30th Australasian Humour Studies Network Annual Conference (AHSN2024)

7-9 February 2024
The University of Queensland, St Lucia campus

Theme

The language of humour

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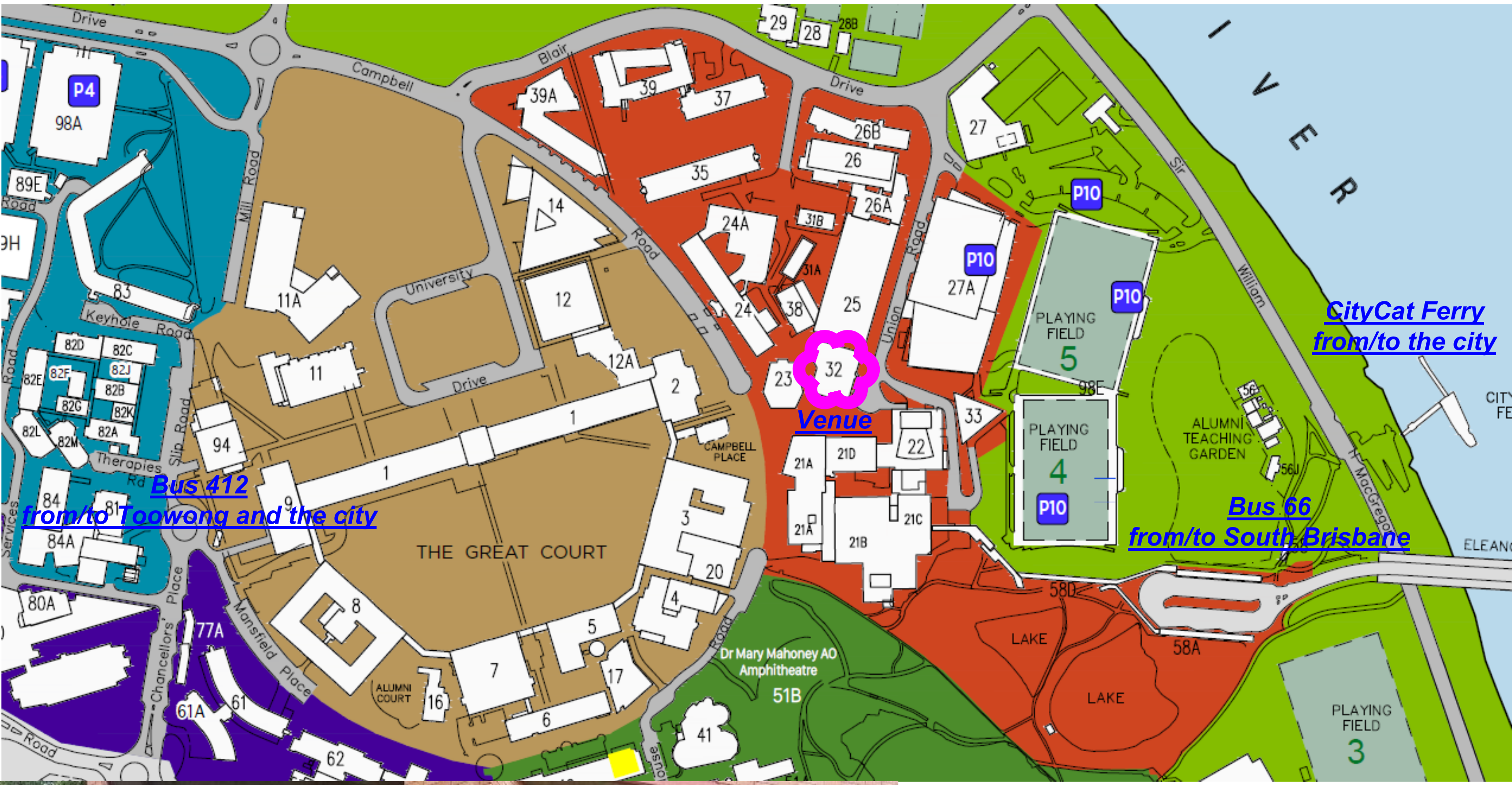


The conference is being held in the Gordon Greenwood Building (Building 32) on the St Lucia campus of The University of Queensland.

You can either take a bus or the CityCat ferry to the St Lucia campus from Brisbane CBD/ Southbank.

Gordon Greenwood building 32

Registration site

Emergency contacts and useful information

Emergency contacts
Emergency (Police/Ambulance/Fire): 000
UQ Security: (07) 3365-3333 (emergencies)
(07) 3365-1234 (non-urgent enquiries)

The UQ Medical Centre is located in Level 1 of the Gordon Greenwood Building.
Campus Pharmacy is located in the Union Complex (Building 21A) nearby.

Food, drinks and services
There are quite a few places to purchase coffee, tea and snacks nearby on campus:

- BrewPoint – UQ Synthetic Fields Precinct, Building 33 (mornings only)
- On a Roll Bakery – Union Complex Food Precinct, Building 21B
- Merlo – Great Court Duhig Tower, Building 2
- Bookmark Café – Central Library Duhig North, Building 12
- Saint Lucy Caffe e Cucina (St Lucy's) (tennis courts)
- Wordsmiths Café (2 Staff House Rd)
- EzyMart convenience store (4 Staff House Rd)
- Boost Juice (Union Building)

You can also purchase food and other meals at various shops and restaurants on campus. Further information is available here:
https://campuses.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/shops/food-retail/on-campus-shops-services

Bottles of water and other drinks will not be provided with the conference catering. Instead, we encourage all delegates to bring their own reuseable water bottle and coffee cup. Water is available in many locations around campus, the closest to our conference venue is on level two, Gordon Greenwood building, opposite rooms 210 and 211. A hot water urn is setup outside of room 215 should you wish to bring your own coffee or tea.

Wifi
Delegates can access wifi via Eduroam or UQ Guest wifi. You can find further information here:
https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/information-technology/internet-and-wifi/visitor-and-conference-internet-access

Welcome and Acknowledgements

The conference organisers warmly welcome you to Brisbane for the 30th Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN2024) conference! The event is being proudly hosted by The University of Queensland, with special support from the School of Languages and Cultures.

The theme of this year's conference is "The Language of Humour". Language is one of the key means by which humour is accomplished across a whole range of different genres, ranging from everyday conversational humour through to political satire and literary humour. Language is also the primary vehicle for talking about and studying humour. The way in which humour varies across different languages also raises questions about how deal with the perennial problem of translating humour across cultures. Finally, the intersection of language with other visual and physical modalities also presents enormous challenges (and opportunities!) for scholars of humour. The keynote presentations, special panel, as well as presentations all touch upon this theme in some way or another.

We would like to thank you for coming to Brisbane for the conference, and hope you enjoy catching up with friends and colleagues as well as making new friends!

