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**Guest Editor
Salvatore Attardo**

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Humor, language, and pedagogy: An introduction to this special issue

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Despite much research on the role of humor in the L2 classroom (see Bell, 2017; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016 for reviews), the conclusion of several major meta-analyses of the field of humor and teaching (Martin, Preiss, Gayle, & Allen, 2006; Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, 2011; McMorris, Boothroyd, & Pietrangelo, 1997) is that, as Bell and Pomerantz (2016) plaintively put it, “it has been difficult to connect the use of humor to increased learning” (p. 101). The reason behind that difficulty is, as Martin et al. (2006,) state: “Although students report enjoying learning and they report that they believe they have learned course material, objective measurements of the recall associated with humorous lectures are rather minuscule” (p. 305). Banas et al. strike a marginally more optimistic note, concluding that “the empirical evidence for the effects of humor on learning is considerably more mixed, with some scholars finding that humor enhances learning (. . .) and others finding no relationship between learning from humor” (2011, p. 131).

One of the fundamental points that emerge from the metanalyses mentioned in the previous paragraph is that humor is not a monolithic object. There are different kinds of humor, such as affiliative and disaffiliative humor, i.e., building an in- or out-group, respectively (Attardo, 1994, pp. 323-329). Humor may also address taboo topics (sex, death, class membership, and racial or ethnic membership, for example). Humor may be aggressive or soothing. The people involved in the humorous exchanges may have different personalities, preferences, and interests. Thus, one cannot help but agree with Kirsch and Kuiper’s conclusion that, “Any further implementation of humor in the classroom (. . .) should first be validated by research which more clearly elucidates the exact nature of sense of humor as a construct” (2003, p. 35; see also Kuiper & Olinger, 1998).

This special issue collects the selected works of scholars who participated in the North-East Texas Humor Research Conference on “Humor and Pedagogy” (see www.tamuc.edu/humor) in February 2014, and comprises three articles and three book reviews that represent the efforts and interests of researchers in the United States, Mexico, Italy, and Australia. The articles in this issue try to move forward the agenda on humor, language, and pedagogy, looking at various ways in which humor may happen in the classroom, while also considering such parameters as age and social class.

In the first research article, “*Is This a Joke?* Metalinguistic Reflections on Verbal Jokes During the School Years,” Karina Hess Zimmermann analyzes the metalinguistic reflections of children and adolescents on different types of verbal jokes. The author shows how humor production and comprehension develop during the school years and highlights differences between participants’ ability to identify, understand, and analyze different types of jokes. The results of this study confirm previous findings on humor and irony development and will inform future teaching practices regarding the use of humor in the classroom, as the results constitute a useful set of parameter for selecting the most appropriate types of jokes based on students’ cognitive abilities and age.

In the second article, “The Risks and Rewards of Teaching with Humour in Western Sydney: Adapting Pedagogy to Complex Demographics,” by Adrian Hale, the focus shifts towards the pedagogical value of humor as a motivator and as a topic in the language classroom. Hale presents his experience using humor as a topic as well as a delivery method to teach linguistics courses in Sydney, Australia. In this article, the author describes the benefits and pitfalls of such an approach regarding students’ enrollment, retention, motivation, and engagement in a region characterized by low income households, social disadvantage, and low English proficiency. A comparison of data from institutional student surveys, students’ grades, and attendance rate on courses taught with and without a specific focus on humor reveals that humor was instrumental in improving students’ experience and outcomes.

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In the third article, "Humor in the Teaching of Writing: A Microethnographic Approach to Developing Critical Thinking," Hempelmann discusses the value of humor as the central topic in three critical thinking and writing courses for undergraduates in the United States. The author begins by highlighting the benefits and risks of using humor in the classroom and then describes in detail the design of the first original course and its subsequent adaptations, the materials used, and some of the students' outcomes. The goal is to provide L1 and L2 teachers with a set of resources that can be used in their own classes. These resources include: the evidence to support the pedagogical decision of integrating humor in the course design, the materials to do so, and some possible student outcomes to assess the pedagogical value of humor.

The three book reviews cover recent publications in the field of humor studies. Forabosco reviews the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, which I edited. Banas reviews Nancy Bell's groundbreaking *We Are Not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction*. Finally, I review Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini's edited collection *Gender and Humor* to wrap up the issue.

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| ES | Salvatore Attardo completó sus estudios en Università Cattolica de Milán y Purdue University. Ha publicado extensivamente sobre pragmática, semántica y lingüística del humor, principalmente acerca de implicaturas, ironía y pragmática neogriceana. Ha sido el editor jefe de la revista <i>HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research</i> durante 10 años y ha editado la <i>Encyclopedia of Humor Studies</i> (SAGE, 2014) y <i>The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor</i> (2017). |
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Is this a joke? Metalinguistic reflections on verbal jokes during the school years

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ABSTRACT

EN The ability to produce and comprehend multiple meanings in words and expressions, such as those included in linguistic humor, develops during the school years and is directly related to the development of metalinguistic reflection. The purpose of this study is to analyze metalinguistic reflections that children and adolescents present on different types of verbal jokes. Participants were 42 children and adolescents in second, fifth, and eighth grades (14 participants per group) from Querétaro, México. They were presented with four verbal jokes (two lexical and two syntactical) and four non-jokes. Participants were asked to determine whether each text was a joke or not and to explain their reasoning. Results revealed differences by school grade in the students' ability to distinguish jokes from non-jokes and in the type and quantity of their reflections. Moreover, lexical jokes were easier to understand and analyze than syntactical jokes, especially for younger participants.

Key words: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, SCHOOL, METALINGUISTIC REFLECTION, HUMOR, JOKES

ES La capacidad de producir y entender los múltiples significados de palabras y expresiones, tales como los que encierra el humor lingüístico, se desarrolla durante los años de escolarización y presenta, a su vez, una relación directa con el desarrollo de la reflexión metalingüística. El propósito de este estudio es analizar las reflexiones metalingüísticas de niños y adolescentes ante distintos tipos de chistes verbales. Los participantes fueron un conjunto de 42 niños y adolescentes que cursaban 2º, 5º y 8º grado (14 participantes por grupo) en Querétaro, México. Se presentó a los sujetos del estudio un total de cuatro chistes verbales (dos léxicos y dos sintácticos), solicitándoles que determinaran si cada texto constituía un chiste o no, y se les pidió que motivaran sus respuestas. Los resultados mostraron diferencias entre el alumnado de los diferentes grados en cuanto a su capacidad de discernir si se encontraban ante un chiste o no, así como al tipo y el número de sus reflexiones. Además, los chistes léxicos fueron más fáciles de entender y analizar que los chistes sintácticos, especialmente para los participantes más jóvenes.

Palabras clave: DESARROLLO LINGÜÍSTICO, ESCUELA, REFLEXIÓN METALINGÜÍSTICA, HUMOR, CHISTES

IT La capacità di produrre e comprendere i molteplici significati di parole ed espressioni, come quelli presenti nel comico linguistico, si sviluppa durante il periodo scolastico ed è correlata in maniera diretta allo sviluppo della riflessione metalinguistica. Questo studio si propone di analizzare la riflessione metalinguistica operata da bambini e adolescenti su diversi tipi di comico verbale. I 42 bambini e adolescenti oggetto dello studio, divisi in gruppi di 14 partecipanti, frequentano le classi seconda e quinta della scuola primaria e la terza media, e provengono da Querétaro, Messico. Messi di fronte a quattro barzellette (due lessicali e due sintattiche) e quattro non-barzellette, è stato chiesto loro di determinare se i testi sottoposti fossero comici oppure no e di spiegare il ragionamento che li ha portati a formulare ogni valutazione. Lo studio ha messo in evidenza uno scarto a seconda della classe scolastica nella capacità degli studenti di distinguere le barzellette dalle non-barzellette nel tipo e quantità delle loro riflessioni. Inoltre, le barzellette lessicali sono risultate più semplici da capire e analizzare rispetto a quelle sintattiche, soprattutto per i partecipanti più giovani.

Parole chiave: SVILUPPO LINGUISTICO, SCUOLA, RIFLESSIONE METALINGUISTICA, COMICO, BARZELLETTE

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1. Introduction

1.1. *Language development in school*

In recent years, it has been recognized that language development is an ongoing process that continues throughout the school years and well into adolescence (Barriga, 2002; Hess, 2010; Hoff, 2014; Nippold, 2007). Several studies have shown that while children acquire the basic skills of their language system during childhood, they still have much to develop in order to become proficient speakers (Berman, 2004). A very important ability that children acquire during the school years and adolescence is the comprehension and production of multiple meanings for words that will allow them to interpret linguistic humor (Hess, 2014). In this paper, we argue that children's and adolescents' ability to reflect on humor, and specifically on jokes, can provide information on the mechanisms involved in later language development.

Later language development is characterized by significant achievements at all linguistic levels (Nippold, 2007). Regarding phonology, it appears that the articulation of polysyllabic words is strengthened and that the child adapts to the accent of the community (Nippold, 2007). In addition, there is a development of phonological awareness (Gombert, 1992; Hoff, 2014). In terms of morphology, during the school years new compound words via prefixes and suffixes and the use of multiple morphemes become more complex and there is presence of new derivative morphemes (Nippold & Sun, 2008; Ravid, 2004). This is because these new forms correspond to morphologically complex words that are part of the system of written language that children have access to during their reading and writing experiences at school (Nippold, 2007; Snow & Uccelli, 2009).

Regarding syntactic development, Tolchinsky (2004) recognized that by the age of five, children produce longer sentences, acquire a greater repertoire of syntactic structures, and increase their ability to comprehend and produce grammatical structures, which they had not used before. In turn, sentence complexity, coordination, and subordination are syntactical features that develop in later childhood (Barriga, 2002; Berman & Ravid, 2010). For this reason, children must make adjustments in context, variation of style, and register in order to meet a new set of discourse functions (Berman, 2004; Tolchinsky, Rosado, Aparici, & Perera, 2005).

Additionally, during the school years important changes take place in pragmatics. Children must be more attentive to conversational interactions with peers and adults outside the family, and therefore create new communicative strategies (Barriga, 2002; Ely, 1997; Ninio & Snow, 1996). It is during the school years that children achieve the consolidation of conversational skills, such as turn taking, dialogue, and discourse (Blum-Kulka, 2004). This implies that children learn to take into account the mental state of the interlocutor (Theory of Mind) to enter into a continuous interplay with their beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions to be able to influence their actions (Miller, 2006; Tolchinsky, 2004; Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007).

Another linguistic level that undergoes an important evolution during later language development is discourse. The child has to develop a set of skills to select the appropriate linguistic forms according to a specific textual genre (narration, description, or argumentation) in order to take into account the information shared with the listener. Additionally, the child must be able to organize discourse that is relevant and appropriate to a given communicative situation and develop a new semantic and syntactic framework that meets the organization of coherent and cohesive discourse (Alvarado, Calderón, Hess & Vernon, 2011; Hess & González, 2013; Hickmann, 2003; Tolchinsky, 2004).

Finally, regarding semantics, during the school years different levels of linguistic progress have been observed. New types of words appear as a result of children's personal interests and of their access to academic language in school settings (Jisa, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004; Zwiers, 2008). In turn, the lexicon ceases to be concrete with specific functions and becomes more general and abstract (Barriga, 2002). The child is able to make new inferences, assumptions, abstractions, and deductions that will lead to the generation of new meanings for words such as those included in metaphors, idioms, irony (Hoff, 2014; Nippold, 2007; Spector, 1996; Tolchinsky, 2004), and, specifically, in linguistic humor.

During the last decade, the study of the development of new meanings for words has become an important topic in psycholinguistic research. Frequently, children and adolescents encounter linguistic expressions where words may have more than one meaning. The comprehension of these new meanings of words is a very important aspect of language development, because it has been associated with academic achievement, leadership, and creativity (Calderón, 2012; Loukusa & Leinonen, 2008; Nippold, 2007). Individuals who do not comprehend or use multiple meanings of words appropriately may have difficulties in

the comprehension of some academic concepts (Milosky, 1994). Additionally, the use of many meanings for words is a necessary and highly valued ability for adequate social functioning (Hoicka, 2014).

The interpretation of several meanings in words implies the development of many linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities. One of the most important ones is to realize that a message may contain or not the intention of the speaker, that is, that words do not always represent intentions (Beal, 1988). To be able to distinguish between words and intention, or *what is said* and *what is meant* (Bonitatibus, 1988), individuals have to be aware that their own thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge are not the same as the ones of the interlocutor (Bosco, Angeleri, Colle, Sacco, & Bara, 2013; Hoicka, 2014; Pexman, 2008). Only then, they are able to comprehend that an expression can be used by a speaker in order to convey more than one meaning and that linguistic expressions may have more than one interpretation.

The ability to produce and comprehend multiple meanings in words and expressions develops during the school years for several reasons. In school settings children encounter new linguistic forms and functions mainly due to the exposure to more formal and demanding oral language in the classroom (Hoff, 2014; Montes, 2011) and to written language (Barriga, 2002; Nippold, 2007). In addition, they start to use language games, riddles, and jokes that imply phonological, lexical, or syntactical ambiguity (Crystal, 1996; Hess, 2014; Martin, 2007). Finally, the development of new language meanings has been directly related to the development of metalinguistic reflection (Gombert, 1992; Hess, 2010; Howard, 2009; Nippold, 2007), as will be explained below.

1.2. Metalinguistic reflection

It is known that during early language development (before the age of 6), children have difficulty in thinking and talking about their own and others' language expressions. This is due to the fact that young children are not able to use language in order to talk about language independently of its communicative function (Gombert, 1992; Hess, 2010; Kemper & Vernooy, 1993). Nevertheless, at about age 6, children start to reflect on the nature and functions of language in order to adjust, modify, and correct language in diverse communicative contexts (Ashkenazy & Ravid, 1998; Barriga, 2002; Hess, 2010; Nippold, 2004; Smith-Cairns, 1996) and to play with language in different ways, such as with rhymes, jokes, and metaphors (Apte, 1985; Cazden, 1976; Crystal, 1996). All these new experiences contribute to the development of children's metalinguistic reflection. According to Gombert (1992), metalinguistic reflection appears when children are able to distinguish language form from its content. Only then, they can reflect on language as an entity in itself and intentionally monitor and plan linguistic processing in all linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse) (Chaney, 1994; Gombert, 1992; Hess, 2010). During the pre-school years, children have an intuitive knowledge about language (Gombert, 1992; Montes, 1994), but during the school years they will develop a conscious reflection about the linguistic system and will be able to process linguistic information independently of the communicative context (Gombert, 1992; Menyuk, 1988). As we stated before, this study will be concerned with metalinguistic reflection on humor and specifically on jokes.

1.3. Humor in later language development

Although humor is related to the appropriation of effective communicative, social, and linguistic competence (Attardo, 2008; Carrell, 1997; Raskin, 1985), the acquisition of humor during later language development has been a somewhat neglected topic in psycholinguistic research.² In this study, we argue that humor development can provide important insights on later language development because comprehension and production of humorous events follow a long developmental path (Ashkenazy & Ravid, 1998; Bernstein, 1986; Ezell & Jarzynka 1996; Hoicka, 2014; McGhee, 1971a, 1971b; Shultz & Horibe, 1974) and involve cognitive, linguistic, metalinguistic, and social abilities (Ashkenazy & Ravid, 1998; Bergen, 2003; Hess, 2014; Martin 2007; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2008; Tamashiro, 1979; Tennison, 1993).

There are several authors who propose stages in the development of humor (see, for example, McGhee, 1971a, 1971b, 1979). Regarding humor development during the school years, studies show that around age 6 children will begin to solve implicit incongruities (Bariaud, 1989; Ezell & Jarzynka, 1996; Falkenberg, 2010). Between ages 7 and 8 they will start to comprehend and produce jokes and riddles that involve phonological, lexical, or syntactical ambiguity (Apte, 1985; Bergen, 2009; Bernstein, 1986; Nippold

² For some exceptions see Ashkenazy & Ravid (1998), Bernstein (1986), Ezell & Jarzynka (1996), Hoicka (2014), Klein (2003), Klein & Kuiper (2006), Martin (2007), Masten (1986, 1989), McGhee (1971a, 1971b, 1979), McGhee & Panoutsopoulou (1990), Semrud-Clikeman & Glass (2008), Shultz (1974), Spector (1996), and Tennison (1993).

2007; Shultz, 1974); they will also start to assess the social models and conventions of their culture in order to understand and produce humor (Bariaud, 1983, 1989; Feuerhahn, 1993; Hoicka, 2014; Masten, 1986; Southam, 2005). Furthermore, during late childhood individuals become able to give higher quality explanations about humor and present better linguistic styles and organization in their humorous productions (Ashkenazy & Ravid 1998; Spector, 1996). Finally, during adolescence, they will favor more sophisticated forms of humor that involve abstract themes and higher cognitive challenges, such as irony. Humor presented in the form of occurrences or spontaneous anecdotes will also be widely enjoyed by young people, especially when they emphasize social conflict or are of sexual nature (Klein & Kuiper, 2006; Koller, 1988; Nippold 2007; Tennison, 1993).

1.4. Jokes

Humor has many manifestations and the classification into different types varies according to theoretical perspectives. From a psycholinguistic point of view, Martin (2007) believes that humor can be divided into three broad categories: *spontaneous humor*, *accidental humor*, and *jokes*. As jokes represent one of the most common types of humor in social interaction, they will be central to this study.

Jokes are short anecdotes that present a specific situation that opposes—via the establishment of an incongruity—another alternative situation, all of which creates a humorous effect (Attardo, 2005; Attardo & Chabanne, 1992; Martin, 2007). Although there are many ways to organize a text as a joke (see, for example, Davies, 2004 and Raskin, 1985), most authors agree on the fact that prototypical jokes consist of three elements: setting, dialogue, and punch line (Attardo & Chabanne, 1992; Chafe, 2007; Martin, 2007). The *setting* is the initial part of the joke except for the last statement, and serves to create certain expectations about how the situation should be interpreted. The *dialogue* is short, generally between two characters, and lies immediately before the punch line. The *punch line* comes at the end of the joke and will be the element that suddenly changes the meaning, leading the individual to a second reading because of the perceived incongruity.

There are many taxonomies of jokes (see Attardo, 1994). In the literature on language acquisition, various distinctions between jokes have been made under semantic (Fowles & Glanz, 1977; Shultz & Horibe, 1974) and pragmatic perspectives (Bernstein, 1986). For the purpose of this research, the classification proposed by Attardo, Attardo, Baltes and Petray (1994), who distinguish two kinds of jokes (verbal and referential), will be used. This study will center its attention on verbal jokes (for a similar study with referential jokes see Hess, 2014).

Verbal jokes are jokes that present a lexical marker (generally a word or a syntactic structure) that entails at least two readings. In general, verbal jokes can be of two types: those based on ambiguity and those based on alliteration. As these latter ones are very rare (2%) (Attardo et al., 1994), this study will focus on verbal jokes due to ambiguity. According to Attardo et al. (1994), verbal jokes that are based on ambiguity can be classified into two types: lexical (93%) and syntactical (5%). Lexical jokes are based on a semantic ambiguity of a word or linguistic expression. See Example 1:

- 1) Un pececito le pregunta a otro pececito:

-¿Qué hace tu papá?

-Pues, nada.

[A little fish asks another little fish: What does your dad do? Well, nothing/he swims]

In this joke, the Spanish word *nada* has two readings: *nothing* and *swim*. To adequately interpret the joke, it is necessary to see the word *nada* as a lexical marker for both meanings. In syntactical jokes, on the contrary, ambiguity is based on the syntactic structure of a linguistic expression. In order to interpret the ambiguity it is necessary to decompose the syntactic expression and rearrange it. See Example 2:

- 2) Una señora entra en una tienda elegante y pregunta:

-¿Tiene bolsas de cocodrilo?

-Depende, señora. Dígame, ¿cómo le gustan a su cocodrilo?

[A woman enters an elegant store and asks: Do you have bags made of/for crocodile? It depends, ma'am. Tell me, how does your crocodile like them?]

Additionally, in prototypical cases, in order to make the ambiguous interpretation possible, verbal jokes include a *connector* and a *disjuncter* (Attardo et al., 1994). The *connector* is any segment of the text that can be assigned to two different meanings (as the word *nada* in Example 1 and the phrase *cómo le gustan a su cocodrilo* in Example 2); the *disjuncter* is a part of the text that plays with the ambiguous element causing the switch from one interpretation to the other (*nada* in Example 1 and *cómo le gustan a su cocodrilo* in Example 2). Verbal jokes can vary due to the position of connector and disjuncter. In most cases, the connector and the disjuncter are in different segments of the text (as in Example 2), but in some cases connector and disjuncter are in the same position (as in Example 1).

Under the previous assumptions, the purpose of this study was to analyze metalinguistic reflections that children and adolescents present on different types of verbal jokes. The underlying hypotheses were:

- 1) Differences between age groups in the ability to reflect on verbal jokes will exist.
- 2) Lexical verbal jokes will be easier to interpret and reflect on than syntactical verbal jokes because they are more frequent and less complex jokes.
- 3) Distance between the connector and disjuncter in the joke will play a role in its correct interpretation. Jokes with the connector/disjuncter in the same segment of the text will be easier to interpret and analyze than jokes with the connector/disjuncter in different segments of the text.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Forty-two children and adolescents between the ages of 7 and 15 participated in the study. They were all students from a school in Querétaro, México, in second, fifth, and eighth grades. Mean ages for the groups were 8.4 (years; months, range = 8-9 years), 11.2 (range = 10-11 years) and 14.4 (range = 13-15 years). Fourteen children were chosen for each grade (seven boys and seven girls). All children came from middle- to upper-middle-class schools. In order to control the variable of previously knowing or not the jokes, only participants who stated that they were not familiar with the jokes presented in the study were included.

