

## Book review

Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo (ed.) (2016), *Metapragmatics of Humour: Current Research Trends. IVITRA Research in Linguistics and Literature 14*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 309 pp.

The volume *Metapragmatics of Humour: Current Research Trends* edited by Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo is a collection of papers aiming at analysing humour as a metapragmatic ability. The book is published as the 14th volume of the IVITRA Research in Linguistics and Literature series and presents research results of the members of the IVITRA Research Project.

The contributions to the volume are organised in three parts. As the title *Revisions and Applications of General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) in a Metapragmatic Context* suggests, Part 1 includes papers devoted to V. Raskin and S. Attardo's *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (Attardo & Raskin 1991, Attardo 2001) and possible ways of its application to studying humour as the metapragmatic ability. Part 2, *Metapragmatic awareness of humour across textual modes*, comprises papers which analyse various genres of humour and use the concept of *metapragmatic awareness* to explain how humour is processed in discourse. Finally, Part 3, *Metapragmatic practices within the acquisition of humour*, contains works devoted to the issue of the development of the ability to create and understand humour.

The book opens with the editor's introductory paper *Exploring metapragmatics of humour*, in which Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo discusses various approaches to the concept of *metapragmatics* and demonstrates how this concept relates to humour research. For the contributors to the volume, the concept of metapragmatics denotes our ability to monitor and plan our own verbal activities, i.e. production and understanding of speech in general and humour in particular. It comes as no surprise that the majority of papers, along with (meta)pragmatic approach, utilise cognitive approaches to model and explain mechanisms involved in creating and processing humour.

Part 1: *Revisions and applications of General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) in a metapragmatic context*

The first part of the volume offers in-depth theoretical discussions on the need to treat humour as a metalinguistic activity and incorporate cognitive and pragmatic analysis in humour research.

Part 1 opens with Laura Alba-Juez's paper "The variables of the evaluative functional relationship: The case of humorous discourse". The discussion centres around the evaluative content of humour. The author suggests that evaluation should be considered as one of the *knowledge resources* of humour and offers a methodology for evaluating the stance of the joke.

Ana Pano Alamán & Ana Mancera Rueda's contribution entitled "Humour and advertising in Twitter: An approach from the General Theory of Verbal Humour and metapragmatics" tests the GTVH against messages published on Twitter by state institutions, national and multinational companies. Because utterances on Twitter tend to be emotionally loaded and colloquial in style, humour and irony become frequently used as strategies which can simultaneously entertain the readers and create bonds of solidarity and friendship, on the

one hand, and respond to attacks aimed at a particular company, on the other. The authors classify humorous tweets according to the source of the script opposition in a message and demonstrate the need of a metapragmatic competence for understanding humour.

In her paper “Beyond verbal incongruity: A genre-specific model for the interpretation of humour in political cartoons”, Marta Agüero Guerra studies cartoons as monomodal or multimodal messages and suggests that a visual component should be added to existing humour theories. The research blends a number of theories to explain the process of understanding humour: the GTVH (Attardo & Raskin 1991), the *theory of conceptual integration* (Fauconnier & Turner 1998), and Giora’s (2003) concept of *salience*. By analysing cartoons which depict the recent economic crisis in Spain, the author demonstrates the role of various cognitive mechanisms, e.g., metaphor, metonymy and profiling, in understanding verbal and visual humour. The incongruity resolution stage is revised and semiotic and cognitive parameters are added to create a new holistic model of understanding humorous cartoons.

In her second contribution to the volume, the paper “Metapragmatics of humour: Variability, negotiability and adaptability in humorous monologues”, Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo puts forward a theoretical model of metapragmatics of humour. The model is based on the concepts of *adaptability*, *negotiability* and *variability* introduced earlier in Verschueren (1999). The GTVH is further enriched by markers and indicators of variability, negotiability and adaptability with the aim of analysing humour from a pragmatic perspective. Because the metapragmatic model of humour is bi-directional, it allows for explaining humorous discourse both as a productive process of the writer/speaker and as an interpretative process of the reader/listener.

