
Dimensions of Humor
Explorations in Linguistics, Literature,
Cultural Studies and Translation

CARMEN VALERO-GARCÉS, ED.

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CARMEN VALERO-GARCÉS is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Alcalá, Madrid (Spain), Director of the Post Graduate and Undergraduate Program on Public Service Interpreting and Translation since 2000. Being a linguist and a translator, her main interests in humour are connected with topics related to languages and cultures. Her first contact with humour research was a paper she presented in the International Society for Humor Studies Conference in 1996 dealing with the translation of underground comics into Spanish. Since then she's been studying comics from different perspectives. In 2003 she coordinated the I Conference on Humor across Cultures. Graphic designers, immigrants from different countries and researchers on cultural aspects and humor were invited to talk about how people from one country see «the



Other» from different countries in their jokes and cartoons. The result was *Interculturality, Translation, Humor, and Migration* (2003), which has been used as a complementary tool in schools and associations working with immigrants. In 2007 she was one of the coordinators of the annual conference of ISHS, and in 2008 she organised the II Conference on Humor at the University of Alcalá. She has also explored Russian and Romanian humour and contrast British and Spanish Humour. Some of these articles have been published in *Quevedos*, the annual journal of the Fundación General de la Universidad de Alcalá. As a teacher, she is also interested in promoting the use of humour in the classroom - which is not a very easy task as many of you will probably know; and she is a member of ISHS and of Humor-Aula. She is also the author of various articles on humor.

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VICENTE LÓPEZ FOLGADO is a Senior Lecturer in Translation and Interpretation at the University of Córdoba, Spain, and former director of that Department. He has published several articles in philological and linguistic journals on discourse pragmatics and translation. His interest in inter-cultural humour started in his courses in Spanish for foreign students (UIMP, Santander Summer



Courses) and in English-Spanish translation (Cádiz, Ciudad Real, Cuenca, Valencia and Valladolid). His co-authored title *Translation in Action* (1999) makes of humour a necessary ingredient. In some of his papers, like «The pragmatics of utterance interpretation: the case of linguistic *puns*», he approached the inter-linguistic ambiguity as a source of humour. At present, he is supervising a thesis on the language of comic (*Ghost World*) and is engaged in a project on humour and politics.

ISABEL NEGRO ALOUSQUE has been an assistant teacher at the Complutense University in Madrid for twelve years. She is graduated in English and French Philology and has a PhD in English Philology. She has taken part in two research projects financed by the Complutense University. She has collaborated in writing two books on business English and has published several articles in journals of linguistics (*CIF, Miscelánea, Atlantis, Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas*). She has also presented many papers in different conferences organized by a number of linguistic associations (AEDEAN, AESLA, AELCO, CRAL, ACLES). Her research fields are cognitive semantics, cultural issues in translation and lexicology.

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DIANA PIFANO attended the University of Ottawa, where she received her MA (2004) and PhD (2008). In the summer of 2008, she joined the faculty at the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Dalhousie University, where she teaches courses in Spanish language and culture, as well as Latin American Literature. Her research in the field of humour in Hispanic literature began with an exploration of the role of humor in *Los jefes*, a collection of short stories by Mario Vargas Llosa. Her doctoral dissertation explores the relationship between humour and literature in the short stories of Venezuelan author Igor Delgado Senior, setting forth a methodology for integrating the study of humour to the orthodox framework of literary analysis through the exploration of both the humorous elements within the narrative (jokes, puns, rhymes), as well as, the pragmatic aspects of the narrative as they serve the humorous intent of the story. Her most recent research project explores graphic humor, specifically, the editorial cartoons of Venezuelan humorist Rayma Supriani. This study contrasts the two main branches of the author's work—the political cartoons published daily in a national newspaper and the cartoons published weekly in women's magazine—in order to explore the formal aspects of each discourse, paying close attention to the intended readers of these texts and their required competence. The aim of this study is to describe how gender differences are articulated in these humorous discourses.