2.2. Materials and procedures

Each participant was presented a total of eight texts: four jokes and four non-jokes (see Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix A). Jokes for the instrument were selected in order to have one joke for each of the following types: a) lexical joke with a connector and disjuncter in the same position; b) lexical joke with a connector and disjuncter in different position; c) syntactical joke with a connector and disjuncter in the same position; d) syntactical joke with a connector and disjuncter in different position. Non-jokes were original jokes that were modified by eliminating the disjuncter and therefore were literal, factual, and serious texts. The intention was for all texts to have similar length and to be accessible for all ages in terms of topic and language. Therefore, number of words and syntactic complexity were controlled and a preliminary pilot test was carried out.

The instrument was introduced in oral and written form. Texts were previously recorded for audio presentation and all participants additionally received the written versions of the jokes so they could return to the text to analyze it in greater detail. Jokes were presented in random order and participants listened to the eight texts one at a time. In order to assess the familiarity with the jokes, after each text, participants were asked whether they knew the joke before. If they said *no*, they were asked questions by way of a guided interview in order to see if they thought it was a joke or not and why. During the interview, participants were asked several questions in order to encourage them to state as many metalinguistic reflections on the jokes and non-jokes as possible (Examples: *Why is it a joke? What makes it a joke? How do you know? What part of the text made you think it was a joke? Was it a good joke? Why? What would you change in the text in order to make it a better joke?*). Before starting the interview, participants were asked if they wanted to hear or read the joke again, allowing them to hear/read the joke as many times as they needed. All interviews were performed by one graduate student of a psychology and education program who was previously trained for this purpose.

Participants' responses were analyzed in two ways. First, correct interpretations of the texts (jokes as jokes and non-jokes as non-jokes) were scored. Second, all responses were broadly categorized into three non-exclusive categories: *content*, *form*, and *impact* (see Appendix B for more details on the categories and subcategories). Responses of *content* included those in which participants reflected on aspects of the content

of the text: plot, events, relationship between characters, etc. (Examples: *It's not a joke because the woman didn't explain to the salesman why she wanted to buy the purse for her crocodile*; *It's a bad joke because they [participants in the joke] enter an illegal store*; *It's not a joke because crocodiles can't use purses*). Responses of *form* were reflections on the form of the text, independently of the content, such as reflections on text length, words, and structure (Examples: *It's not a joke because the dialogue is not coherent*; *I know it's a joke because the word has two meanings*; *It's a joke because it is short*). Responses of *impact* included reflections on the impact of the joke on a potential recipient (Examples: *It's a good joke because it makes people laugh*; *It's a good joke for children because they are always telling jokes like this one*; *For me, it's a joke because it made me laugh*).

3. Results

3.1. Overall results

Overall results include the responses that participants gave to the question "Is it or isn't it a joke?." Many of the participants answered *yes* or *no*, although their responses showed that they had not necessarily understood the jokes. A complete understanding was only considered when in the participants' responses it was clear that they were able to see the ambiguity in the jokes (Example: *I know it's a joke because he wears the same shoe size standing and sitting*; *It's funny because he says "nothing" and "swim"*). Therefore, for this first analysis only answers where it was evident that the children and adolescents had understood the joke were scored. Figure 1 shows these results.

As shown in Figure 1, there is an important increase in the number of correct answers in relation to school grade in both types of text (jokes and non-jokes). An analysis of students' t-distribution showed significant differences for jokes (second vs. fifth grade: $t = -2.973$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$; second vs. eighth grade: $t = -8.062$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$; fifth vs. eighth grade $t = -3.551$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$) and non-jokes (second vs. fifth grade: $t = -2.696$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$; second vs. eighth grade $t = -6.866$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$; fifth vs. eighth grade $t = -2.530$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$).

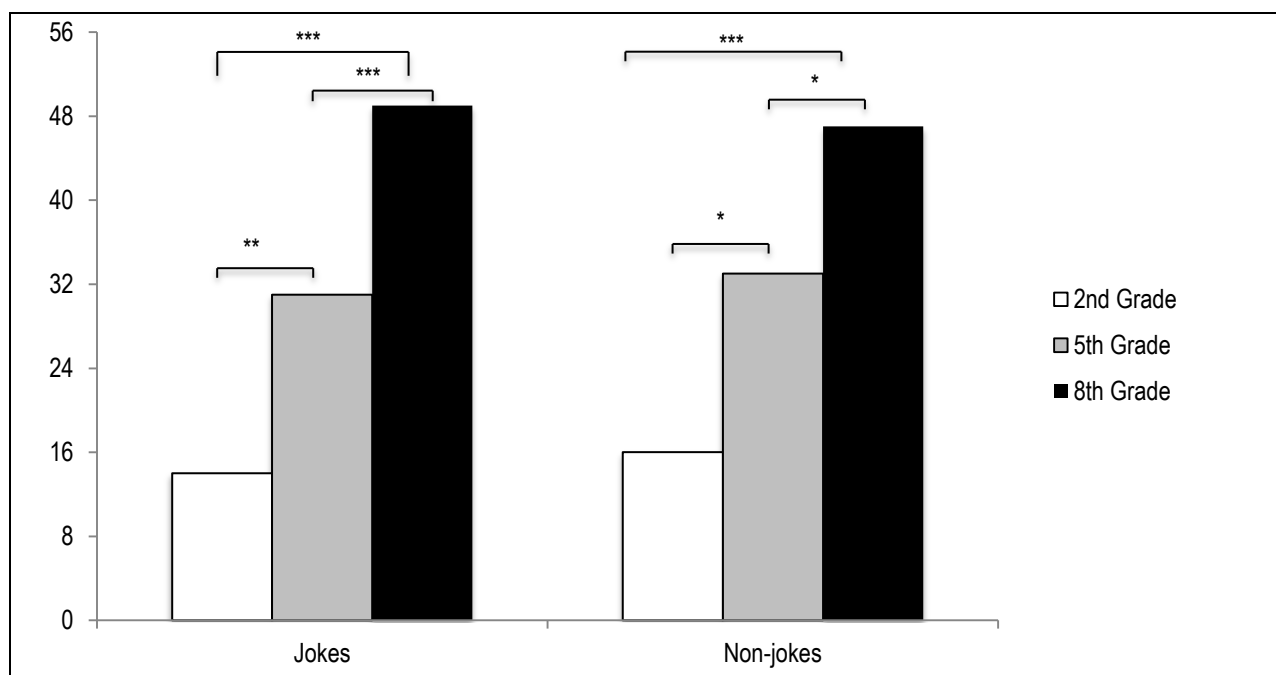


Figure 1. Correct interpretation of jokes and non-jokes by grade. Numbers represent number of correct responses to the question "Is it or isn't it a joke?" by all participants per grade for jokes and non-jokes. Total of possible correct answers per grade for each text type is 56.

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

3.2. Lexical vs. syntactical jokes

In the second part of the analysis we explored if there were differences in students' ability to interpret jokes due to their type (lexical vs. syntactical). Results of this analysis are shown in Figure 2.

As can be seen in Figure 2, participants were better at correctly interpreting lexical jokes than syntactical jokes, although differences between lexical and syntactical jokes were only significant for fifth grade ($t = 2.188$, $df = 13$, $p < 0.05$). An analysis by grade showed a significant increase for lexical jokes in second vs. eighth grade ($t = 5.871$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$) and fifth vs. eighth grade ($t = -2.333$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$). In the case of syntactical jokes, there were significant differences between the three grades (second vs. fifth: $t = 2.553$, $df = 27$, $p < .05$; second vs. eighth: $t = -6.026$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$; fifth vs. eighth: $t = -2.855$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$).

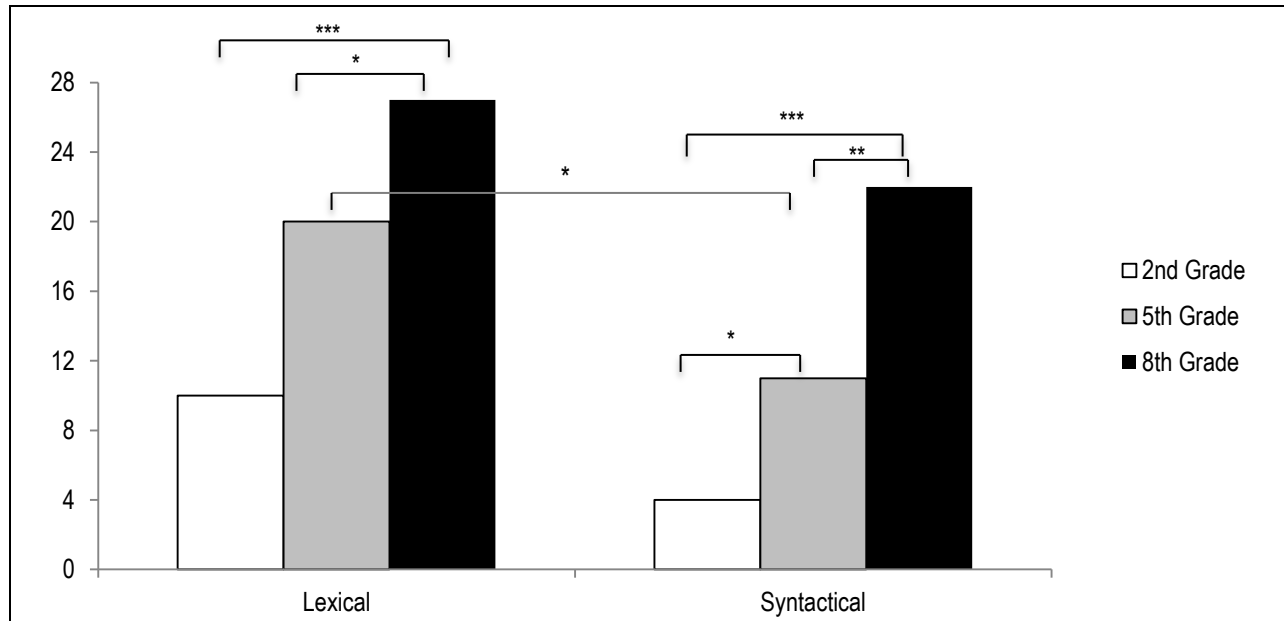


Figure 2. Correct interpretation of jokes by type of joke (lexical or syntactical) for each grade. Numbers represent numbers of jokes interpreted correctly. Total of possible correct answers per grade is 28.

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

3.3. Position of connector and disjunctive

In the third part of the analysis we examined whether the position of a connector and disjunctive (same or different) had an impact on the participants' ability to reflect on jokes. As can be seen in Figure 3, there is an increase in students' ability to reflect on jokes with both types of positions during the school years. In jokes with a connector and disjunctive in the same position, differences in the number of correct interpretations of jokes were significant for grades second vs. eighth ($t = -3.942$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$) and fifth vs. eighth ($t = -2.222$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$). In jokes where a connector and disjunctive were in different positions, there was a significant increase in the number of correct interpretations of jokes between grades second and fifth ($t = -2.924$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$) and between fifth and eighth ($t = -3.294$, $df = 26$, $p = .01$). A comparison between jokes with same vs. different position showed significant differences only for participants in second grade ($t = 2.104$, $df = 13$, $p < .05$) in favor of jokes with a connector and disjunctive in the same position, even though this value was very close to not being of statistical significance.

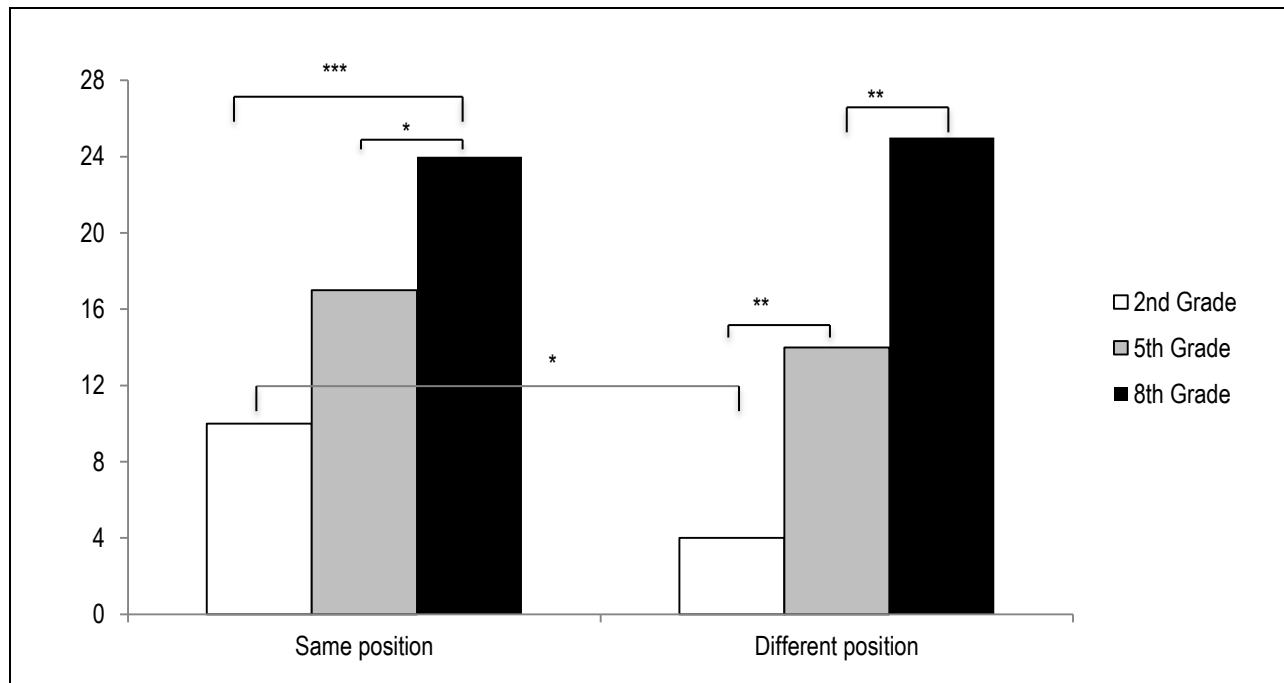


Figure 3. Correct interpretation of jokes by position of connector and disjunctive (same or different) for each grade. Numbers represent numbers of jokes interpreted correctly. Total of possible correct answers per grade is 28.

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

3.4. Types of responses (content, form, and impact)

Finally, an analysis of the types of responses given by the participants was performed. Because our interest resided in seeing the types of reflections that the participants could make on the texts (jokes and non-jokes), this analysis was completed for all the responses given by participants, independently of whether they had understood the jokes or not and whether the answers were correct or not. As stated in the method section, responses were categorized under three types: *content* (reflection on text content), *form* (reflections on text form), and *impact* (reflections on the impact of the joke on a potential recipient). Results for this analysis are shown in Figure 4.

As can be seen in Figure 4, responses for the category of content were the most frequent ones for all grades. This was expected, because the texts did not differ much in length or structure. Differences per grade were significant between second and fifth grade ($t = -4.532$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$) and between second and eighth grade ($t = -4.151$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$), although not between fifth and eighth grade. In relation to the responses of form, results showed similar tendencies (second vs. fifth: $t = -3.039$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$; second vs. eighth: $t = -3.426$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$). Finally, responses of impact did not show any significant differences by grade.

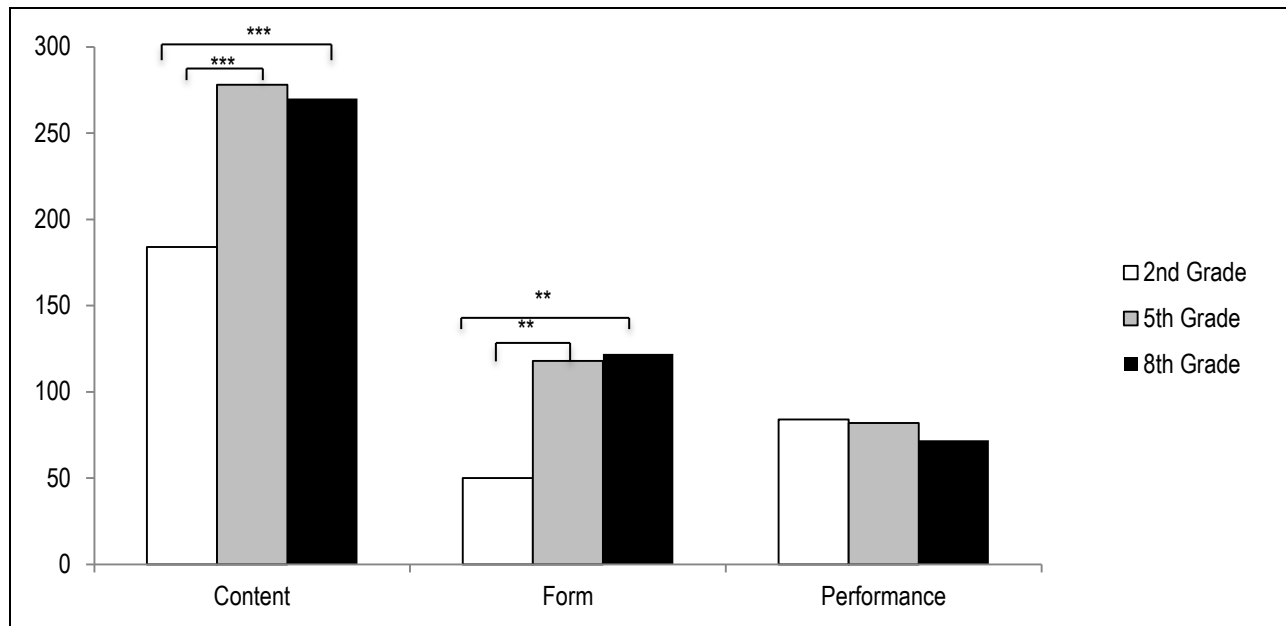


Figure 4. Total responses for the categories of content, form and impact produced by the participants per grade. Numbers include number of responses provided by participants for each category for all types of texts (jokes and non-jokes).

Note: ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In order to conduct a deeper analysis on the types of responses given by the participants, all responses included in the categories of content, form, and impact were further divided into subcategories (see Appendix B for definitions and examples of responses in each category) and statistical analyses were conducted. Results for the category of *content* are shown in Figure 5.

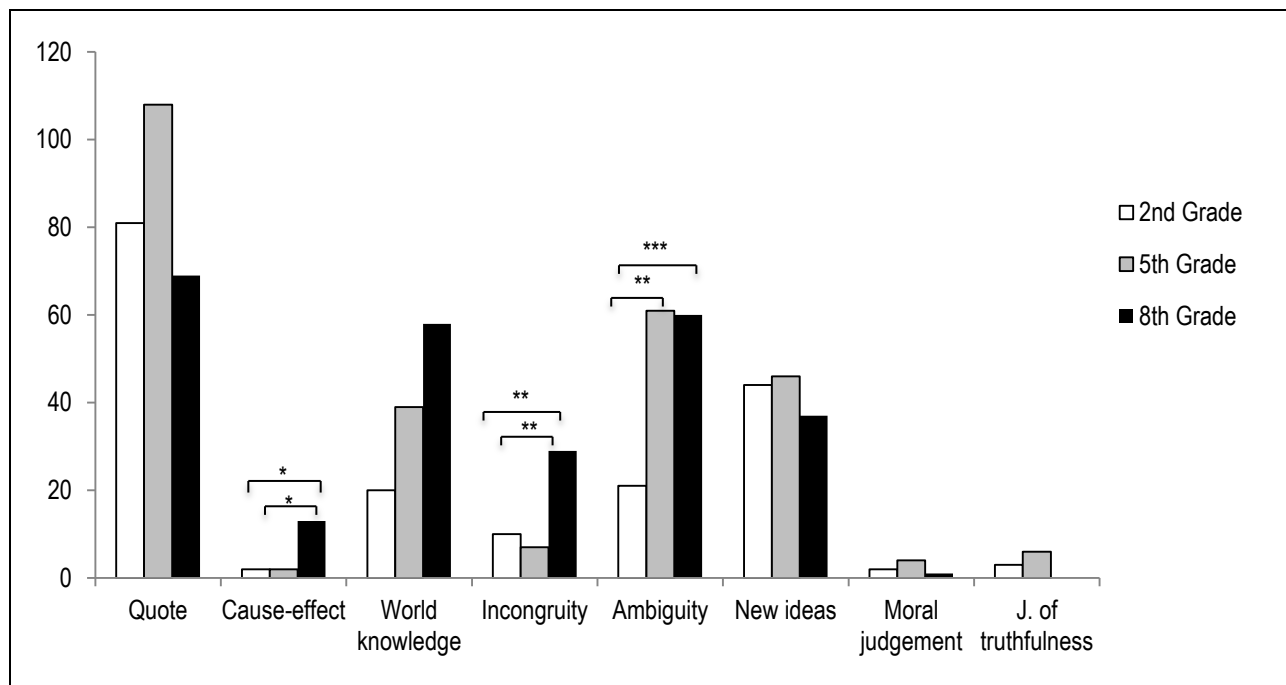


Figure 5. Total responses for the subcategories of content produced by the participants per grade. Numbers include all responses for the subcategories of content for all types of texts (jokes and non-jokes).

