

Workshop

Conversational humour in French and other languages: a comparative approach

Monday 19th October 2015

8:30-17h

[Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3](#)

Salle Charles Camproux
[Bâtiment U \(Maison des Etudiants\)](#)

8:30-9h	Coffee / registration Salle Charles Camproux
9 -9:30h	Opening address: Prof. Agnès Steuckardt (Director Praxiling) Welcome : Prof. Christine Béal (Montpellier 3), Prof. Véronique Traverso (Lyon 2), Dr Kerry Mullan (RMIT)
9:30-10:30h	Plenary: Prof. Cliff Goddard (Griffith University) <i>Ethnopragmatics and the challenge of "conversational humour" research across languages, cultures and contexts</i>
10:30-11h	Coffee
11-11:30h	Prof. Catherine Evans Davies (University of Alabama) <i>Jokey Americans: An intracultural and crosscultural perspective</i>
11:30-12h	Assoc. Prof. Michael Haugh (Griffith University) (remote presentation) <i>Teasing and (non-)seriousness in initial interactions amongst American and Australian speakers of English</i>
12-12:30h	Assoc. Prof. Carsten Levisen (Roskilde University) <i>Danish Ways of Laughing: Sort humor 'black humour' in intercultural perspective</i>
12:30-14:30h	Lunch : Trinque Fougasse, 1581 Route de Mende
14:30-15h	Dr Georgina Heydon (RMIT University) (remote presentation) <i>Laughing at your own jokes: the use of humour in police interviews</i>
15-15:30h	Prof. Christine Béal (Montpellier 3), Prof. Véronique Traverso (Lyon 2), Dr Kerry Mullan (RMIT) <i>Conversational humour in French and Australian English: What makes an utterance funny?</i>
15:30-15:45h	Refreshments
15:45-16:15h	Assoc. Prof. Christelle Dodane (Montpellier 3), Prof. Alessandra Del Ré (UNESP-FCLAr, Brazil), Prof. Aliyah Morgenstern (Sorbonne Paris 3), Prof. Alessandra Jacqueline Vieira (IFSP/São, Roque/Brazil), Assoc. Prof. Marie Leroy-Collombel (Université Paris Descartes) <i>Humor, discourse and culture in children's language: French and Portuguese</i>
16:15-16:45h	Assoc. Prof. Carsten Levisen (Roskilde University) <i>"Trickery humour" in Bislama A postcolonial semantic study of the speech act verb giaman</i>
16:45-17h	Concluding remarks : Dr Béatrice Priego-Valverde (Université Aix-Marseille)

Abstracts and bios

Prof. Cliff Goddard (Griffith University, Australia)

Plenary: Ethnopragmatics and the challenge of "conversational humour" research across languages, cultures and contexts.

Abstract

This paper argues that many of the challenges of categorising, analysing and understanding conversational humour in ethnolinguistic contexts can be met using the framework known as ethnopragmatics (Goddard ed, 2006, 2015; cf. Levisen 2012; Peeters ed. 2015). Grounded in a decades-long program of cross-linguistic semantic research (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014), the ethnopragmatic approach enables us to overcome the Anglocentric bias (Wierzbicka 2014) inherent in mainstream approaches, including much interactional pragmatics, which build their theoretical vocabulary from English-specific materials—terms like 'amusing', 'serious', 'joking', 'teasing', and 'mock'—oblivious or indifferent to the fact that these terms and the concepts behind them are not precisely cross-translatable even into other European languages, let alone into many other languages of the world. At the same time, the ethnopragmatic approach enables the analyst to explicate local words and phrases in fine detail, thus giving access to culturally situated understandings of what participants are doing in their moments of "conversational humour". The paper ranges widely across semantic and pragmatic issues, demonstrating the ethnopragmatic techniques of semantic explication and cultural scripts. Aside from selective comparisons with French and German, the paper draws extensively on contrastive examples from Australia and the USA, showing that even Anglo interactions can and should be viewed ethnopragmatically.