AHSN2024 Organising Committee
Wei-Lin Melody Chang (co-convenor)
Michael Haugh (co-convenor)
Valeria Sinkeviciute (co-convenor)
Nick Hugman
Amir Sheikhan
Chantima Wangsomchok
Lara Weinglass

Acknowledgements
The University of Queensland acknowledges the Yaggera and Turrubal peoples as Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we are gathering for this conference. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

30TH CONFERENCE OF THE AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR STUDIES NETWORK (AHSN)

WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2024
Venue: Gordon Greenwood building 32, The University of Queensland, St Lucia

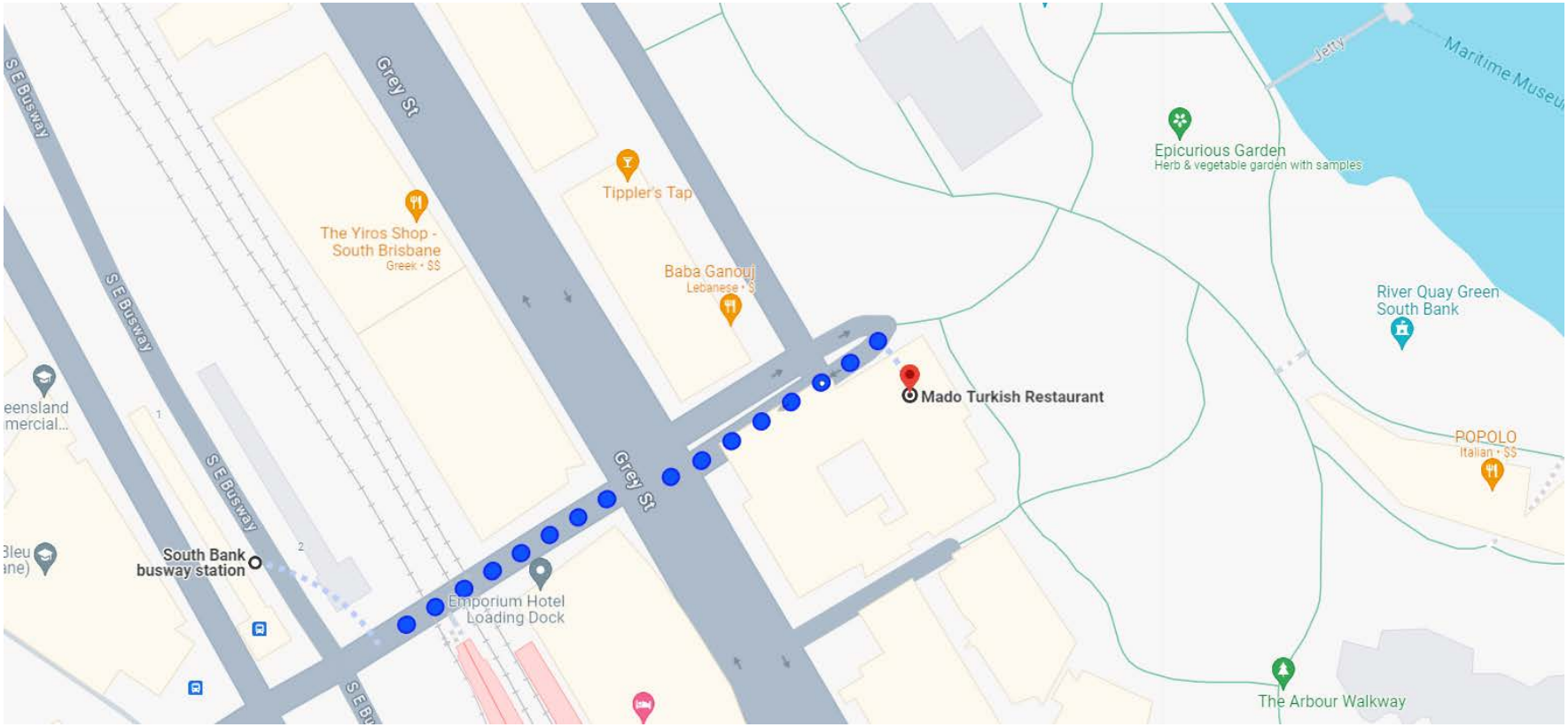
Time	Activity	
12:30-13:30	**Registration and lunch** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***	
13:30-14:00	***Room 215*** **Official opening** Introductions, welcome and housekeeping Kerry Mullan (Chair AHSN Board) and Wei-Lin Melody Chang, Michael Haugh & Valeria Sinkeviciute (Co-chairs of AHSN2024)	
14:00-15:30	**Concurrent sessions**	
	Room 210 **CONVERSATIONAL HUMOUR (1)** Chair: Lara Weinglass 1. Why so serious? Challenging the notion of seriousness as the default mode of talk **Lara Weinglass & Evelyn Ansell**, *The University of Queensland* 2. "Sometimes it's just easier to join in": Gender and joking in a sports organisation **Stephanie Foxton**, *Victoria University of Wellington* 3. Humorous tellings as relational practice in a sports team **Nicholas Hugman**, *The University of Queensland*	***Room 211*** **HUMOUR IN AUSTRALIA** Chair: Mark Gibson 1. From fringe theatre to prime time – the creative ecology of Australian performance comedy **Mark Gibson**, *RMIT University* 2. Off Broadway': Public Broadcasting as a vector between 'alternative' and 'popular' Australian performance comedy **Tony Moore**, *Monash University* 3. FROM KYLIE MOLE TO NANETTE: Some thoughts on a recent trend in the performance of Australian humour, from 'theatrical troupe' to 'Ted talk' **Steve Vizard**, *Monash University*
15:30-16:00	**Break**	

16:00-17:00	***Room 215*** **Keynote Address 1** Chair: Jessica Milner Davis ***Criss-cross Humour aka Translation across the great divide*** Professor Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna, Italy)
17:00-18:00	**Welcome Reception** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***

THURSDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2024 **Venue: Gordon Greenwood building 32, The University of Queensland, St Lucia**		
Time	**Activity**	
	Room 215	
09:00-10:00	**Keynote Address 2** Chair: Michael Haugh ***"Resident Superhero": community veneration as social action*** Assoc. Professor Kerry Mullan (RMIT University, Australia)	
10:00-10.30	**Morning tea** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***	
10.30-12.30	**Concurrent Sessions**	
Room 210 **CONVERSATIONAL HUMOUR 2** Chair: Amir Sheikhan 1. Conversational humour and the joking-serious dialectic **Michael Haugh & Nicholas Hugman**, *The University of Queensland* 2. Jocular complaint in ELF workplace interactions **Chantima Wangsomchok**, *The University of Queensland* 3. Cross-generational study of conversational humour amongst Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese: metapragmatic commentary on humour practices **Wei-Lin Melody Chang**, *The University of Queensland* 4. Affiliation and conversational humour in initial interactions **Amir Sheikhan**, *The University of Queensland*		***Room 211*** **HUMOUR TERMS, STYLES AND FORMS 1** Chair: Angus McLachlan 1. Laughter, play and solidarity **Angus McLachlan**, *Federation University Australia* 2. Relations between comic styles and creativity (Preliminary results) **Robert Durka & Katarina Matejova**, *Catholic University, Slovakia* 3. Comic blather: An interdisciplinary problem **Nicholas Holm**, *Massey University* 4. Humour as an umbrella term **Conal Condren**, *UNSW*
12:30-13:30	**Lunch** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***	