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results in Figure 5 show differences between school grades for many of the subcategories of content. Nevertheless, these differences were statistically significant only for the following subcategories:

- Responses about ambiguity were more frequent in fifth and eighth grade than in second grade (fifth vs. second: $t = -3.919$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$; second vs. eighth: $t = -4.192$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$). This indicates that during the first school years children acquire the ability to observe that verbal jokes are based on structures or words that entail two readings.
- Participants in eighth grade produced more responses about cause-effect and incongruity than participants in fifth and second grade (cause-effect: $t = -2.228$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$; incongruity: $t = -2.978$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$). This suggests that during later childhood there is an important development in the ability to identify relationships between events and incongruity in jokes.

Results of the analysis for the subcategories of *form* are shown in Figure 6.

As Figure 6 shows, the most frequent responses were those referring to the subcategories of text structure, ambiguity, and new ideas (see Appendix B for further detail). These subcategories, as well as the subcategory of speaker's expressiveness, showed statistically significant differences by age groups in their average scores:

- Participants in second grade presented fewer responses about text structure than participants in fifth grade ($t = -2.954$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$) and eighth grade ($t = -2.076$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$). This indicates a growth in the ability to reflect on text structure during the first school years.
- Participants in second grade included fewer responses that refer to the ambiguity present in verbal jokes than participants in fifth grade ($t = -3.683$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$) and eighth grade ($t = -4.192$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$). As with the case of ambiguity in the category of content, these results show a significant increase in the ability to locate two meanings in jokes at around fifth grade.
- Participants in eighth grade presented more responses of new ideas than participants in fifth ($t = 2.163$, $df = 26$, $p = .040$) and second grade ($t = -4.338$, $df = 26$, $p < .000$). This finding indicates that during adolescence individuals develop the ability to suggest new ideas in order to improve texts.
- Participants in fifth grade included more responses on the speaker's expressiveness than participants in second grade ($t = 3.358$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$). This suggests that during the early school years individuals become more conscious of the way in which language is expressed.

Finally, an analysis of the subcategories of *impact* was conducted. Results are shown in Figure 7.

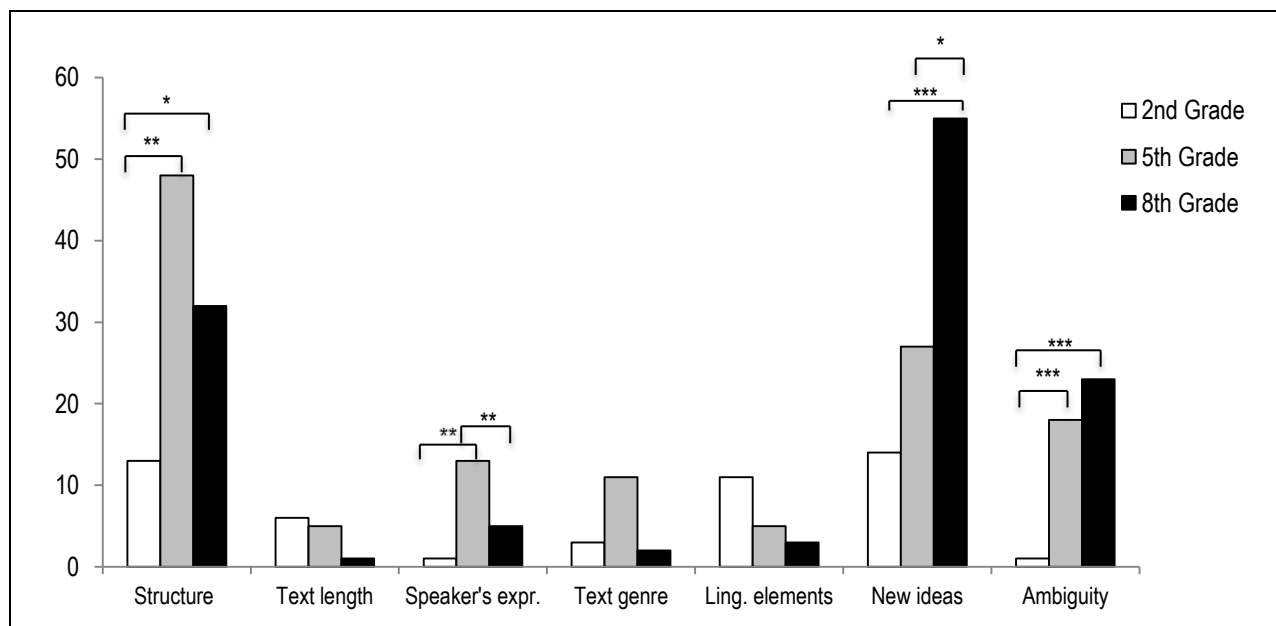


Figure 6. Total responses for the subcategories of form produced by the participants per grade. Numbers include all responses for the subcategories of form for all types of texts (jokes and non-jokes).

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

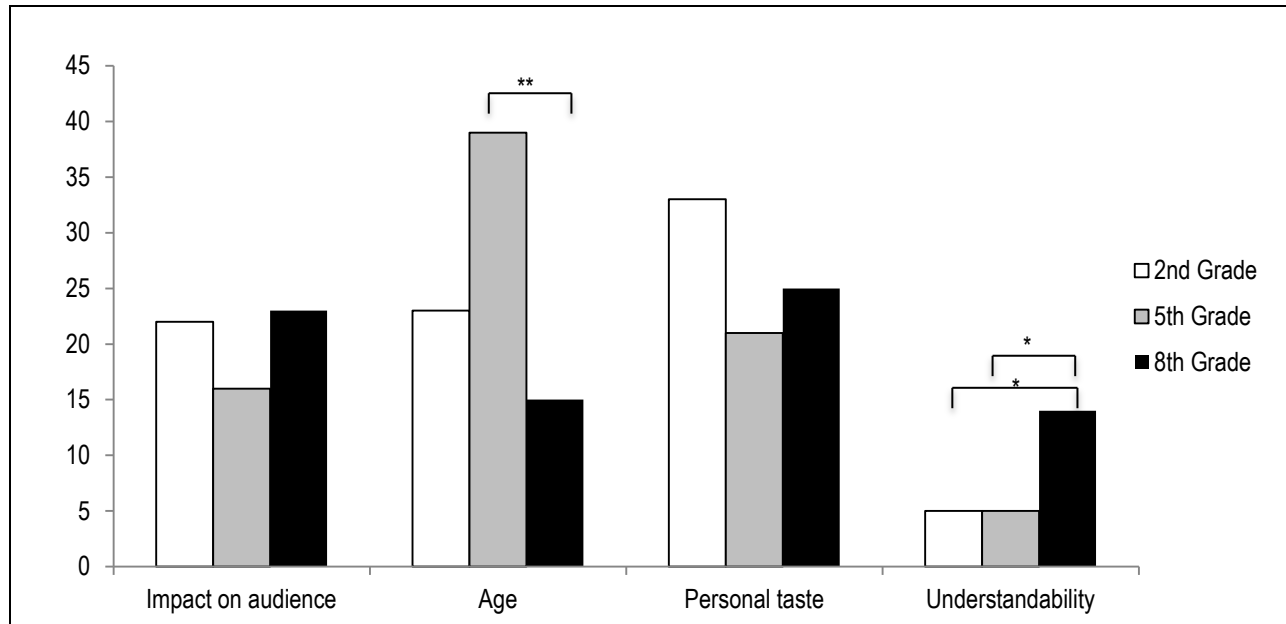


Figure 7. Total responses for the subcategories of impact produced by the participants per grade. Numbers include all responses for the subcategories of impact for all types of texts (jokes and non-jokes).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

For the category of impact, statistical differences were found for the following subcategories:

- Participants in eighth grade presented more responses in reference to the understandability of the joke than participants in second grade ($t = -2.386$, $df = 26$, $p = .025$) and fifth grade ($t = -2.090$, $df = 26$, $p = .047$). This shows that the ability of taking into account the possible audience of a joke is a late acquisition milestone.
- Participants in fifth grade included more responses in reference to the age of a potential listener than participants in eighth grade ($t = -2.819$, $df = 26$, $p = .009$). This suggests that younger individuals center their attention more on the characteristics of a particular person who might interpret the joke, whereas older ones take into account a more general audience, as previously stated.

4. Discussion

In general terms, results show significant differences by school grade in the ability to interpret a joke as a joke and a non-joke as a non-joke, that is, to reflect on the characteristics that make a text a joke. This suggests that the ability to reflect on jokes as a text type grows significantly during the school years. As it has been shown in previous studies (see, for example, Bariaud, 1989; Falkenberg, 2010; Hess, 2014), the understanding of jokes increases when individuals develop the ability to interpret the implicit incongruity. This growth is especially important at around ages 9 to 10 (Ashkenazi & Ravid, 1998; Bariaud, 1983), as also shown by the present study, for both lexical and syntactical verbal jokes.

Additionally, as expected based on a previous study with referential jokes (Hess, 2014), results revealed an effect of age in children's increasing ability to make metalinguistic reflections on several characteristics of jokes. Data showed that even if responses on the content of jokes were the most frequent ones for all school grades, older participants displayed a larger repertoire of responses about content and form. In regard to the responses of content, our data showed that around fifth grade an important development takes place in the children's ability to establish cause-effect relationships and to locate the incongruity present in jokes. Similar findings were also reported by Bergen (2009). By fifth grade, our data showed that other significant changes take place in the responses on the form of jokes: fifth graders are better at reflecting on the structure of the text, on the speaker's expressiveness, and on the presence of an ambiguity. This indicates that by fifth grade participants are better at analyzing the joke as a text regardless of its content. This aspect was also previously documented with referential jokes (Hess, 2014) and metalinguistic reflections on narrative texts (Hess, 2010, 2011). Our results also show that some other

abilities develop between fifth and eighth grade. In particular, adolescents become able to reflect more on the understandability of the joke and less on the specific age of a potential listener, thus being able to think of a more general audience. The adolescent also becomes more capable of stating new ideas in order to make a joke a better text. This means that older individuals are more conscious of the impact that a joke may have on an audience.

In regard to responses of impact, our study showed very few in all age groups, whereas in a similar study with referential jokes, Hess (2014) reported an increase by grade in the ability to reflect on the impact that a joke may have on a potential listener. The fact that responses of impact were not common in our study with verbal jokes, but were frequent in reflections on referential jokes, indicates that the type of joke (verbal or referential) may have an impact on the types of reflections participants may produce. In the case of verbal jokes, as the ones included in this study, the impact of the joke on a potential listener was not central to the differentiation between jokes and non-jokes. Nevertheless, differences between grade groups in the subcategories of impact showed that older participants were more able to reflect on the impact that jokes may have on a more general audience and not on a particular individual in a certain context. This ability to take into account more general and abstract aspects of language during metalinguistic reflection has been documented as a major challenge of language acquisition during adolescence (Barriga, 2002; Nippold, 2007).

As for the results concerning the participants' ability to interpret different types of jokes (lexical vs. syntactical), the results showed that lexical jokes were easier to understand than syntactical jokes, a fact also documented by Bernstein (1986). This finding points to the possibility that jokes in which it is necessary to decompose and rearrange syntactical structures may be harder to understand than jokes in which there is a lexical marker to be disambiguated. This was expected, because the metasyntactical ability to reason consciously on syntactic structure and to intentionally control the application of grammatical rules is acquired during late childhood (Gombert, 1992). Additionally, literature on later language development has documented that it is easier to process particular words in a local level than to establish relationships between words in a more global level (Barriga, 2002; Calderón, 2012; Hess, 2010, 2014; Nippold, 2007). Furthermore, the results concerning the position of a connector and disjunctive in verbal jokes seem to support this finding. As this study showed, jokes that have a connector and disjunctive in the same position are easier to understand than jokes in which a connector and disjunctive are in different positions, especially for younger children (second grade). Again, locating and interpreting one salient word or structure seems to be easier than establishing connections between two or more parts of the text.

In sum, even though the small number of participants and items in this study does not allow for generalizing the results, it is possible to conclude that as children get older they seem increasingly able to reflect on jokes, to argue about them with more elements, as well as to establish relationships between different parts of the joke as a text. These data coincide with studies on later language development (Barriga, 2002; Berman, 2004; Hess, 2010, 2014; Nippold, 2007), with findings on humor development (Ashkenazy & Ravid, 1998; Bariaud, 1993, 1989; Ezell & Jarzynka, 1996; Prentice & Fathman, 1975; Shultz, 1974), and with studies on the development of irony understanding (Filippova & Astington, 2008). Overall, although the present work confirms that metalinguistic reflection on humor continues its development into adolescence, future studies with larger samples and a more complete set of stimuli should further explore the metalinguistic, linguistic, or cognitive abilities underlying the development of metalinguistic reflections on jokes. Future investigations should also consider the relationship between metalinguistic reflection and the development of a Theory of Mind and/or other linguistic abilities, as well as the variations present between individuals.

On a final note, the results of this study are also relevant for language practitioners who are using or wish to use humor in their classes. The choice of the humorous texts to be used in the classroom should be made taking into account the age of the students and the types of humorous texts they can successfully understand, while also favoring the cognitive development of the child. Jokes can also be explained to children in order to introduce them to metalinguistic reflection, for example, showing them different syntactic functions and meanings of certain parts of speech. At this end, it would be interesting to engage students in creating jokes themselves, playing with the parts of speech to stimulate their ability to use and apply metalinguistic reflection.

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Appendix A

Jokes and non-jokes presented in the study

Table A1

Jokes presented to the participants

Elements of the joke	Lexical jokes	Syntactical jokes
Connector and disjunctive in the same position	Un pececito le pregunta a otro pececito: -¿Qué hace tu papá? -Pues nada . [A little fish asks another fish: "What does your dad do?" "Well, nothing (nothing/swim)"]	Una señora entra en una tienda elegante y pregunta: -¿Tiene bolsas de cocodrilo ? -Depende, señora. Dígame, ¿ cómo le gustan a su cocodrilo ? [A woman walks into an elegant store and asks: "Do you have crocodile bags (bags made out of crocodile/for crocodiles)?" "It depends, ma'am. Tell me, how does your crocodile like them?"]
Connector and disjunctive in different position	Entra un nuevo maestro al salón y se presenta: -Buenos días, mi nombre es Largo . Interrumpe Juanito y dice: -No importa, tenemos tiempo. [A new teacher comes into the classroom and presents himself: "Good morning, my name is Long." Juanito interrupts and says: "Don't worry, we've got time."]	En una zapatería el vendedor pregunta: -¿Qué número tiene de pie ? - El mismo número de pie que de sentado . [In a shoe store the salesman asks: "What foot size/size by foot do you have?" "The same one as sitting."]

Table A2

Non-jokes presented to the participants

Non-jokes in Spanish	Non-jokes in English
Una señora le dice a otra: -¡Le pusieron lentes a mi hijo! -¡Qué mala suerte!	A woman says to another woman: "My son got glasses". "Too bad!"
Un ratoncito entra en un elevador y un señor le pregunta: -¿A qué piso va? Y el ratoncito responde: -Al tercero.	A little mouse comes into an elevator and a man asks him: "What floor?" "Third."
Dos caníbales pasean por la selva y uno le pregunta a otro: -¿Has visto a mi hermano? -No.	Two cannibals go for a walk in the jungle and one of them asks the other: "Have you seen my brother?" "No."
En un restaurant pregunta un señor: -Mesero, ¿el pescado lo sirven solo? -No, viene con arroz.	A man asks in a restaurant: "Waiter, is the fish served alone?" "No, it is served with rice".

Appendix B

Subcategories for the categories of content, form, and impact

Table B1

Categories of content responses, i.e. responses that referred to the contents of the joke (plot, events, etc.).

Subcategory	Definition and example
Quotes	The participant quoted parts of the text. Example: <i>When he said "it depends on how your crocodile likes it," I knew it was a joke.</i>
Cause and effect	Refers to the "what" or "what for" of a situation or event that occurs in the joke. Example: <i>because the woman didn't explain to the salesman why she wanted to buy the purse for her crocodile.</i>
World knowledge	Participants relate contents of the texts with their personal experience. Example: <i>When it says that she goes into an elegant shop, I imagine that she goes into a restaurant.</i>
Incongruity	Situations or events in the joke that are strange or illogical. Example: <i>I don't see what standing in the store has to do with the shoe size.</i>
Ambiguity	The participant states that some information in the text can be understood or interpreted in more than one way and explains both interpretations. Example: <i>because Juanito thinks that he is long, because his name is long instead of that his name is Long.</i>
New ideas	The participant brings new ideas to make the joke better in content. Example: <i>I would take away the parte in which they say it's bad luck to give the child glasses, because if he needs glasses to see, it's good luck.</i>
Moral judgement	The participant expresses moral judgments about the character's behavior or about the theme of the joke. Example: <i>It's a bad joke because they enter an illegal store.</i>
Judgement of truthfulness	The participant states a judgement on the falsehood or truthfulness of the events taking place in the joke. Example: <i>Crocodiles can't use purses.</i>

Table B2

Categories of form responses, responses in which participants analyzed of the text as an object, without mentioning the content.

Subcategory	Definition and example
Structure	The participant made reference to the structure of the text and mentioned textual elements: beginning, ending, questions, dialogues, narrator, etc. Example: <i>There is no coherence in the dialogue.</i>
Text length	The participant referred to how long or short the text was. Example: <i>It's short.</i>
Speaker's expressiveness	The way in which the text is narrated was referred to. Example: <i>He spoke very slowly.</i>
Text genre	The participant referred to some kind of text genre. Example: <i>it's a sarcastic joke.</i>
Linguistic elements	Linguistic elements, such as word categories, graphic symbols, letters, were mentioned. Example: <i>I know because the word has two meanings.</i>
Incongruity	Participants mentioned that there is an incongruity between the structural elements of the text. Examples: <i>because there is no congruity with the last part.</i>
New ideas	The participant brings new insights into the structural elements of the joke. Example: <i>You could include another dialogue to make it a better joke.</i>
Ambiguity	The participant states that there is an ambiguity between structural or linguistic elements of the text and explains both interpretations. Example: <i>The response has two meanings, "nada" from "swimming" and "nada" from "nothing".</i>

Table B3

Categories of impact responses, which show reflections on the impact of the text on a potential audience.

Subcategory	Definition and example
Impact of the audience	The participant referred to the impact that the text can have on the listener/reader or the impression that the joke probably leaves. Examples: <i>It is a good joke because it makes people laugh.</i>
Age	The fact that the joke is for people of a certain age is mentioned. Example: <i>It is a good joke for children because they are always saying jokes like this one.</i>
Personal taste	Participants mentioned whether he/she liked the joke or part of it or not. Example: <i>For me, it's funny because it made me laugh.</i>
Understandability	These responses refer to whether the joke is or is not understandable. Example: <i>I didn't understand it, although I imagine it has two meanings.</i>

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The risks and rewards of teaching with humour in Western Sydney: Adapting pedagogy to complex demographics

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ABSTRACT

EN The University of Western Sydney (UWS) services Australia's most multicultural region, where a large proportion of students are either migrants or the children of migrants, and many are from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is also an area of chronic social disadvantage. Apart from generic literacy issues, there is also what could be termed a deficit in student motivation. Thus, teaching in this context requires a more creative approach to engage and retain students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Humour, as used in topical content and delivery, has been very successful as a vehicle for these aims. This paper will present a summary of central findings over four years of teaching with humour in two courses. It will be asserted that negotiating students' literacy levels is best performed through effective use of humour: students are more motivated to learn when they feel that humour use is in their best interests.

Key words: HUMOUR, FACE THEORY, MOTIVATION, AFFECT, SOCIAL-LITERACY DISADVANTAGE

ES La University of Western Sydney (UWS) presta sus servicios a la región más multicultural de Australia, donde una gran parte del alumnado es extranjero o de padres inmigrantes y, además, en su mayoría, proveniente de contextos no anglófonos. Asimismo, se ubica en un área de marginación social crónica. Aparte de problemas de alfabetización genérica, se añade lo que se podría denominar un déficit de motivación en el alumnado. Enseñar en este contexto requiere un enfoque más creativo para involucrar y retener a los estudiantes en los niveles de grado y posgrado. El humour, tal como se viene utilizando en los contenidos y en la instrucción, ha resultado de gran éxito como medio para conseguir estos objetivos. El presente trabajo proporciona un resumen de los principales hallazgos obtenidos a lo largo de cuatro años de enseñanza con humour en dos cursos. Se concluye que la negociación de los niveles de alfabetización del alumnado es más eficaz si se usa el humour de forma efectiva: los estudiantes se sienten más motivados para aprender cuando ven que el humour se usa en su beneficio.