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PREFACE

ENGLISH AS A CONTACT LANGUAGE.

HUMOR AS A NECESSARY FEATURE OF TRANSLATION

An old riddle defines a *polyglot* as someone who speaks many languages, a *bilingual* person as someone who speaks two languages, and a *monolingual* as an American. The extent to which native speakers of English, especially Americans, deserve the reputation of not learning other languages relates to the fact that historically English speakers have been physically separated from having intimate contact with speakers of other languages. This separation was first caused by something as small as the English Channel, but later by oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges.

That today this anthology (*Dimensions of Humour: Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and Translation*) is being written in English shows how physical barriers are no longer an impediment to communication. Today English is spoken, either as a native or a learned language by about half of the people in the world –some two billion speakers. The model that speakers used to aspire to was either Received Standard British or Broadcast American, but now we have Australian English and Indian English, along with such interlanguages as Spanglish, Deutschlish, Franglish («la Langue du Coca Cola»), Japlish, Chinglish, and Russlish.

While English speakers may not have been very good about learning other languages, we have always borrowed the «best» metaphors from other speakers. The English word *walrus*, comes from Germanic *whale horse*, while *porpoise*, and *puny* come from the French *porc poisson* (pig fish), and *puis né* (later born) respectively. My grandchildren love the humour shown in such Italian food metaphors as *linguini* meaning «tongues»; *vermicelli* meaning «worms», and *tortellini* meaning «turtles». They also appreciate knowing that Dutch *poppycock* means «soft dung», Yiddish *schmaltz* means «chicken fat», and *schnoz* means «nose».



In Spanglish, *shopping*, *chilling*, *hanging out* and *muggers* have become *chopping*, *chileando*, *jangear*, and *joldoperos* («holdup specialists»). This humour is intentional, but unintentional humour is also inevitable, as when in the 1960s, U. S. President John F. Kennedy was visiting Germany and said «Ich bin ein Berliner» («I am a jelly donut») when he meant to say «Ich bin Berliner» («I am a Berliner»). If he had been in a different German city he could have appropriately said, «Ich bin Hamburger», «Ich bin Frankfurter», or even «Ich bin Wiener».

Some thirty years ago, I began studying humour in my linguistics classes, not just because it was fun, but because I had observed that humour is one of the last areas to be mastered when students learn a new language. And since humour always has to involve some kind of a surprise –something different and unexpected– I’ve come to appreciate the challenge of understanding and explaining the linguistic underpinnings of what makes readers and listeners smile.

This is why I am so happy to see twenty talented scholars putting forth their best efforts to work with the wide range of humour subjects represented in these essays, which I am eager to share with my own students. I am hoping they will help my students understand why I so often encourage them to «Be bold!». Rather than being afraid to speak, I want students to enjoy experimenting with language. I tell them that when they make mistakes, they can always use humour to recover. It is a valuable social bonding mechanism and an effective tool in learning both languages and cultures. It is wonderful to have a book which so clearly makes these points.

DON L. F. NILSEN
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

DIMENSIONS OF HUMOR.

AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE HUMOR IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

The book *Dimensions of Humor. Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies, and Translation* aims to be a different type of contribution to the growing number of articles that are published in the academic literature on the topic of humor. There are two main reasons behind the publication of this volume. The first of these is to continue the journey along the path towards full recognition of humor as a discipline worthy of academic-level research and assessment. The other reason is to offer a new and integrating perspective of humor, to showcase the wide range of dimensions that humor offers by applying the current trends and theories used in such established areas as literature, Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies.

In reference to our first objective, the conviction held in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s that humor was not serious enough to be studied by prestigious researchers has since been shattered. Only a few papers dedicated specifically to the subject of humor could be found at congresses or in literary or linguistic publications past. Thanks to the work of authors like Attardo, Raskin, Davies, Nilsen, Martin, Ruch, Chiaro or Zanettin, or associations such as the *International Society for Humor Studies* (ISHS) or the *Hispanic Society for Humor Studies*, whose annual conferences are becoming more and more renowned, or the appearance of journals (*Humor*) and special editions (*Translating Humor* 2002; *Humor in Interaction* 2009), the void is being filled. Gaps, however, still remain that need to be addressed, hence the second objective of this paper.