References

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- Goddard, Cliff and Wierzbicka, Anna. 2014. *Words and Meanings. Lexical Semantics Across Domains, Languages and Cultures*. Oxford: OUP.
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Bio

Cliff Goddard's research lies at the intersection of language, meaning, and culture. He has published widely in theoretical and descriptive semantics, intercultural pragmatics, language description and typology, and Australian English. Goddard works primarily in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to the study of meaning in language and in its pragmatic "sister theory", known as ethnopragmatics. He has published many studies in collaboration with Anna Wierzbicka, the originator of the NSM approach. He has authored two textbooks, both with Oxford University Press.

Prof. Catherine Evans Davies (University of Alabama, US)

Jokey Americans: An intracultural and crosscultural perspective

Abstract

Taking as a point of departure that the notion of sense of humour is best understood as it is enacted in conversation, this presentation will focus on conversational data on joking in American culture. Using Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness framework as a theoretical grounding to show how joking fits into the solidarity (in B&L terms, "positive") politeness that is favoured by Americans, this presentation will lead participants through three examples of prototypical American joking styles, starting with the ritual insult style that is a reflex of a pattern that has been documented among young men in many cultures. After considering examples of a "collaborative play" style and an empathy-based style, the presentation will shift to analysis of a crosscultural "joking" interaction which can be understood only against the background of an understanding of typical American joking styles.

Bio

Catherine Evans Davies is Professor of Linguistics in the Department of English at the University of Alabama in the southern United States. She typically teaches a graduate introduction to linguistics and an undergraduate/graduate course on variation in American English. She is an interactional sociolinguist who has published articles specifically on humour as well as on other topics such as cross-cultural interaction, media language, narrative, gender and language, and Southern American discourse, in which humour often emerges as significant. She is co-editor of *English and Ethnicity* (2006) and *Language Variety in the South: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (2015).

Assoc. Prof. Michael Haugh (Griffith University, Australia)

Teasing and (non-)seriousness in initial interactions amongst American and Australian speakers of English (remote presentation)

Abstract

The diverse range of practices referred to by native terms such as teasing in English or linked to culturally-shaped notions such as non-seriousness have arguably only been addressed in passing from an emic, cultural insider's perspective in research to date. The aim in this paper is to start to redress this relative neglect by working towards an emically-informed account of non-serious teasing in different varieties of English that offers a path for subsequent analyses of 'teasing'-like practices amongst speakers of different (varieties of) languages and cultures. Drawing from a combination of methods and analytical frameworks from interactional pragmatics and cultural discourse analysis, "acts" of teasing are examined as they are accomplished in a particular "style", namely, non-serious talk, in a particular type of locally situated "event", namely, interactions amongst American and Australian speakers of English in which they are getting acquainted. In the course of this analysis it is argued that there is a nuanced inferential substrate underpinning jocular forms of teasing that is immanent to the style of non-serious talk within episodes of getting acquainted from an emic, insider's perspective. In particular, through an analysis of expressions of the form "[just/only] [joking/kidding]" by which participants (ostensibly) disavow a serious stance, it is suggested that non-seriousness may itself be invoked as both an interpretive and evaluative resource in social interaction. In other words, claims to non-serious intent are not only sequentially implicative, but morally implicative as well. The moral work accomplished through claims to non-serious intent include pre-empting or blocking the taking of offence to the tease, acknowledging a possible impropriety, sanctioning a recipient for taking things too seriously, and disputing the appositeness of the claim to non-serious intent itself. The extent to which non-seriousness is culturally shaped is then briefly considered through examining

variability in evaluations of jocular forms of teasing amongst American and Australian speakers of English. The paper concludes by suggesting that teasing that is construed as non-serious or jocular should be analysed not only as a locally situated interactional achievement, but as a socioculturally-shaped practice as well. The implications for analysing “teasing”-like practices in other languages and cultures are then briefly considered.

