Book review

Chłopicki, Władysław & Dorota Brzozowska (eds.) (2017). *Humorous Discourse.*
Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter.

The editors of this collection of essays need to be commended for challenging relevant linguistic researchers of humour to further think about, rethink, or newly think about humour in terms of a unifying theme, namely discourse. Essay collections without themes tend to be eclectic arrangements of more or less related contributions documenting research and analyses at varying levels of maturity (e.g. Popa and Attardo 2007; Dynel 2013). The theme of the present collection is tenuously adhered to only by several of the chapters. This becomes obvious to the reader despite the attempt of the editors' foreword at providing a completely unifying perspective. Moreover, several of the chapters are merely updated elaborations of their authors' extant thoughts, and not always substantially updated either.

The editors' foreword provides a rather generous definition of discourse against the background of the well-known question of where humour, or meaning in general, resides: "text, context, or both". This issue is also explicitly addressed by several of the chapters. Despite being obvious—it's "both"—the answer is nevertheless left open. Some humour scholars are still confused by the fact that to answer certain research questions, the focus of an analysis should be either on text or on context. The work by such scholars often reads as if they just recently discovered the importance of context and now think it must be all that language needs in order to have meaning. Several chapters in this collection are affected by this single-mindedness to varying degrees. But to claim that text alone or context alone determines meaning has never been fruitful. After all, we do not communicate with language just by sharing a context. There is, for the most part, also at least some text. The foreword ends with the customary summaries of the contributions in the order in which they are published, as grouped in three sections.

The first section, labelled "Approaches at the essence of humorous discourse", opens with a chapter that is another reminder by Raskin of what he considers a (humour) theory to have to be to deserve that name. In the second chapter, Chłopicki focuses on one type of logical mechanism, as it would be called in terms of the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH), which he labels *metonymy*. In this mechanism, an object that implies the event that it is the default instrument for (e.g. a spoon for eating soup), but which the punch line reveals is not the event it actually participates in in the joke's context (e.g. a spoon for stirring up trouble). These two events are (part of) the opposite scripts. Next, Libura presents a summary of conceptual blending theory, but adds little else than four examples already discussed in previous papers by the author. The chapter by Kitazume revisits the distinction between humour and laughter, overlooks that Raskin's main hypothesis (1985) is not just overlapping, but opposed scripts, rediscovers the GTVH's logical mechanism as "a twist", but furnishes some interesting examples of visual humour analysis.

A chapter by Attardo opens the second section on "Humour as a function of discourse". He reminds us of Chomsky's important distinction between performance and competence and that discourse clearly is performed. As originally conceived, the GTVH is largely a theory of

competence (the humorous text). In this chapter, Attardo explicitly extends its purview of a theory of humour performance (the contexts of the humorous text), complementary to the GTVH. He argues that the latter has always been an implicit, and more recently an explicit (cf., e.g., Tsakona in the reviewed volume), extension, in the sense that the GTVH had been initially conceived to answer questions about humour competence. The central task for a competence theory of humour is to predict whether a text is humorous or not. The central task for a performance theory is to determine how a performed humorous text has different degrees of funniness in different contexts. Attardo begins to sketch such a theory of humour performance with examples, including failed humour and repeated (!) remarks about debunked folk theories of punch line delivery. Attardo also includes an elegant summary of the argument why there can be no bottom-up theories.

The next chapter, by Shilikhina, emphasises the important work metapragmatic markers (i.e., explicit pragmatic markers on the discourse itself that help structure it) play in signalling *non bona fide* mode prevalence. There is some interesting but not always convincing taxonomising of these markers, which can be basically understood as variants of "I'm kidding" or "I'm not kidding." Chovanec's chapter analyses humour in sports commentary with the example of English soccer print news about the Euro Cup 2004. Lightly argued, indulgent in examples, its main point is that sports commentary contains more humour than other news. But it rather seems that he rediscovers the well-known punning in English-language headlines, not particularly specific to sports, as facilitated by syntactic ellipsis.

The chapter by Santiago and Seewoester Cain analyses a comedian who constructs different social group affiliations for himself and his audiences as he performs the same routine in different settings. It focuses on how he adapts his pronunciation of key terms, which is more convincing in the first analysis than in the second. I would like to note that Gruner (1997) may be one of the strongest among the current proponents of Superiority theory, but he is probably not the greatest, as the chapter claims.

Next, Tsakona revisits a TV ad she analysed in an earlier publication from a new perspective, namely an analysis of metapragmatic (there it is again) attitudes toward humour about certain themes, here sexism. The two central attitudes are that viewers claim the ad is sexist vs. that the ad satirises sexism, either way mainly revealing their own attitude toward sexism. Tsakona's conclusion is not least based on Kramer's (2011) analysis of analogous attitudes toward rape jokes, which makes her juxtaposition of "traditional, context-free approaches" to humour research and "contemporary, context-sensitive" ones as aligned with the attitudes to the type of humour under discussion rather contentious. Evidently, this side-line argument also features the "traditional, context-free" strawman of a humour researcher that is complementary to the all-is-context one set up above.

The final section on "computer modelling of humorous discourse" seems to have been created to accommodate its only chapter by Taylor Rayz. This contribution contains another good summary of the *Ontological Semantic Theory of Humour*, albeit including some barely decipherable figures. It sketches how this kind of computational theory could be informed by contextual selection of possible senses.

The volume is overall edited well and has a somewhat short index of little over two pages. Some of its contributions are thought-provoking, others are merely page-filling. Overall, the editors, series editors, and publishers have made a step in the right direction: away from unfocused collections of premature essays, some of which would not have passed the peer reviewing process of a journal, and many of which quote their editors beyond relevance, in ever-increasing numbers of book series in humour research. Not so here. Full disclosure: Several of the researchers who contributed to this volume are collaborators and some are even good friends of this reviewer. I allowed myself to be the least kind with their chapters.

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