2008). The model of family resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1951) is important in order to understand this first dimension. None of such features, taken alone, can be assumed as a humor universal; the outlined cluster should be considered in a holistic perspective, i.e., one or more (combinations of) features are present in any humor manifestation.

Such features can be referred to as the psychological concept of *incongruence* that, even if not humor-specific, is a constant of the reflections on humor since the philosophical approach of Plato. The incongruity-resolution model (Suls, 1972; McGhee, 1979; see also Koestler, 1964)⁴ is important for humor universals research because it points out how the cognitive framework can isolate potentially universal elements, or aspects, of humor. A cognitive approach can, indeed, provide a more basic understanding of how humor mechanisms operate across different cultures (Alden et al., 1993). Nonetheless, processing (and resolving) the inner incongruence of a humorous stimulus is seen as an evolutionary/adaptive advantage in the Disabling theory of Chafe (1987).

The same conceptual features, as well as the incongruity model, are gathered and synthesized into an operative model (i.e., a set of verifiable conditions) by Raskin (1985). The Semantic-Script Theory of Verbal Humor is the only one individuating two conditions for humor occurrence; because it has not yet been falsified, we can assume the semantic-pragmatic mechanism of Scripts Opposition (whose neural correlates are analyzed, for example, by Casadonte, 2003) as a first (and absolute: see the section “Methodology and Sample Analysis”) humor universal. The model is also at the base of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), which lists six parameters to be instantiated in a humorous text; such parameters (Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Target, Situation, Narrative Strategy,

Language) can be considered a systematic base for the development of comparative studies on humor universals.

2. Concerning the presence of specific phenomena across languages and cultures, I only point out a datum. Despite its universality, humor derives uniqueness from the cultural context (Apte, 1985) or co-text. As argued by Sherzer (p.c.), the kind of text identified as “joke” within the so-called Occidental culture does not exist in others, e.g., the Kuna culture. A cross-linguistic analysis of puns (Guidi, 2008) shows that, besides contents of humor, text types and cultural contexts represent a limit in the search for humor universals; this is due to the fact that so many textual/contextual patterns in which humor regularly occurs (e.g., the Balinese verbal routines, the Japanese Rakugo, the Tzotzil verbal dueling) are culture-specific. This does not imply that Knowledge Resources, such as the Narrative Strategy, are not crucial in comparing jokes or other text types; for example, the question-and-answer pattern, as a language-independent construct, could be detected across languages/cultures (Petrenko, 2008), with specific instantiations (e.g., riddle, knock-knock joke).
3. Concerning specific aspects of humor phenomena, according to Apte (1985) the “verbal techniques” of humor “are universal [. . .] probably used in all cultures, although they may not be as extensively defined as the numerous structural processes in language. At the basis of much linguistic humor are the various types of linguistic units and their interrelationship” (pp. 178–9). In a similar way, Hill (1985) argues that “punning owes its own occurrence to the essential nature of language and meaning, and [. . .] it must therefore occur in all languages and cultures” (p. 450). The importance of such reflections is also related to connections made by Hymes (1964) between humor and verbal play. Such juxtaposition makes even more clear the fact that linguistic mechanisms, processes,⁵ clues at the base of humor are not only the correlates of a common semantic-pragmatic pattern; they are language mechanisms *tout court*:

there are two anthropological maxims for the study of speech play and verbal art: unlike some forms of art, (1) their medium is itself already culturally structured and (2) they are universal. Hence the need [. . .] to consider the structure of the language which is their mode of existence.⁶

(pp. 291–293)

We find the same idea in the first analyses of verbal humor in non-Indo-European languages. Sapir (1932), looking at the relationship between productions of native speakers and the characteristics of Navaho language, argues that the homonymy relationship is the most important factor determining the occurrence of puns; the great number of homonymous elements in Navaho allows the humorous reinterpretation of words and phrases in riddles, proverbs, and puns.

Then such a consideration can be found in Pike, one of the first linguists (with Emeneau, 1947) collecting data on non-Indo-European humor. The key idea influencing the following studies is that homonymy—as a structural property and a constitutive ambiguity of language systems—can be exploited for humorous purposes. Homonymy and near-homonymy presumably occurs in all languages and tonal ones, such as Mixtec, are no exception.

It is not by chance that such kinds of phenomena (homonymy, near-homonymy, and so on) represent the base of the first taxonomies of puns. Such scholars implicitly highlight the possibility of finding unifying elements across languages/cultures. The aim to individuate a constant and the ability to explain the nature of humorous texts beyond differences of time

and space, also inform Greimas's work (1970) on jokes, that moves from a conceptual feature (contrast or disjunction) to an effort to model such texts in terms of isotopes (i.e., semantic interpretations).

The Development of Puns Studies as a Path Towards Humor Universals

For a long time, and mainly within a structuralist approach, puns have been the sole application field of linguistics to humor⁷ (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994). Their universality has been taken for granted within the scientific community but has not been supported by experimental data; the models proposed appear partially limited with respect to the aim of accounting for, and predicting, puns mechanisms across languages/cultures. For example, "systematic" taxonomies of puns (Attardo, 1994), centered on the levels of language systems, appear to be based on Indo-European languages; as a consequence, their classification categories are invalidated by typological differences (e.g., tonal vs. non-tonal, analytic vs. fusional language).

Important enhancements have been conveyed by a second generation of studies, based on phonetic similarity/distance. Such concepts have gained a crucial importance since the 1980s; taxonomies simplify the set of classification criteria and point out the relevance of the phonetic structure. Therefore, the string (vs. the word), as a "linear sequence of elements of determinate length and constitution" (Crystal, 1991, p. 329) emerges as the unit of analysis; this is an important step in the search for universals, because it foregrounds (1) the basic, abstract elements (or resources) of the phonetic chain involved in punning, and (2) the mechanisms of manipulation of such elements. The appropriateness of the string is claimed by Attardo (1994), who notes that puns manipulate words as well as smaller and larger units, i.e., "arbitrarily large segments of utterances [. . .] strings of phonemes arbitrarily chosen in the utterance" (pp. 131–132). The string is used by Hempelmann (2003), Ritchie (2004), and Guidi (2012a, 2012b).

