

Book review

Vásquez, Camilla. (2019). *Language Creativity and Humour Online*. London and New York: Routledge.

As technology is evolving amazingly fast and people are highly connected to the Internet, humour is becoming more and more present in the online space, particularly in social media platforms. However, the author of this book shows us that humour is not only part of Twitter or Facebook, but also of Tumblr, a platform that is mostly based on pictures, and Amazon, an e-commerce platform where clients express their funny views on products via the review section. *Language Creativity and Humour Online* reveals multiple ways online users utilise to produce humour, starting from figures of speech such as metaphors, metonymy, slang expressions or hyperbole to voicing, exaggeration, intertextuality, contextualisation, etc.

The book is structured in 6 chapters, wherefore the first two chapters contextualise the topic of linguistic creativity online, then the following three chapters focus on humour mechanisms on Twitter, Tumblr and Amazon, and the final chapter is dedicated to similarities and differences between the digital genres explored throughout the book, memes, the experiences the author had while writing the book, and some advice for researchers interested in this topic.

The “Introduction” is premised on the idea that we are all creative users of language, hence the necessity to address the sociolinguistic side of this topic, both considering the linguistic and the discursive approach. After summarising some findings on language creativity and the humorous mechanisms used by participants in the online space (metaphor, simile, metonymy, idiom, slang, evocative metaphor, etc.), the author points out that online humour does not only aim at entertaining, but also at taking a stance about something or expressing an opinion on a certain matter. Then, starting from Bakhtin’s (1981) insights on voicing, which means impersonating others, it is underscored that this particular method is highly used on the Internet, as imitating other individuals (often famous people) makes online texts more recognisable. Thus, shared knowledge is also extremely important when creating and interpreting humorous texts from the online space.

Chapter 2, “Research on linguistic creativity online,” starts from acknowledgements found in *Cyberplay*, a book written by Brenda Danet (2001), which, as pointed out by Vásquez, represents a pioneering work highlighting how Internet users exploit the online space just to be creative and engage with one another. Then, the author focuses on studies on online humour which have led to the conclusion that linguistic creativity should not just be analysed as deviations from conventional linguistic forms, but also from a sociolinguistic point of view. Also, Camilla Vásquez talks about humour methods in fan fiction texts (voicing), YouTube videos (homophony) and memes (incongruity between the text and the image). These particular examples prove that, when it comes to online humour, resources are extremely diverse, depending on the possibilities a certain platform offers to users. In the last part of this chapter, the author talks about five key factors which are important when analysing online humour, developed by Chovanec and Tsakona (2018): contextualisation cues, audience reactions, sociocultural parameters of humour, goals and functions of humorous discourse, and the genre

that humour appears in. All these factors are to be used by scholars in the analysis of humorous texts online.

Further on, in Chapter 3, entitled “Novelty Twitter accounts,” Camilla Vásquez analyses language creativity on the microblogging platform Twitter, whose main goal is to entertain. She starts from highlighting that Twitter’s humorous tendency began when users started to create fake accounts for famous personalities, often producing both humour and criticism through what Bakhtin (1981) calls *heteroglossia*. The accounts analysed by the author include one account which calls on political matters (*Alt-POTUS 45*), two accounts that combine historical and contemporary events/aspects to create humour (*Medieval Reactions* and *The Valentine’s Day Cards*), three accounts particularly relying on textual humour (*Kim Kierkegaardashian*, *YA BOY BILL NYE* and *birdsrightactivist*) and, then, one last account that takes the voice of a collective academic experience (*Shit Academics Say*). The author points out that for the political-based humour account, the main humour mechanism used is the incongruity between political facts and quotidian activities (real-fictional). Then, on the *Medieval Reaction* account, she concludes that most of the tweets are a combination of old art images and texts targeting contemporary life phenomena. As the author explains, this account has two different voices: “the textual voice, which is always contemporary, and the visual voice, which is always historical” (p. 40). The *Valentine’s Day Cards* account mostly relies, as the book claims, on paronymy, but also on historical incongruity.