Bio

Michael Haugh is an Associate Professor in Linguistics and International English at Griffith University, Brisbane. His research interests include pragmatics, intercultural communication and conversation analysis, with a focus to date on analysing key pragmatic phenomena such as face, (im)politeness, teasing, intention and implicature in interpersonal interactions across different languages, in particular, English, (Mandarin) Chinese and Japanese. He is co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (Elsevier), and his recent books include *Im/Politeness Implicatures* (2015, Mouton de Gruyter), *Pragmatics and the English Language* (2014, Palgrave Macmillan, with Jonathan Culpeper), and *Understanding Politeness* (2013, Cambridge University Press, with Dániel Z. Kádár).

Assoc. Prof. Carsten Levisen (Roskilde University, Denmark)

Danish Ways of Laughing: *Sort humor* ‘black humour’ in intercultural perspective

Abstract

Sort humor (lit. “black humour”) is king in Denmark. It stands for a highly culturally-specific laughing and speaking style, reflective of Danish values, norms and ideas. As a false friend of the English black humour concept, *sort humor* is largely misunderstood in the Anglo-International discourses. *Sort humor* is not a “morbid” humour style or an absurd, humorous way of talking about grave situations, such as the English black humour. Rather, *sort humor* is a kind of “jocular nonsense-making”, which serves as an in-group ethnopragmatic code. The aim of my paper is to shed light on the meaning and practice of *sort humor* – one of the most “murky” areas of Danish ethnopragmatics. A contrastive analysis with black humour in English is provided, along with an intercultural analysis of “encounters” with *sort humor* in intercultural communication. The cultural scripts method developed by Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard is applied to articulate the shared understandings of the *sort humor* laughing/speaking style and its cultural ramifications.

Bio

Carsten Levisen is Associate Professor at Roskilde University, Denmark. He teaches semantics, pragmatics, and ethnolinguistics at the Department of Communication and Identity. He is the author of *Cultural Semantics and Social Cognition* (2012), and several publications on language and cultural values, emotions, cognition, sociality, personhood, speech acts, and the human body. He has worked with words and meanings in a variety of contexts: Scandinavia, Urban Europe, Australia, Melanesia, and the Caribbean. In humour studies, his interests lie mainly in the ethnopragmatics of laughing, fine-grained semantic analysis of humorous speech events, ethnotypologies of humour in language, and interjections of laughter.

Dr Georgina Heydon (RMIT University, Australia)

Laughing at your own jokes: the use of humour in police interviews (remote presentation)

Abstract

Rapport-building is widely recognised as an important strategy in eliciting detailed narratives from interviewees in police evidentiary interviews with witnesses and suspects. The strategies used to build rapport are equally important in multi-lingual interviews that are mediated by an interpreter, and yet little research has investigated the impact of an interpreter on this aspect of police interactions. The telling of a joke represents a conversational routine that will obligate participants in an interaction to respond in culturally specified ways. This paper first explores the particular implications of joke telling in the serious context of monolingual police evidentiary interviewing. Drawing on recorded police interview data, it finds that the interactional obligations placed on participants by humour make it a powerful resource both for suspects and for police interviewers. However, this research finds that the conventions of joke-telling in ordinary conversation, such as 'being a good audience' are often ignored by police as joke recipients in favour of interactional displays of power, leaving joke tellers to 'laugh at their own jokes'. This suggests that humour is not used as a conventional rapport-building tool in monolingual interviews, especially by police officers. The second part of this paper applies these findings to the context of multi-lingual, interpreter-mediated police interviews. Here, we consider how the turn-taking structures imposed by the interpreter mediation might affect attempts by participants to include joke-telling routines in their rapport building or other discursive strategies. Importantly, the turn-by-turn analysis of jokes in police interviews provides another angle from which to view the negotiation of discursive power between participants, and the institutional consequences of the hostility that appears to underlie such interactions.