Palabras clave: HUMOUR, TEORÍA DE LA IMAGEN SOCIAL, MOTIVACIÓN, AFECTO, DESVENTAJA SOCIAL EN LA ALFABETIZACIÓN

IT La University of Western Sydney (UWS) serve l'area più multiculturale dell'Australia, dove una larga fascia di studenti e studentesse è costituita da immigrati/e di prima o seconda generazione e molti/e di loro provengono da contesti in cui non si parla inglese. È anche un'area socialmente svantaggiata. Peraltro, oltre ai generali problemi connessi all'alfabetizzazione, esiste, in quest'area, quello che potremmo definire un *deficit* nella motivazione delle studentesse e degli studenti. La didattica in tale contesto richiede un tipo di approccio creativo che coinvolga e trattienga gli studenti e le studentesse durante i percorsi di laurea e post-lauream. Il comico, usato come contenuto disciplinare e come strumento espressivo nell'esposizione delle lezioni, si è rivelato un mezzo molto indicato per il raggiungimento di questi obiettivi. In questo lavoro presentiamo una sintesi dei risultati più significativi ottenuti in quattro anni di insegnamento usando il comico in due corsi. Sostengo che la negoziazione dei livelli di alfabetizzazione degli studenti e delle studentesse si verifichi meglio se accostata all'uso efficace del comico: studenti e studentesse sono più motivati a imparare quando si rendono conto che l'umorismo è usato nel loro interesse.

Parole chiave: COMICO, TEORIA GOFFMANIANA DELLA "FACCIA", SVANTAGGIO SOCIALE E EDUCATIVO

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1. Introduction

This paper will address the complex problem of humour as a vehicle not only for general, theoretically-informed pedagogical practice, but more contextually as a tool for making an actual difference in what is, effectively a difficult university teaching environment. To do so, demographic information will be provided to frame the specific learning situation for students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). The paper will then present university-generated statistical data relating to two linguistics-based subjects taught at UWS, which will evidence that humour has been instrumental in engaging students. That is, it will be asserted that when humour is deliberately employed both as an attendant-incidental feature of content presentation (often typically improvised) and as a strategic feature of textual choices (often student-directed), students are heuristically intrigued and motivated to attend classes and to engage with assessment tasks. It will be postulated that this strategy has aided in retention of enrolled students and in pan-cohort grade improvements. This data is more significant, perhaps, because of the diversity and large-scale enrolments involved in the student population.

1.1. UWS student demographics

UWS is a university which serves a unique geographical region of Australia. This region, officially referred to as *Greater Western Sydney* (or GWS), comprises around half of the population of Australia's largest city, Sydney (or 2.3 million of a total population of 4.39 million), but it occupies around 9,000 square kilometres, or $\frac{3}{4}$ of the entire Sydney metropolitan region by area (NSW Trade & Investment, 2013). UWS is a multi-campus university, which is spread across a large area of Sydney's suburban sprawl, from semi-rural fringes to suburban centres in the wider Sydney basin. As a university that is only 25 years old, UWS tends to target residents from its catchment area only, and it lacks the lure of the four other publicly-funded, and older, more prestigious, and wealthier universities in the eastern half of the city. It is thus, perhaps by its very nature, more flexible and more responsive to its particular region than these other universities are, or have to be. This is due, at least in part, to the very distinctive demographical features of UWS' student catchment area, to which the university must respond.

In many ways, UWS' spatial presence is emblematic of the demographics of its region. Spread over multiple campuses separated by significant distances (often 30-40km of suburban separation, and without any direct public transport links), the reality for many students is that they typically need to physically travel long distances, by private vehicle, just to attend lectures and tutorials. Sydney's eastern universities are more typically one-campus based and very well serviced by public transport options, which are also concentrated around the urban hub where general amenities, services and employment opportunities are in greater supply. Overall, the eastern half of Sydney is typified by a population, which is more educated, ethnically homogenous, and advantaged for economic and employment factors (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013; Western Sydney Region of Councils [WSROC], 2013). In terms of multiculturalism, eastern Sydney is below the national average; in terms of economic and educational advantage, it is well above the Australian average (ABS, 2013). It is not, perhaps, a generalisation to argue that the metropolis of Sydney is a city of two very different halves.

Greater Western Sydney is distinctive not only for its below-average household income; it is also the centre of Australia's multicultural society and social disadvantage. It has been, for more than half a century, dominated by large-scale patterns of immigration, social disadvantage (including welfare dependency, lower educational attainments, and poorer options for public transport), and higher diversity for language spoken, culture, ethnicity, and religion than anywhere else in the country (ABS, 2013; WSROC, 2013). While this part of the city does attract skilled "immigrant entrepreneurs" (Collins, 2006, p.135), it also attracts the majority of Australia's intake of refugees and family reunion migrants, and these categories of new arrivals are distinguished by high social disadvantage and non-English speaking backgrounds (ABS, 2013).

Indeed, and overall, GWS is the single biggest destination of choice for Australia's immigrants, with over 40% of all newly arrived immigrants settling in Western Sydney (WSROC, 2013). Adding to the existing "pool" of decades of migration, these newer arrivals boost the diversity of GWS, such that almost 60% of Western Sydney's population consists of either 1st or 2nd generation immigrants (Collins, 2006, p.135). The source nations of this population are also linguistically and ethnically diverse, such that GWS is a region where 180 nationalities and at least 100 different community languages are represented (UWS Pocket Profile, 2009; Collins, 2006, p.135). A significant number of these migrants arrive in Australia with inadequate English language skills (ABS, 2013).

1.2. Demographics as a deficit-obstacle

What this signifies is a population area with a significant number of homes where English is a second or other language. Even when English is a first language for the children of migrants, it is frequently not the language spoken in the home. In the 2011 census, for instance, respondents were asked to self-define for English language proficiency: "128,617 [adults] in the WSROC Region who speak another language report difficulty with speaking English" (WSROC, 2013). This figure is representative only and it suggests a much wider English language deficit across the region. Another figure, which relates to the language spoken at home, indicates that around half of GWS' population, or 42.7%, speak a language other than English in the home (ABS, 2013). There is some potential, therefore, for linguistic capital in the English language to be diluted, depending on how bilingually (or multilingually) competent these persons are. This potentiality is extremely difficult to assess, but it is important to consider at this point that the potential for English language deficit, for UWS students, is quite high.

To exacerbate this deficit-potentiality, there is some evidence from internal UWS data that the best students across GWS do not choose to study at UWS. While there are five universities in Sydney, in reality, the prestige and higher-level entrance requirements (for literacy, as rated by secondary school leaving exams) for the four eastern suburbs universities mean that these universities attract the better-performing students from across the entire region (University of Western Sydney [UWS], 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). To put it another way, UWS effectively is a second choice university for the more literate, or linguistic-capital-rich, students. By extension, UWS is also the only option for students with poorer linguistic capital, since they are excluded by the higher entrance requirements of the other institutions. Thus, a general index of inequity is further entrenched by a linguistic-educational divide: "education is political and its relationship to other social institutions is readily defined in a system that works more effectively for social groups that already have cultural and social power" (Jones Diaz, 2004, p.98).

This divide can be further defined for a type of ethnic "selection." A corroborating feature of the demographic data produced internally by UWS is that while many students are born in Australia, they come from families where English is either not spoken at all, or it is only one of two or several languages spoken at home (UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Some of these major community languages include Arabic, Hindi-Urdu, Chinese (typically Mandarin, but also Cantonese), Vietnamese, Bengali, Farsi, Spanish, Greek and Italian (Cardona, Noble, & Di Biase, 1998; UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). With up to 80% of all UWS students growing up in homes where the English language is a relatively new acquisition, it is apparent that UWS' students are actually more linguistically and ethnically diverse than the general GWS population, perhaps even double the rate for either of these distinguishing features (UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). One conclusion is that ethnically "Anglo" students from GWS are more likely to enrol at an eastern university, rather than at UWS, further concentrating this ethnic-linguistic diversity among UWS's student body. It can be meaningfully referred to as a pattern of "white flight" (Frey, 1979) which simultaneously dilutes UWS' linguistic capital. That is, the students who are ethnically mainstream, and who typically also have a greater linguistic tradition in the English language (that is, they are more likely to be native speakers and expert users of the language) are least likely to attend UWS. The students who are neither native speakers nor expert users of the English language are most likely to enrol at UWS.

This translates into a major linguistic-capital challenge for both students and educators at UWS. What is a little more difficult to quantify is the extent to which these linguistic differences impact academic performance. However, once the failure rate is factored into the equation, there is some more corroborating evidence: at between 25-30% failure rate for all first years (a failure rate 5-10% above the national tertiary average), UWS students are clearly underprepared for the linguistic demands of university (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2008).

One explanation for this inflated rate of failure is that there exists an educational under-achievement culture across GWS. This culture of under-achievement is tied to various deficits, which are very difficult to dislodge. These include a general cultural deficit of educational aspiration that is linked to a typical lack of confidence, both regionally and individually. This is representative of a culture of deficit which begins with generally poor educational (cohort) attainments prior to commencement at university (UWS, 2013c). For example, almost 60% of ARW students begin university without having completed high school (UWS, 2013c). It is hardly surprising then, that most students (up to 80%) who start at UWS in the 1st year cohorts are also the first in their family to have ever attended university (UWS, 2013a/b/c).

UWS students are also more likely to face challenges including a higher than average rate of disabilities or other life circumstances, such as migrant experience of dislocation or refugee trauma; fulltime

or insecure casual work responsibility; and transient accommodation issues (UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). It is also probable that UWS students are sensitive to being “marked” for difference. Apart from cultural or ethnic differences, such markedness might be as simple as an accent or phonic intrusion from another language. Accent, even for the competent or expert user of English, is a limiting factor in self-esteem for many people (Hale, Bond, & Sutton, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2012). In general, the person with a variant accent experiences the “grim reality of limitations imposed by a standard language ideology” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p.253). Rather than confront this reality for the construct that it represents, UWS students may very well decide that they cannot conform or succeed in the wider professional environment. This is despite the fact that, given the general demographics of UWS, it is logical to assume that a diversity of accents is actually the norm, or at least it would be generally considered to be *un*-remarkable, in the university environment at UWS. However, UWS students are likely to be sensitive to the fact that language/accents discrimination is common in the wider community, and this is true even for the professionally qualified individuals (Hale, Bond, & Sutton, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2012).

If these factors are regarded as a collective challenge, not only to the commencement of tertiary education, but also for the continuation of study, it is hardly surprising that the participation rate for residents in GWS in tertiary institutions is at least 20% below the national average (UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; WSROC, 2103). There also appears to be an awareness, or expectation, of educational underachievement for residents of GWS, which students are sensitive to. That is, the general Australian community, and in particular, the wider community of Sydney, considers tertiary success for GWS residents as the exception, rather than the rule. This only enhances the student’s chances of being discouraged from pursuing study, since the student, already aware of a wider community expectation of academic failure, is especially prone to feelings of being an institutional “impostor” (following Ross, Stewart, Mugge, & Fultz, 2001).

Collectively, this set of deficits contributes to what can be called an overall deficit in intrinsic motivation. A student at UWS is less likely to share in the “optimal experience of individuals being fully engaged in a given task and pursuing whatever they are doing for its own sake” (Waring, 2013, p.192). This deficit, in the context of UWS demographics, is even more apparent if we define academic motivation as a student’s ability to achieve autonomous control over—and sustain—study habits and learning where there is clear enjoyment and satisfaction derived from the process *and* the end result. Aspects of motivation include a student’s ability to internalise, personalise, attend classes, be self-directed/autonomous, seek higher grades, integrate, and socialise. Whether the student taps into this intrinsic motivation depends largely on whether the student is acculturated into the university environment at an early stage. General deficits in capital, including linguistic capital, are powerful drags on any student’s ability to acculturate and to develop motivation (Delpitt, 1988; Nesi, 2012; Waring, 2013). As a form of linguistic capital, this means that many of UWS’ potential students will demonstrate competence in the English language, which may not be adequate for the literacy demands of university.

1.3. Humour as yet another educational hurdle

Students at UWS are thus largely unprepared for the general literacy demands of the university setting. In addition to literacy demands, however, students may very well find one, additional educational hurdle, which is extremely challenging: the use of humour by educators at university. While there is some evidence for pedagogical benefits from the use of humour in the educational setting (see, for instance, Gardner, 2006; Nesi, 2012; Zhang, 2005), these studies seem to rely on the assumption that students already possess the linguistic capital required to process such instances of humour.

In the case of UWS students, however, this assumption cannot be made, since a general linguistic capital-deficit in English necessarily underpins the ability to process humour. One important literacy deficit is the ability to process humour as presented by educators in the context of a lecture or tutorial. Indeed, for too many students at UWS, the presence of humour in the academic setting is both unexpected and challenging. There are various reasons why these students may fail to negotiate humour in this setting. One reason is that students experience an increased cognitive load of university-level subjects in general which demands complex “processes at many different levels [interacting with] reading or listening, syntactic and semantic analyses, knowledge integration, as well as reasoning processes” (Kintsch, 2005, p.127). It is hardly surprising, then, that the processing of humour in this context seems to present an unexpected and additional challenge for UWS students. This is because so much humour taps into “a large chunk of semantic information surrounding a [word] or evoked by it” (Raskin, 1985, p.81). That is, students will not necessarily be familiar

with the specific background knowledge of the English language variety they are being asked to reference, especially since this knowledge differs “from culture to culture” and it is, at least potentially, always “local in some way” (Vandaele, 1999, p.265). Another reason is that a humorous text makes pragmatic demands on literacy for the processing of schemata, which are complex and non-literal (Attardo, 1994; Bertoff, 1999; Hertzog & Anderson, 2000; Raskin, 1985). Indeed, the contradictory schemata of humour draw on “underlying inferential processes [requiring] a wide range of sources of knowledge (linguistic knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, world knowledge, social knowledge, etc.)” (Mayerhofer, Maier, & Schach, 2015, p.4). For UWS students, an obstacle is found not only in the specificity of general English language background knowledge, but also the cultural styles of humour, which characterise Australian humour in the Australian variety of English. Students lack the experience of many Australian cultural references, where schemata rely on culturally specific references. For these reasons, processing the pragmatics of humour, as with other expert-user demands of English, is simply very difficult and intimidating for many of these students. A student who is not capable of processing these demands is likely to experience discouragement in pursuing study. This is because the student who generally feels excluded from the experience of university study will specifically resent the use of humour, which they cannot participate in, thus tainting the overall tertiary experience.

2. Theoretical framing

Taken together then, these aspects of UWS student demographics indicate that the average UWS student is extremely vulnerable to discouragement. Being under-motivated already means that it takes little to discourage a student from persisting with studies in an environment that is already unfamiliar, alien to home culture, and (potentially) toxic to personal and ethnic-cultural identity. Any educator’s use of humour which inadvertently or deliberately targets a student in one of these sensitive areas can therefore be viewed as a critical trigger, which, while not necessarily (or primarily) causative, is at least associative (and thus integral) to a student’s acculturation and academic success overall. An educator’s use of humour, whether merely insensitive or deliberately caustic, cannot be underestimated for its affective influence on a student’s discourse/motivation. It can be stated that the use of humour by an educator carries enormous weight, and thus the onus of responsibility must be primarily the educator’s.

This focus can be rephrased, therefore, as an equation of power in a university lecture-tutorial setting. The success (or failure) of humour can be viewed as a pedagogical outcome, which is, at heart, contingent upon a “power differential” (Beck & Malley, 1998; Delpit, 1988; Smith, 2007). For UWS students, the power differential is particularly salient. At the macro level, the power differential is embedded in the university’s *Ideological Discursive Formations* (or IDFs, following Fairclough, 1985), which are constituted in opaque institutional structures of privileged subject-curricula-study foci and in unfamiliar pedagogical expectations. These IDFs prove especially intimidating for UWS students because these students have little cultural, personal, or familial experience of Australian tertiary education settings. Indeed, the concept of IDFs seems to be especially pertinent when describing an educational setting where relationships of power are obscured in cultural norms, which are framed, or treated, as unexceptional. That is, UWS students are typically underprepared for the acculturation demands of university. This is particularly true when it comes to contrasts of power. As per Delpit’s codification, UWS students encounter a tertiary situation where:

- 1) Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.
- 2) There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power.”
- 3) The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power [...]
- 4) Those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (Delpit, 1988, p.282)

Thus, UWS students experience a culture shock when attending classes on campus in their first year of study. As a reinforcing and enacting expression of a power differential, the implicit knowledge-capital gap between the university educator (typically a career educator with multiple degrees, including a Ph.D.) and the student (either a first-year undergraduate or an MA first year) is allied with the rather confronting, and typically unfamiliar, institutional nature of university. Considering the demographics of the typical UWS student, many of whom have not completed secondary schooling, there are multiple cultural-literacy deficits which magnify this potentially enormous power differential. For instance, a complicating factor, which activates the pre-existent and latent power differential is the typical UWS student’s general ignorance of

student-educator relationship norms. The university setting typically endorses, and thus provides, an excellent example of the latent inverse power relationship between “populations of relatively powerless people” and those who exercise social control “power [across] many dimensions” (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton & Richardson, 1993, pp. 89-90). It is a setting where the educator can select forms of content, delivery, and discourse style at an autonomous or discretionary level, without being necessarily responsive to student sensitivities. This is generally true when humour is employed by the educator but particularly effective when the educator knowingly, or deliberately, transgresses social taboos. In the case of many UWS students, where conservative traditions dominate, these transgressive actions can therefore be especially confronting. As a form of “‘activism’” or “‘criticality,’” such an application of humour can enact moments of superiority, aggression, and transgression, where “humour involves immorality, reckless and extravagant behaviour, and gaucherie” (Carroll, 2014, p.21).

Indeed, any such aggressive instance of humour, for at least some students (especially students who are socially vulnerable), will contextually represent authoritarianism, and an educator’s humour may very well be regarded as a token of self-aggrandizing indulgence or, discursively, anti-student militancy. It may certainly be taken personally. In some cases, educator humour, which disregards students’ discursive sensitivities could very well constitute a form of bullying. Prime examples include humour topics, which denigrate ethnicity, religion, or social status. This is consistent with Koestler’s (1964) reference to humour’s “impulse [for] aggression [...] manifested in the guise of malice, derision, the veiled cruelty of condescension [since humour’s] common ingredient [is] the aggressive-defensive or self-asserting tendency” (Koestler, 1964, p.52). To regard humour as benign, or serving a higher pedagogical need to affront in order to engage, is perhaps, therefore, naïve at best or, at worst, a type of class-based arrogance. This naiveté relies on a “mirage of innocent humor” (Gruner, 2000, p.147).

A useful frame for measuring the extent to which humour can offend and exacerbate a pre-existing power differential is Face Theory, as developed by Goffman (1967) and expanded by Brown and Levinson (1987). Additionally, Partington (2006) offers some insights into the application of *face theory* to real-life situational humour. Thus, the linguistic transaction of an educator’s humorous text (whether deliberate or inadvertent) presents a face-threatening act (FTA) since the text, as an act of interpersonal, unexpected aggression—potentially at least—offers a destabilizing challenge to “the public self-image that every [person] wants to claim for [himself/herself]” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61).

The notion of the FTA is generically relevant for situational, negotiated discourse where parties have capital to bargain with or to collaborate in conversational goals under “‘normal’ or ‘unexceptional’” conditions (Jaworski & Coupland, 2014, p.41). Even under these “normal” conditions, there is a serious potential threat to a person’s face needs, since “face is extremely sensitive, volatile and vulnerable” (Partington, 2006, p.87). It is even more applicable to situations where a pre-existing imbalance in linguistic and social capital is exposed, and amplified, by the humorous actions of educators who cannot negotiate, or accommodate, the face needs of their students for whom “sociological variables” require more politeness and tact (Partington, 2006, p.88). When students are already marginalized across aspects of social-linguistic capital, as is the case with the majority of UWS’s students, face loss is especially confronting.

Ironically, some educators represent more of a FTA, since they see themselves as “politically engaged, working [with] disenfranchised social groups” (Jaworski & Coupland, 2014, p.29). Humour as enacted by such an educator can backfire, because the educator, with every good intention, may draw attention to aspects of life, which students resent being “spotlighted” for; that is, students may simply suffer embarrassment, rather than any feeling of solidarity. On the other hand, careful work performed in building trust, rapport, and solidarity over a space of time across social-economic divides can easily evaporate when an educator presents a failed and highly sensitive blunder with humour. This attempt at humour can be viewed as an act of disloyalty or betrayal, and its failure affects the “in-group” solidarity, which is highly sensitive to any act of negative “affect face” (Partington, 2006).

In any of these scenarios, it is rare that an educator will lose the most face. That is, in a UWS context, FTA humour offers a very clear example of a social (or speech) event, which is far more than merely a failed teaching moment. The face investment by the socially vulnerable—in a situation where they stand to lose even more face—is a critical example of where the educator needs to attend closely to the face needs of the students. Or, to put it another way, the teaching situation is a site for careful, collaborative, facetending, since it requires consistency and trust in the maintenance of a lop-sided relationship. It is a site of “interpersonal rhetoric—the way speakers and writers accomplish goals as social actors who do not just need to get things

done but attend to their interpersonal relationships with other participants at the same time" (Kasper, 1997, p.105).