## Part 2: *Metapragmatic awareness of humour across textual modes*

The second part of the volume is divided into three subsections according to the data used by researchers: jokes, humorous TV genres and spontaneous conversations.

*Subsection 2.1. Jokes* centres around this most studied genre and opens with the paper “Lawyers, great lawyers and liars: The metapragmatics of lying in lawyer jokes” by Miguel Ángel Campos. Since lawyer jokes have a number of specific structural and topical features, their description needs to be based on both pragmatic and cognitive theories. The author sets out to convince us that understanding of lawyer jokes is often based on the metapragmatic awareness which, in turn, is based on our knowledge of existing stereotypes on lawyers according to which they are immoral and money-hungry. It is the social stereotype that makes the lawyer jokes predictable and, therefore, successful.

Isabel Balteiro’s paper “A look at metalinguistic jokes based on intentional morphological reanalysis” presents a study of metalinguistic morphological mechanisms which allow speakers to manipulate the morphological structure of words to create humorous effect. Such manipulations include intentional morphological misinterpretations, reanalysis, and division of morphologically indivisible words. Balteiro suggests that this kind of verbal behaviour is “purely intentional, perfectly calculated and not arbitrary at all” (p. 138). The research also shows that intentional distortion of morpheme boundaries or graphic forms of words for humorous purposes is often accompanied by contextual cues which function as signals of the humorous mode of discourse.

*Subsection 2.2. TV genres* opens with Iulia Grosman’s paper “How do French humorists adapt across situations? A corpus study of their prosodic and (dis)fluency profiles”. The aim of this study is to analyse prosodic and discursive features that fall into the category of (dis)fluencies

(e.g. pauses, repetitions, substitutions, false-starts, discourse markers) of eight French humorists' speech variations presented in theatre and radio sketches, radio and face-to-face interviews. Unlike other contributors to the volume, Grosman focuses on humour performance (rather than on humour competence) and claims that individual phonostyles, i.e., typified acoustic images of humorists, are pragmatically motivated by context. By measuring temporal and intonative variation and accentual density the author describes phonological features characteristic of theatre sketches, radio sketches, radio interviews and spontaneous face-to-face situations, and reveals the existence of phonostyles across four situations. The analysis of (dis)fluencies, however, does not confirm the hypothesis of the correspondence between context and register and style variation in humorous discourse.

In his paper "Truthiness and Consequences. A cognitive pragmatic analysis of Stephen Colbert's satirical strategies and effects", Craig O. Stewart explores Stephen Colbert's speech delivered at the White House Correspondent's Dinner in 2006. The analysis of this sample of risky but highly successful political satire is based on Simpson's (2003) cognitive pragmatic model of satire and Bell's (1991) theory of audience and referee design. Stewart argues that satire is not a type of discourse; rather, it is a discursive effect. Understanding satire is a complex cognitive procedure which involves "appropriate background knowledge of intertextual references and inferences based intravenously cues and strategies" (p. 187).

*Subsection 2.3. Conversation.* The third subsection of Part 2 includes papers which analyse humour in spontaneous conversations. The authors take a performance-based stance to demonstrate the interrelatedness of humour with social and psychological factors.

M. Belén Alvarado-Ortega adopts the pragmatic perspective developed in Verschueren (1999) in her paper "Variability, adaptability and negotiability in conversational humour: A matter of gender". The aim of the study is to reveal conversational humour strategies and their gender features. The research is based on the *Corpus of Colloquial Conversations* and utilises the concepts of negotiability, adaptability and variability for profiling humour strategies as well as gender-specific humour markers and indicators used in spontaneous conversations. The results of the analysis prove that in spontaneous humorous discourse men and women demonstrate different patterns of negotiability and variability. According to Alvarado-Ortega, conversational strategies tend to be gender-specific mainly because males and females negotiate humorous mode "according to whether it affects the interlocutors' image or not" (p. 210): while women negotiate use of humour without threatening the interlocutor's image, men choose to attack the image of a certain dialogue participant. As a result, dialogues with failed humour are more frequent in male communication.