13:30-14:30	**Concurrent Sessions**
Room 210 **HUMOUR IN THE WORKPLACE** Chair: Nicholas Hugman 1. What's going on in the chat? Online humour and fun in hybrid work **Barbara Plester & Rhiannon Lloyd**, *University of Auckland* 2. The language of prison radios: Humour and coping **Reza Arab & Heather Anderson**, *Griffith University*	***Room 211*** **HUMOUR TERMS, STYLES AND FORMS 2** Chair: Bradley J. Dixon 1. Cringe comedy and the suspension of empathy **Bradley J. Dixon**, *RMIT University* 2. How is humour related to religion? Comparing the views of contemporary writers with those of Christian theologians of the past **David Rawlings**, *University of Melbourne*
14:30-15:30	**Concurrent Sessions**
Room 210 **COMEDY COUNTRY – AUSTRALIAN PERFORMANCE COMEDY AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE (PANEL)** Chairs: Tony Moore, Steve Vizard, Anne Pender, Mark Gibson	***Room 211*** **L2 HUMOUR AND HUMOUR IN THE CLASSROOM** Chair: Wei-Lin Melody Chang 1. Extending the psycholinguistic study of verbal irony to second-language contexts **Stephen Skalicky, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia & Lydia Chan**, *Victoria University of Wellington* 2. Humorous communication and improv in the TESOL classroom **Maren Rawlings**, *TIMA Anglican Church*
15.30-16.00	**Afternoon tea** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***

16.00-16.30	***Room 215*** **Book launch by Distinguished Emeritus Professor Stuart Cunnigham, Queensland University of Technology** *'Fringe to famous. Cultural production in Australia after the creative industries'* Authors: Tony Moore, Mark Gibson, Chris McAuliffe, Maura Edmond
16:30-17:00	***Room 215*** **Joe Avati** *How political correctness and use of language is effecting comedians today*
17.00-19.00	**Free time**
19.00-late	**Optional Conference Dinner**: ***Mado Turkish Restaurant*, 1-3/15 Tribune St, South Brisbane (bus 66 from campus)**



<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">FRIDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2024
Venue: Gordon Greenwood building 32, The University of Queensland, St Lucia</th></tr>
<tr><th>Time</th><th colspan="2">Activity</th></tr>
<tr><td>9.30-11.00</td><td colspan="2">Concurrent Sessions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Room 210

COMEDY, PERFORMANCE AND PLAY 1
Chair: Jessica Milner Davis

1. Humorously Hinglish: Delimiting access through Hindi-English code-switching in Indian stand-up comedy
Suchi Chowdhury, RMIT University

2. The Comedic case for performative linguistics: Churchill and Stoppard
Fergus Edwards, University of Tasmania

3. The language(s) of contemporary cabaret and burlesque
Will Visconti, UTS</td><td>Room 211

HUMOUR AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE
Chair: Jocelyn Chey

1. China’s 1970s “Red Tourism” and expatriate coping humour: A personal reflection
Jocelyn Chey, University of Sydney

2. Humour & the reinforcement of partisan identity in the United States
Mark Rolfe, The University of New South Wales

3. Hogarth and Gillray as the eighteenth-century progenitors of political caricature
Robert Phiddian, Flinders University</td></tr>
<tr><td>11.00-11.30</td><td colspan="2">Morning Tea Level 2, outside Room 215</td></tr>
<tr><td>11.30-12.30</td><td colspan="2">Concurrent Sessions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Room 210

COMEDY, PERFORMANCE AND PLAY 2
Chair: Jessica Milner Davis

1. Taking humour theory on the road ~ the stand up for mental health comedy road show. A case study
Daryl Peebles & David Bakker, University of Tasmania</td><td>Room 211

HUMOUR ONLINE
Chair: Kerry Mullan

1. Laughter 2.0: The online race for the digital replication of human laughter
Benjamin Nickl, The University of Sydney & Christopher John Müller, Macquarie University</td></tr>
</table>

2. Blurring the edge and blunting the point: taking care not to offend **Debra Aarons**, *The University of New South Wales* & Marc Mierowsky, *The University of Melbourne*		2. A translation device for reading opposed conceptualisations of humour **Beatriz Carbajal Carrera**, *The University of Sydney*
12.30-13.30	**Lunch** ***Level 2, outside Room 215***	
13:30-14:30	***Room 215*** **Workshop** **Text Analytics for Humour Studies** Sam Hames & Martin Schweinberger, *The University of Queensland*	
14.30-15.30	***Room 215*** **Awards and Closing Ceremony**	
15:30-17:00	***Room 211*** **AHSN Board / Annual Review Panel meeting [members and conference organising committee only]**	
16:00 -	**St Lucy's (on campus)** **Farewell drinks**	

Keynote Speakers

Criss-cross humour aka translation across the great divide

Delia Chiaro

The University of Bologna

My talk will deal with the complexity of translating humor from one language to another highlighting the fact that translational difficulties are not limited to language alone but also to cultural references that are usually only typical of the lingua-cultural community of the original exemplar. Translation is increasingly relevant today as English has become the digital lingua franca, and humor couched in English is widely consumed in diverse media. Consumers/ speakers who are not completely fluent in English may lack the cultural context required to understand some of the humor which is based on various cultural aspects of the language context. The digital ubiquity of humor in English means that languages other than English require translation into English in order to occupy a place on global platforms. So far, the topic of humor translation has been mainly studied in literary disciplines and have focused on issues related to equivalence and translatability. Currently, though, as humor and debates concerning humor are becoming ever more prominent within the public sphere, the translation of humour has gained in importance in all computer mediated communication especially in the diverse subfields of media studies, advertising, and digital humanities in general. Of increasing centrality, is the development of various AI (artificial intelligence) programs to understand, create and translate contextual humor. This remains one of the toughest challenges for the translation of humour, which is so culturally and contextually bound. I will reflect on this issue.

“Resident Superhero”: Community veneration as social action

Kerry Mullan

RMIT University

This presentation will examine the social action of community veneration of a local plumber by members of a neighbourhood Facebook group, the vast majority of whom do not know each other personally (nor necessarily the plumber). Particular attention will be paid to the way in which this veneration (or “hero worship”) is co-constructed through linguistic creativity and humour, such as limericks, exaggeration and terms of reverence. In addition to these linguistic devices, it will be shown how the participants actively exploit the online environment for the purposes of creating context-dependent humour through emojis, memes, and other graphics. The selected examples will illustrate how this collaborative veneration also fosters a sense of positivity and belonging in this group of online strangers.

The examples will be analysed following the linguistic theoretical and methodological approaches outlined in Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, e.g., interactional pragmatics; conversational analysis; discourse, image, theme and feature analysis. A participant-observer ethnographic approach will also be employed. This allows for identification of the various contextualization cues that signal in-group humour, in order to more fully understand and describe the interactional practices of how the members of this community venerate their local plumber in this specific online context.

Panel

Comedy Country –
Australian performance comedy as an agent of change

Tony Moore, Steve Vizard, Anne Pender, and Mark Gibson

Monash University, The University of Adelaide, RMIT University

This panel presentation provides an overview of the newly funded ARC Linkage Project 'Comedy Country: Australian Performance Comedy as an Agent of Change', providing opportunities for dialogue with members of the AHSN in what we hope will be an ongoing exchange.