Another aspect of this relationship between students and the educator, which is constitutive of an FTA, is the variegated literacy competencies of students, which are rarely in line with the educator who typically qualifies as an *expert user* of English (following the usage of Rampton, 1990). This can be summarized as the gap in *pragmatic competence* (Saville-Troike, 2012, p. 3) between students and the educator. In practical terms, this means that when the educator employs humour, students may feel excluded on several counts. The first is a cultural literacy tied to the use of humour as a teaching practice, such that students may be puzzled by the purpose of humour in the educational setting, and may feel alienated by this as a practice that seems to have no explicit pedagogical purpose. That is, much pedagogical humour seems to be completely incidental to the setting and topic, and it is a practice, which is culturally unfamiliar for many students (Hofstede, 2001; Peng, 2007; Rao, 2002). Not understanding why humour has been used in the teaching situation is immediately confusing and destabilizing as a FTA, regardless of its linguistic accessibility. Closely allied to this cultural literacy is the student's inability to process propositional content when it requires the higher-order, pragmatic-level literacy of an expert user of English. Apart from the natural inability of many UWS students to process this level of language, there is also the implicit message which they take from the experience, which is that jokes which unintentionally (or even intentionally) exclude persons on the basis of pragmatic competence are explicitly read as exclusive out-group or in-group triggers. Humour, in this situation, which might accrue face to the educator, is a linguistic transaction, which is necessarily at the expense of students' face needs.

Little wonder, then, that students resist humour when it offers a FTA for any or all of these reasons. Apart from the natural, discursive hesitance about unfamiliar humorous situations, the student will experience anxiety. Discursive resistance to humour has been identified as a type of *affective filter* where a participant will invoke cognitive-emotional defenses (Waring, 2013, p. 192). Ineffective humour can not only fail at the cognitive level; it can arouse strong, affective, associative reactions which are very difficult to dislodge and which can be permanent or at least long-term (Strick Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg, 2012, p. 219). This is simply more evident, or pronounced, in the context of a student who is only too painfully aware of literacy deficiencies or of discursive-power differentials. Such a student, perhaps also feeling coerced into a discursive position which runs counter to their own (say, if a text covers material which is offensive to a student's conservative background), will respond with natural defense mechanisms to the humorous text which has been identified as an act of persuasion or undermining of a student's ideology: "Resistance stems from a basic need to restore freedom in response to a persuasive attempt" (Strick Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg, 2012, p. 213).

This perspective provides a possible interpretation for the mixed findings reported by Suzuki and Heath (2014), who conclude that students respond most favourably to, and have their "recognition performance" improved by, "humor that is relevant" (p.99), but that there are enormous variables for context and across student samples. This is particularly interesting as an equation of what constitutes relevance, since this would naturally foreground the interpretation from the student's perspective. It thus applies particularly to the notion of humour as being contextually variegated for UWS students, given that there are very significant variables in student backgrounds and discursive formations and that these serve as sites of resistance when confronted by the performance of humour by the educator. Simply put, there is much at stake for the less powerful interlocutor in a university setting, and this imbalance is particularly acute for the UWS student. Humour in this context, as instigated by an educator, is a high-stakes gamble. It is also true that, given these elements of affective, cognitive and discursive defense, the successful outcome of an attempt at humour seems to have the odds stacked against it.

However, there is also an opportunity for humour to be productive. If humour is at the service of the student's discursive needs, rather than those of the educator, it follows that the investment in successful humour can bring about great dividends. It has, for instance, been recognized that in the workplace, the power differential between leaders and subordinates can be managed through humour: "humor, a ubiquitous human interpersonal behavior, can help initiate and perpetuate a cycle of individual and social-level positive affect" (Robert & Wilbanks, 2012, p. 1072). Indeed, it is argued that the careful utilization of humour can overcome language gaps, generate affective links between staff, and facilitate productivity, by "improv[ing] performance...humor creates positive affect [and] suggests a shared set of personal values...and increases trust" (Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012).

In the educational context, theoretically at least, this reorientation of affect could be at the heart of the humorous linguistic transaction's purpose. The focus in much of the literature has been on whether humour is productive in improving memory recall or in directly improving learning. Indeed, there is no consensus in the literature that the use of humour can actually achieve this end anyway (see for instance, conflicting results from Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980; Ennis, 2003; Fields, 2011; Fowler, 2006; Frymier, Wanzer, & Wojtaszczyk, 2008; Hellman, 2007; James, 2004; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Kuhrik, Kuhrik, & Berry 1997; Nesi, 2012; Powell & Andresen, 1985; Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, & Smith, 2006).

Rather, what is generally agreed upon is that the use of humour by an educator can be directly instrumental in an affective re/orientation, so that students are more disposed towards the educator and/or the institution. It would appear then, that the role of student perception of humour is paramount. So, for instance, students report that a careful use of appropriate humour creates "the effect that the instructor took the extra effort [to] make the class more enjoyable [and] reduce anxiety" (Garner, 2006, p. 180). Similarly, Zhang (2005, p. 115) reports that humour can "enhance students' affective learning, create an enjoyable classroom atmosphere, lessen students' anxiety, increase affect and liking for the instructor and the course, and facilitate students' willingness to participate." In other words, while there seems to be some evidence that an appropriate use of humour can produce the *conditions*, which are conducive for learning, humour is not causatively linked to the process of learning itself. By extension, it should be a fairly straightforward matter to decide what usages of humour would be counter-productive for the conditions of learning.

It is not difficult to define types of humour, which are likely to transgress these student needs. Fields (2011) recommends that "put-downs, sarcasm, ridicule, sexual or profane jokes, and sensitive issues should never be sources of humor in an educational setting [including] humor based on disabilities [or] physical appearance." (p. 63). Similarly, Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, and Smith (2006) argue that educators should avoid humour "targeting a particular student or group of students [or] joking about a student's intelligence, personal life/interests, appearance, gender, or religion [or] using sexual or vulgar types of humor" (p. 193). It can be argued, then, that if these conditions are met by the educator, the students will be more likely to feel safe and welcomed in the educational setting with the result that student motivation to learn in a more general sense is enhanced. That is, students are more likely to feel positive about themselves and to be more active learners if the educator uses humour which communicates a sincere concern for their students.

Indeed, it would appear that humour is not only an asset to teaching, but it can also be endorsed as a powerful motivational tool. A seamless and successful humorous transaction can offer face rewards for students, it can engage for affect, offer scaffolded and accessible literacy learning (cognitive outcomes), and it can provide an incentive for learning at the discursive level. This blend of rewards can result in an internalisation of motivations, producing a more lasting effect of student learning autonomy, where a sense of empowerment through active participation can be developed. The key seems to be in locating the type(s) of humour, which can be productive for both student and educator as a mutually beneficial exchange, where the student is actively involved in the reception of the "joke" and consents to it. This is, after all, by definition (and contextually) the nature of successful humour, where what is "intended by the speaker to be amusing" must be equally "perceived to be amusing" by the student (Holmes & Marra, 2002, p. 1693). Indeed, it is feasible in the educational setting, where UWS students are involved, to produce what Holmes (2006, p. 33) refers to as "jointly constructed or conjoint" humour. Such a collaborative effort is even possible when the educator is performing a purely "monologic" (Nesi, 2012, p. 80) lecture, if the educator is actively working to put their humour at the service of their students.

It is this premise, which the balance of this paper will address. The study which will be presented offers evidence that humour, when successfully implemented as part of teaching strategies, can be used to engage, to be inclusive, to produce affective connections between the educator and students, and to offer vulnerable students a positive environment in which they can develop motivated, autonomous learning.

3. Overview of subjects, method and study

The two courses, which are referred to in this paper are both linguistics-based units of study. The discussion of these courses covers the four-year period between 2010 and 2014. One course, *English Text and Discourse*, or ETD, is a discourse analysis course in the Linguistics/Interpreting Translation program, with an average enrolment of up to 120 students, some of whom are post-graduate. This course is dominated by international students (around 50% of all students), the majority of whom (at least 90%) are from mainland China. The rest of the cohort is very representative of the diversity of UWS' student body. The other course,

Analytical Reading and Writing, or ARW, is designed to address literacy issues for 1st year students. It is also offered as an elective across all years of undergraduate study, and is therefore available to students across 15 degree programs (from Nursing, to Business, Law, and Arts). During the period studied, it had an enrolment of between 1800-2000 students annually, with an average of 25 students per class/section. This course cohort is highly representative of UWS' student diversity. There are two areas of data collection. The first is the collection of student feedback across four years of the courses being offered. The second is the measurement of grade distributions across the same period for various cohorts.

The period of data collection was the calendar period between the start of 2011 and the end of 2014: a period of eight complete semesters for ARW and four semesters for ETD (which was offered once a year). One variable is the fact that ARW was offered across one or two campuses the first two years, and then rolled out across all three campuses in the next two years. This is not considered to be important, however, since the diversity of students across all three campuses is roughly equivalent: ethnic backgrounds might vary by campus, but grade distributions indicate an equivalence of educator abilities. So, for instance, while Lebanese and other Middle-Eastern backgrounds may dominate at one campus, other ethnic-cultural backgrounds dominate at other campuses, and all are surprisingly comparable for educational outcomes and socio-economic disadvantage (cf. UWS Pocket Profile, 2009; UWS, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). With an enrolment of up to 2000 students per year, there is also the variable of having up to 32 tutors/teaching staff with inconsistent teaching styles across the subject. This can be discounted, however, since the surveys on courses (SFUs) are consulted for the unit ARW, where almost all lectures are delivered by the same person, and it is the lecture, as emblematic of the course, that students are responding to. Surveys on teaching (SFTs), by contrast, were not consulted for ARW, because most of the teaching was performed by tutors (in tutorials). SFTs were consulted for the course ETD, however, because this course was taught by only one lecturer and one tutor (the same person). Therefore, surveys on course (SFUs) and teaching (SFTs) are consulted for the course ETD, while only SFUs are consulted for the course ARW. This selection tends to narrow the samples, in order to demonstrate the trajectory in improved results as various aspects of humour are refined and experimented on, as confined to the feedback for one educator.

One variable which should be considered is that the collection system switched to online (the link was student-email delivered) from paper in second semester 2013. The response rate fell from an average of 61% to 26% before lifting to 33% in second semester 2014. While this is a significant drop in responses, it still represents, at its lowest point, a minimum of 497 unique student returns, which is considered to be a viable sample. Also, the fact that the surveys became more optional for completion tends to indicate that only highly motivated students completed the surveys. Considering that the surveys managed a fairly uniform pattern during this period, regardless of medium of return, indicates that they are reliable.

3.1. Data from UWS institutional student surveys and grade distributions

Data is supplied from two end-of-semester, UWS institutionally-generated student surveys: Student Feedback on Unit² (SFU for both ARW, ETD) and Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT for ETD only). These surveys are standardised across the university for question types and for methods of data collection. Data for the unit is then compared against data for UWS and the School. Reproductions of these 2 different surveys are attached to this paper as Appendix A and Appendix B. This paper will present data from these surveys for both quantitative results (rating of Likert-scale responses across various categories, where the maximum rating is 5.0) and open-ended qualitative results. In both SFUs and SFTs, the qualitative questions asked if the student had any further comment to make. The actual wording for these qualitative questions, which is identical in both the SFT and SFU, is as below:

- *Please indicate the important characteristics of this lecturer/class that have been the most valuable to your overall learning experience.*
- *Please indicate the particular characteristics of this lecturer/class that you feel are important for him/her to improve.*

² Note that nomenclature at UWS may be different to other institutions: unit means course or subject, while course refers to degree or degree major/area

Note that the wording is quite generic in that there is no explicit prompt for the criterion of humour. Student responses to these questions were assessed for the presence of humour as explicitly mentioned without any prompting. This unprompted presence of humour as a variable in the student feedback is asserted to serve as evidence that students notice the presence of humour and report favourably on it as a successful pedagogical/affective factor in teaching. That is, if students consider humour to be an important associative factor in their engagement and learning, then it is. Note also, that surveys are conducted well before grades are released to students, so students complete their feedback without actually knowing what their grades will be. This is corroborated by the nature of the wording in the SFU quantitative questions, where student responses were collected using the following question types in the SFU (samples are provided):

- 1) *The unit covered what the learning guide said it would.*
- 2) *I was able to see the relevance of this unit to my course.*
- 3) *The learning activities in this unit have helped my learning.*
- 12) *This unit helped me develop my skills in critical thinking, analysing, problem-solving & communicating.*
- 13) *Overall, I've had a satisfactory learning experience in this unit.*

Note that none of the questions in the SFUs offered any prompts or direct propositional content relating to the category of *humour*. Therefore, the responses offered in the open-ended category of the SFU survey indicate that any student mention of humour was completely unprompted, and not suggested or tainted by association. Key words were assumed to be from the semantic field of humour if they included the lexical items or collocations which contextually offered a comment on affect (in references to the lecturer, lectures, or textual items), and included any of the following: *fun, funny, humour, laugh, engaging, humorous, enjoyable, easy-going, enthusiastic, friendly learning environment, humour and respect, approachable, inspiring and welcoming, or down-to-earth*.

Humour was found as a constituent of, primarily, positive feedback: instances relating to negative feedback at no stage constituted 1% or greater. Further data for rating distributions during the same period are supplied as a comparative item. The following tables split the data between subjects ARW and ETD.

Table 1 represents the trajectory of SFU results for ARW across the years 2011-2014, over eight full semesters.

Table 1

Student Feedback on Unit (SFU) for the subject ARW with incidence of humour as an explicit item in feedback

		2011		2012		2013		2014	
		Term 1	Term 2	Term 1	Term 2	Term 1	Term 2	Term 1	Term 2
Responses	Frequency	646	536	950	210	474	84	497	91
	Percentage	53%	47%	50%	61%	26%	25%	33%	25%
Average course rating	ARW	3.9	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.5	4.0	4.4
	UWS	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.0
Comments mentioning humour	Positive	+0%	+9.8%	+11.8%	+14.7%	+ -	+26.4%	+ -	+30.4%
	Negative	-0%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Grade distribution	HD (High Distinction)	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%
	D (Distinction)	9%	7%	9%	10%	8%	15%	8%	12%
	C (Credit)	13%	17%	21%	26%	23%	22%	21%	27%
	P (Pass)	42%	43%	39%	37%	37%	35%	38%	34%
	F (Fail)	33%	31%	27%	25%	29%	26%	31%	23%

In Table 1, the data indicate three general trends. The first is that, as measured against university-wide feedback (UWS average for all courses), students' satisfaction with the course ARW is steadily improving, to the point where it is, overall, registering at a level, which is significantly higher than the UWS average. The second trend is that positive feedback on the educator's use of humour has steadily increased as a percentage of all feedback in qualitative responses, such that it constitutes more than 30% of all student responses. This is significant since the SFU does not explicitly solicit feedback for the presence of humour, but students proactively identify it as a factor in their experience. Negative feedback for the same criterion during this period has not significantly altered, and it remains a very minor component of overall feedback. The third trend is that during the same period, the number of students failing the course has dropped significantly. Related to this figure is the fact that the number of students in the Pass range has also dropped, while the number of students achieving results in the Credit to High Distinction range of results has steadily increased. The data suggest that there is an association between these three trends: student grades are improving, the student feedback on the subject is improving, and students increasingly, and without any prompting, are identifying humour as being a significant factor in their positive experience. There is, at least, an associative likelihood that humour—in lectures and in textual content—was identified by students as a positive aspect of their learning experience (if they perceived it as being present). It is suggested also, that this affective response enabled students to transition to a cognitive engagement with content and in managing their own study. Quite simply, if students feel less vulnerable, more welcome, and part of the pedagogical experience through the successfully affective use of humour, they will identify this use of humour as being important to them. As a comparative exercise, data were assembled from a combination of SFUs and SFTs for the course ETD. Significant differences in this sample were: a smaller cohort (up to 120 students); the fact that students had the same educator for all lectures and tutorials, and in the fact that the SFT contained an explicit question which asked students to evaluate the educator on the basis of humour used in classes.

Table 2 represents the trajectory of SFU and SFT results for ETD across the years 2009-2012, which is a period of four full semesters (the subject is taught once a year, and where the maximum course/subject rating is 10.0 and 5.0 respectively). Note that, unlike the SFU, the SFT had a specific question, which prompted students to respond for the category of humour.

Table 2		2009	2010	2011	2012
<i>Student Feedback on Unit (SFU) and Teaching (SFT) for the subject ETD with incidence of humour as an explicit item in feedback</i>					
Average course rating	SFT	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.6
	UWS	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.4
Average course rating	SFU	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.4
	UWS	3.8	3.8	3.9	4.0
Humour rating SFT	Frequency	77	75	35	87
	Percentage	74%	78%	74%	73%
Grade distribution	HD (High Distinction)	2%	4%	2%	3%
	D (Distinction)	15%	13%	12%	17%
	C (Credit)	28%	28%	33%	24%
	P (Pass)	43%	44%	46%	51%
	F (Fail)	12%	11%	7%	5%

In contrast with Table 1, Table 2 assembles data from a course with a much smaller cohort, where the same staff member lectured and tutored all students across four consecutive instances of the same subject. It maps the variations in teaching (SFTs) and unit (SFUs) survey returns. It would appear that the data in Table 2 not only corroborates the trends in Table 1, but points to a greater significance for the same

trends. That is, firstly, as measured against university-wide feedback (UWS average), students' satisfaction with the course (as measured by SFUs) in the course ETD is not only steadily improving, it is at least one full percentile higher than the UWS average for all courses. Secondly, and with greater specificity, the quantitative question from the SFT (Question 7), which explicitly seeks student evaluation of the educator on the basis of humour used in teaching, also registers a positive rating. Indeed, not only does this rating steadily improve over the period surveyed, it consistently registers at a full percent higher than the average across the university for all educators. General feedback from the qualitative questions in the SFU for this course confirms this, with a pattern similar to that in Table 1 for unprompted, positive comments on the educator's humour.

One caveat can be imposed here: while SFUs are a good indication of results for unprompted student references to humour, SFTs explicitly make mention of humour as part of an educator's teaching style. There is some expectation that because the two surveys were delivered to students at the same time in the course ETD, there could be some cross-suggestion which would taint any spontaneity. This can be countered, however, by arguing that if humour was a problem, then it would also be strongly suggested, and thus marked, as a distinctly negative response across both types of surveys. A positive relationship, therefore, seems to be more likely. In the subject ETD an even stronger correlation between humour and positive feedback was found, where it was present in up to 50% of all comments.

This is also borne out by the third trend, which is that student grades improved during the period surveyed. While there was not a consistent improvement across all grades, there was noticeable improvement across the Fail and Pass grades: Fails were halved and Pass grades improved by eight full percentile points. The smaller variations across the higher grades might be merely related to a smaller cohort, or to intrinsic features of the subject itself, perhaps as a matter of academic-course integrity. Together, it is possible to claim from these data that there is some evidence for students being more engaged, motivated, and achieving positive outcomes in the subject ETD during the period surveyed, and that these data are clearly linked to positive feedback from students.

4. Discussion of negative feedback, tables and data

Overwhelmingly, student feedback relating to the use of humour was positive. However, it should be noted that negative feedback was received and that this feedback was considered to be valuable because it informs best practice for teaching. For instance, even though some minority negative feedback relating to humour (around 1% of all comments) was made, it was indicated by students commenting that they did not understand the humour itself. Comments also negatively remarked on the ways in which the respondent surmised that humour might negatively affect *others*. Examples of these negative comments are:

- a. *Maybe we should consider the fact that some international students can't understand humour appropriately due to the lack of background knowledge.*
- b. *Sometimes please talk about something [humorous text] in detail because students sometimes don't understand.*

This type of comment was valuable in reassessing instances of humour in response to student needs, particularly when students failed to appreciate higher levels of humour. As part of an ongoing reflexive practice, the comments are a valuable resource, but should be contextualised as a minor problem overall.

The positive comments in both surveys indicate that students have associated humour with a pleasant learning experience and that they judge it to be a factor in their motivation to learn (samples are offered below, from both subjects):

- c. *The humour used in the lectures - was effective [educator identified by name] to ease first year students into what was a fairly difficult subject and this made it pleasurable to attend. This was one of my hardest and most feared subjects at the start of semester, but due to the teaching staff became one of my favourite subjects by the end of semester.*
- d. *The Excellent lecturer, his ability to present the course material and interact with humour and respect.*
- e. *The lectures were interesting because the teacher used humour.*
- f. *The humour involved in class really allowed for deeper learning.*

One aspect of the descriptive statistics is that, overall, there was a steady but measurable improvement in student responses and in grade distributions over the two subjects and over the period studied. In particular, the number of Fails was reduced while the number of Passes increased as an overall portion of all grades. Higher-order grades, across Credit to High Distinction, were not substantially different. It is asserted that this reflects the integrity of the subjects' curricula and marking standards across assessment tasks, so that little difference was made to the grades of students who were already equipped linguistically and motivationally. The difference, it is claimed, was with the students who were "borderline" or "at risk": for these students the atmosphere of steadily more welcoming humour assisted greatly in their motivation to persist with education. This is especially significant, given that the cohorts' demographics did not alter substantially in any way over this period, so it is clear that one major factor came into play. Allowing for other, unrelated factors, such as ongoing improvements in curricula and in subject delivery, it can be asserted that the difference occurred because the educator learnt from the students how to use humour more productively (not the other way round). The educator moved from a tentative, experimental phase of humour with students in early manifestations of the subjects, to a more confident, and informed, use of humour as the subjects progressed. That is, there were obviously failures and successes in the use of humour initially, but as the educator got to know the students better, and became more sensitive to their face-needs, choices were made to put the educator's humour at the service of the students.