Because phonetic similarity emerges as a core factor, phonetic distance is deeply analyzed. Vitz and Winkler (1973) define phonetic distance as "the proportion of phoneme positions after alignment which do not match" (p. 376). The first hypothesis on a threshold of phonetic distance is due to Attardo (1994), who considers phonetic similarity as crucial with respect to pun processing and appreciation, also in the light of the metalinguistic nature of puns (i.e., a text making an implicit reference to its linguistic structure). The author hypothesizes that such a recognition process could fail when a certain phonetic distance threshold is passed, i.e., when the two strings (target and pun—e.g., respectively, *dying* and *lying* in *Diplomacy: the fine art of lying for one's country*) are phonetically distant to the extent that their similarity is too difficult to be perceived. Phonetic distance thus comes to represent a cognitive constraint, to be satisfied by patterns of punning manipulation. Scholars who focus on phonetic distance are Lagerquist (1980), Monnot (1981), Zwicky and Zwicky (1986), Sobkowiak (1991), and Hempelmann (2003). The latter deals both with measuring phonetic distance and establishing a threshold of perceived similarity, and is the first application of Optimality Theory to puns. Hempelmann calculates distance according to the number of segments (i.e., phonemes) differing in target and pun and the difference, in terms of distinctive features, between each pair of segments. His study determines a threshold corresponding to five phonemes. It is hypothesized that, if a pun went above this threshold, the target string would be not recognizable. Such a threshold has been extended to cross-linguistic comparison and tested in languages other than English (see the section "Methodology and Sample Analysis").

Core Issues and Topics

In the outlined framework, the primary focus in the study of humor universals is not on the specific Target (e.g., cultural symbols) or Situation represented in humor (or place in which humor occurs); it is on the cognitive, semantic-pragmatic mechanisms, Logical Mechanisms (see their relation to the resolution of humorous incongruities: Attardo, 1997), Narrative strategies (e.g., questions-answers, exposition, dialogue as narrative arrangements of jokes), and formal (e.g., linguistic) general mechanisms through which humor is expressed/understood. The universal to be tested is not, say, a social category as the humor Target; the universal to be tested is the presence of a Target of humor and, at a more detailed level, the fact that such Target is characterized (and laughed at)—for example, on a social or linguistic basis (e.g., a different language: Cardona, 1976; non-grammatical expressions: Raskin, 1985). Some specific Script Oppositions may not be present in a culture/language community, but the point would be to find humor that is not script-opposition-based, or jokes not including a punch line in a specific position of the text (see Attardo, 1994).⁸ Script Opposition and Target can be analyzed in terms of absolute universals (Evans & Levinson, 2009): the matter would not be sampling, but finding one counterexample. As for puns, phonetic similarity represents the Logical Mechanism, and a cognitive constraint (the lower the grade of phonetic similarity, the higher the cost of pun processing); for other phenomena, the relationship Logical Mechanism/cognitive cost can be analyzed. Consider jokes in a cross-cultural perspective: can Logical Mechanisms differ in terms of cognitive load? Which Logical Mechanisms recurrently gather together the opposed scripts? Which Narrative Strategies are more frequently related to specific Logical Mechanisms?

The issue of phonetic similarity is even more important in the light of research focused on the perceptual dimension of language universals, which shows how speakers can avail themselves of the universal form-meaning relations embodied in the biological code.⁹ Such dimension is relevant with respect to the pragmatic correlates of punning manipulation. Besides phonetic similarity and intentionality, which conditions do allow the felicity of pun? Which is the role of cues, or humor markers, i.e., elements that distinguish humor from other aesthetic experiences (Berlyne, 1969)? How to compare them across languages/cultures? Regarding verbal cues, a promising result concerns the relationship between puns and idioms. According to scholars in Conversational analysis (Sacks, 1972; Sherzer, 1978), puns are likely to occur in formulaic expressions. Despite the language-specificity of such expressions, cross-cultural tendencies emerge (Gossen, 1973; Partington, 2006; Litovkina, 2014), and the current base of data could be enhanced by further corpora studies. Formulaic phrases are present in 67% of Hempelmann's (2003; 2004) corpus of English puns; in Guidi's (2008) multi-language corpus, they are involved in 41% of cases. Two main hypotheses can be formulated on the correlation between punning manipulation of an idiom (e.g., English/Balinese: target *see you later*, pun *siu surat* "1,000 letters") and perlocutionary effects. On one hand formulaic expressions, because of their salience (i.e., frequency, familiarity, accessibility), could act as clues, facilitating the target recognition; this can explain why puns tend to manipulate them. On the other hand, experimental data (Guidi, 2012b) show that puns manipulating idioms are more frequently judged as errors by native speakers; the idiom seems to act as a limit; i.e., its violation leads to the interpretation of the pun as an ill-formed, or senseless, utterance. Other verbal cues are represented by specific lexical and grammatical intensifiers, as well as metalinguistic comments and tropes (see Burgers et al., 2012; Fusari, 2013 for irony). In puns, phonetic similarity (also involving idioms) guides the hearer in backtracking the whole expression and realizing the overlapping of opposed scripts. This relates to Non-Bona-Fide communication and recognizing the humorous intention

of the speaker. Also regarding other phenomena and modalities, it could be important to compare how humorous intention is signaled:¹⁰ are the laughter (Vetlin & Todt, 2004) or the tone of voice and the facial expressions (Caucci & Kreutz, 2012 for sarcasm) cues, or markers, of humorous intentions in languages/cultures other than those in which such aspects have already been shown? And, do languages share the ways in which such cues occupy specific positions in the text, discourse, or conversation?