Performance

How political correctness and use of language is effecting comedians today

Joe Avati

Comedian

Internationally renowned comedian Joe Avati discusses how some comedians have had to change the content of their show due to the current climate of political correctness and woke culture and how some have chosen to go the other way. Having continuously performed globally for a staggering 22 years Avati gives us an insight into how different audiences react to the same material, how audiences have changed especially in the last 10 years and how today changing a single word in the punchline can completely change an audience's reaction.

Presentations

Blurring the edge and blunting the point: Taking care not to offend

Debra Aarons and Marc Mierowsky

The University of Melbourne

In this talk we explore the ramifications of analyzing standup comedy in a time when 'mention' is frequently conflated with 'use'. To do so, we recount an ongoing experience of self-censorship in submitting an invited chapter to an edited collection. The mention/use distinction is a well-known one in the philosophy of language, helpful in allowing us to talk about particular expressions mentioning them as an object of discussion as opposed to using them in ongoing discourse.

Our intent here is to explore the strictures imposed on the study of standup that come about from self-censorship as well as publisher caution, especially in cases where the comedy can be perceived as offensive or inflammatory.

For the chapter, we were invited to present an analysis and discussion of some particular hallmarks of standup comedy from its early emergence as persona driven social critique. As part of our discussion we provided a transcript of one of Lenny Bruce's most famous routines, "Are there any ******s in here tonight?" This routine involves Bruce using racist slurs for a long line of American ethnicities, current in the climate of the early 1960s. Initially we submitted the chapter with the transcript uncensored, as we regarded it as important evidence of the way Bruce worked, and as a caveat we made it clear that we were merely quoting it for analysis. We submitted the chapter; the editor loved it. When the editor submitted the volume to the publishers, they came back with the advice to censor the transcript. This seemed bizarre to us, given that it was Bruce's skilful use and repetition of the offensive words that were the point. We asterisked the words in question and put in a footnote. The editor went ahead; the publisher, however, suggested we remove the transcript and surrounding discussion entirely. We removed it, and in its place, inserted a routine in which Bruce compares Kennedy and Truman to Adolf Eichmann, suggesting they too are war criminals. So far, this (to us, outrageous) routine has been acceptable to the editor and the publisher.

This little vignette has some terrifying implications for scholarship in humour studies, and most particularly for analysing the recording of standup comedy. We need some thoughtful, canny strategies to ensure that our discipline remains as robust as the dangerous, edgy comedy itself.

The language of prison radios: Humour and coping

Reza Arab and Heather Anderson

Griffith University

Prison radio is a growing field, simply defined as radio and other audio that involves incarcerated people and their communities, either produced inside prisons – limited to and targeting a prison-based population – or produced outside of correctional centres and broadcasting to a wider public (Anderson, Bedford & Doliwa, 2022). As a generic term 'prison radio' is used to encompass the act of using audio as a force for good in criminal justice settings (Prison Radio Association, 2021).

This paper focuses on three Australian prison radios projects: Beyond the Bars, Jailbreak, and Radio Seeds. Beyond the Bars is a live program involving First Nations people from inside Victorian prisons. Jailbreak airs from New South Wales sharing stories and poetry from inside prisons as well as giving voice to inmates' families and friends. Radio Seeds was a radio presented by – and for - women with lived prison experience in South Australia.

Two full years of each radio program were selected randomly, transcribed and compiled as three parallel corpora. All instances of humour are tagged based on the genre, conversational features and the types of humour used. Discourse analysis of framing (Goffman, 1974) is used in this study to explore how situation and experience, reflected in speech, are framed in prison radios. This study contributes to our understanding of how the experience of incarceration and stigmatized territories (Arab, forthcoming) is framed by prisoners, their families and former prisoners with a focus on the use of humour in community media content.

A translation device for reading opposed conceptualisations of humour

Beatriz Carbajal Carrera

The University of Sydney

Public debates on everyday matters easily turn into binary positions in social media. But how can we have a better understanding of the perspectives behind those positions? Recent trends in social media research have shown a growing interest in conceptualizations of discursive practices from an emic perspective. This presentation contributes to this body of research with a methodology from the sociology of knowledge that allows for analysing visions of legitimacy at both epistemic and social levels in social media comments. In particular, specialization codes from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) are enacted in a dataset of Spanish-language social media responses to a controversial post framed as humorous targeting a minority identity. This process aims to reveal what characteristics of humour are emphasized or downplayed as legitimate. In order to bridge the gap between abstract LCT notions and specific manifestations, a translation device inclusive of indicators of strength was created and systematically implemented. The analysis of epistemic and social relations reveals humour conceptualizations with emphasis on the notion of knowledge or the notion of knowers.

Cross-generational study of conversational humour amongst Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese: Metapragmatic commentary on humour practices

Wei-Lin Melody Chang

The University of Queensland

There has been increasing interest in the study of conversational humour in contemporary Mandarin Chinese over the past two decades, including research about humour in everyday conversational interactions (e.g. Chang and Haugh 2020; Chen 2017, Li, X. 2020), humour in institutional settings (e.g. Li, C. 2020), humour in television variety shows (e.g. Chang and Haugh 2021; Chang et al 2021, Gong and Ran 2020; Yang and Ren 2020) and so forth. However, the study of possible variation with respect to age has been relatively scarce to date. The aim of this paper is thus to examine conversational humour practices through the lens of metapragmatic commentary in Mandarin and Taiwanese sourced from interview data where two distinct generations of Mandarin Chinese speakers (those in their young 20-30s, and those in their mid-40s to mid-60s) provide insights into their perceptions of conversation humour in Mandarin Chinese. Building on previous work by Chang and Haugh (2022) on diachronic variation in Chinese conversational humour practices, the aim of this paper is to undertake a metapragmatic, cross-generational analysis of the evaluations and perceptions of key conversational humour practices, such as language play and biting teasing, across generations. Preliminary analysis indicates that different conversational humour practices are more prevalently recognised, appreciated, or even favoured across those two generations, in particular, with a greater frequency of instances of language play amongst the older generation and instances of biting teasing amongst the younger generation, as ways of establishing relational connection or rapport with interlocutors among friends, acquaintances and even among strangers. This broad tendency does not mean that those practices do not appear in the conversational humour repertoire of the other generation, but it does appear that particular conversational humour practices are more well received and appreciated in particular generations.

China's 1970s "Red Tourism" and humour as a coping mechanism

Jocelyn Chey

The University of Sydney

"Red Tourism" refers to Mao-themed tourist packages developed in the 1990s, mainly for Chinese domestic tourists. The tours comprised visits to places associated with Chairman Mao Zedong's role in the formative years of the Chinese Communist Party. Prior to the development of the domestic tourist industry in China, these had been pilgrimage sites for Red Guards and other youth groups during the Cultural Revolution, but few foreigners had the opportunity to visit. In the 1960s/70s, there was no international tourism, and strict restrictions applied to travel by resident diplomats, students, journalists or business representatives.