Bio

Georgina Heydon is an internationally recognised expert in the field of police investigative interviewing, and her book 'The Language of Police Interviewing: A Critical Analysis' is being translated and published in Chinese next year by Palgrave Macmillan. She has delivered training in interviewing, credibility assessment and strategic questioning to more than twenty police and judicial colleges from Melbourne to Maputo. Dr Heydon is currently Vice President of the International Association of Forensic Linguists and a member of the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group. Together with colleagues in the Translating and Interpreting discipline at RMIT University, where she is Senior Lecturer, Dr Heydon is developing a research and training specialisation in legal interpreting, bringing her expertise in best practice interviewing to the study of interpreter performance in legal settings.

Prof. Christine Béal (Montpellier 3), Prof. Véronique Traverso (Lyon 2) and Dr Kerry Mullan (RMIT University, Australia)

Conversational humour in French and Australian English: What makes an utterance funny?

Abstract

This study on conversational humour takes place within the framework of a larger project on social interaction in French and Australian English. Two comparable corpora of naturally occurring conversations during social visits among friends in France and Australia were analysed to investigate how speakers use humour spontaneously in the course of social visits in the two cultures. The data consist of audio recordings of twelve visits (with sixteen speakers) in the Australian corpus and fourteen visits (with eleven speakers) in the French corpus. The corpora were recorded in two urban environments (Melbourne and Lyon), each of

them mostly in the same location, i.e. the host's house. Approximately five hours of conversation were recorded in each corpus.

As is also shown elsewhere (Dynel 2011), we found that traditional folk categories of humour such as jokes, anecdotes, wordplay or teasing are not readily suited to a comparative cross-cultural discourse-based analysis of humour. This is because humour is a complex area where many different aspects come into play simultaneously, and where the difficulty lies in separating these aspects. This led us to revisit the analysis of conversational humour using a cross-cultural and interactional approach, and to show that there are four dimensions involved concurrently:

1. The speaker/target/recipient interplay
2. The language dimension: linguistic mechanisms and/or discursive strategies used by speakers
3. The different pragmatic functions
4. The interactional dimension

Our earlier research focussed on the pragmatic and interactional dimensions, showing that humour plays an important part in negotiating socially sensitive moments in interaction, such as opening rituals (Béal and Traverso 2010) or various face-threats (Béal and Mullan 2013). We also showed that Australians showed a marked preference for recipient-oriented humour in our corpus whereas the French speakers preferred to reinforce complicity at the expense of an absent third party via third-party oriented humour.

In this paper we concentrate on the linguistic devices and discursive strategies used by speakers, in other words, on the mechanisms that make a particular utterance or exchange a humorous one. We will show that, although a number of similarities can be pointed out, there are also marked differences in terms of preferential choices between French and Australian speakers. In particular, French speakers display a greater tendency to play with the language per se. We will also show how the different forms of humour combine with the other dimensions in our model, such as the target, the pragmatic function and the dynamic of the interaction over several turns.

Links to the participants' respective underlying ethos and cultural values will also be explored, in particular the importance for Australians of not taking oneself too seriously (Goddard 2009) and the need in French culture to appear sharp and witty.

References

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- Goddard, C. 2009. Not taking yourself too seriously in Australian English: Semantic explications, cultural scripts, corpus evidence. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6, 1, 29-53.

Bios

Christine Béal is Professor of Linguistics at Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3 and a member of Praxiling, a CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) Research Lab specialising in linguistics and communication. She currently teaches French linguistics, interactional linguistics and cross-cultural pragmatics. Her work is based on naturally occurring data (spontaneous talk between work colleagues, meetings, job interviews, among friends) in French and English. She has focussed on terms of address, speech acts, politeness, rituals and routines, turn-taking and conversational humour.

Kerry Mullan is Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of French Studies at RMIT University and a member of the Globalism Research Centre. She teaches French as a Foreign Language and a course in introductory

sociolinguistics. Her main research interests are cross-cultural communication and differing interactional styles - particularly those of French and Australian English speakers. She also researches in the areas of intercultural pragmatics, discourse analysis and language teaching. She is currently investigating humour in French and Australian English social interaction.