Concerning the Knowledge Resource of Language, because cognitive processes and constraints are assumed here as a base, a first issue concerns the determination of an operative model for cross-linguistic comparison of humorous phenomena. Results of second-generation studies point in this direction, highlighting the overlap between puns and ludlings:¹¹ this model corresponds to the manipulation of phonetic material, based on shared knowledge, and aimed to goals other than those of Bona-Fide communication. Whether the goal is to amuse the hearer, and/or to respond to the needs of in-group communication, the speaker intentionally modifies, on the basis of shared cognitive rules/processes, the elements of a string corresponding to a (or part of a) sentence or a word. At a high level of abstraction, such manipulation takes the form of one or more of the categories of change in structural rhetoric: an item can be altered “per adiectionem,” “per detractioem,” “per immutationem,” or “per transmutationem” (Lausberg, 1998, §58, pp. 217–220). Other results of second-generation studies relevant for the definition of such a model are related to the line between puns and errors. On the semantic-pragmatic plan, Script Opposition seems to differentiate puns from phonological-lexical errors, slips of the tongue, and spontaneous blends (Guidi, 2012a, 2012b). While in puns relationships other than Script Opposition (e.g., co-hyponymy) seem not to be present, in spontaneous phonetically based phenomena, a semantic part (Script Opposition, or other relationships), or “interference” (Motley, 1980), can’t be excluded. Comparative corpora studies, besides providing new semantic-pragmatic and phonological data on humor universals, could contribute to further define such a boundary.

A last topic deserving cross-cultural analyses is metalanguage of humor. Is a common organization recognizable across folk taxonomies? Such an issue affects the definition of the humor universal itself and its level of generality; in this case, the object is represented by semantic components (Langacker, 2009). Guidi (2006; 2012c) shows four components to recur in six humor classifications:¹² Verbal (humor expressed through language: Zinacantan *ʔiʃtol loʔil*, lit. toy tale or “frivolous talk, joke”); Codified (humor characterized by constraints on text structure, or linguistic form, or situation in which it occurs—e.g., rituals: Tzeltal *loʔil k’op*, lit. Carnival language or “humorous speech, jests occurring in Carnival”); Bilateral (humor characterized by a double constraint—i.e., a specific number of participants producing specific actions: Tzotzil *bač’i ʔiʃtol loʔil*, lit. genuine frivolous talk or “verbal dueling, puns”); Aggressive (humor directed to a target with explicit derogatory tones and purposes: Tzotzil *jolom-k’optay*, “to ridicule”). These components are hypothesized as a cross-culturally shared structure, i.e., a pattern of features grouping/differentiating in a similar way the words of the humor field. Semantic values, as well as specific combinations of components, are proposed as cultural specificities. For example, all analyzed languages tend at least to discriminate between Verbal and +/– Verbal humor (Basque *irrimarra* or “caricature”), and between Aggressive and non-Aggressive humor; the combination (Verbal, Bilateral) is found to be lexicalized only in Chinese, English, and Tzotzil.

Methodology and Sample Analysis

The methodology outlined here is based on a definition of pun, used as an operative model (i.e., a tool for cross-linguistic comparison) whose theoretical framework is represented by

Optimality theory (Prince & Smolensky, 1993). Autosegmental Phonology (Goldsmith, 1976) is used for data representation and comparison (through Segments tiers, Consonant-Vowel tiers and Tonal tiers). The model is related to Greenberg (1966/2005) with reference to a hierarchy of constraints as the interpretive mechanism and a series of cognitive-linguistic patterns (i.e., phonological processes modifying elements of strings) as empirical universals to be verified on multi-language corpora.

The main points related to Optimality theory, whose hierarchy of violable constraints has proven to account for puns' cross-linguistic tendencies, are the following. Phonological patterns (e.g., substitution of phoneme clusters, as in English/Navaho: target *studebaker* or "car trademark," pun *hastoi bibia* or "old man's stomach") are bound to phonetic similarity and designed as violations of constraints. Marked/unmarked (e.g., metathesis/substitution of phonetic elements) is equated to less frequent/more frequent and, here, to more costly/less costly in terms of cognitive processing. Markedness (and its cognitive cost) is a scalar concept; e.g., a frequency-based hierarchy of phonological processes can include metathesis (least frequent, most marked), addition and deletion (less frequent, less marked), and substitution (most frequent, unmarked). Low frequency/markedness are related to a high processing cost, while high frequency/unmarkedness are related to a low processing cost.¹³

On a corpus of English puns, Hempelmann (2003) examines violations of constraints postulated by Optimality theory. Such theory models language diversity in terms of differences among hierarchical arrangements of universal and violable (an important difference with previous approaches in generative grammar), constraints (e.g., No Metathesis). The scholar hypothesizes a correlation between phonetic similarity and frequency of puns: the lower the phonetic distance, the higher the frequency in the corpus. The proposed hierarchy of constraints is ordered according to the frequency of their violation and their cost in terms of phonetic similarity:

higher-ranking constraints rule out [...] "less similar" output forms [...]. When we observe one output and not another, it is essentially the same thing to say [...] that in a description in OT the constraints which are relevant in the evaluation of this form are in a certain order, implying different levels of perceived similarity.

(Hempelmann, 2003, pp. 56–57)

The hierarchy is arranged from the most to the least frequent corresponding violation.

IDENT(f) pt	no change at level and type of feature f
MAX _{pt}	no deletion
DEP _{pt}	no insertion
MAX/DEP _{pt-σ}	no deletion/insertion of a syllable
IDENT(')pt	no change of stress position
LIN _{pt}	no metathesis

(Hempelmann, 2003, p. 87; p = pun, t = target)

On this hierarchy is based the cross-linguistic analysis of puns (Guidi, 2008) aimed at verifying the existence of common punning mechanisms and providing a predictive classification for further comparative studies. The following definition is operative in the sense that it can be used to describe puns in any language; it is represented by a set of conditions, hypothesized to operate simultaneously in punning.

A pun is a phenomenon consisting of the manipulation of a string of undetermined length, which represents a section of an utterance. Such manipulation consists of an exploitation of

phonological *processes* ordinarily involved in language, which can be reduced to four basic categories: addition, deletion, substitution, and inversion. This manipulation operates within a certain threshold—it does not involve more than five *elements* (which can be phonemes, syllables, word and syllable boundaries, stress or tone patterns); can occur in any *position* of the string domain (initial segment, final one, any other) and of the syllable domain (onset, nucleus, coda, rhyme); evokes two (or more) scripts, whose relationship is a Script Opposition; is intentionally performed by the speaker and/or perceived as intentional by the hearer (Guidi, 2012a).