At the time that the Australian Embassy opened in Beijing in 1973, and even after the death of Mao in 1976, foreigners' interactions with Chinese officials and ordinary citizens were tightly controlled. Conversations were conducted in highly political language that featured copious quotations and references to Mao's speeches and lectures. Australians usually reacted to this situation, that they found at best awkward and unnatural, with liberal use of humour.

Although R.A. Martin and Herbert Lefcourt's Situational Humour Response Scale has been applied across cultures, little attention has been paid to reliance on coping humour by expatriates. This paper examines qualitatively and descriptively how a group of Western senior diplomats used coping humour to vent their frustration during an officially arranged "Red Tourism" tour in southern China in 1976. The challenges of political education lessons from the official hosts by were exacerbated by bad weather that affected travel plans and by Cold War era bans on socialising with Soviet bloc representatives. These severe psychological stresses produced some memorable joking exchanges that will be quoted.

Humorously Hinglish: Delimiting access through Hindi-English code-switching in Indian stand-up comedy

Suchi Chowdhury

RMIT University

With the rise of right-wing nationalism in India, political satire – and other forms of dissent - have been fiercely decried by supporters of India's ruling party. Comedians ridiculing BJP leaders or their ideology, have been trolled, abused, given threats of rape and death, and also, in one instance, arrested and jailed. To minimise such risks, comedians - who still continue do political jokes - use a mix of Hindi and English in their routines so that the import of their jokes may not be easily comprehensible to those with limited English language knowledge. Broadly speaking, a major section of the population of northern India are pro-BJP; the prevalence of education in general, and English-language education in particular, have been less in these states in comparison to the southern states.

Since Independence, English has become one of the most recognisable symbols of cultural capital in India. It has tended to remain limited to the upper- and upper-middle-classes; the classes of people who form the most prominent section of live stand-up comedy audience. However, as online circulation of comedy grows, comedians poking fun at the BJP find themselves increasingly at odds with its supporters. The deliberate Hindi-English code-switching allows comedians to still do political jokes, while also protecting themselves from online abuse and threats to an extent.

This paper will present an analysis of jokes from online videos of four comedians: Neeti Palta, Punit Pania, Vir Das, and Kunal Kamra. Palta and Pania code-switch between Hindi and English, Kamra performs in Hindi, while Das performs in English. Primary data from my interviews with Palta and Pania, and secondary data from interviews of Kamra and Das available online, will also be presented to demonstrate how switching between languages in comedy is a conscious practice aimed at either according or delimiting accessibility to comedic intent.

Humour as an umbrella term

Conal Condren

The University of New South Wales

It is now common to call humour an ‘umbrella term’. This paper discusses the meaning and implications of this metaphor in the context of other forms of classification. Set theory is largely put to one side, and ‘umbrella terms’ considered as a type of unstable classifier. Others of partial relevance to humour are the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance, W.B. Gallie’s specification of conceptual contestability; and fuzzy classification as an entailment of the extended application of mathematical fuzzy logic. The umbrella term humour has come to shelter a complex range of phenomena and social and psychological functions, the result, I suggest, of contingent and continuing historical processes and cultural adaptation. I outline some of the strict implications of humour’s being an unstable classifier. It makes global generalisations about humour uncertain; even the distinction between the humorous and serious is a matter of degree, resulting in a fuzzy classification, and therefore is not necessarily a reliable point of demarcation. As humour’s becoming an umbrella term has been in part through multi-disciplinary exploration, the goal of establishing a common conceptual vocabulary for the study of humour per se is questionable. But in fact, humour’s being an umbrella term is sometimes conveniently forgotten when analysts want to make global generalisations that it makes difficult. The covering term may be universally applicable, a function of epistemology; but it does not follow that the subsumed content of humour and the focus of analysis is similarly ubiquitous. There is thus always the danger of falling foul of the sort of ‘category mistake’ Gilbert Ryle discussed of confusing a heuristic organizational device (umbrella term) with a reified and ontologically independent phenomenon (Humour).

Cringe comedy and the suspension of empathy

Bradley Dixon

RMIT University

Cringe comedy has been an ascendent form of comic media for the past two decades, testing viewers' ability to endure extreme levels of awkwardness and abjection. One popular mode of cringe comedy — practiced by the likes of Sacha Baron Cohen, Nathan Fielder, and Eric Andre — involves staging interactions between a comedian and real people who are not in on the joke. These encounters, which blend comedy with techniques borrowed from documentary and reality television, intensify the discomfort to such an extent that they walk a delicate line between humour and cruelty. Competing theories of humour have attempted to explain how and why we laugh at the expense of others, as well as how we can find humour in subjects considered taboo or disruptive of social norms. Schadenfreude, comic license, superiority, and benign violation theory are all useful but inadequate concepts for considering the mechanism of humour in cringe comedy, which poses distinct challenges to how we think and talk about the ethics of humour. In cringe comedy, it is not necessarily the content of the joke that is problematic, but rather that the joke is at the expense of an unwitting mark, who may have done nothing to deserve the indignity of victimhood. For the reasonable viewer this would seem to preclude ethical enjoyment of such comedy — and yet, these cringe comedies remain a popular and respected form of comic media. In this paper I draw on the notion of the "suspension of empathy" to explore how these comedies cultivate an affective environment in which a viewer can laugh at an innocent person experiencing discomfort or being made to look like a fool. Additionally, I survey the assortment of visual and other cues cringe comedies use to signal to the viewer the ethical permissibility of laughter.

Relations between comic styles and creativity (Preliminary results)

Robert Durka and Katarina Matejova

Catholic University

The aim of this study is to utilize a hierarchical regression analysis in the prediction of comic styles with the domains of creativity above and beyond the Big Five personality factors, and vice versa, the prediction of the domains of creativity with comic styles above and beyond the Big Five personality factors. The eight comic styles could be differentiated to lighter styles (fun, wit, benevolent humour, nonsense), and darker styles (irony, sarcasm, satire, cynicism) (Ruch et al. 2018). The domains of creativity are self/everyday, scholarly, performance, mechanical/scientific, and artistic (Kaufman 2012). Altogether 121 Slovak adolescents (mean age: 16,91(SD=1,32) years) filled out 3 scales: Comic Style Markers (CSM, for measuring the comic styles), Big Five Inventory 2 (BFI-2, for measuring the factors of Big Five), and Kaufman Domains of Creativity Scale (K-DOCS, for measuring the domains of creativity).

According to the preliminary results, two lighter comic styles “wit” and “benevolent humour” are predicted above and beyond personality factors by self/everyday creativity a mechanical/scientific creativity, while “wit” is also predicted by performance and “benevolent humour” by artistic creativity. “Fun” is best explained by performance creativity. Scholarly creativity is the best predictor of two darker comic styles “satire” and “cynicism” and one lighter comic style “nonsense”. The lighter comic style “wit” it is the best predictor of creativity, whereas it predicts 4 out of 5 domains of creativity (self/everyday, scholarly, performance, and mechanical/scientific). Moreover, scholarly creativity is also predicted by the absence of “fun”. Finally, artistic creativity is best explained by “irony”. The results of this study showed that the domains of creativity could be utilized in the prediction of comic styles (and vice versa) above and beyond Big Five personality factors. These are the just the preliminary results and our research is still ongoing.

