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Book review*

Priego-Valverde, Béatrice (Ed.) (2024). *Interactional Humor: Multimodal Design and Negotiation*. De Gruyter Mouton.

This edited collection brings together an international group of humour scholars united not just by a shared research interest but also joined by the strong belief that humour is first and foremost an interactional phenomenon. There are probably two groups of readers this edited collection is best suited for. The first group will be humour researchers who already possess an interest in interactional humour, and will likely appreciate the varied discussions and analyses of humour from an interactional lens. The other group are those humour scholars who work with humour, but not necessarily from an interactional point of view. In many ways, the book is designed to convert or at least convince this second group that humour must be considered as an interactive process. Indeed, the introduction of the volume makes it clear that the book is not only designed to report on a need for more research in the area, but also to simultaneously demonstrate the importance of such work within the context of humour studies.

As a member of this second group of readers, my assessment is that this mission has been accomplished. It is clear both from the theoretical and empirical arguments appearing through the volume that interaction and humour are hopelessly intertwined, in a complex yet fundamental way which is important to recognise when we all sit down and think about what humour *is*. In addition to the focus on interaction, the collection places a strong emphasis on the multimodal nature of (interactional) humour. The multimodality relates most immediately to the range of linguistic and paralinguistic cues associated with humour during interaction. But multimodality is also extended to digital contexts, including text chat applications and social media. The overall effect is to convince the reader that just as interaction is inseparable from humour, multimodality is inseparable from interaction.

The volume starts with an introductory chapter which makes broader arguments about the importance of interaction and multimodality for humour. There are then eleven chapters across two sections. The first section, "Face-to-face interactions", is not as narrow as the title might suggest – it ranges from babies to robots. In the first chapter, "A multimodal approach to children's development of humour in family life, Aliyah Morgenstern, Christelle Dodane and Marie Leroy-Collombel provide a multimodal discourse analysis of communicative events between parents and children. The focus is on young children, some of whom have yet to develop verbal abilities, but nonetheless seem to participate and engage in humorous interaction with their parents. The result is compelling evidence of how the *interactive* nature of humour is acculturated before any semantic means for communicating humour are possible. The second chapter, "On target. On the role of eye-gaze during teases in face-to-face multiparty interaction", by Clarissa de Vries, Bert Oben and Geert Brône changes tack to focus the role of gaze during

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interaction involving humorous teasing. The results clearly demonstrate that gaze is not a marker of but instead a crucial element in communicating how teases should be received by tease targets. In other words, gazes are not just a marker or correlate of teasing, but instead function as communicative signals and monitoring strategies for interlocutors involved in a tease.

The next three chapters give the reader something to smile about, as each involves measuring different degrees of smiling and how smiling manifests during interactional humour. These chapters make it clear that methodological techniques for measuring smiling are sophisticated and continuously refined. For instance, Elisa Gironzetti in "Humorous smiling: A reverse cross-validation of the Smiling Intensity Scale for the Identification of Conversational Humor" shows how to simplify an existing Smiling Intensity Scale (SIS) framework, whereas in "Alternative conceptualizations of the Smiling Intensity Scale (SIS) and their applications to the identification of humour", Hilal Ergül, Shelby Miller, Kevin Kramer, and Salvatore Attardo show how that same scale can be simplified in a different way, reducing the need for formal training on the original SIS. The following chapter, "Facial gestures and laughter as a resource for negotiating humour in conversation" by Béatrice Priego-Valverde and Stéphane Rauzy analyses smiling in a corpus of conversations using the SIS and other measures of body movements and gestures. Their analysis includes a quantitative timeline showing smiling during the time course of humour, coupled with a qualitative analysis of the same interactions to provide a rich complement to the timeline measures. This first section concludes with a chapter on artificial intelligence and humour titled "Multimodal humour in human-robot interaction" by Thomas Kiderle, Hannes Ritschel, Silvan Mertes, and Elisabeth André, the goal of which is to discuss the potential ways that interaction could be programmed into robots to help improve their humour delivery and generation. The chapter draws heavily from prior reviews, and is largely summative, which can be helpful for those interested in developing taxonomies of various ways of operationalising aspects of interactional humour regardless of their desires to train a robot who can do humour.