I agree with the authors cited above and with some of the authors that appear in this volume when they say that, traditionally, Literary Criticism and applied conferences have accepted the presence of humor in order to study it as something secondary. Even when humor was awarded «first class» status, it was studied through the



application of subjective criteria or appreciations that lacked theoretical foundation or that were based on momentary impressions. Who has not read or seen articles about the irony or the paradoxes of such-and-such an author? Or about an author's use of language and the resources used which give that author a humorous tone? Or about the humor in such-and-such a novel? The present volume does contain a few articles along these lines; however, as Larkin points out so well, Literary Criticism of humorous texts can be more complicated and offer much more. The same is true of linguistics, which I hope to be able to demonstrate in the following pages, and which is manifested in the contributions that made this book possible.

As for other disciplines such as Translation Studies, the significant increase in the number of papers whose central theme is humor gives us the confidence to say that the idea that humor has trouble crossing over languages and cultures is no longer believed. For years, the absence of academic literature on humor and translation has been felt. In the mid 1990s, a certain awakening started to develop with the reading of doctoral theses, conferences, or the publication of special issues dedicated exclusively to humor by important publishing houses like John Benjamins, Mouton de Gruyter, or St. Jerome under titles that revealed the highly interdisciplinary nature of Humor Studies (HS). Translation Studies and Gender Studies also began this way, sharing with Humor Studies the same moment of initiation in their trajectory as independent areas of study.

Just a look at a few recent titles will be enough to check the variety of disciplinary approaches, genres and types, and a growing interest in projects to test humor appreciation and behaviour.

Following the *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century American Humor* by Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen –nominated Outstanding Academic Book in 2000– publications related to humor could be categorised into the following genres and types: Art and Cartooning, Gallows Humor, Humorous Names, Jokes, Lawyer Humor, Paradox, Parody, Play and Games, Poetry, Political Humor, Puns and Riddles, and Satire.

If we talk about disciplinary approaches, the following are included: Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, Foreign Language, Gender Studies, Linguistics, Psychology, Religion, Music and Dance, Science, Sociology, Theatre, Theory.

Under the heading of Cultural Studies a big selection of studies on specific traditions are available: African Humor, African-American Humor, Australian Humor, British Humor, Canadian Humor, French



Humor, German Humor, Irish Humor, Italian Humor, Latin American Humor, Jewish Humor, Native American Humor, Polish Humor, Russian Humor, Scandinavian Humor, or Spanish Humor. Examples of some of them can be found in this volume.

The applications of humor offer us another possibility to classify Humor Studies and another opportunity to reaffirm its multidisciplinary. Under the heading of «Applications», Nilsen and Nilsen include: Creativity, Coping with Stress, Disability and Special Needs, Adult Education, Child Education, Humor and Aging, Humorous Errors, Laughter, Medicine, Rhetoric, Testing and Evaluation, or Therapy.

It is also significant the interest for developing humor tests. Over the past century, social and behavioural scientists have constructed questionnaires, surveys, tests, and other *measures* to assess humor appreciation and creation as well as humor-related behaviour. Historically, these tests have varied in quality, but in recent years they have become more rigorous in their development and application. The institutional website of the *International Society for Humor Studies* offers a catalogue of humor appreciation tests, and by entering each test, information on authorship and test design along with references to key articles involving the measure are included. A few examples as taken from the ISHS website are:

Example 1:

3 WD Humor Test

Authorship: Willibald Ruch

Category: Humor Appreciation Test

Year: 1983

Measures: Six scales for the funniness and aversiveness of 3 types of humor based on structure (*Incongruity-Resolution* and *Nonsense*) and one type of humor based on content (*Sexual Humor*).