It appears, then, that humour can be an important factor in student engagement and enjoyment of the course, given that the students themselves identify it as relevant and that feedback is overwhelmingly positive when it is present. Trends in the data suggest that students' grades may have been positively affected by the judicious use of humour. Indeed, it might be possible to refer to the type of humour, which creates the positive, affective conditions for learning as positive humour. This type of humour addresses the face needs of students such that they are oriented towards their educational environment and their educator/s as a primary focus. Another way of defining positive humour is to regard it as humour, which is at the service of the recipient (or interlocutor), and which the recipient can feel some ownership of.

4.1. Discussion of textual collaboration as a proposed measurement

There is another principle suggested by this research, which is indicative of its potential for future enquiry: the question of ownership of the humorous transaction might be further developed. This extension was prompted by an observation during the period of data collection, which is that students' confidence could also be measured by their willingness to be interactive in the production of humorous exchanges. For instance, we probably should not assume that humorous exchanges are always unilateral, meaning that they are characteristically initiated by the educator with the passive acceptance of the students. Indeed, it was observed during the period studied, that as students felt increasingly confident, they became proactive in the collaboration of humorous text production. That is, it was noted that many students themselves actively contributed to the sustaining of a humorous exchange which the educator had initiated, and that a number of students even felt comfortable enough in the lecture and/or tutorial, to initiate a humorous exchange themselves, without any prompting from the educator.

One example, hopefully, will be illustrative of this principle. In the course ETD, the educator presents a variety of texts, which are used for discourse analysis (DA); many of these are humorous. Students are then assigned to find their own text for a final assessment task, which they must analyse at length for DA concepts. There is nothing in the marking rubric or in the instructions to indicate genre or if the chosen text should have humour in it. Quite unpredictably, therefore, a group of Muslim students selected the Jeff Dunham (US puppeteer-ventriloquist) skit featuring the character, *Achmed the Dead Terrorist* (Dunham, 2015), as a text to demonstrate the positive aspects of humour. The text itself can be regarded as highly face-threatening for Muslims in general, since the character presents as a failed Muslim terrorist. This was unexpected for several reasons: because of the textual content, because of the American author of the text, and because of the post-9/11 global environment in which it occurred. It was felt that the autonomous student choice of such a text was evidence of great trust in the educational environment where students felt entirely comfortable in presenting (and by implication, identifying with both in-group and out-group relating to) a humorous text. The implications of this type of event may be significant, not only for future research into the operation of humour as a positive factor in student engagement, but also for positive humour as a vehicle of wider social engagement.

5. Conclusion

This paper sought to discover if the affective use of humour in teaching could make a real, and positive, difference in student learning—and whether this could be measured. In order to do this, it was necessary to define humour itself, especially in terms of the ways in which humour works as social transaction. Using face theory, it was determined that humour works as a transaction of power, and that there is, therefore, no such thing as humour without risk or reward. In other words, for every act of humour, there is also a face-threatening act (FTA). This means that, potentially at least, someone must gain face, and someone must lose face, in a humorous exchange. Thus, in the educational setting, where the educator typically enjoys an incumbent position of power, and students, almost by definition, are relatively powerless, the educator's use of humour is a high risk strategy. Therefore, if humour is used by an educator in a negative way to further entrench (or even exacerbate) this power differential, the FTA will naturally be at the expense of the students, who risk losing what little face or power they had in the first place. We can refer to this use of power as negative humour, in that it removes power from those on the receiving end of a humorous exchange. However, it is also evident that when used appropriately, the FTA of humour can be rewarding. If an act of humour by the educator does not target students in unfair ways, but rather seeks to produce rapport, emotional connections, and a supportive learning environment, it can be referred to as positive humour. Positive humour invites humorous exchanges, which are produced and used conjointly to establish affective relationships and an environment of collaboration. Positive humour also works to minimize the power differential between educator and students. In this sense, the use of positive humour is probably more of an FTA for the educator than for the students, since the educator will be allowing students to take more control in the classroom.

The question then is whether this performance of humour can be measured, and in particular whether it can be measured as a type of student outcome. In response to this question, it was proposed that we can establish if humour as a classroom strategy is working effectively to improve student satisfaction within a course by measuring student feedback and grade distribution. More specifically, this research paper applied this measurement to a very challenging educational environment: a university setting in the western suburbs of Australia's largest and most diverse city. The students at UWS are typically underprepared for the demands of university, with many coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, refugee and migrant experiences, weaker English-language competencies, and poorer educational qualifications. For these students, the university experience is already challenging enough; to negotiate humour in the context of a university lecture or tutorial is, potentially, an unexpected and even more discouraging obstacle. In terms of obstacles, humour presents an additional FTA for these students. It was also asserted that for students with little social and linguistic capital, the humorous act by a capital-rich educator in the university setting can be enormously destabilizing.

Data were collected from student feedback on courses and teaching (SFUs and SFTs), and the results were encouraging. Quantitative feedback, which specifically solicited responses on whether the educator used humour appropriately indicated that students were more than satisfied with the educator's use of humour in the educational setting. Similarly, quantitative feedback, which sought generic feedback on student satisfaction with the course itself and the educator's teaching style, respectively, indicated that student satisfaction was well above the average for the university overall. In addition, both areas of feedback indicated that satisfaction improved consistently over the four years of data collected in these areas. Perhaps more interestingly, qualitative feedback, which had no explicit prompts for the topic of humour, was dominated by student feedback that explicitly mentioned humour as a positive factor in their experience. The association in students' minds between a positive overall experience and the positive presence of humour in the educator's teaching style seems to indicate that, as an unprompted response, students feel that the presence of humour was a significant factor in their satisfaction at university.

We can then compare this feedback with the measurable (and more objective) outcome of student grade distributions during the same period. Data indicated an upward trend in student grades overall, which coincides with improvements in student satisfaction. This suggests that students who experience positive humour as part of an overall satisfactory experience will associate humour as being contributory to that overall experience. We can argue, therefore, that perhaps the conditioning influence of positive humour will may provide a more welcoming environment for the student, and that this may enable a student to develop more engagement with the courses studied. If students feel as though they have more control over the use of humour in the classroom setting, this affect will probably contribute to an overall feeling of control in the educational experience. The reverse is also likely to be true: if students are confronted by face-threatening

humour in the classroom, it will detract from their overall experience. The significance, therefore, of humour in the university experience is that it can be considered to be a powerful factor in a student's overall satisfaction. It is also likely to factor in a student's performance at university.

We can contextualise humour, then, as being part of an institutional experience for students at university, but yet part of the experience which students are probably not expecting. If we view the university as an institution, which relies on a type of generic trust between educators and students, then humour becomes more significant. In the context of a university like UWS, there is a very fragile bond of trust, which needs to be negotiated between students of more vulnerable social status and the educators whose humour as part of their teaching style. This is a bond of trust, which, it can be argued, is both personal and institutional. At the personal level, students can be quite easily destabilised by humour, which targets them in front of other students. By contrast, humour as used by an educator which positively favours a student's face needs, is more likely to strengthen the relationship between the student and the educator. Since the educator is a representative of the university, it is likely that students conflate their experience with an educator as being their experience of the university. At the institutional level, this experience of trust is very significant. It can, quite possibly, mean the difference between a student feeling disposed towards the institution or feeling alienated by that institution. That is not to say that humour, by itself, is a deterministic cause of affect or trust, but that it is a significant element in that relationship between the educator and the student.

There is one other, very significant point of measurement, therefore, which this paper suggests. It is premised that humour as used by the educator is effective if it can be demonstrated that students actively seek out opportunities for, manage, and initiate, successful humorous exchanges between themselves and the educator. These exchanges would be instances of collaborative humour, and they could not occur without the groundwork of positive humour as laid down by the educator. Indeed, it can be surmised that if this happens, it is because the students "read" an environment of positive humour from the educator as an invitation to reciprocate. If this were to occur, it would provide evidence that the educator's use of humour is at the service of students since they would feel empowered enough to venture an exchange, which presupposes a measure of equality. In an environment of affect and trust, even the most vulnerable students might hazard face-loss by instigating a humorous exchange with their educator.

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Appendix A

ITEM 1: FULL LIST OF STANDARDIZED QUESTIONS AS LISTED IN THE UWS SFU SURVEY

(Note that nomenclature at UWS may be different to other institutions: *unit* means course or subject, while *course* refers to degree or degree major/area)

1. [Unit Content] - The unit covered what the learning guide said it would.
2. [Relevance] - I was able to see the relevance of this unit to my course.
3. [Learning Design] - The learning activities in this unit have helped my learning.
4. [Assessment Activities] – The assessments in this unit have helped me learn.
5. [Assessment Feedback] - I was able to learn from feedback I received in this unit.
6. [Assessment Guidelines] – There were clear guidelines for all assessment tasks in this unit.
7. [Learning Resources] – The learning resources provided for this unit helped me to engage in learning.
8. [Learning Flexibility] - The unit provided a reasonable amount of flexibility for study.
9. [Learning Spaces] - The teaching & learning spaces used for this unit were adequate.
10. [Workload] - The amount of work required in this unit was reasonable.
11. [Equity/Fairness] - In this unit people treated each other fairly & with respect.
12. [Generic Skills] - This unit helped me develop my skills in critical thinking, analysing, problem solving & communicating.
13. [Overall Experience] - Overall, I've had a satisfactory learning experience in this unit.

Appendix B

ITEM 2: FULL LIST OF STANDARDIZED QUESTIONS AS LISTED IN THE UWS SFT SURVEY

Learning / Academic Value (summary)

1. You found the class intellectually challenging and stimulating.
2. You have learned something which you consider valuable.
3. Your interest in the subject has increased as a consequence of this class.
4. You have learned and understood the subject materials in this class.

Staff Member's Enthusiasm (summary)

5. Staff member was enthusiastic about teaching the class.
6. Staff member was dynamic and energetic in conducting the class.
7. Staff member enhanced presentations with the use of humour.
8. Staff member's style of presentation held your interest during class.

Organization Clarity (summary)

9. Staff member's explanations were clear.
10. Class materials were well prepared and carefully explained.
11. Proposed objectives agreed with those actually taught so you knew where the class was going.
12. Staff member gave presentations that facilitated taking notes.

Group Interaction (summary)

13. Students were encouraged to participate in class discussions.
14. Students were invited to share their ideas and knowledge.
15. Students were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers.
16. Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and/or questions to the staff member.

Individual Rapport (summary)

17. Staff member was friendly towards individual students.
18. Staff member had a genuine interest in individual students.
19. Staff member made students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside of class.
20. Staff member was adequately accessible to students during office hours or after class.

Breadth of Coverage (summary)

21. Staff member contrasted the implications of various theories.
22. Staff member presented the background or origin of ideas/concepts developed in class.
23. Staff member presented points of view other than his/her own when appropriate.
24. Staff member adequately discussed current developments in the field.

Examinations / Grading (summary)

25. Feedback on assessments/graded material was valuable.
26. Methods of assessing student work were fair and appropriate.
27. Assessment/Examinations tested units content as emphasised by staff member.

Assignments / Readings (summary)

28. Required readings/text were valuable.
29. Readings, assignments etc. contributed to appreciation and understanding of the unit.

Overall Rating (summary)

30. Overall, how does the class compare with other classes at this institution?
31. Overall, how does this staff member compare with other staff members at this institution?

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- EN** **Adrian Hale** is a native of the Western Sydney region. With degrees across Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, English and Applied Linguistics, he has taught in the Literacy, Linguistics and TESOL programs at the University of Western Sydney for the past 10 years. As a successful researcher and practitioner, he seeks to create positive educational outcomes for the students of the most diverse, and disadvantaged, community in Australia. One feature of his teaching is the use of humour, which he considers to be most effective when it is used to communicate, educate, and empower.
- ES** **Adrian Hale** es natural de la región occidental de Sídney. Sustitulos universitarios cubren áreas de la Lingüística, Análisis del Discurso, Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada, llevá impartiendo docencia en los programas de Alfabetización, Lingüística y Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de la University of Western Sydney durante los últimos 10 años. Como investigador y docente de éxito, busca obtener resultados académicos positivos en los estudiantes de la comunidad más diversa y desfavorecida de Australia. Una característica de su enseñanza es el uso del humour, que considera más eficaz cuando se utiliza para comunicar, educar y capacitar al alumnado.
- IT** **Adrian Hale** è originario della regione di Western Sydney. I suoi titoli di studio coprono vari ambiti della linguistica, analisi del discorso, lingua inglese e linguistica applicata e da dieci anni insegna all'interno dei programmi di Alfabetizzazione, Linguistica e TESOL dell'Università di Western Sydney. Ricercatore e insegnante di successo, il suo obiettivo è portare gli studenti della comunità australiana più disomogenea e svantaggiata a ottenere risultati positivi in campo educativo. Il suo metodo d'insegnamento è caratterizzato dall'uso dello humour, uno strumento a suo avviso particolarmente efficace se usato per comunicare, istruire e responsabilizzare gli studenti.

Humor in the teaching of writing: A microethnographic approach

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ABSTRACT

EN This paper presents the content of a critical thinking and writing course, along with similar courses derived from it, designed around the topic of humor and culminating in a microethnographic investigation of humor in students' lives. The aims of the paper are threefold: to offer a general rationale for using humor in the writing classroom; to illustrate different types of potentials and dangers of such an approach; and to suggest extensions of the findings to the second-language writing classroom. The paper offers texts, writing prompts, and activities for instructors teaching classes that focus on the writing process in a first or second language.

Key words: HUMOR IN THE CLASSROOM, COLLEGE COMPOSITION, MICROETHNOGRAPHY, FIELDWORK, CRITICAL THINKING

ES El presente artículo expone el contenido de un curso de pensamiento crítico y escritura, así como de otros cursos similares basados en él, con un diseño centrado en el humor que finalmente culminó en una investigación microetnográfica del humor en la vida de los estudiantes. Tres son los objetivos en este trabajo: ofrecer una justificación general del uso del humor en el aula de escritura; presentar diferentes tipos de potencialidades o debilidades de tal enfoque, y sugerir posibles extensiones de los hallazgos al aula de escritura en segunda lengua. El artículo ofrece textos, temas de escritura y actividades para profesores que impartan clases centradas en el proceso de escritura en lengua materna o extranjera.

Palabras clave: HUMOR EN EL AULA, ESCRITURA ACADÉMICA, MICROETNOGRAFÍA, TRABAJO DE CAMPO, PENSAMIENTO CRÍTICO

IT Questo articolo presenta i contenuti di un corso su pensiero critico e scrittura, e di corsi analoghi che ne sono derivati. I corsi sono stati progettati attorno al tema del comico e si sono conclusi con una ricerca micro-etnografica sull'umorismo nella vita degli studenti. Gli obiettivi dell'articolo sono molteplici: offrire un'argomentazione generale per l'uso del comico nelle classi di scrittura, illustrare potenzialità e pericoli di tale approccio, suggerire l'applicazione dei risultati alle classi di scrittura in lingua seconda. L'articolo offre testi, tracce e attività per gli insegnanti di corsi incentrati sul processo di scrittura in lingua madre o in una seconda lingua.

Parole chiave: COMICO NELLA CLASSE, SCRITTURA, MICROETNOGRAFIA, RICERCA SUL CAMPO, PENSIERO CRITICO

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1. Introduction

Finding a new voice in writing is analogous to learning a new language, or at least a new register in that language (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 1997). Academic writing requires the development of an academic writerly voice, which can be challenging even for first-language writers. It can be especially difficult in cases where students have not had models of such a voice in the past, such as at rural universities with many diverse students who often are the first members of their family to attend university (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). This paper proposes that humor can be a tool to help students develop such a voice. It describes four college-level critical thinking and writing courses taught by the author, in which humor is the explicit research focus. The paper also theoretically extends the scope to second-language writing classes.

The focus in this paper is therefore neither on humor as part of the style or practice of the educator, nor on the use of humor in learning materials (e.g., funny examples or readings). Rather in the courses described, humor was an explicit topic of the class, both as a research and writing topic and as a means to discuss general issues in the humanities as they surface in universal human behavior (cf. Bell & Pomerantz, 2016, pp. 166-182). The purpose of the paper is thus to provide an overview of such a course, including a course outline and suggestions for course materials, and to make the course adaptable by other instructors of first language (L1) or second language (L2) reading and writing. The materials presented here have been previously discussed in Hempelmann and Beermann (2013), but they were presented in German and only as background to an analysis of themes in students' field notes for computational humor generation. This article instead makes the course material the focus, promoting teaching humor as a path to learning and providing scholars and instructors with novel evidence of the relation between the study of humor and language practice.

The organization of the paper is as follows: Section 2 reviews literature on humor as a motivator and a pragmatic tool in language learning and practice. It also introduces humor as a motivational double-edged sword: Humor may enhance learning for some, but it is also a potential distraction or annoyance to others. Section 3 describes the three portions of the original composition course designed around humor-based microethnography. It presents the course texts used and provides all writing prompts and other assignments. It also briefly discusses themes that were found in the field notes of student who took the course. Section 4 presents two later adaptations of the course materials and their integration with newer readings, one for an honors composition class and one in core curriculum course in the humanities illustrating a different, non-writing-based thematic arrangement of the materials. Finally, Section 5 presents conclusions and highlights the central experiences of the courses.

2. A review of the study of humor in teaching and learning

2.1. *Humor in the composition classroom*

Humor is frequently understood to be a motivator in the classroom in general, and in writing courses in particular. Since Berlyne's (1960) work more than 50 years ago, scholars agree that in composition classes, students need to write about something that they care about in order to provide intrinsic motivation. Humor can play this role (Harnett, 2007). Humor is strongly associated with emotions, particularly mirth (Martin, 2007), which can be motivational. And while humor can also be associated with emotions such as aggression (Martin, 2007), aggressive humor, if properly contextualized, can also motivate students. When students have a sense of injustice about the uses of aggressive humor, they can be motivated to explore this strong emotion by writing about it, as illustrated in the section about ethnic humor and sexist humor outlined below.

Apart from motivation, humor has also been found to be a window on rhetorical logic, because of the pseudologic necessary to playfully resolve the key element of incongruity in humor (Attardo, Hempelmann, & Di Maio, 2003; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Hempelmann, 2004; Hempelmann & Attardo, 2011). Exploring the pseudologic that connects the two opposed meanings of a humorous text provides an example of sophistry that can help students understand logical fallacies in general. A clear example is seen in the logic of punning, which is based on the fallacy that the relation between the linguistic signifier and the signified is natural, or motivated, so that if two concepts surface in an identical word in a given language, the concepts are somehow meaningfully related. This, of course, is the exception in natural language, where the arbitrariness of the sign holds in the vast majority of cases.

It should be noted, however, that much research on the effects of humor in the classroom and, in particular, much of the "research [on humor as a motivator in the classroom] has been equivocal" (Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, & Smith, 2006, p. 178), and remains so to this day (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Martin,

2007). While research suggests that certain types of humor may be a motivator in specific contexts and when used by a specific instructor, humor needs to be used carefully and selectively (e.g., Chabeli, 2008; Darling & Civikly, 1986/1987; Gruntz-Stoll & Rißland, 2002; Wanzer, 2002; Wanzer et al., 2006; Zillman & Bryant, 1983; Ziv, 1988). Instructors should be particularly careful about using humor in lecturing, which might put the instructor, the jokes, the instructor's personality, or all three in between the student and what is to be learned or practiced. In assessment materials, humor also risks being a distractor (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

2.2. Humor in the second language classroom

In second language research, several studies provide evidence of the benefits of including humor in the L2 curriculum, such as positive effects on motivation, a more natural interaction with learners, and assessment of pragmatic proficiency (e.g., Bell, 2009; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Deneire, 1995; Fung, 2010; Schmitz, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2005). The close observation of humor mechanisms can also benefit the language learner in developing and strengthening language competence at both a communicative and a pragmatic level. As Bell and Pomerantz (2016) write, "humor does have something very important to teach us about how language is used and to contribute to how it is taught and learned in classrooms" (p. 197). Using humor in the second-language classroom is also a good means of assessing learner's mastery of intercultural pragmatics, as the ability to understand and produce humor and language play often requires the highest mastery of the pragmatics of language (see Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Additionally, the observations in Section 2.1 about humor in the writing classroom are also relevant for the second language classroom, as "L2 users encounter many of the same social, cognitive, and linguistic challenges using humor as L1 users" (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016, p. 42). Despite the differences between L1 and L2 writing—including differences in revision strategies, linguistic competence (Widdowson, 1983), and discourse conventions (Connor, 1996; Kaplan, 1983;), all of which should undoubtedly be addressed in the classroom—the overall similarity of the writing process in L1 and L2 (Arndt, 1987; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983) makes for a logical basis for the meaningful transfer of the insights gained in each context. L1 and L2 writers, for instance, rely on a similar set of skills, procedures, and critical thinking abilities to develop and express their ideas in writing (Silva, 1993). Additionally, proficiency and development of L1 and L2 writing are correlated (Schoonen et al., 2003). Finally, with the increasing student diversity in classrooms, scholars are currently advocating for a shift towards thinking beyond L1/L2 binaries and enacting pedagogies based on translanguaging and multiliteracies (Canagarajah, 2013), which draw on students' repertoires across languages, in the teaching practices for composition courses as well as language courses. Thus, research in both L1 and L2 writing pedagogy is relevant for understanding multilingual writers and learners.