PROCESS (PUN)	CONSTRAINT	PROCESS (CASUAL SPEECH)
Substitution IDENT(F,')	constraint	assimilation, dissimilation, lenition, fortition, lengthening, shortening, neutralization
Deletion	MAXpt constraint	truncation
Addition	DEPpt constraint	epenthesis, reduplication
Inversion	LIN constraint	metathesis

The definition was tested on 209 puns across 15 languages differing in family and morphological typology;¹⁴ the main goal was to find, in each language, a pun for each category of the model (e.g., for any pattern displayed in the definition). Results are synthesized as follows.

The four processes can account for all cases; some are not always realized (i.e., inversion is present in 9 languages out of 15). This datum can be explained both in terms of the limited number of puns available in those languages, and through the fact that inversion is the most costly mechanism. Substitution is realized in all languages, addition in 13 languages, and deletion in 12 languages. Hempelmann’s hierarchy proves to be valid across the languages analyzed; it is thus a starting point for further cross-linguistic testing.

SUBSTITUTION
DELETION
ADDITION
ADDITION/DELETION of syllable
ADDITION/DELETION/SUBSTITUTION/INVERSION of stress/tone
INVERSION

Also the phonetic distance threshold established by Hempelmann is a valid reference point for cross-linguistic analysis: only 10 puns (half of which are bilingual ones) manipulate more than 5 elements.

Elements not considered in previous studies are the word boundary and the syllable boundary.¹⁵ Syllable boundary (.) manipulation tends to match the word boundary (#) one, as in the Balinese pun represented in Figure 3.1 (target *kaki ja?* or “where is your grandfather?” *di semae* or “in the graveyard,” pun *ka kija?* or “where will you go to?” *di semae* or “in the graveyard”):

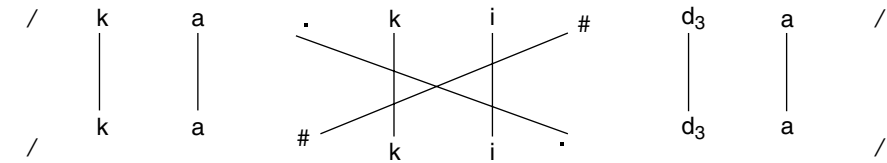


Figure 3.1 Inversion of the syllable boundary and the word boundary in a Balinese pun

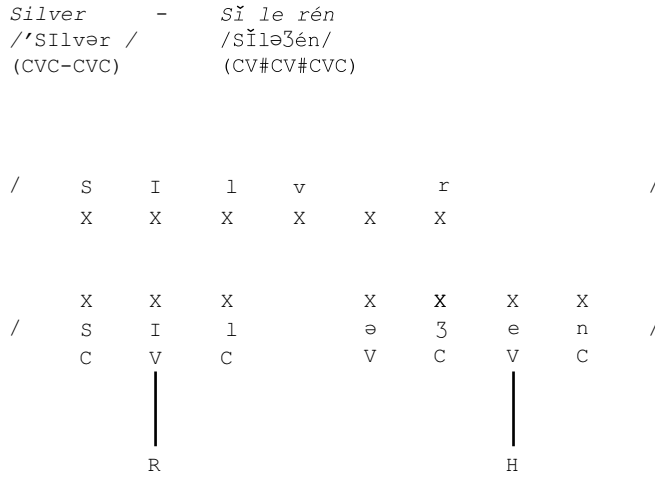


Figure 3.2 Addition of the word boundary in the syllable domain in a Chinese/English pun

In other cases, word boundary manipulation involves the rhyme domain: the symbol # is added between syllable nucleus and syllable coda, as in the English/Chinese example in Figure 3.2 (target *Silver* or “person name,” pun *sǐ le rén* or “a person is died”):

In semantic-pragmatic terms, pun strings convey attested meanings; the list of Script Oppositions available within the literature can account for all puns of the corpus. In some cases, Script Oppositions show the salience of a certain concept within a cultural context; for example, incest/non-incest (a specification of the essential normal/abnormal opposition) is found only in Tzotzil and related to a specific social hierarchy and system of kinship relationships. In a similar fashion, grammatical/non grammatical opposition reflects the Mixtec sociolinguistic situation (e.g., contact with Spanish language, prestige of bilingualism) documented by Pike.

New Debates

Turning to future research directions, a first set of paths descends from the cross-linguistic analysis outlined earlier. On a phonological plan, humor studies can verify if the model proposed can account for puns in other languages; it is possible to find, in languages already analyzed, puns exploiting processes, manipulating elements, using domains predicted by the definition, but not observed in the corpus; puns in other languages are bounded to the same phonetic distance threshold; the measure of distance proposed (Guidi, 2012a) is suitable for further comparative analysis; Hempelmann’s hierarchy of constraints is suitable to describe puns in further languages or not (in the latter case, different rankings of violations could be observed).

The model proposed is characterized by a high level of abstraction that is necessary in order to compare language systems. Fine-grained analyses can, however, be designed in terms of empirical universals, i.e., hypotheses falsifiable by new findings. For example, if we consider substitution as the basic (i.e., unmarked, most frequent) punning process (i.e., the “No change at level and type of feature *f*” as the softest constraint), we can hypothesize that if a language shows puns, substitution is present,¹⁶ or, if in a language puns are realized through deletion, addition, or inversion, they are also realized through substitution of phonetic elements.

Another path concerns the tendency to realize puns through manipulation of just one element (Guidi, 2012a: 12 out of 15 languages), or distinctive feature (Lagerquist, 1980). It can be

hypothesized that, if puns are present in a language, cases based on such kind of manipulation are present. Concerning other aspects of the Logical Mechanism (phonetic similarity), it could be verified whether, across languages, puns tend to show an inverse relationship between the value of phonetic distance and the string length; to manipulate the first element(s) (e.g., first phoneme, onset of the first syllable) of the string;¹⁷ to preserve the syllabic structure (Sobkowiak, 1991; Hempelmann, 2003; Guidi, 2008). Moreover, concerning the relationship markedness/frequency/cognitive cost, further corpora-based comparisons of puns could clarify the extent to which marked and unmarked elements (e.g., voiced/unvoiced consonants) oust each other.¹⁸

A final point (also relevant with respect to a further comparative analysis of the Script Opposition of language distortion: Raskin, 1985) is that puns do not violate phonotactic constraints, i.e., do not realize impossible sequences. Experimental results in Berent et al. (2008) show that speakers are aware of universal constraints on specific linguistic elements absent from their native language.¹⁹ The author's conclusion is that language universals reflect universal linguistic knowledge, as well as that Optimality Theory sees cross-linguistic generalizations arising from a universal knowledge, which is part of the speakers' language faculty. Puns as humor universals can thus be seen as evidence of the fact that speakers share a cross-linguistic knowledge (i.e., patterns²⁰ and constraints) and exploit it (i.e., using patterns to violate constraints) for humorous purposes.