Example 2:

Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ)

Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ)

Authorship: Rod A. Martin & Herbert M. Lefcourt

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1984

Measures: Overall score for the tendency to be amused and laugh easily across situations.



Example 3:

State-Trait-Cheerfulness-Inventory-Trait Part (STCI-T)

Authorship: Ruch, Köhler, & van Thriel

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1996

Measures: Trait cheerfulness, trait seriousness, trait bad mood

Example 4:

Sense of Humor Questionnaire 6 (SHQ-6)

Authorship: Sven Svebak

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1996

Measures: Single sense of humor score

Example 5:

Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS)

Authorship: James A. Thorson and Falvey C. Powell

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1993

Measures: Four scales for Overall Humor Sense, Humor Appreciation, Creativity, and Coping

Example 6:

IPAT Humor Test

Authorship: Donald L. Tollefson and Raymond B. Cattell

Category: Humor Appreciation Test

Year: 1963/1966

Measures: Thirteen humor-related personality traits

In order to finish this introductory section, a sample of some significant titles more clearly related to the topic of this volume are mentioned. These are books published from the mid 1990's onwards, and they have highly contributed to the recognition of Humor Studies as a category on its own right.

Linguistic Theories of Humor by Salvatore Attardo (1994), *The Basic Humor Process* by Robert L. Latta (1999), *Techniques of Satire* by Emil A. Drahtser (1994), *Humorous Texts* by Salvatore Attardo (2001), *The Sense of Humor* Willibald Ruch (1998, 2007), *Good Humor, Bad Taste* by



Giselinde Kuipers (2006), *Jokes and their Relation to Society* by Christie Davies (1998), *Humor Theory* by Igor Krichtafovitch (2008)), *The Psychology of Humor* by Rod A. Martin (2006), *Translating Humor* by Jerome Vandale (2002), *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin (2008), or *Humor in Interaction* by Norris and Chiaro (2009).

All these publications were preceded by the seminal work by Victor Raskin *The Semantic Mechanism of Humor* (1985), and by «Script theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarly ad joke representational model», an also seminal article published in *Humor, International Journal of Humor Research* in 1991 by Attardo and Raskin. A large number of studies that have appeared since then have somehow adopted the broad linguistic framework they presented as the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH).

This volume wants to be another significant contribution to the every day more extensive literature on humor and a proof of the ever growing interest in humor by academics and researchers coming from different disciplines. I hope this helps, first, to stop being considered as «a few scholars who are either courageous enough (or possibly foolhardy enough) to address such a problematical, yet at the same time fascinating area of research», as Delia Chiaro (2009: 475) writes; and secondly to fulfil the main goal of HS as stated by Brône et al (2006: 224): «the goal is to take subjectivity out of the loop and somehow capture that aspect of a humorous meaning that humans themselves cannot always quantify without recourse to ‘it’s funny because it makes me laugh’».

The book is a miscellany of studies and reflects an assortment of diverse forms of humor, trying to go further from personal *ad hoc* reflections and offering a more scientifically oriented approach. The authors represent an international array of scholars from various theoretical perspectives, more specifically concerned with linguistics, literary, translation, cultural and gender aspects of humor. The contributors and topics were chosen to represent current research in the interdisciplinary area of humor studies in the above mentioned areas. The authors are all scholars with interests in both humor studies and adjacent disciplines such as Linguistic Pragmatics, Translation Studies, Discourse Analysis, or Gender Analysis. They analyse data of various sorts, ranging from everyday conversation to talk at work to control experiments to questionnaires, and they employ a variety of approaches, from Conversation Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics, to Literary Criticism, Second Language Acquisition or Sociolinguistics, to name but a few.