3. Original freshman composition course at GSU

In the fall of 2005, I developed a freshman composition course at Georgia Southern University (GSU) in Statesboro, Georgia, based around the topic of humor, which I taught in three parallel sections. The general purpose of composition courses at GSU was to coach students in developing an academic voice in written English, as well as to introduce research methods. Full-time faculty were not required to use a prescribed textbook or syllabus, but were invited to build courses around their expertise and interests. Because of my research in linguistics and in humor, I was aware of research on humor as a motivating factor in the classroom (see Section 2.1.), and I was curious to evaluate its effects in my own course. Additionally, my department, the Department of Writing and Linguistics, encouraged a microethnographic approach (cf. Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2011) for composition classes. In a microethnographic approach, students research the subtle social structure of a community as it manifests itself in the interactions of the members of the community. Thus, my course combined these two strands, humor and microethnography, asking students to assume the viewpoint of an anthropologist who encounters a human society for the first time and documents its actions—here, primarily the interactions that involve humor—without preconceived notions. Bell (2009) suggests that making students collect instances of humor, for instance through field notes, is a beneficial focus-on-form activity in L2 classrooms as well. "Using humor in the language classroom (. . .) could be useful for raising learner awareness of the different types and functions of humor" (Bell, 2009, p. 254; see also Medgyes, 2002).

My 15-week course had three general units: a) introduction and classic readings; b) studying humor and aggression; and c) the final project on humor fieldwork (initiated during the second stage through field

notes), in which students then used humor as a window on structures of social interaction (e.g., Norrick, 2003; Sacks, 1974). Each unit lasted roughly five weeks. I now discuss each of the three units in turn.

3.1. Unit One: Reading and writing about humor in general

At the beginning of the semester, students wrote a free-writing piece on what humor means to them and what they laugh about in their daily life. They were asked to reflect in particular on what they laughed about in the media, and also what was *not* funny to them, even when they identified humorous intention, in general or in a given context. These free-writings served as important tools in helping the instructor to identify sample materials for lessons later in the semester.

Next, students read a series of basic and classic readings (Armus & Decker, 1988; Douglas, 1984; Keith-Spiegel, 1984; Koestler, 1964; Oring, 2003a; Raskin, 1985b; Walker, 1984) and responded to them in in-class discussions and various writing assignments, including summaries, counterarguments, compare-and-contrast essays, and an abstract. The readings were contextualized with lectures, particularly when heavy on theory (e.g., Raskin, 1985b) or dated and weak in their main points, but very illustrative and influential beyond humor research, such as chapters from Freud (1905/1990), including, for instance, *Technique of Jokes* (pp. 16-20, 60-66), *Purpose of Jokes* (pp. 90-116), and *The Motives of Jokes* (pp. 140-158).

Another early exercise and homework unit was structured around a learning-by-doing approach based on Greg Dean's standup writing workshop (Dean, 2000). This approach, drawing on Raskin (1985a), coaches readers through developing material for jokes and the actual joke-writing process. After an introductory lecture, I created several jokes on the spot in class—which were not perceived as particularly funny, but were recognizable as jokes—by following the steps of Dean's "Joke Map" (2000). These steps are: a) select a setup; b) pick a target assumption and choose a connector; c) list reinterpretations for the connector; d) choose a reinterpretation and compose a second story; e) write a punch line that expresses the second store. Students then authored two jokes in group work, sharing the one they thought funnier with the class. Finally, students created two more jokes as homework. This exercise was overall a very successful method to assess whether the students had become aware of the principles underlying humor as presented in Raskin (1985b), a more easily digestible summary of Raskin (1985a), and Dean (2000). Here are some of the funnier examples of the students' jokes:

- What did the cow in the pasture do?
Drop food on her mumu.
- My Netflix stopped working again: unpaid.
My neighbors are so irresponsible.
- Our relationship is like Romeo and Juliet:
We broke up after 3 hours.
- I got dumped Friday night.
One minute I'm napping, the next minute the dumpster gets emptied into the dump truck.
- What do you call four honors students playing scrabble at 2 a.m.?
Virgins.
- I took out the trash extra early today.
I would have waited, but my kids started looking for Fluffy.

To summarize, the first third of the semester proceeded through the following steps:

- 1) Free-writing about humor;
- 2) Discussions and writings in response to classic readings;
- 3) Joke-writing workshop.

3.2. Unit Two: Reading and writing about aggressive humor in particular

The second segment of the course was based on the thematic complex of humor and aggression, already introduced in the context of Freud's ruminations (1905/1990). The focus of this segment was the so-called "ethnic joke." On the basis of several readings (Boskin & Dorinson, 1984; Davies, 2002; Oring, 2003), the students had to make an argument about whether ethnic humor is always aggressive. The largest thematic focus was the discussion of Jewish-American Princess (JAP) jokes (Chayat, 1987; Davies, 1990,

2002b; Dundes, 1997; Spencer, 1989; Zappa, 1979; Zappa & Zappa, 1982). Although these had to be contextualized for students in parts of the United States with very low Jewish populations, like rural Georgia, they also acquainted students with part of the American experience they had not been extensively exposed to.

The introductory media item presented to students was Frank Zappa's song *Valley Girl*, in the form of a music video that was intended to pique their interest also in terms of early 1980s aesthetics. As homework, students read articles from a range of perspectives: from those who find any humor with targets offensive, such as Freud (1905/1990), to those who see the joke-tellers intentionality as an important factor to consider (Davies, 1990, 2002; Oring, 2003). Students were encouraged to watch (after being warned about explicit content) Zappa's *Jewish Princess*. They were then asked to write a 5- to 6-page paper in response to the question of whether JAP jokes are racist, sexist, both, or neither, while addressing the general question of whether there is a kernel of truth in humorous stereotypes. Although students were encouraged to consider the relevance of intentionality on the part of the joke teller as separate from the joke itself, many students sided with the position that assumes any targeted humor as aggressive. Regardless, the debate generated much discussion and writing.

The next third of the semester therefore proceeded through the following steps:

- 1) Focus on humor and aggression;
 - a. Jokes targeting groups of others;
 - b. Jokes targeting women;
- 2) Freud vs. Davies and Oring;
- 3) Starting the microethnographic field diary on everyday humor (discussed in the following section).

3.3. Unit Three: Researching and writing about the humor of a community

In the third, final, and longest segment of the semester, a task that had been going on for most of the semester came to fruition. Starting in week four of the semester, students had been keeping a field diary with anthropological notes. For this purpose, the methods for such a microethnographic project were discussed with the help of instructions and examples from a handbook dedicated to this method (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2011). In this microethnographic project, the main purpose was to make the familiar unfamiliar by close-up observation of what is normally taken for granted, so as to gain insights into one's own environment from a renewed perspective. Everyday actions of people using humor were documented in detail without preconceived hypotheses. In this phenomenological-inductive process, individual observations became the basis of generalized qualitative results.

Students collected observations in field diaries over the course of weeks, beginning with five observations per week at the beginning of the project and gradually increasing to 10 per week by the end of the semester. This timeline made it possible to collect laughter events over a longer period of time and not just take an impressionistic snap shot. The field notes were intended to document everyday events that were accompanied by laughter in the life of the students. As a first step, the circumstances of the laughter event were to be recorded in a notebook. Participants in the events were to be given a pseudonym. Any dialogue that may have occurred before or after the laughter was to be quoted in as much detail as possible. Most importantly, the participants in the situation, the circumstances, and the locality were to be sketched. Students had to pay attention to detail in the dialogue noting any joke targets (Raskin, 1985b). Field notes were to be submitted by email by the end of each week, with a short reflection on each note. The prompt for the field note task can be found in Appendix A1. Typical field diary entries are shown in Section 3.4. Emphasis was placed on the fact that it was not necessary for humor to have had occurred, only that there was laughter, which is of course not necessarily the result of a humor event. This basic and important causal dissociation of humor and laughter (cf. Zweyer, Velker, & Ruch, 2004) was developed with the students through examining the example of events in which laughter was used to structure conversation rather than being triggered by humor, as well as examples of fake vs. sincere laughter. As another reading intended to facilitate the students' documenting of humorous events, Sack's (1974) classic paper on the telling of a dirty joke was assigned.

While students were collecting these laughter events, the course introduced more theory on humor. An episode of the television show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "The Outrageous Okona" (Armus & Decker, 1988) was used to show how humor is an important part of being human. As part of its humanization

journey, the android Lieutenant Commander Data approaches the human behavior called humor both practically and theoretically. Students were directed to summarize humor theories in a helpful email to the android, cc'ed to the instructor.²

Students also completed a character study (see Appendix A2 for prompt) of a character in the cartoon series *Family Guy* (McFarlane, 1999), which was mentioned by the majority of students as their favorite funny television show at the time. Students selected one of the main characters of the show (Peter, Stewie, Meg, Lois, or Brian) and focused on events in which the character laughed. They then analyzed what could be gleaned about that character's humor from patterns in those instances. This character study was an exercise in ethnographic study, using a framed media context to ease students into self-observation and self-reflection. A subsequent character study was then based on one of the people in the students' field notes. It was also intended to be, and successfully became, part of the final cumulative paper of the course. In general, they were successful in maintaining the "othering" distance (Said, 1978) they had developed for the *Family Guy* character. An additional advantage was that this show was being aired on a local cable channel at the time of the course. Even so, it is not appropriate to assume that all students have access to media products that are not by themselves free or only accessible through paid Internet access, in particular in rural areas of the United States. To ensure that all students were exposed to the material regardless of home circumstances, two randomly selected episodes of the show were also watched during class time.

Students also wrote 6- to 8-page location studies (see Appendix A3), in which they were asked to take a closer look at one of the locations in which the group they study commonly congregates, like the gym, the cafeteria, or the church. If no such location had emerged by the time this task was assigned, students were allowed to write an additional character study. Either of these was to become a source for their microethnographic study on the topic of the humor culture of a community (they are part of or they regularly observe).

Finally, in Week 10 of the course, based on the character and location studies, students embarked on the final paper for the course. Instructions for the final paper specified that students were to focus on one of the social groups that they had been observing, emphasizing the humor of social groups, its recurring themes, and its functions. This step was also discussed in 15-minute one-on-one conferences that replaced class sessions during that week. These conferences were followed up on by another set of conferences in Week 12. These were intended to provide students with feedback on the basis of their drafts with respect to the structuring of their argument and its illustration. The specific prompt at this stage of their writing focused on the development of their text by phrasing their emotional response to the laughter of the group in relation to specific examples from their field notes. The final instructions for this group study were to first introduce the group, with the help of individual characters from the character studies. It was also helpful to refer back to discussions of aggressive vs. affiliative humor (out-group and in-group marking).

For many students, these final papers, with a length requirement of 12-15 pages, were the longest they had ever written. The lengthy data collection period, paired with continued theoretical reading and discussion, allowed students to develop a writing topic that was substantial and motivated by patterns from their specific context. It also allowed for reflection on their own social circumstances, driven by humor. Looking at the familiar from a newly acquired distance and relating it to contextualized research proved to be a fruitful approach to providing these writers with a writing context that lowered motivational and genre boundaries.

In summary, the final third of the semester thus proceeded through the following steps:

- 1) Continuing the field diary on everyday humor;
- 2) A focus on microethnographic research on the humor of a social group that the students had access to or were even members of;
- 3) In parallel, studying the humor of fictional characters;
- 4) Character study and location study;
- 5) Final paper on the humor of a community;

² It should be noted that this media material was no longer a recalled item for students in 2005, much less in 2014, so newer examples should be identified (e.g., IMB's Watson: www.ibm.com/watson) by instructors wishing to adopt this activity.

3.4. Themes as result of the field study

As part of the evaluation of the course, a colleague and I conducted an analysis of the themes that occurred in the field notes that students generated throughout the semester. The results are the focus of Hempelmann and Beermann (2013). Because those findings were published in German, I present here a very short overview of the results.

In our analysis, randomly selected field notes by 28 students, 16 males and 12 females, between the ages of 18 and 22 ($M = 18.64$, $SD = 0.91$) were used to understand themes in everyday humor of undergraduate students. The random selection of field notes comprised 1,000 situations that involved laughter (average of 35.71 per participant, $SD = 12.00$). They were coded in accordance with the key assumptions in Raskin (1985a), who postulates one or several semantic script oppositions with script overlap as the central component of humorous texts. At first, one coder added themes of the script oppositions to a growing inventory as the coding progressed. Later, these themes were consolidated into 21 groups as seemed meaningful. These groups are reported below. A second rater annotated 10 randomly selected field notes. The interrater reliability, as calculated with the algorithm used in Ekman, Friesen, and Hager (2002), was satisfactorily high at .81.

The results in the themes held few surprises. Our informal hypothesis—exemplified in the title of a chapter from Gernhardt (1988), “Dick, Stumble, Fart” [*Schwanz, Sturz, Furz*—was that most instances would involve sexual humor, *schadenfreude*, and bathroom humor. And indeed, the most frequent themes were: university life, sexuality, drugs and alcohol, sports, physical pain, romantic relationships, and food. Highly significant gender differences could be identified for the following themes: sports, alcohol and drugs, religion, police encounters, and hunting, which were more frequently reported by men. Only “family life” was reported significantly more frequently by women. Below are three examples of field notes used in this study of themes. The first line reports demographic details and the annotated theme, the remainder is the original field note itself, ending with the short reflection.

1) Student #9 (female, Caucasian, 18 years), field note #4, annotated theme: sexuality

Kim, Aubrey, Ann-Marie, and I in Kim's room. Crystal bangs on door before she comes in.

Kim – What were you doing? Humping the door?

Crystal – Yeah, most wood I've gotten all week.

Wooden door.

I am starting to notice that my friends and family seem to have very sexual and sarcastic humor.

(2) Student #17 (female, Caucasian, 18 years), field note #30, annotated theme: alcohol

30. November 8

(Susie and Laura are sitting and gossiping)

Susie: Did you hear what happened to Brad this weekend?

Laura: What happened?

Susie: Brad got really drunk and could not get up the stairs. 3 people had to carry him.

Laura: (pulls back her hair) Look what else happened...

Susie: Hahaha! A hickey!

Laura: Yep, he gave one to me, Emily, and Sarah.

Susie: Damn. He had a good night.

Laura: haha

Susie was trying to gossip about Brad's crazy weekend. But, in reality, Laura knew more of what was going on than Susie did. Little did she know, Laura and several others had received hickeys from the drunken Brad.

(3) Student #14 (female, African-American, 18 years), field note #19, annotated theme: sports

11/7 5:05pm Dorm room

Ellen and I are talking about softball.

Ellen: The coach said I had the best swing on the team, it's just that I had no eye-hand coordination. He told me, "Ellen, if you could just hit the damn ball, you'd be great. "

This is funny because it's almost sad that she was such a good player, she had all of the fundamentals down, but she couldn't make contact with the ball.

These field notes also illustrate how students were able to focus on humor (Examples 1 and 3) and social relations as manifested in humor (Example 2 and 3), thus meeting one of the intended pedagogical outcomes of the course.

4. Further implementations at TAMUC

Two further iterations of the basic course design were implemented in 2014 and 2016 at Texas A&M University-Commerce (TAMUC), the first closely aligned with the original design, the second more loosely. This section briefly introduces those courses, in order to illustrate the portability and expandability of the original course.

4.1. Honors composition course

In the fall of 2014, I taught another composition course at Texas A&M University-Commerce (TAMUC), in Northeast Texas. While the type of school and general student population at TAMUC is very similar to that of the initial group of courses, the new course was for honors students. Honors students are assumed to have higher intrinsic motivation (Wimberley & Stasio, 2012), and the number of students per course is often restricted, to 15 in this case.

The general semester plan remained identical to that of the earlier course, centering on the microethnographic final project. I added a recent introduction to humor research, *Ha! The Science of When we Laugh and Why* (Weems, 2014), as an affordable textbook to replace most of the texts listed under Section 5.3. (except for Oring, 2003 and Raskin, 1985b). In retrospect, I do not recommend Weems (2014) for this kind of class, because it focuses on recent research results rather than fundamentals in humor research. It is also based heavily in psychology and neuroscience, Weems' fields of research, to the neglect of other perspectives, and it uses too much personal anecdotal evidence by the author. It also has some factual inaccuracies (cf. Platt & Ruch, 2015), although these were of no consequence for the composition classroom. Judging from experiences reported by Goodfleisch (2016) and my own readings, Morreall's (2009), *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* might provide a better affordable introductory text.³

As expected, the honors students fared better than non-honors freshmen in terms of grasping many of the complex issues that are needed to explain humor. The main tool—script theory as in the popularized form presented in Raskin (1985b) and applied in Dean (2000)—was easier for the honors student to grasp, and thus the focus could shift more quickly to further applications and the analysis of more types and instances of humor. The course had otherwise similar outcomes to those described above.

4.2. Core course on humor in the humanities and the psychology of humor

During spring 2016, I taught a third iteration of the course, as a sophomore-level, lecture-based core curriculum class called "Humor in the Humanities." The course was a required core curriculum course, and thus like the original composition course and like second language courses, motivation among students was anticipated to be a concern (Boyer, 1987). Additionally, many students with low likelihood of retention became participants in the course. This was because the course started "on flex terms," later in the semester, to "scoop up" students with financial aid issues or students with other reasons to join the semester with a delay, such as students on academic probation lifted only at the last minute. Thus, the hope was that the motivating effect of humor would again support students in the course.

³ Many of the introductory lectures for the TAMUC composition course could be adapted from course materials I had developed for participants of International Summer Schools for Research in Humour and Laughter (www.humoursummerschool.org) in the years 2003-2008 and 2013. The audience of these summer schools is sufficiently similar to the students in the class, as non-experts in humor research, but summer school participants are generally graduate students, sometimes established researchers, with solid knowledge in their fields and an initial interest in a thesis, dissertation, or a first project in humor research. They are also usually second-language speakers of English.

Goals for this class were largely different from the other implementations in that the course was designed to introduce students to major historical, social, psychological, and communicative concepts in the humanities, in this case as they manifest in humor. While mainly lecture-based, including guest lectures by experts in humor research, the course made extensive use of videos and other humorous media products. The course took the following trajectory:

- 1) Introduction: Humor and Laughter
- 2) Mechanisms of Incongruity I: Psychology of Humor
- 3) Mechanisms of Incongruity II: Humor and Cognitive Development
- 4) Mechanisms of Incongruity III: The "Logic" of Humor
- 5) World History of Humor
- 6) Universality and Diversity of Humor I: The English-Speaking World
- 7) Universality and Diversity of Humor II: Non-English Cultures
- 8) Midterm
- 9) Sociology of Humor
- 10) Conversational Humor: Gender and Power
- 11) Humor and Confrontation: Ethnic Humor
- 12) Conclusions and Wrap-up
- 13) Finals Week

While students in this course were assessed through traditional means of quizzes, short writing assignments, online discussions, and a midterm and final exam, rather than through extensive field work and writing, the course still required students to develop critical thinking habits, as they engaged in analyses and value judgments about the positive as well as negative aspects of humor, including their own. In addition to their course work, several students regularly sought discussion with the instructor after class and during office hours to informally discuss humor in terms of the class material as well as based on students' daily humorous interactions and media products they consumed.

5. Conclusion

In this article, humor as an explicit topic in the classroom, particularly the first-language writing classroom, has been argued to facilitate students' participation and their learning outcomes. Materials and activities were presented, which could be adapted by teachers in the writing classroom and in writing-intensive classes in general. Based on research as to the parallels between first and second language writing, these materials could be extended into the second-language writing classroom, as well. Additionally, the tools presented in this paper would support students in general second-language classrooms, particularly in the study of L2 pragmatics. In sum, the uses of humor in the classroom presented here—not in the form of isolated jokes or humorous items injected at random into classroom materials, but as a focused topic of study and the explicit theme of readings and writings—aligns with research findings presented in Sections 1 and 2: that humor can provide students with intrinsic motivation, insight into the workings of language, and a window into human interaction in general.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A1: ORIGINAL FIELD NOTES WRITING PROMPT

Start writing field notes on an event involving laughter. Take the examples and information from the handout as a guide. Make sure you include as much of any occurring dialogue as necessary into your notes, as well as anything else that may become relevant later. The trick is, of course, that you don't know yet what might become important. But that's why we're starting this early and practicing it. Take these field notes asap, put them into a notebook, keep them. Type them up later and add a short sentence or two of reflection to them: anything that comes to mind when you revisit the instance of laughter as you type it up. Note if the humor seems to be directed at one or more of the participants in the event. Note that it is not important if you or anyone detected humor in the situation, merely someone laughing qualifies it for your notebook. Please pseudonymize all participants, especially if you describe illegal acts, including yourself consistently. Keep a list of real names and pseudonyms with short descriptions of the persons for your own use, but never share it with anyone.

APPENDIX A2: ORIGINAL CHARACTER STUDY WRITING PROMPT

Learning about humor tells us a lot about the people who use it, what they joke about, why they use it, and how they use it. It provides insights not only into the psyche of the individual, but also into the dynamics of whole communities. You have looked at the humor of a certain community for quite a while now, and you have collected many field notes about laughter events in that community and elsewhere. Previously in the semester you have read about humor, how it works, and what people use it for. And you have of course written a lot about it. In this project, you will bring these pieces together and write an analysis of the humor of the community that you observed. You have all the material that you need in the form of the field notes. These will form the appendix of your paper (start a new page, titled "Appendix" and include all your field notes in chronological order, number them). And you have done some of the analytic work already, either two character studies or one character study and a location study. Now it is time to bring these together and take the analysis further.