Notes

- 1 Specific humor categories can of course be individuated, through a focus on the social context, also in the case of puns: see Bell et al. (2011).
- 2 One of the scholars' points concerns ethnocentrism and the focus on European languages/cultures as factors leading to spread misconception of (language) universals; the same affect the possibility, for the first-generation studies on verbal humor, to provide descriptive or explicative models suitable for any language/culture.
- 3 On irony as a "natural and universal" phenomenon that does not need to be learned or taught see Wilson and Sperber (1992); on irony as a cultural universal see Li (2008); Liberman (2009) analyzes situational irony in a cross-cultural perspective, also referring to metalanguage of humor; on translation of irony see Hirsch (2011). A list of universal irony mechanisms is proposed by Coromines I Calders (2010, pp. 151–157), including "contrast between verbal surface and message" and other features, actually analyzable in terms of Script Opposition and Narrative Strategy (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). On irony factors (e.g., evaluativeness) see Attardo (2000). On dialect humor see Davies (2014).
- 4 An event will be experienced as incongruent if its constitutive elements, and its structure, is perceived as not compatible with normal, or expected, patterns. Incongruity is resolved when the event pattern is recognized as meaningful, or compatible with another, not previously considered, pattern.
- 5 As highlighted by Sherzer (1976), play languages are based on processes, or "rules" (e.g., metathesis of the syllables of all or most words), not different from those operating in "ordinary" language. The difference is only related to the frequency of use, or productivity, of such rules.
- 6 The appropriateness of this framework depends on an interdisciplinary approach:

One can hope that the study of verbal play and art will be extended by the structural analysis of many more individual cases and by the development of cross-cultural typologies and frameworks for controlled comparison [. . .] both activities require close cooperation between linguistic and ethnographic work, for the phenomena are essentially sociolinguistic [. . .] needless to say, linguistic accuracy is the only solid basis for all such work (Hymes, 1964, pp. 291–293).

- 7 De Saussure (1922, pp. 46–48, 152) considers puns as data, useful to determine the phonological system of antique languages; and, also, as an empirical evidence of the existence, in what we now would call mental lexicon, of associative mechanisms exclusively based on phonetic similarity.
- 8 Enlightening in this sense is the definition of ethnic humor (Raskin, 1985), whose scripts are acquired separately from linguistic competence and are not part of native speakers' semantic competence; see

- also Davies (1986; 1997 for a comparative study on jokes). The universalist assumption underlying the concept of humor style is examined by Taher et al. (2008).
- 9 As shown by Chen (2005, p. 187) speakers, regardless of their language repertoire, perceive paralinguistic sound-meaning relationships in unknown languages. Language-specificity would impact on interpretation, i.e., on the association of a given parameter (e.g., a specific tone of voice) with a given meaning (thus on the cue role of the parameter).
 - 10 On meta-communicative signals see Canestrari (2010).
 - 11 The term is used by Laycock (1969) to define secret languages, play languages, ritual languages (phenomena often related to entertainment, but non-necessarily humorous). For a more detailed analysis see Guidi (2012a).
 - 12 On the base of previous studies, dictionaries, and informants' reports, lexical fields of humor in Basque, Chinese, English, and three Mayan languages (Tzotzil, Tzeltal & Zinacantan) are determined and analyzed.
 - 13 Comrie (2003, p. 209) specifies that "some language universals reflect inbuilt constraints on human beings, in particular on their cognitive capacities [...] some other language universals find a [...] natural explanation in terms of the relation between linguistic structures and the functional uses to which they are put." Puns are considered here as violations of soft cognitive and phonological constraints, realized through linguistic patterns that are exploited for humorous purposes.
 - 14 Languages of the corpus (followed by the number of puns collected) are: Balinese (10); Chinese (27); English (12); Italian (14); Japanese (41); Korean (8); Mixtec (13); Navaho (8); Rundi (4); Sanskrit (12); Seneca (3); Tzotzil (24); Vietnamese (16); Winnebago (5); Yoruba (7).
 - 15 For an analysis of this aspect in Arabic punning see Eisele (1997).
 - 16 A language in which puns do not show patterns of substitution would determine the non-absolute nature of substitution as universal.
 - 17 See Sobkowiak (1991, p. 93) on the "super-high phonological salience of word-initial consonantism" and Attardo (1994) on the salience of initial and final domains ("bathtub effect").
 - 18 Zwicky and Zwicky (1986, p. 497) show that, in the pattern 'substitution of occlusive consonants', marked sounds tend to oust unmarked ones. See also Sobkowiak (1991) and Attardo (1994, p. 124) for an interpretation in terms of the relationship puns-errors.
 - 19 For example, a test on universal constraints on onset clusters represented by consonant sequences (e.g., *block*) shows that speakers of languages in which C-C-initial syllables are not present misperceive ill-formed (or, universally dis-preferred) clusters.
 - 20 On the relationship between universals and processing preferences, and the "better predictions" obtainable through processing factors, see Hawkins (2001).

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Key Terms in the Field of Humor

Christian F. Hempelmann

1 Introduction

1.1 General

Not only is humor research a multidisciplinary field, but, at least in amateur form, it has been a multilingual endeavor over many centuries, before the field became dominated by English as the lingua franca of research, as in almost all other fields. For a long time before that, until the Middle Ages, it was Latin that served that role. Both sources, varying fields and different languages, have led to several sources of misalignment in key terminologies about humor. As an introduction, the history of the central term in English and many other languages, derived from Latin (*h*)umor, will serve as an orienting example. The main body of the chapter will summarize various approaches to pinning down and comparing key terms referring to core concepts in the study of language. The main methodological fields here are linguistic semantics, linguistic etymology, and the history and philosophy of science. The main tensions are the transition from the dominance of Latin to the dominance of English and how selected other European languages, like German and Spanish, as well as a few non-Indo-European languages, have contributed, or not, against this background.