The comedic case for performative linguistics: Churchill and Stoppard

Fergus Edwards

University of Tasmania

Douglas Robinson's Performative Linguistics (2014) understands language as an iterated, ideosomatic, social practise. The theory builds upon foundational work by Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Paul Grice; and it stands in direct opposition to the many static, synchronic accounts of language that are implicitly derived from Ferdinand de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics (1916). None of these scholars is known for their sense of humour, none of these texts is known for its jokes.

My paper will nevertheless argue that some of the most convincing arguments for performative linguistics are those staged in comedies such as Caryl Churchill's Blue Heart (1997) and Tom Stoppard's Dogg's Hamlet(1974). The audience can only appreciate the jokes in these plays because they comprehend the language being used — but the words of that language are, quite radically, failing to fulfil their Saussurean functions.

Churchill's tale of Derek the con man and his many proposed mothers has a text that is infiltrated by the words 'blue' and 'kettle'. The discrepancies multiply; everyday language disappears; words contract to individual letters; but still we follow along – and still we laugh at the rather dark comedy.

Stoppard's story of a private school prizegiving has a host of characters speaking a language of English words that have different referents. A mixture of context, cadence, action and reaction slowly teach the audience this language of 'Dogg' – to the point where we laugh at puns that only exist because we have done so.

“Sometimes it’s just easier to join in”: Gender and joking in a sports organisation

Stephanie Foxton

Victoria University of Wellington

Humour has continually been recognised by workplace discourse analysts as a key discursive tool in the construction and maintenance of workplace relationships (Kim & Plester, 2014), and especially for negotiating community boundaries (Vine et al., 2009). Within the range of types of humour, some, like banter, have a dual function to both include and exclude; in-group members use it to signal and maintain their insider identity, while outsiders are kept at the fringes due to a lack of knowledge, not fully understanding how to interpret humorous interactions (see also Marra, 2022). Using audio-visual recordings of authentic interactional data collected from a work team within a regional sports organisation, this paper examines how women in a male-dominated workplace resist exclusionary practices through the use of humour.

Previous research indicates that jocular abuse and banter is often considered an inevitable part of male-dominated workplaces (Wright, 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that banter forms an integral part of the linguistic repertoire established by group members within the data. These community norms create a set of conditions for identity construction that draw on heteronormative and masculine styles, most notably in the role, content, and use of humour. Analysis of the dataset suggest that banter (and other forms of jocular abuse) is used by women to maintain an in-group membership; participation in the banter allows women within the team to maintain their insider identity whilst also sustaining and challenging existing gender discourses. I argue that women in the group are in a double bind. Banter is used to gain acceptance into the in-group at the expense of reinforcing normative discourses of masculinity which are frequently, and often negatively, associated with these types of organisations.

From fringe theatre to prime time – The creative ecology of Australian performance comedy

Mark Gibson

RMIT University

Most mainstream comedy franchises in Australia have had roots in small fringe scenes in which creative ideas are developed through close interactions among peers and intimate audiences. Examples of such scenes include student revues, comedy clubs, theatresports groups and satirical DIY publications or YouTube channels. What is the relation then between fringe and mainstream? In response to this question, the paper outlines an argument from a co-authored book, currently in press, Fringe to Famous – Australian Cultural Production After the Creative Industries.

It is common, both in scholarly work and in wider public debate, to see fringe and mainstream as structurally opposed, such that any space claimed by one will necessarily be at the expense of the other. Fringe to Famous suggests, by contrast, that the relationship be seen in more positive terms as one of productive hybridity. While the mainstream draws on the fringe as a source of renewal, it also feeds back resources and production expertise that enable ideas emerging from the fringe to develop and to reach wider audiences.

The book examines other cultural forms besides comedy – music, fashion design, Indigenous film and digital games. However, it also sees comedy as playing a specific role in drawing attention to the potential of hybridity. Because the fringe in the case of comedy is marked as 'unserious', it has been less prone to romantic pretention than in other fields – and also, therefore, to an anti-romantic reaction that has affected thinking about relations between the mainstream and fringe over the last three decades. At a time when arguments between romanticism and anti-romanticism have reached a point of exhaustion, comedy offers a time tunnel, reconnecting us with the broadly 'carnivalesque' cultural possibilities of the 1970s and 1980s.

Conversational humour and the joking-serious dialectic

Michael Haugh and Nicholas Hugman

The University of Queensland

Conversational humour, that is, humour arising spontaneously in everyday, interactional settings, has been theorised in various different ways. The most prominent among these is perhaps Bateson's (1955) concept of frame, subsequently developed by Sacks (1972), Tannen (1993) and others, which contends that discourse produced within a non-serious frame or key is treated as joking, playful or otherwise non-serious by participants. However, while the notion of frame is widely employed in research on conversational humour, such accounts arguably do not readily account for the widespread observation that conversational humour very often also clearly delivers serious messages (Dynel 2011; Emerson 1969). The challenge for frame-based accounts is how can we account for the serious subtext of conversational humour?

To account for this pervasive feature of conversational humour, we propose an alternative theoretical conceptualisation: the joking- serious dialectic. A dialectical approach to conversational humour conceptualises the joking and serious sides of an utterance to be enmeshed in a yin-yang dialectic, such that both joking and serious propositions are not only inferable from humorous utterances, but are dialectically linked in that the existence of one implicates the presence of the other. The advantage of a dialectical approach over frame-based accounts of conversational humour is that it does not separate out humorous and serious forms of discourse, but understands them as inherently intertwined.

Drawing on conversational humour data in English in different interactional settings, ranging from everyday interactions among family and friends, to interactions among team members in recreational settings, through to first conversations among people who have not previously met, we demonstrate how various kinds of conversational humour can be analysed through the lens of the joking-serious dialectic. We conclude by suggesting that a dialectical account is better equipped to explain the serious side of conversational humour than traditional frame-based accounts.

Comic Blather: An interdisciplinary problem

Nicholas Holm

Massey University

Multiple scholarly traditions and disciplines are represented in the field of humour studies: prominent among them linguistics, psychology, and literary studies. Each of these disciplines is accustomed to approaching the subject of humour in its own ways, and through its own set of examples that lend themselves to their preferred methods. For example, linguists tend towards the analysis of either jokes or informal conversational humour, whereas cultural and literary scholars favour complex, carefully constructed comic texts. These differences in favoured examples have contributed not only to disciplinary silo-ing, but also to the neglect of forms of humour that fall between these preferred modes.

Professional comic blather—directionless comic chat performed to entertain a formal audience—is one of those forms. Found on podcasts, radio shows, sports commentary, panel and talk shows, and in improvisational comedy, comic blather involves the co-construction of comic talk that draws on the rhythms, conventions, and limitations of particular genres. Falling between the humour of vernacular conversation and scripted comedy, comic blather is neither entirely conversational nor entirely textual. It is both informal and performed, both spontaneous and constructed. It is also an incredibly prominent, influential, and unfortunately under-studied form, because it challenges rather than conforms to the methodological priorities of different areas of study.