Véronique Traverso is Director of Research at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research), in the ICAR Lab (ICAR, "Interaction Corpora, Apprenticeship Representations"), dedicated to the study of spoken interaction. She teaches conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and corpora of Spoken French at the University Lumière Lyon 2. Her work is grounded in the analysis of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction in French and/or Arabic, including verbal, prosodic and gestural aspects used by participants in a variety of settings: ordinary conversation during social visits and talk at work.

Assoc. Prof. Christelle Dodane (Montpellier 3), Prof. Alessandra Del Ré (UNESP-FCLAr, Brazil), Prof. Aliyah Morgenstern (Sorbonne Paris 3), Prof. Alessandra Jacqueline Vieira (IFSP/São, Roque/Brazil) and Assoc. Prof. Marie Leroy-Collombel (Université Paris Descartes)

Humour, discourse and culture in children's language: French and Portuguese

Abstract

Humour plays an important role in children's socialization as it reflects the norms and values of the community in which it is grounded. Indeed, children must learn what can or cannot make people laugh according to context: cross-cultural as well as individual differences are thus fundamental. It is tightly linked to social, linguistic and interactional practices transmitted by the parents and internalised (Vygotsky, 1978) by the children, as they grow older. It is therefore important to take cultural norms into account in the analysis of children's production of humour, and to compare them across languages and cultures. In order to understand how children learn to recognise and use humour in their own cultural environment, we have chosen to study productions in two different languages and cultures: French and Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Both cultures use humour for social or political critic, but Brazilians seems to use more auto-derision and diminutives ("bonitinho" instead of "bonito"), which allow them to reduce the huge social distances between the different social classes. This is a legacy from the days of slavery according to Saliba (2002). Many of these aspects have been studied in adults' conversational humour by Possenti (1991, 1998 etc.) in Brazil, by Béal & Mullan (2013) in Australia and in France, and should be analysed in children's language too.

As adults transmit their socialising practices in their daily spontaneous exchanges with their children, it is thus essential to study humour in day-by-day interactions. Thus, we will use two longitudinal follow-ups of spontaneous interactions as the main source for our coding and analyses of humour: one (A.) in French from the project COLAJE (Morgenstern & Parrisé, 2012) and the other (G.) in BP from the project NALingua, both from 24-42 months to examine whether children combine prosody, facial expressions and gestures with their first productions of humour. Children have been filmed from 0 to 7 at home one hour a month, with their family. They all belong to middle-class families and the parents are all college educated. The videos are entirely transcribed in CHAT format and the transcriptions are lined up alongside the videos with the help of CLAN software. We identified four parameters that need to be co-present to identify humour in conversation:

- 1) Intentionality of the speaker who produced humour.
- 2) Marks of amusement on the part of the interlocutor (laughing, smiling, verbal or gestural reaction).
- 3) Complicity between the conversational partners.
- 4) A favourable context in which the children become aware of some discrepancy or incongruity.

First results have shown that adults take the initiative in sequences containing humour and progressively, children will be the initiator. Before children can display mastery of language through humour, children can display mastery of communication through laughter, facial expressions and body movements. A natural continuity between visual cues, prosodic cues and humour can therefore be traced. From a cultural point of view, the Brazilian child seems to participate in a lot of situations in which, with his father, they both play on words (Priego-Valverde 2003; Charaudeau 2006). Indeed, Brazilian parents tend to play more with words and sounds than French parents. Besides, for both sets of children, beyond the cultural differences, the different parameters required for humour (including intentionality) are set up from the age of 3 years, which is very precocious.

Since very little is known about the roots and development of verbal humour in very young children and about its regulatory functions in social interactions, this research is original and innovative.