APPENDIX A3: ORIGINAL LOCATION STUDY WRITING PROMPT

Some communities' humor is influenced or reflected by the location where you have observed them. Analyze how the location influences the people and their use of humor, the specific circumstances under which they meet, the way they get to the location, the activities they habitually do there. GSU, or more specifically your dorm, would be a good example of a location. If there is no specific location that has an influence on the humor of your community, you can do a detailed analysis of one of the events that you took field notes about. Pick a typical one, so that it can become a section in your paper. Give your audience all the details necessary (who, where, what) and then analyze: Who uses humor, who is the butt, is it typical for these people, what are similar events, if untypical what are events that contrast with it, how does the humor of this event reflect these people's character, how does it influence your feelings about them, why?

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN The concept of the encyclopedia is well suited for this impressive publication. In an extended, yet detailed form, this project brings together a significant number of research findings on humor, beginning with contemporary work that inserts itself into an important, largely philosophical, tradition of studies and theories. Many researchers and scholars have focused on defining the plethora of voices contained in these two volumes, totaling more than 900 pages. Even if a certain quantity of material and some interesting perspectives have not been included, there is no doubt that the breadth of representation, significance of the research, and value of this collection represent a stimulus for future studies with an interest in sense of humor.

Key words: HUMOR, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HUMOR STUDIES

ES El concepto de enciclopedia se adapta bien a esta publicación imponente. Recoge de una forma amplia y, al tiempo, detallada, buena parte de los conocimientos que se han producido sobre el humorismo, empezando por la investigación contemporánea que se inserta en una importante tradición, filosófica sobre todo, de estudios y teorías. Numerosos investigadores y estudiosos se han centrado en definir los muchos lemas contenidos en los dos volúmenes de más de novecientas páginas. A pesar de que por el límite que impone cada empresa humana, cierta cantidad de material y algunas perspectivas, seguramente interesantes, no han sido incluidas en la obra, no cabe duda de que tanto el grado de representatividad como el de significatividad del contenido, así como su valor de documentación, representan un estímulo para futuras profundizaciones en las muchas disciplinas que se ocupan del sentido del humor.

Palabras clave: HUMOR, ENCICLOPEDIA DE ESTUDIOS DEL HUMOR

IT Il concetto di enciclopedia si adatta bene a questa imponente pubblicazione. Raccoglie, in forma estesa e approfondita, gran parte delle conoscenze prodotte sul comico dalla ricerca contemporanea che si innesta su una importante tradizione, soprattutto filosofica, di studi e teorie. Un gran numero di studiosi e ricercatori sono stati impegnati a definire le molte voci contenute nei due volumi di oltre novecento pagine. Anche se, limite di ogni umana impresa, una certa quantità di materiale e alcune prospettive anche interessanti non sono state comprese, è indubbio che è del tutto rilevante sia la rappresentatività e significatività del contenuto che il suo valore di documentazione e di stimolo per futuri approfondimenti nelle tante discipline che dello humor si occupano.

Parole chiave: COMICO, ENCICLOPEDIA DELLA RICERCA SUL COMICO

It is a general rule that a reviewer should be neutral and independent. This is not the case here. Not only am I a contributor to the encyclopedia having provided an entry, but I am also in a close, and even friendly, relationship with some of those who had a part in this editorial enterprise. On the other hand, it would not have been an easy task for the editors of the hosting journal to find someone completely uninvolved and still an experienced scholar or a researcher in the field of humor studies, as many if not most humor scholars are among the 212 authors of one or more entries of the *Encyclopedia*. Keeping this bias in

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mind, I will offer a description and an analysis of the main features of this imposing work of more than 900 pages in two volumes in the most objective way possible.

A preliminary question to be addressed is, "Why an encyclopedia"? An answer comes from the following consideration. Up until the 1970s, it may have been sufficient to read 10-15 books and some articles in order to have an adequate knowledge of the state of the art of humor studies. Freud, Bergson, and a few others were among the scholars who had written books on this topic. While many other philosophers and thinkers, including Plato, Hobbes, and Kant, had proposed their own observations on the matter of ridicule, laughter, comic, and so on—in fact, it may be easier to list who *did not* express his thought—most authors dedicated only a few pages, or even just a few lines, to this subject. From the beginning of the seventies, an explosion of studies and research took place. After the first decade of the 21st century, the corpus of studies on humor became extensive. One consequence was that either humor researchers narrowed their fields of competence to very restricted and limited areas, as it would have otherwise been practically impossible to have a general and complete view of what was produced and published on the topic of humor within their own disciplines, let alone within different disciplines. The situation resembled that which brought Diderot e D'Alambert to the illuminist project that he carried out in the seventeenth century, when science and culture had had an impressive growth, and it seemed necessary, yet still possible, to collect all, or most of, the existing knowledge in a series of volumes, which formed the *Encyclopedia (Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers)*.

The meaning and the function of these two volumes of the *Encyclopedia of humor studies* is that of collecting the existing knowledge in humor studies and of favoring the development of new studies.

Salvatore Attardo is not only the editor, but also a reason for the quality of the Encyclopedia. I had the opportunity to read a manuscript of his many years ago, *Morfologia della barzelletta* (1989). Since then many publications have followed and have had a significant impact on the whole field of humor studies. Among other things, his role as the editor of the "International Journal of Humor Research" also needs mentioning.

Another element suggesting the high quality of the contributions is that scholars and researchers have summarized in a limited number of pages the work of years, or even of decades. Many disciplines are represented, from psychology to linguistics, from archeology to sociology. (Geology is not; followers of *The Big Bang Theory*, quoted by Attardo in his introduction, know why.)

A functional and effective editorial choice has been that the language and the style of presentation address both the humor researcher and the general reader. The entries are written in an accessible, clear, and readable way, without technicalities, and yet they are adequately articulated, rigorous, and informative. Perhaps, one exception to the standard of clarity—and for a reason, given the discipline—is the entry on "Mathematics and humor", by Donald Casadonte. Casadonte always makes me feel humble and willing to learn more. Anyway, I do believe that one day I will also be able to understand the "modified Van der Pol oscillator equation," with hard work and some tutorial help.

Most of the 335 entries are to be expected, as they are relevant and clearly connected with humor and related phenomena. "Aphorism", "Bergson's theory of the comic", "Caricature", "Cognitive aspects", not to mention "Laughing", "Paradox", "Riddle", "Slapstick", etc. are in this list. Others are the result of a choice among possibilities and alternatives. This applies in particular when specific theories are included that might not have a universal support (I have my own opinions on one or two), but they still represent an interesting topic for a debate. Some entries are not expected, at least not by the average reader. This regards, for instance, some expressions that do not belong to the Euro-American culture and language. The inclusion of "Xiangsheng", or "Xiehouyu," may surprise some. However, reading this entry, which by the way is the very final one, one opens one's mind to the Chinese world and finds out that the word is a "common figure of speech in standard Chinese" (p. 813) and many dialects. The term is often translated into English as "a proverb with the second part suspended" (p. 813). We may welcome this widening of the horizon as the benign face of globalization.

The *Encyclopedia* is extremely well documented and informative. An impressive quantity of scientifically and culturally valuable material is included. It would not be fair to underline what is not included, as the field of humor studies so extensive and differentiated. Yet, at least three omissions need to be noted. Although the work of Stanley Hall is mentioned in the entry on "Tickling", the article he published with Arthur Allin in 1897 is not referred to in the Appendix A (the chronology of notable events and publications). This article is of great historical importance, being the first recorded empirical study on humor. It was a report and analysis of the daily occasions of laughter, and data were collected from more than 700 subjects.

In addition, Hall was the first president of the American Psychological Association and the founder of the American Journal of Psychology. Another omission is Lillien Martin (1905) who performed the first-ever systematic experiments on humor, defining and manipulating many relevant variables, such as the characteristics of the stimuli or the conditions of the subjects (for instance, to name a curious variable, looking at cartoons after drinking or not drinking coffee). One important outcome of her studies was the description of the two principles of “fun accumulation” and of “fun fatigue”: the first well known to comedians in terms of the “warming up” process, and the second which every conductor of “Laughter Yoga” is (or should be) aware of.

A book by another Martin, Rod, called *The Psychology of Humor. An Integrative Approach* (2007) is mentioned in Appendix A. While I completely agree with this reference, another book with partially the same title, *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical perspectives and empirical issues*, edited by Goldstein and McGhee (1972), should have been listed as well. In my view, this 1972 publication was the opening of a new and more scientifically founded wave of studies. In particular, the contributions were highly stimulating, and they promoted a new vision of research: No more wide, all-encompassing, “theoretical” statements or formulae, but models or mini-theories dealing with more focused aspects or dimensions of humor, that explained, so to say, less but better. To mention just one example, the model proposed by Suls (1972) on the two-stage information processing of jokes (the core of the incongruity resolution model) had a great influence.

Last, but certainly the opposite of least, a word about William Fry Jr. and his “Foreword.” Paul McGhee once said, about studying humor, “I had found a subject that could engage my attention for a lifetime” (1979, p. vii). That is the story of Bill Fry. A pioneer of humor research, he founded the Institute of Gelotology in San Francisco in the early 1960s. He passed away at the age of 90 in 2014, after having enriched humor studies with many and valuable publications, from *Sweet Madness* (1963) to the foreword of the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*. In the last conference in which I had the opportunity to meet him, after my presentation he told me: “You made a good point.” A gold medal would not have made me more proud.

Definitely, the present reviewer is neither neutral nor independent.

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Bell, Nancy. (2015). *We are not amused: Failed humor in interaction*. Berlin, Germany/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN This review examines *We Are Not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction* by Nancy Bell, the first systematic examination of humorous miscommunication. Situating failed humor broadly as a (mis)communication phenomenon, the text provides an impressive range of conversational data to support each level of analysis.

Key words: FAILED HUMOR, INTERACTION, CONVERSATION

ES Esta reseña examina la obra *We Are Not amused: Failed Humor in Interaction* de Nancy Bell, el primer estudio sistemático del humor en la comunicación fallida. El humor fallido se presenta en general como un caso de comunicación (fallida) y el volumen ofrece una amplia gama de datos para cada uno de los niveles de análisis de este fenómeno.

Palabras clave: HUMOR FALLIDO, INTERACCIÓN, CONVERSACIÓN

IT Questa recensione esamina *We Are Not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction* di Nancy Bell, il primo studio sistematico sul comico nella comunicazione fallace. L'umorismo mancato viene presentato in generale come un fenomeno di comunicazione (fallace) e il volume offre un'ampia gamma di dati a supporto di ognuno dei diversi livelli di analisi di questo fenomeno.

Parole chiave: UMOREISMO MANCATO, INTERAZIONE, CONVERSAZIONE

We Are Not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction by Nancy Bell is a 184-page study of failed humor during interaction. The book is aimed at two primary audiences: people interested in the academic study of humor and people with an interest in conversational interaction. *We Are Not Amused* relies on applied linguistics but also includes work from sociology, psychology, communication, and anthropology, among others. Unique in its focus, this book makes an important contribution to both discourse analysis and the study of humorous communication. By carefully analyzing a wide range of specific examples of failed humor, Bell is able to share valuable insights as to how failed humor illuminates theoretical issues about human communication, evident in conversational partners as well as society as a whole.

Chapter 1, "Introduction," explains failed humor as well as justifies its study. Additionally, the chapter includes background information important to understanding the study, specifically the following: language and interaction, context and the emergence of meaning, linguistic creativity, formulaicity, and competence and performance, as well as face and politeness. Perhaps most importantly, the first chapter introduces the primary research method—discourse analysis of largely the qualitative variety—employed in the service of three main goals: to identify the ways humor can fail, to identify the interactive structure of episodes of failed humor, and to examine the social consequences of failed humor. The chapter concludes with an overview of the book's structure, briefly previewing each of the following chapters. Overall, the chapter accomplishes a great deal and leaves readers well prepared for the analysis that follows.

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Chapter 2, "Conceptualizing Failed Humor," delves deeper into the definition and meaning of failed humor. The second chapter begins by examining how three seminal theoretical orientations to humor contribute to our understanding of failed humor. Using superiority/hostility theories, release theories, and incongruity theories, Bell does an excellent job explaining the theories and their relationship to contemporary understandings of humor in general, and then she (to borrow her phrasing) turns "the theory upside-down" (p. 21) to reveal how each theory might make sense of failed humor. She concludes that incongruity theory is best equipped to deal with the failure of humor. This section of the book especially resonated with me as I begin teaching my class on humor and communication by examining these (and other) theories of humor. This section of the book is a perfect fit for any teacher who includes theories of humor in his/her course. After the theoretical section of Chapter 2, Bell details how competence and performance are useful for analyzing failed humor. The chapter concludes with how failed humor was identified in her study, as well as a thorough explanation of her data set, which includes data from observations, self-reports, previous publications, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008-), television/movies, and elicitation.

Chapter 3, "Failed Humor as Miscommunication," places failed humor in the context of conversation trouble, or miscommunication. The chapter begins with a review of several central concepts necessary to understand miscommunication. Afterwards, sources of miscommunication are described and a framework for addressing failed humor is presented. The framework uses and expands on Bell and Attardo's (2010) seven levels of failure that produce miscommunication. After presenting a revised framework for understanding failed humor, which includes locutionary factors, linguistic rules, ambiguity, pragmatic force of utterances, message form, humorous frame, joke incongruity, joke appreciation, joke (meta)messages, and humor support, Bell shifts her focus to research on interactional structure and how unsuccessful communication repair is negotiated. The revised framework and repair will serve as the foundation of the analyses that are covered in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 4, "Triggers of Failed Humor", expands on the first six levels of the model from the previous chapter in order to explore the ways communication can fail at each level during serious or non-serious discourse. This chapter, as well as the chapters to follow, present the main analyses of the book. With the background, definitions, and framework established, Bell offers examples of each type of trigger with accompanying analysis. Chapter 4 convincingly argues that failed humor and serious talk share many of the same triggers; however, there are important differences in how interlocutors manage the miscommunication between failed humor and failed serious conversation. For example, the interlocutors in failed humor are more likely to forego repair, perhaps because humor is perceived as less significant than serious communication.

Chapter 5, "Triggers of Failure Specific to Humor," continues the analysis from the previous chapter using Bell's framework for understanding failed humor, but the focus now is on the final four levels of her revised framework, which are triggers exclusive to humor rather than inherent to all communication. These levels include joke incongruity, joke appreciation, joke (meta)messages, and humor support. Scholars of linguistics are likely to be especially intrigued by this portion of the book as it breaks new ground in the study of humor, as well as in applied linguistics more generally.

Chapter 6, "Managing Failed Humor in Interaction," addresses in greater detail the strategies used by both speakers and hearers in the management of failed humor. Both speaker and audience management of failure are discussed. From the audience perspective, lack of understanding and lack of appreciation are considered. Failed humor is considered through the lens of face saving and face threats: speakers wish to minimize damage to face, and hearers wish to preserve their identity as possessing a good sense of humor while simultaneously signaling failure to the speaker. The analyses revealed that the type of failure largely predicts the type of response.

Chapter 7, "Failed Humor and Society," focuses on the larger issues related to failed humor. Considering failed humor and social action, the issues of humor for solidarity and humor, power, and subversion are examined. Deliberately failed humor is explored. The chapter considers the power of humor to unite and divide people and dives deeper into issues of marginalization. This chapter is particularly provocative and, without many of the technical discourse analyses presented in Chapters 5 and 6, will likely be more palatable for less methodologically sophisticated audiences.

Chapter 8, "Conclusion," summarizes the findings, presents implications for the study of language and humor, and ends with directions for future research. The chapter opens with a clever question and answer format. The results of the book are summarized by answering the research questions from Chapter 1. The implications are thought-provoking and the directions for future research will hopefully inspire other noteworthy studies.

This impressive book is a must for scholars of humor or scholars of conversational interaction. Although I am not an applied linguist and my method is experimental social science rather than discourse analysis, I found the analysis both fascinating and persuasive. The commitment to discourse analysis is a strength as well as its biggest limitation. The methodological specificity of the book will be an obstacle for scholars not well-versed in discourse analysis. However, scholars of humor can learn a great deal from the careful and thorough analyses presented in this book. Those who teach courses on humor will also find this book quite useful, whether used in its entirety or as supplementary material when discussing conversational humor and/or failure of humor. The book is smart and—it should be mentioned—a great deal of fun.

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN This review introduces readers to *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, a collection of essays from various disciplines and topics in the field of humor and gender studies, encompassing different countries and languages.

Key words: HUMOR, GENDER STUDIES

ES Esta reseña presenta el volumen editado *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, una colección de trabajos que abarca diferentes disciplinas, temas, países y lenguas en el ámbito de los estudios de género del humor.

Palabras clave: HUMOR, ESTUDIOS DE GÉNERO

IT Questa recensione presenta il volume *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, una collezione di saggi in diverse discipline, lingue, paesi e temi nell'ambito degli studi di genere del comico.

Parole chiave: COMICO, STUDI DI GENERE

As the subtitle of the book makes clear, this is a collection of 20 essays (including the introduction) from various disciplines, and the topics encompass several countries and languages. As such, the various chapters will likely be more or less interesting to the individual reader on the basis of personal interest, and only very few readers will be interested in all the chapters. In this review, I focus unapologetically on those chapters that I found most interesting, either because they presented novel ideas or because they made points that strike me as important. Obviously, other reviewers will find other areas to emphasize.

The most interesting chapter is Rod Martin's authoritative synthesis of psychological research on gender differences in humor. Martin reviews a significant number of studies, from a variety of approaches, and concludes that "we find more similarities than differences between men and women" (p. 144). One consistent difference is that men report using more aggressive humor, both directed toward others and the self. Martin's conclusions are nuanced and rich with interesting details that would be too complex to summarize here. The book is worth having for this chapter alone.

The opening chapter by Bing and Scheibman discusses the application of blending theory to humor. This is not a novel idea, but the authors take a novel approach, exploring the world-building aspect of blends by emphasizing that each blend in a joke creates a (mini-)world composed of the properties of the two scripts involved in the blend. This is an original idea within humor studies, and it deserves more attention. In particular, as Bing and Scheibman themselves observe, it may be interesting to distinguish between those blends that are humorous and those that are not, as well as those that are "subversive" (i.e., do not buy in to gender-stereotyping ideologies) and those that are not.

Milner Davis' chapter on female roles in farces ends with the rather unexpected conclusion that while farces "necessarily reflect the gendered roles of their times ..." nevertheless they all depend on an essential egalitarianism between the sexes (. . .) men and women are co-equals in sexual matters, in aggression, in general intelligence, and in the ability to get things done (. . .) [and] equally lacking in insight, equally self-preoccupied, and equally unable to see the impact of their behavior on others" (p. 49).

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The sixth chapter, on lesbian humor, by Kulick wins the funny-when-taken-out-of-context award with the sentence, here quoted in its entirety: "I am particularly interested in lesbians" (p. 85). The runner-up, also by Kulick, is "Germans are an interesting kind of parallel case to lesbians" (p. 90). Disappointingly, what lesbians and Germans turn out to have in common is that they are both stereotyped as humorless. In all seriousness, however, Kulick's chapter presents an engaging discussion of cultural history on how the myth of the humorless lesbian arose.

In Chapter 13, Lockyer considers two characters in the *Catherine Tate Show*, a British sketch comedy show that aired on the BBC between 2004 and 2007. The interest in this chapter, in my view, lies in the fact that the characters represented are distinguished by social class and age, two topics that often do not get much coverage in humor studies.

A group of three chapters, respectively by Coates (Chapter 9), Holmes and Schnurr (Chapter 10), and Huy (Chapter 11), is focused on gender differences in conversational humor. For those familiar with the literature on discourse and conversation analysis of humor, the novelty here is Huy's work on Chinese (Cantonese) data. Given that he very usefully provides a quantitative breakdown of his observations, it is possible to check some of the conclusions he draws. One conclusion which may be worth reconsidering is that his data support the superiority theory of humor (conceptualized here as "higher status individuals initiate more humor;" [p. 192]) since the highest status family member (the father) is not involved in much humor (p. 192) and initiates no instances of in-group humor. It is too bad that Huy did not provide the original Cantonese and a transliteration for the examples. Nonetheless, and despite the usual limitations on the sample size and how generalizable the data is, this is a very good paper that broadens the field significantly.

Three chapters deal with film: Finney (Chapter 14), on the U.S. indie film *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006); Senzani (Chapter 16), on Italian-Australian director Monica Pellizzari; and Gardaphè (Chapter 15), on the portrayal of Italian-American male gender roles in *Goodfellas* (1990). The volume is rounded out by other chapters on feminist fiction (Wagner-Lawlor, Chapter 4), post-war British film comedy (Gray, Chapter 5), Japanese humor and its relationship with gender roles in Japan (Bouchetoux, chapter 7), female designers' humor (Klein, Chapter 12), grotesque humor in three contemporary Italian writers (Maher, Chapter 17), a well-documented chapter on queer humor (Emig, Chapter 18), and a discussion of feminist comedian Judy Tenuta (Del Negro, Chapter 19).

The final chapter is a "virtual" round table discussion among some of the authors. The general conclusion is that more research on humor and gender is needed and that simplistic male/female labels need to be problematized. While the four page index is underwhelming, the general bibliography common to all the articles in the book is a valuable research tool.

Overall, this is a valuable contribution to the field, which definitely belongs in research libraries and on the bookshelves of serious scholars of gender and humor.

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