In this presentation, I will attempt to offer an overview of comic blather as a form of humour. I will document how it manifests across multiple media forms and outline some of its consistent formal features. However, I will not present this as a complete account, because my analysis will be limited by my own disciplinary orientation. Instead, I will present this as an invitation to future collaboration and a way to develop the future of humour studies as a field where disciplines do not just co-exist, but collaborate.

Humorous tellings as relational practice in a sports team

Nicholas Hugman

The University of Queensland

Humorous narratives, characterised as an extended period of talk in which a participant relays an event containing humorous incongruity (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012), are a pervasive interactional practice. The typical structure of a humorous narrative comprises asymmetrical access to the conversational floor, wherein one participant relays the narrative, while the others provide minimal feedback, typically in the form of continuers, which display the recipient's attention and understanding (Stivers, 2008).

This asymmetry in conversational turns poses a significant challenge for interactional achievement approaches to communication (e.g. Arundale, 2020), which view conversational phenomena as non-additive processes dynamically constructed in interaction. Given that there is little space to negotiate these phenomena during the narrative proper, how do participants employ narratives to interactionally enact these processes? This issue is arguably exacerbated in the case of interpersonal relationships, given that they are fundamentally dyadic, interactional affairs (Arundale, 2021).

In this study, using interactional data collected using ethnographic methods from an amateur football team, I document two practices by which participants overcome the difficulty posed by the functional pressures of humorous narratives to engender interpersonal relationships. Using Arundale's (2020) Face-Constituting Theory (FCT), which foregrounds the dialectically linked relational qualities of connection and separation, I demonstrate how participants use both the post-narrative space, exploiting the symmetrical turn-taking that it offers, and responding stories (Sacks, 1992), to enact relationships.

The analysis demonstrates that, via these two distinct practices, participants manipulate the humorous incongruity present in the narrative to engender varying degrees of connection and separation. They construct connection by aligning with events in the narrative as humorously incongruous, while concurrently indexing separation by competitively negotiating different aspects of the incongruity. I conclude by considering the applicability of the analysis to other areas of humorous narratives previously unexplored.

Laughter, play and solidarity

Angus McLachlan

Federation University Australia

It is generally accepted that animated, light-hearted conversation, involving plenty of laughter, is a good indication that people are getting along. Put more rigorously, support for the idea that laughter is heavily involved in achieving solidarity has been shown in numerous pragmatically oriented analyses of conversation as well as in abundant empirical findings from quantitative research. In an effort to explain more precisely how interactors use laughter to foster and sustain close social relationships, Austin's commentary on speech acts and Harré's ideas concerning positioning of the self in interaction will be employed. It will be proposed that laughter serves as an expletive attributive that both speakers and listeners use to characterise locutions as not to be taken seriously. In virtue of their lack of illocutionary and perlocutionary force, these qualified locutions, or laughter imbued acts, will be suggested to serve as critical indices of playful and non-serious episodes of talk. Following Harré's argument that personal identity emerges from episodes of talk involving serious speech acts, it will be suggested that playful episodes allow participants to forge a measure of solidarity by eliding their personal identities during such talk. This form of relatively weak, transient solidarity will be contrasted with that achieved by serious talk, when interactors jointly construct closely aligned positions that 'mean' something to the interactors involved. Non-serious episodes, when instrumental talk is delivered playfully, constitute an intermediate category of talk, during which competing but malleable positions are articulated while retaining a measure of solidarity. It is concluded that laughter itself is only indirectly related to the form of temporary solidarity that is achieved through participation in play and non-serious episodes but that playful interaction nonetheless fulfills an important counterpoint to the potential divisiveness that accompanies all serious talk when personal identities are hazarded.

Off Broadway': Public broadcasting as a vector between 'alternative' and 'popular' Australian performance comedy

Tony Moore

Monash University

This paper draws from the ARC Linkage Project Fringe to Famous, that examines the circulation between small scale experimental initiatives in art and culture -including comedy - and the mainstream cultural industries, arguing that this movement is a significant enabler of not just economic, but cultural value. The paper considers the crucial role of public broadcasting as vector in this circulation between fringe and popular mediated performance comedy, through outreach, development, professionalisation, team building, co-productions and access to larger audiences. The ABC and the SBS have played a crucial osmotic role in comedy through structures (such as SBS Independent); outreach initiatives (eg Fresh Blood, Black Comedy); collaborations with festivals (notably MICF); partnering with emerging performers on YouTube; and recruitment of 'animateurs' with experience of the comedy fringe who develop content and audiences. In particular, the public broadcasters have engaged contractually with a diversity of small-scale independent production companies (eg Working Dog or Gristmill) led by comedy makers with fringe provenance. In Australia's mixed state/commercial broadcast model, ABC and SBS provide a nurturing 'off Broadway' environment tolerant of experimentation and risk, while imposing the professionalism and discipline of reaching a wider mass audience that can bring improvements to the quality of work initially developed for a select group of peers. However, this circulation is not without tension, and sometimes conflict, between cultural values (experimentation, novelty, diversity, transgression and autonomy) and economic or utilitarian imperatives of public media corporations vulnerable to managerial practices of control, caution, routinisation, nepotism, and political pressure that can cruel risk-taking, favour track record, entrench orthodoxies and close off porosity with outside creative communities. In negotiating these tensions, our research indicates that comedy, more than other art forms such as drama, is extended a greater freedom, or license, due to its inherent carnivalesque qualities.

Laughter 2.0:
The online race for the digital replication of human laughter

Benjamin Nickl and Christopher John Müller

The University of Sydney and Macquarie University

Our online world is rapidly evolving with digital technologies that shape people's daily activities and interactions, all from banking to booking a flight and to how we communicate with each other. As our lives become more and more intertwined with the virtual realms that we interact with through apps, chatbots, and avatars of artificial intelligence, the need to make the user feel less frustrated by tech that fails us, one may suggest for example the 'error 404' message or a dreaded blue screen freeze, has given rise to a curious phenomenon: the online replication of laughter, which is supposed to make us feel better when entrusting our lives to 'things' instead of humans. Our paper thus aims to describe and dissect the intriguing replication race for the most authentic and engaging digital expressions of laughter that make technology feel more human. This phenomenon represents a profound shift in how humour is created, communicated, and consumed online. The cyberspace applications of laughter 2.0 that we look at range from emojis and GIFs to AI-image generations, and even to artificial people like the ERICA laughbot project that was developed at Kyoto University in Japan with funding from the Japanese government's Moonshot Programme. Our paper examines how and why this replication matters at the intersection of humour studies, technology, and the changes in the way we increasingly enact humanness through, with, and oftentimes in close dialogue with our devices. We will delve into the implications of digital laugh replication for humour research, exploring how online laughter influences the perception of humour and what the cultural consequences may look like. By analysing the evolving language of humour in the digital age, our paper will contribute to a deeper understanding of Laughter 2.0's implications for our digital society.

Taking humour theory on the road ~ the stand up for mental health comedy road show. A case study

Daryl Peebles and David Bakker

University of Tasmania

The mutual interest in standup comedy, and as performers witnessing the release of underlying emotions through distraction and expression of laughter, led to the convergence of ‘psychology meets Human Resources' as the presenters discuss and examine the impact of humour on the well-being of audiences attending Tasmania’s Mental Health Comedy Roadshows.