Language is about transmitting and recording meaning, but the meaning of language is in principle unobservable. What can be scientifically observed are the audible or legible artifacts of language that carry the meaning, i.e., spoken or written text. To analyze the meaning of key terms in humor, which this chapter is about, we therefore need to rely on the classic linguistic method of comparison of comparable words, and analyzing why one might have been chosen over the other. This raises the question of what makes two words comparable. The answer is that given a language situation, a speaker/writer/language had the choice between either, and the choice makes a significant difference. For example, when I observe someone contracting certain facial muscles around their eyes and on their cheeks, raising the corner of their mouth, but I don't hear them make a sound, in English I could describe this behavior with the word *smile* or *grin*. But if in addition to the facial gestures, I also hear them make a certain characteristic vocalization, I would be more inclined to describe the behavior as *laugh*. Thus, English has comparable words that mark a significant difference. This general semiotic principle is called the principle of commutation (cf. Eco, 1976), meaningful substitution.

In this chapter we look at studies that have compared key terms in the field of humor meaningfully in three ways. First, one can compare how a language at one point in time used one word, but later or earlier used a different word, or several words. This is called an interlingual, diachronic approach; comparison of one language to itself at different points in time. Another type of intralingual comparison is, how the same language uses one word in one situation and another word in a comparable situation, as in the previous example. Third, one can compare how one language uses one word, while another language uses one, or more, words to describe the same situation. This is called a synchronic interlingual approach; comparison of one language against another at the same point in time.

For diachronic analyses, traditionally also called etymological studies, the relatedness of meanings of words that share a root to many people implies the steadiness or consistency of meaning over time. While this is a partially valid assumption, is not the only assumption in tracking meaning over time; on the contrary, meaning changes and meaning, unlike the sounds of words, can change unpredictably. This assumption of non-variance in meaning has led to the etymological fallacy, the assumption that the meaning of a word is necessarily related to the meanings of its ancestors. An extreme form of this fallacy assumes that the “true” meaning of a word is closest to the oldest retrievable meaning of an ancestor of the word. For example, someone operating under this fallacy could claim that present day use of *decimate* in the sense of “drastically reduce” is incorrect, or at least imprecise, because in Latin it meant to kill every 10th member of a military unit as a punishment. Rather than documenting that today’s meaning is wrong, this example documents change in meaning, in this case in from one sense to a related, more general sense. If one applied the etymological fallacy to *humor*, one could claim that its true meaning is “fluid,” as the next section will show. This would obviously be an absurd argument.

1.2 The Etymology of Humor

Let us start with an overview of the diachronic development of the most important key term in the field of humor in English, *humor* itself. Schmidt-Hidding (1963b, pp. 91–160) is the main basis of this introduction and of several later sections. He summarizes the commonly described development as follows: in Latin, *humor* means fluid and enters Medieval medical language with that meaning, as part of the notion of humoral pathology, to denote the four main fluids in general and fluids of the human body in their relation to four types of temperament in particular. In this sense *humor* enters Middle English via French. The main early proponents of this humorism were Hippocrates (4th/3rd century BC) and Galen (born in 129 AD), but it is based on older conceptualizations of medicine also found in Aristotle. The four fluids (*humores*) as representing the four main elements, and their temperamental analogs are arranged as follows:

humor	classical term	element	quality	temperament
blood	<i>sanguis</i>	air	warm, moist	sanguine
yellow bile	<i>chole</i>	fire	warm, dry	choleric
phlegm	<i>phlegma</i>	water	cold, moist	phlegmatic
black bile	<i>melanchole</i>	earth	cold, dry	melancholic

The main idea, prevalent from classical times to the Middle Ages, and still in circulation as recently as the 19th century, is that the four fluids should be in harmony in a healthy human. But when one of the *humors* prevails, this fluid determines a pathologically imbalanced temperament.

Too much black bile and you are melancholic by humor. Balanced, you are good-humored; imbalanced, you are bad-humored.

In a crucial semantic change, proposed or promoted by Ben Jonson (1598), individuals who act in a bad-humored manner according to a humorous imbalance are considered the subject of comedy, i.e., they are *humors*. Competing senses of humor still existed at the time, and other writers emphasize that *humors* are individuals who are not naturally imbalanced and thus funny, but those who perform an affected peculiar temperament, i.e., mixture of fluids.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) summarizes the semantic change of *humor* in other European languages as parallel to the English development as follows:

The Latin noun was borrowed into other Romance and Germanic languages at an early date. Compare Old Occitan *umor*, Catalan *humor* (12th cent.), Spanish *humor* (first half of the 13th cent.), Portuguese *humor* (14th cent.; 13th cent. as [. . .]umor), Italian *umore* (1306), and also Middle Dutch *humoor* [. . .], Middle Low German *hūmeres*, *hūmoren* (plural) bodily fluids collectively, German *Humor* (early 16th cent.). The course of the word's semantic development, from "fluid," "four cardinal humours," to senses relating to moods, temperaments, and caprices, and finally to amusement or comedy, is paralleled in all of these languages.

Apart from the history of the word *humor*, we need to keep in mind that its current use—by itself and in combination covers such diverse concepts as: the sense of humor, itself a complex construct (see in particular the foreword in Ruch, 1998a, but also the other contributions) involving individual and group differences, mainly as a personality trait; humor as a psychological state; humor as a quality of a symbolic event; humor as an emotion (see also section 2.3).