References

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Bios

Christelle Dodane is Associate Professor at Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3 and a member of Praxiling, a CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) Research Lab specialising in linguistics and communication. She currently teaches phonetics and language acquisition. Her main research interests are prosody, language acquisition, children's laughter and humour. Her work is based on longitudinal studies recording natural interactions between children and their parents in French and in Brazilian Portuguese.

Alessandra del Ré is currently Professor at the University State of Sao Paulo, in Araraquara (UNESP-FCLAr) where she teaches linguistics and language acquisition. She coordinates a research group in Brazil called NALingua (CNPq) and supervises several research projects on monolingual and bilingual children's communication and linguistic development. She has published books and papers on language acquisition, mainly about humour in children's speech, using a discursive-dialogical perspective in spontaneous longitudinal data.

Aliyah Morgenstern is currently Professor at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3 where she teaches English linguistics and language acquisition. She supervises several research projects on children's communication and linguistic development financed by different agencies. She has published books and papers on language acquisition using socio-pragmatic, constructionist and functionalist perspectives with multimodal approaches to spontaneous longitudinal data.

Alessandra Jacqueline Vieira is Associate Professor at IFSP/São Roque/Brazil, where she teaches Portuguese. She works with language acquisition in NALingua research group from CNPq, at Unesp/Araraquara/Brazil, where she studied for her doctorate. Her main research interests are language acquisition, argumentation,

explanation and humour in child speech. Currently, she works with Brazilian and French children to investigate the aspects about argumentation and humour in their speech.

Marie Leroy-Collombel (Université Paris Descartes - CNRS MoDyCo) is Associate Professor at the University Paris Descartes where she teaches linguistics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition and pathology. Her research work is based on spontaneous longitudinal data of interactions between children and parents, comparing normal and pathological development. She is especially interested in the role of parental input and feedbacks in the language acquisition process.

Assoc. Prof. Carsten Levisen (Roskilde University)

“Trickery humour” in Bislama A postcolonial semantic study of the speech act verb *giaman*

Abstract:

Bislama is a postcolonial language born out of Melanesian-European language/culture contact. Urban contemporary Bislama consists of more than 90% English words, but underneath the mainly English lexical surface, there is a rich neo-Melanesian universe of meaning, which makes Bislama a fertile ground for postcolonial studies in cultural semantics and pragmatics – including studies in the practices and styles of laughing. In today’s urban Melanesia, it is commonly asserted that *waetman* ‘whites’ and *blakman* ‘blacks’ have different styles of laughing, and that these differences cause problems in intercultural/interethnic communication. Based on recent semantic and ethnolinguistic fieldwork in Port Vila, Vanuatu (2013-2015), this paper explores the experienced reality of such claims, by digging into a central speech act in Bislama, the verb *giaman* ‘to fib, fool, trick,’ a word with origin in the colonial British word *gammon* ‘to hoax, deceive, humbug’. *Giaman* seems to hold the key to understanding Melanesian cultural scripts for laughing and the positive values behind laughing practices. Using the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) and its system of presentation, the paper seeks to tease out the meaning of *giaman*. The postcolonial semantic approach to “laughing” helps us to relativize and rethink current Europe-focused theories of “humour”, and at the same time, the study of Bislama laughing practices expands our understanding of the diversity of the social functions of laughter across languages, cultures, and world areas.

Dr Béatrice Priego-Valverde (Université Aix-Marseille)

Concluding remarks

Bio

Béatrice Priego-Valverde is Lecturer at Aix-Marseille Université (Linguistics Department) and at the Laboratoire Parole et Langage, CNRS, Aix en Provence, France. She teaches interactional linguistics and sociolinguistics. Basing her research on naturally occurring data (everyday conversations among close acquaintances – friends or coworkers), she studies humour in conversations with an interactional approach. Trying to delimit conversational humor as a specific form of humour (which includes teasing and self-deprecating humour), she focuses her analyses on the ways humour is produced by the speaker and on the reactions it triggers, both positive and negative.