In the second part of this chapter, the author first analyses the *Kim Kierkegaardashian* Twitter account, which blends Kim Kardashian’s voice (a US TV star) and philosopher Kierkegaard, therefore humour emerges from the exploitation of two different topics, beauty and philosophy. However, voicing is made differently comparing to *YA BOY BILL NYE* account, says the author, as the former keeps the two voices separated, meanwhile the latter blends them in the same text. The *YA BOY BILL NYE* account approaches scientific topics by using non-standard language, including slang words and internet-based expressions and aiming at creating a colloquial language. Further on, the author analyses the humour mechanisms used on *Birdsrightactivist* account, which refers to political topics and contemporary events and themes a bird would usually be concerned with, using non-standard spelling, non-standard grammar and non-standard punctuation. The final example the author gives is that of a Twitter account that uses a collective voice to highlight the experiences of an academic researcher, involving humour mechanisms such as irony, linguistic registers blending or performing other people’s voices. Also, by referring to Maybin & Swann’s (2007) work, it is claimed that the textual, contextualised and critical linguistic creativity all apply to this Twitter account as it is based on *heteroglossia*, adapted to certain sociocultural contexts and providing a certain view of academic life. I find this particular chapter extremely useful for researchers addressing online users’ language, as Camilla Vásquez provides examples that are different in terms of the mechanisms used to create humour, but also to simply communicate, therefore proving that users’ creativity is quite unlimited.

Chapter Four, entitled “Tumblr Chats,” offers a view on how users on this platform that is mostly based on pictures manage to be creative when it comes to Chats, through polyphony and polyvocality. Firstly, the author starts by pointing out that most of the Chats on Tumblr are based on linguistic, visual and multimodal intertextuality, but also on memes whose main character is “Me.” Such examples refer to personal events that could provide a perfect occasion for experience exchange through memes. Hence, sharedness is significantly important for this particular platform. Then, polyphony is analysed starting from texts created on opposing stances between social classes or non-animate entities and “Me” characters. Further on, the author also offers examples of humorous Tumblr Chats involving register incongruity, popular and digital culture differences or political themes.

Chapter five, entitled “Amazon review parodies,” approaches users’ creativity when reviewing products from the e-commerce platform Amazon. Whether they use fictional stories and experiences they had with the product, through exaggeration and hyperbole, or they play the confused client role, most of the parodies from the review section offer both entertainment and information and often criticism. The author analyses six products (*Tuscan Milk*, *Hutzler Banana Slicer*, *Three Wolf Moon T-shirt*, *AutoExec Steering Wheel Work Tray*, *Bic for Her Pens* and the *Avery Binder*), offering many examples that support her initial idea that users are extremely creative in the online space. This particular topic related to the rise of a new online discourse genre, i.e. reviews, was also developed by the author in other publications (see Vásquez 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016, Vásquez & Sayers China 2019). Compared to the above-mentioned works and books, the present book focuses only on language creativity, which often results in humour.

In the last chapter of the book, Vásquez talks about the conventionality-creativity relation, as she acknowledges that online users do not invent new constructs to create humour, but they appeal to existing resources, choosing those which better match their communicative intentions. The similarity between the genres she discusses in this book, as the author herself claims, is that they all bring to life voices which are different from their own and they all rely on reflexivity (p. 158). Then, after talking about contemporary online memes trends, calling on their authors’ adaptation to existing material and then their ability to transform and contextualise them, the author gives some methodological reflections and directions for possible future research (e.g. exploring other digital genres, ethnographic analysis, and multilingual forms of language play).

Camilla Vásquez’s book offers detailed analyses of users’ online creativity which often results in humour, highlighting the multiple functions of this phenomenon: entertainment, information and criticism. Even though I think *Language Creativity and Humour Online* is a great book which explores digital genres and online language creativity, as it provides more than one way of analysing online texts and images and a great insight on the versatility of such discourse genres, I would not find this book perfect for researchers wanting to find out more about linguistic theories on humour, but rather for researchers exploring the digital space, its functions and communication/interaction methods.

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