As the title indicates the book is divided into four parts: 1 Humor and Linguistics; 2 Humor and Literature; 3 Humor and Cultural Aspects; and 4 Humor and Translation. In each section the articles appear in alphabetical order. However, this classification does not intend to be rigorous and it can be considered one of the many possible ones as overlapping is inevitable between the areas we are trying to cover: Applied Linguistics, Literature, Translation Studies, and Cultural Studies. Many papers use translation within literary, linguistic, or cultural studies as just another element, others make it the central theme of their article. Other times, a literary work or a cultural subject serves as the base on which such-and-such a theory is applied, or a (sub)genre of humor is chosen, such as the use of comics in teaching a second language. Humor, thus, offers many dimensions: it is, if you will, a polyhedral structure with many faces and diverse points of contact which give it coherence and its interdisciplinary character. As for the spelling, we have tried to be respectful with the authors of the articles. The contents of this volume are briefly summarised in the following pages.

In part I –Humor and Linguistics– four articles are included:

Delia Chiaro in «Found in translation: crosstalk as a form of humor», in contrast to traditional comparative studies on humor and translation, examines devices which make use of different languages in contact and in contrast as well as translation itself as a source of humor in examples taken from cinema.

Vicente López Folgado, under the title of ««A musical comedy without music»: P.G. Wodehouse's sense of humor», offers a classical study of humor in literature by concentrating on Wodehouse, the acclaimed storywriter of *The Saturday Evening Post before the World War II*, under the theoretical framework of Cognitive Pragmatics. López discerned three recurrent resources for humor: the overstatement, the understatement and the style shift throughout the series of three stories on Jeeves as a co-leading character. Attention is mostly paid to the role of implicatures with regard to the explicit meaning of sentences, which, needless to say, requires the explanation of contextual assumptions as made both by interacting characters and by the readers.

Isabel Negro, as the title indicates –«A cognitive approach to humor in political cartoons»– offers a cognitive approach to French humor in political cartoons following Raskin's incongruity theories of humor together with the cognitive Blending Theory by Fauconnier and Turner.



Eduardo José Varela's article «Comic strips in the classroom linguistically and pragmatically considered. A first description of cases» offers another specific dimension of humor research: humor in Second Language Acquisition. He explores his concerns as a teacher and analyses the production, processing and interpretation of comic strips as examples in the classroom to account for difficult structures in terms of lexical, syntactic, semantic, register, variant, pragmatic and communicative deviance. Varela considers that the exam of these deviant examples in class together with the exploitation of deviance as a technique to create comic strips can be a useful pedagogical tool to study many communicative, social and cultural aspects that are not usually present in the standard textbooks.

Elizabeth Woodward, in «Socio-political Cartoons: a reflection of cultural values», examines the underlying cultural references in a sample of pocket cartoons published in the British press from 2007 to 2009. She studies the importance of the assumed shared knowledge and experiences for comprehension, and discusses how a seemingly simple format such as the pocket cartoon can reflect the specific cultural values which define a community.

In section 2 –Humor and Literature– the four articles included are the following:

Diana Coromines, in «Intensification, reduction or preservation of irony? Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* and its translation into English», explores translation topics in literature. She analyses the translation of irony as conceived in terms of intensification, reduction or preservation vis-à-vis with the original text by concentrating in Günter Grass's novel *Im Krebsgang* (2002) and its translation into English, as the title indicates.

Teresa González, in «Visual rhythm, iconicity and typography: the ways to humor in E. E. Cummings' poetry» demonstrates how Cummings makes humor and laughter compatible with poetry by studying this poet's particular use of linguistic devices, combined with his use of satire and irony, to act as vehicles of cultural transmission under his own optimistic vision of social changes.

Cristina Larkin, in «How to tackle humor in literary narratives», provides a systematic framework for the criticism of humorous narrative texts by studying, first, the nature of the narrative conventions and techniques used in humorous texts; secondly by analysing how these techniques function to make us laugh or at least smile; and, finally, by questioning the importance of the context,



both literary and extra literary, in leading us to a humorous interpretation of them.

Diana Pifano explores humor in Igor Delgado Senior's short story *Epopeya malandra*, a parody that transposes the historical events of Columbus' initial voyage to the context of a modern Latin American criminal subculture. She explores both the humorous elements within the narrative and the pragmatic aspects of the narrative that allows for a reflection of its social and critical values.