Béatrice Priego-Valverde analyses teasing (or *linguistic pinning*) as a form of conversational humour in her paper "Teasing in casual conversations: An opportunistic discursive strategy". Being an ambivalent strategy of managing social relations, linguistic pinning, i.e. "a hetero verbatim repetition of a supposed inappropriate word or expression in order to tease its producer" (p. 230) can be a sign of aggression or a marker of close social bonds between the interlocutors. According to the author, the effect produced by linguistic pinning in interaction largely depends on the hearer's reaction. The target's refusal of the tease can be explained by his / her unwillingness to accept the playful mode of interaction which the teaser tries to introduce without prior negotiation.

Elisa Gironzetti, Salvatore Attardo & Lucy Pickering study connections between gaze patterns, smiling and conversational humour in their paper "Smiling, gaze, and humour in conversation: A pilot study". The research results presented in the paper constitute a part of a larger project on humour and conversation. By using qualitative and quantitative research methods, the authors explore the data of a multimodal corpus of interactions of speakers of

English, Spanish and Chinese. Their findings confirm the hypothesis that gaze patterns, verbal humour and smiling are interrelated in humorous discourse.

### Part 3: *Metapragmatic practices within the acquisition of humour*

The third part comprises two papers which focus on the developmental dimension of the metapragmatic competence in humorous discourse.

The focus of Elena Hoicka's paper "Understanding of humorous intentions: A developmental approach" is on young children's humour appreciation and understanding of humorous intentions. The author presents an overview of a number of studies which show that humorous intention can be understood by children as young as 2 years old, and parental scaffolding plays an important role in learning to distinguish between humour and literal speech. Hoicka also claims that understanding other forms of non-literal communication (e.g. irony or metaphors) comes later, since these forms are cognitively and socially more complex.

Larissa Timofeeva-Timofeev's paper "Children using phraseology for humorous purposes: The case of 9-to-10-year-olds" presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 148 children's narratives in which phraseological units are used with the intention of creating humour. The findings show that the development of a metapragmatic competence at the age of 9 and 10 can be described as "a gradual shift from epipragmatic to metapragmatic verbal performance" (p. 286).

### *Overall evaluation*

Overall, the book effectively demonstrates the role of metapragmatic awareness in creating and processing humour. The mix of pragmatic and cognitive methods of analysis is perhaps one of its strongest features: it offers a new perspective for future humour research by enriching existing theories of humour (e.g. the GTVH) with new components, thus making them more applicable to the analysis of specific humorous genres. Every chapter is accompanied by a substantial reference section, which is another strong point of the volume.

Although the book does a great job in presenting humour as a metapragmatic activity, there are some minor inconsistencies and shortcomings. For example, in Part 1, the knowledge resources proposed within the GTVH are reviewed in detail in every paper, which is repetitive.

The book is devoted to the analysis of predominantly intentional, preplanned humour which is created and processed because language speakers possess metalinguistic or, more precisely, metapragmatic ability. The aim of modelling this ability is successively achieved in the majority of contributions. However, not all papers explicitly describe humour as a metapragmatic linguistic activity. For instance, the volume includes three papers devoted to the analysis of spontaneous humour in the *Conversations* subsection of Part 2. None of these papers addresses the issue of metalinguistic nature of conversational humour. Consequently, the question arises: can spontaneous humour also be treated as an intended verbal activity based on our metapragmatic ability?

To sum up, the volume offers a comprehensive perspective on humour as a type of verbal activity largely based on our metapragmatic ability. Most chapters establish clear connections with concepts and theories traditionally developed in the field of humour research. The authors also emphasise the necessity to take into account the cognitive nature of this ability, and highlight the idea that intentional humour should be treated as the ability to monitor one's own verbal behaviour. Thus, the book provides a good opportunity for those interested in studying humour as a planned verbal activity to obtain a comprehensive reading on cognitive and pragmatic analysis of humour production and perception.

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