In all, the first section exemplifies how various measures of interaction can be drawn upon to study and theorise the nature of interactional humour. While the diversity of chapters is described in the introduction generally in positive terms, their variance can also become a downside as the reader shifts somewhat drastically from empirical to theoretical, and from qualitative to quantitative. However, the nature of an edited collection does mean a reader can pick-and-choose the chapters as necessary, and this might be preferred to reading the volume straight through, chapter-to-chapter. The small streak of coherence among the three chapters on smiling did however exemplify that there is power in linking methodological and empirical chapters on a similar topic. For a reader such as myself, it was rewarding to first learn about the SIS through methodological validation session and then seeing it applied in an empirical study.

The second section of the collection is titled "Mediated interactions", wherein *mediated* seems to generally refer to interactional humour which is communicated through a digital medium. However, the first chapter, "Facial expressions as multimodal markers of humour: More evidence from scripted and non-scripted interactions", by Sabina Tabacaru seems to deviate from this group. In Tabacaru's chapter, facial gestures (specifically, eyebrow movements) are analysed among different instances of interactional humour as they appear in television shows, movies, and stand-up comedy routines. The results showcase how powerful a raised eyebrow can be – shifting discourse modes from the serious to the playful, again highlighting how important facial expressions are during interaction humour. While I recognise the data was itself digital, I felt that these data were not mediated *through* the digital modality, leading to some slight confusion as to its membership in the second section.

The following chapters appear to more accurately reflect this theme of digital mediation, with analyses of interactional humour occurring in mobile phone text chat applications and

social media contexts. In their chapter "Emojis and jocular flattery in Chinese instant messaging interactions", Jia Qiu, Xinren Chen, and Michael Haugh focus on the interactional nature of jocular humour in Mandarin Chinese among several communities of *WeChat* users. Specifically, the authors focus on the use of emoji within jocular flattery, showing that emoji are not merely marking but instead involved in the co-construction of jocular flattery. A very similar analysis follows by Agnese Sampietro in "More than laughter: Multimodal humour and the negotiation of in-group identities in mobile instant messaging interaction", who examines a group *WhatsApp* chat used by a group of male friends in Spain. Much like the conversations in the previous chapter on *WeChat*, these *WhatsApp* users employed emoji, GIFs, stickers, and images in their chats to co-construct humour, in turn prompting the reader to reflect on several layers of multimodal humour.

The final two chapters focus more broadly on online interaction. In "Humor and creativity in a family of strangers on Facebook", Kerry Mullan presents a detailed look into how users of a local community Facebook group in Melbourne, Australia pepper their discussion threads with various forms of humour, all for the greater good of fostering community and simply having fun. As such, Mullan's chapter hits just the right combination of levity in examples and serves as a reminder that one of the many functions of humour is to jointly celebrate in its creativity and ability to bring members of a community together. The final chapter, "'Loanword translation and corrective acts are incongruous': Debating metapragmatic stereotypes through humorous memes", by Villy Tsakona focuses on the use of memes in an online debate about how English loanwords should be translated into Greek during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is a larger question here about citizen sociolinguistics and reactions to if and how loanwords should be fully translated into Greek equivalents, perhaps an equally as important contribution is that parts of this discussion take place using humorous memes. Interaction in this sense is mediated through the online dissemination of humorous memes, expressing very serious opinions about language using a very non-serious medium.

In summary, this collection provides the reader with a diverse mixture that might be better served in pieces rather than as a whole. Doing so would not be to any detriment of the larger goals of the collection, because each chapter includes arguments and evidence for the importance interaction as it relates to humour. We also see a remarkable similarity in that features that might be simply considered *markers* of humour (smiling, gaze, facial gesture, emoji) are instead recast as *elements* of the interaction. This runs true regardless of setting, age, or language, and provides a clear and salient reminder of how humour is more than just language. I should at this point admit that, given my own research interests and priorities, this is not the first volume I would have chosen from the bookshelf. But I am glad that I did, as the concepts and analyses tested my limits and understanding of humour studies, and made me think about the topic in several new ways. The volume is a good reminder of the methodological and theoretical diversity in humour studies, and should represent a solid foundation for anyone who might need a good authority for the importance of interaction in humour.

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