In section 3 - Humor and Cultural Aspects – the articles included are the following:

Raoudha Kammoun, in «Humor and Arabs», presents the results of her research on the importance of jokes in Arab daily life. A questionnaire was submitted to a sample of Tunisians to know their opinion on the Arab sense of humor, humor and gender and on the most widespread and appreciated type of humor. Kammoun also calls the attention to the ways in which Arab humor can contribute to widen the gap between the Arab Islamic world and the Western society.

Ibrahim El-Hussari, in «Foolery as a means to personal safety: the comic apprehension of power relations in Emile Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*», bases his study in the analysis of asymmetric power relations in the highly acclaimed novel *The Pessoptimist* through the study of the main character in a scene of political satire to show the dynamics of power relations between the indigenous community as the underprivileged minority and the immigrant Jewish settlers as the privileged majority in the so-called democratic State of Israel.

Marta Nadales, in «A humorous portrait of the English culture: Julio Camba's London», concentrates in cultural aspects and analyses the unusual humorous portrait of the English culture as seen by the Spanish journalist Julio Camba in *Londres. Impresiones de un español* (1916), a book full of irony and comic comparisons.

Jorge Salavert, in «Pitfalls, impossibilities and small victories in translating Australian humor: A case study on Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* and *Dirt Music*», assuming that Australian humor has some distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other English-language cultural settings, argues that, for a reliable translation of Australian humor to occur, the translator needs to be deeply familiar with Australian society and language. He uses examples from two novels by the Australian novelist Tim Winton and its Spanish translations.

In the last part –Humor and Translation– the articles included are the following:

Chiara Bucaria, in «What's in a title? Transposing black comedy titles for Italian viewers», shows the connection between Humor Studies and Translation Studies by exploring the transposition from English into Italian of film titles from a specific comedy subgenre –dark comedy– to show that in the corpus analysed the common elements found in this type of comedy are paradoxically maintained, and tend to disambiguate the references to death, murder, crimes of various kinds, but this is done in such a caricature-like tone that translations produce a different effect in the readers by foregrounding the comic elements rather than the Margherita Dore, under the title «The audiovisual translation of fixed expressions and idiom-based puns», concentrates on the analyses of the canonical forms of puns and their transfer across language and culture in examples taken from the first series of the TV comedy programme *Friends* and its Italian dubbed version combining the studies by Moon, Veisbergs, Raskin and Attardo at the lexical and cultural level.

Adrian Fuentes' research in «Shopping around: translating humor in audiovisual and multimedia advertising», concentrates on the translation of humor in audiovisual and multimedia advertising by analysing some of the main humor devices used to trigger a cognitive or an affective reaction in the viewer, with a persuasive function in mind. She also pays attention to the cultural and semiotic dimension of humor taking into account the limits and constraints of the different audiovisual formats (television, internet) and modes of translation.

Margherita Ippolito, with «Translating humor in comics for children: a Donald Duck comic strip and its Italian translation», explores the phenomenon of the translation of humor in children's comics by analysing the difficulties implied in the process of translating and the strategies used to put into Italian the *Donald Duck* comic strip.

Heather Vincent, in «Roman satire and the General Theory of Verbal Humor» first examines the applicability of Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor to Latin verse satire and its implications for translation; secondly, she discusses some difficulties posed at various levels of the hierarchy when script-switching (discretely triggered) coincides with multiple diffuse disjunctors such as register shifts; finally she outlines a strategy for the translation of Juvenal's satire.

Cui Ying and Zhao Jing are the authors of «Humor in advertisement translation» which focuses more on the relationships between Cultural Studies and Humor. They analyse some linguistic and cultural



differences in the language of advertising through the translation of word play from English into Chinese.

Summarising, the authors of the different articles all work independently across languages and cultures but all if them include humor as an essential element in their research which explains the title *–Dimensions of Humor*. This fact makes this volume an essential book to read by anyone interested in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and/or Translation, and it also makes a valuable contribution to Humor Studies.

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