Wit, on the other hand, originates from the word field of wisdom and cleverness, the quick operation of the mind (Trier, 1931). In the collocation *wit and humor*, *wit* came to cover the more aggressive, cerebral aspects, while *humor* covers the benevolent, crude aspects. In German, these two key terms had similar histories to English in terms of origin and meaning changes (Schütz, 1963). With the rise of the influence of French on German in the late 17th century, *Witz* ("wit") became the standard translation of the newly fashionable loan *esprit*, and took on a connotation of elegance, witnessed by the collocation *Witz und Geist*, in which *Witz* stands for a lighter mode of thinking and *Geist* ("spirit") for a deeper mode. Two things need to be noted about this statement by Schütz. First, it contrasts in a disturbingly tendentious, "romantic" way French superficiality and German depth. Second, not all collocations are contrastive, they can also be mutually enhancing, as witnessed by his next examples of later uses of *Witz* in *Witz und Scherz*. Here, both words refer to lighter types of jokes, attesting to the contemporary second sense of German *Witz*, apart from "wittiness": it is the standard German word for what English refers to as a *joke*, not cerebral, but rather the everyday pedestrian concept of "canned joke." The cerebral sense has been on the wane in German since the 19th century. The development of German *Humor* parallels that of its English cousin not just by chance, but under direct English influence. As in English there is a tension between an earlier sense of a *humorist* as a person with an imbalanced temperament whom one laughs at with sympathy and a person with a feigned imbalanced character that they perform for the purpose of entertainment.

In the final chapter in Schmidt-Hidding's short collection (1963a), Hempel looks at the diachronic development of Spanish *humorismo* (1963; see also section 2.1). This endeavor is mainly literary in method and, again, motivated by an implicit aim to grasp a culture's essence by its literature, history, and language—also known as philology—than the previous chapters of the collection and does not warrant detailed summary here.

2 Case Studies on Key Terms in the Field of Humor

2.1 Humor vs. Wit

Already having served as the most important source for the introduction, Schmidt-Hidding's "Wit and Humour" (1963b) is the central publication on key terms in humor, especially on German and English. It is part of a large, multi-author, semantic project based on lexical field theory, edited by the same author and published in German (Schmidt-Hidding, 1963a; all translations are mine). Another lexical field study, partially inspired by Schmidt-Hidding (1963b) will be discussed later (see section 2.3).

Schmidt-Hidding's methodology is not fully explicit, especially in its initial steps, and seems inspired by (neo)romantic notions of the past telling us what the present means and the vocabulary of a nation telling us about its character. This is not unsurprising for an author ideologically involved with national socialist doctrine to the degree of requiring "denazification" after the war (Schuchard, 2006; Hausmann, 2007; 2014). Without going into the ideological ramifications of this kind of approach, the reader is referred to the still vibrant debate on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (e.g., Whorf & Carroll, 1956), or linguistic relativism, especially in its strong version. Simplifying its main claim, this hypothesis claims that we are trapped in our thinking in the language we are thinking in. For national chauvinists this can lead to the argument that a certain language can embody the superior way of thinking of a certain culture, a flaw already noted with some of the sources summarized here earlier.

The chapter discussing methodology is written in German, using somewhat idiosyncratic terminology. Mainly though, the opacity of the methodology seems to stem from the general problem of lexical field analyses where a hard notion of delimiting what is part of a field and what isn't can't be teased out theoretically in such a way that it will survive the attempt at practical application. Schmidt-Hidding (1963b, pp. 25–26) presents the following six relations between words as possible criteria for their inclusion in a common lexical field. The first two are formal, surface relations and the remaining four are semantic relations (my examples are added in italics): (1) shared word stem (etymology): *wit-unwittingly*; (2) compound words based on the same stem: *joke-jokesmith*; (3) concepts grouped by a shared property: *fool-mime*; (4) (near)synonyms: *laugh-smile*; (5) connotations: *laugh-mouth*; (6) lexical fields *per se*: (this category remains too undefined to furnish an example; presumably synonyms, antonyms, and other better-established semantic relationships; cf. Lyons [1977]). Despite these problems the study has found much attention, especially among German-speaking humor researchers (e.g., Ruch, 1998; but see also Attardo, 1994: 7), presumably not least because of the visualization of its main results (see Figure 4.1). The weakness of the linguistic method and the actual discussion of his results are usually ignored.

After advocating to ground all participants in a lexical field in contextualized tokens, i.e., uses of the word in the given sense in context, much in the style of the OED, Schmidt-Hidding proceeds to tackle the field relevant here in German and English with a synchronic and loosely comparative perspective. With German as his starting point, he identifies five subfields, partially according to how they are lexicalized in parts of speech, for no apparent reason but introspection, in German. Next he uses Roget's (1962) thesaurus to harvest the same inventory for English. The relation of the step for German to that of English remains implicit. Again, for merely introspective reasons, Schmidt-Hidding uses two dimensions to structure these five subfields. One is degree of aggression from aggressive *ridicule/mock* to non-aggressive *humour*, the other degree of cerebrality from cerebral *wit* to crude *fun*. These two dimensions create a two-dimensional plane on which he locates the terms from the field, resulting in a famous chart for the

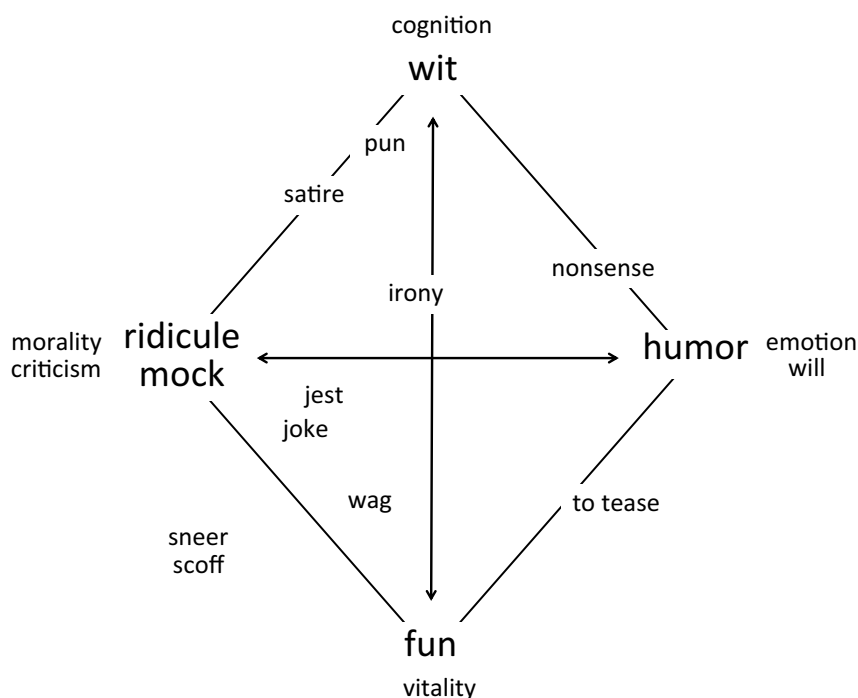


Figure 4.1 Illustration of the lexical field of humor with an aggressive/affiliative horizontal and a cognition/vitality vertical dimension

Adapted from Schmidt-Hidding (1963b, p. 48).

English field (1963: 48). The five subfields with extremes of the two dimensions in English are populated as follows, with the first example from Schmidt-Hidding given for each of the four dimensions: (1) humor as a facility (“Anlage”): *wit*: wit, *humour*: humour, *fun*: fun, *ridicule*: mockery; (2) humor as a trait (“Eigenschaft”): *wit*: witty, *humour*: humorous, *fun*: funny, *ridicule*: laughable; (3) terms for agents of humor (“Nomina agentis”): *wit*: a wit, *humour*: humourist, *fun*: wag, *ridicule*: satirist; (4) humorous actions (“der verbale Bereich”): *wit*: jest, *humour*: banter, *fun*: joke, *ridicule*: mock; (5) objectifications (“Objektivierungen”): *wit*: jest, *humour*: pleasantry, *fun*: joke, *ridicule*: sally.

Schmidt-Hidding proceeds to sort the words by frequency based on the Thorndike English Dictionary (1948), which uses a 20 million word corpus. He sorts the words by lemma, basically words using the same stem, such as *laugh* and *laughable*, and finds the following order of descending frequencies, reproducing here the highest-count lemmata and omitting words that are only “partially used in the realm of humor” (1963b, p. 41). Schmidt-Hidding counts these as the innermost of three zones of the lexical field: *laugh*, *smile*, *wit*, *humour*, *joke*, *mock*, *amuse*, *grin*, *jest*, *ridicule* (1963b, pp. 41–42, 46).

After discussing key terms in humor in German and English synchronically, Schmidt-Hidding proceeds with a history of selected key terms, which has been discussed in the introduction. He argues that key terms should be studied primarily in the language from which they were loaned. Again, this is somewhat chauvinistic naïveté. Loan words can take on very different meanings in the languages that loan them; semantic change is unpredictable: etymology is a tool that needs to be used extremely carefully, as mentioned in the introduction. Yet, etymology is the

main tool of the romantic historical linguists. The remainder of this section will summarize the etymological observations from Schmidt-Hidding (1963b) that have not yet been outlined and two further central sources (Reinhold, 1953; Wahrig, 1955).

An early two-way contrast between the Germanic ancestors of *laugh*, open, triumphant laughter, and *smile*, inward, potentially aggressive behavior, was amended by Romance loans in the Middle English period (1066 to ca. 1450) as in all of the English vocabulary. Wahrig (1955) compares the “Germanic warrior democracy of the early Middle Ages and the feudal society of late medieval England” (1955, p. 277). Germanic warriors supposedly laugh like triumphant heroes, while later feudal English people like polite ladies-in-waiting. Note, again, the romantic, sometimes openly nationalistic, tone in the discussions of the German linguists. As in the English vocabulary in general, many French words are loaned during the Middle English period, e.g., *revile*, *jape*, and during the Renaissance, *irony*, *satire*, *comic*, *cynic*, *ridicule*. To determine their earliest known usage, Schmidt-Hidding uses the OED. Other words extend their meaning to humorous ones, e.g., *wag*, *jest*, *wit*, and *humor*. In general, raw Germanic laughter becomes courteous and can be referred to with a diversified vocabulary. This development is paralleled in German somewhat later, according to Schörle (2007). Reflecting the next waves of words entering the field in the 17th and 18th centuries are these examples: *pun*, *repartee*, *banter*. In a sense relevant to humor, both *quaint* and *pleasant* entered the field, but have since left it again. The OED cites 1670 as the year for the earliest account of *joke*, from Latin *jocus*, in English. *Fun* in a positive humorous sense is of the same period with a first citation for 1727. But it is not established as a key term until the 1850s (Schmidt-Hidding, 1963b, p. 60f).

Next, Schmidt-Hidding singles out from among the four main orienting terms of the field—*wit*, *humor*, *ridicule*, *fun* according to frequency of usage—what he considers the two key terms. To these—*wit* and *humor*—he devotes detailed analyses to them from their earliest use since the 17th century. These were summarized in the introduction.

2.2 German Humor vs. Spanish Gracia (vs. English Humor)

In her lexical field study grounded in translation research, Santana López (2006) aims to clarify what the hierarchies of key terms in the field of humor are in Spanish and German. This subsection is based on a book review of her dissertation (Hempelmann, 2011). From the translational perspective, her main issue is that English *hum[or]* has become the de facto generic term for the field, because of the status of English as the lingua franca of science (see Figure 1.1). In languages that have cognates of *hum[or]* this can lead to the false elevation of this cognate as the main term (cf. also Hempel, 1963). As mentioned, because a somewhat unified scientific community existed in Europe until the waning of Latin as the language of learning, this includes practically all languages spoken on that continent. This effect can also occur the other way around, as will be discussed. German researchers, for example, tend to speak of “the comic” as the generic term meaning humor, in analogy to German “das Komische,” because they don’t have a sense that “the comic” is a specific instance of a comedian.

The common flaw of confusing semantics and etymology also lies at the basis of the Santana López (cf. sections 1.1 and 2.3). Apart from this misunderstanding, she operates under the useful and somewhat novel assumption that longer texts can serve as more reliable material for humor studies than jokes (cf. also Attardo, 2001), as well as the motivation for her study, namely the dearth of literature on Spanish-German humor and its translation. Thus, her study represents an exemplary study in synchronic interlingual research on key terms in humor.

In the chapter that outlines her methodology, the one most relevant here, Santana analyzes the lexical fields of German *das Komische* and Spanish *gracia*. She correctly points out that most