In undertaking his 2015 PhD research from an HR perspective, The Value of Positive Humour in the Workplace, Dr Daryl Peebles (who has ‘moonlighted’ as a comedian for over 45 years) found that when emotions such as anger, sadness and fear were released through humour, people moved into a more uplifting, joyous state of well-being with subsequent benefits for workplace productivity.

Dr David Bakker is a clinical psychologist and Founding Director of mental health app MoodMission. He has also performed in and ran comedy rooms in Tasmania for the last 12 years. In 2018 he teamed up with comedian and social worker Brittany Szlezak to launch the Mental Health Comedy Roadshow. This initiative produces mental health-themed stand-up comedy shows in regional Tasmania as part of Mental Health Week, breaking down stigma, educating the public, and improving help seeking in an entertaining and fun way.

Although David, Brittany and Daryl often met at comedy venues around Tasmania, it was not until 2021 that Daryl had the opportunity to join the road show which is now partly funded by the Mental Health Council of Tasmania. The comedy road show presents a 100-minute evening of stand-up comedy in urban and country venues.

The feedback of audience participants, performers and organisers alike provides a platform and opportunity for further assessment of the value of humour, laughter, and management of those audience participants who self-report mental health concerns.

It is in this context that David and Daryl present their anecdotal findings.

Hogarth and Gillray as the eighteenth-century progenitors of political caricature

Robert Phiddian

Flinders University

The 18th century is the first period to have a theory of humour in a recognisably modern sense. Before that there is a primarily medical theory of the bodily humours. The 18th century is also the period that sees the development of printed caricatures that are the ancestors of modern political cartoons.

Shaftesbury's characterisation in the Characteristics (1711) of 'wit and humour' as an aid to reasoned civility and intellectual freedom (popularised by Addison in the Spectator) skews towards a benign versions of humour. The wider study of which this paper is a part indicates that this is a correct but partial account. The other part of the story involves the darker emotions that tend to travel with satire, and attends to older, more bluntly moralising modes.

Before 'wit and humour', laughter was associated mostly with rank-defining scorn or with a carnivalesque 'world-turned-upside-down', with moralising or with holiday. Thus the idea of humour as a potentially rational and liberatory analysis of power was a novel thing in the 18th century, and it had to swim against persistent counter-currents.

One of these currents occurs in printed caricature. Caricature, verbally and visually, concentrates these issues, and this paper will focus on how these issues played out in the most famed mid- and late- 18h century caricaturists, William Hogarth (1697-1764) and James Gillray (1756-1815). As continues to be the case in contemporary cartooning, their caricatures use shorthand images and phrases. They are judgey, they belittle, and they very often mobilise the 'negative' CAD emotions (contempt, anger, disgust). They were also, as are modern cartoonists, widely recognised as humourists, even if modern audiences will only occasionally find their works funny.

This paper will look at whether and, if so, how Hogarth and Gillray can be seen as ancestral figures for modern political cartooning. In doing so it will address issues in the history humour theory as they relate to caricature and its mediation by changing print technologies and political circumstances.

What's going on in the chat? Online humour and fun in hybrid work

Barbara Plester and Rhiannon Lloyd

The University of Auckland

Through our exploration of humour and fun in hybrid work we find that traditional in-office forms of humour and fun have had to adapt to new work modes where people work flexibly from a combination of places including the office, home, and other remote locations (Gonot-Schoupinsky and Garip, 2021). The language of humour is fast-changing and dynamic (Attardo, 2017). We argue that changes to humour and fun interactions have necessitated changes in humour language and that humour and fun are now conveyed in an increasing variety of ways, adapting from in-person exchanges to verbal online exchanges, textual exchanges, and the increasing use of emojis and other pictorial symbols (Zhang et al, 2021) to express laughter, enjoyment, and fun. This adaptation has changed the nature of workplace humour and fun. Traditional workplace humour and fun shared by co-located colleagues is displaced through increases in online interactions and chat in informal online channels such as Slack and Kahoot. This interconnection of modalities may cause language disconnection between different worker groups differentiated by hierarchy and age. Our series of research questions asks: How has humour adapted to hybrid formats? How are online forms of humour changing the language and nature of workplace humour? What are the implications of hybrid humour and fun for workers, team relations, and organizational culture?

How is humour related to religion? Comparing the views of contemporary writers with those of Christian theologians of the past

David Rawlings

The University of Melbourne

Several recent writers have pointed to the disconnect between humour and religion. For example, Bernard Schweitzer notes that “humour and religion are odd bedfellows” because religion is defined mainly by delineating social and symbolic boundaries, humour by troubling them. Focussing on Christianity, I look critically at the views of Schweitzer and two other relatively recent humour researchers – the philosopher, John Morreall, and the psychologist, Vassilis Saroglou, with particular reference to the question of whether religious people tend to avoid humour and laughter when compared to other people. While recognising the diversity of opinions among theologians, I then compare the three modern writers with the views concerning humour and laughter put forward by three early theologians influential in setting up the framework in which Christian attitudes towards humour and laughter developed: Clement of Alexandria (150-212 CE), St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430 CE), and St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). While there are differences between the sources, a reasonable conclusion is that the relative tendency of Christians to avoid humour is far from clearcut, and due largely to their avoidance of certain topic areas.

Humorous communication and improv in the TESOL classroom

Maren Rawlings

TIMA Anglican Church

In a TESOL class of Mandarin and Farsi speakers, could humour have a role in facilitating English language acquisition? Bell and Pomerantz (2019) list three functions of humour in the L2 classroom: An aid to pragmatic development; a source of interactions, and an aspect of the language to be acquired. According to Christiansen and Chater (2022) factual knowledge (in both transmitter and receiver), social roles, culture and empathy are among the "hidden" characteristics of communication. Zen Buddhist masters traditionally used humour to liberate minds from relativism, from illusion and to encourage intimacy (Dijkstra, 2022). This humour was definitely incongruous, designed to deflate pretensions, and to introduce an element of play between pupil and master. In comparison, Islamic sources (Hussan, 2022) appeared to have many rules about the use of humour, particularly embargoes on superiority humour. In this on-going ethnographic case study, the model is action research (Efron & Ravid, 2020).Drawing on the theories of Christiansen and Chater (2022), together with McGraw et al., (2012), humorous gestures and drawn cartoon illustrations were used to supplement listening tasks, and also to provide parallel interpretation of students' speaking attempts. Where practical, the teacher used whole-body movement (improvised mime) to illustrate concepts. The most prominent outcome of these atypical teaching behaviours has been an increase in students' attempts by using their English, to communicate with each other, across this Middle Eastern-Asian cultural divide. A secondary and surprising development has been volunteers hosting "afternoon teas" in their Chinese or Iranian homes.

Humour & the reinforcement of partisan identity in the United States

Mark Rolfe

The University of New South Wales

Many scholars have treated political humour simply as a form of comic rebellion that speaks 'truth to power' and have then applied this dissident ethos to humourists, such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert who were depicted in as insurgents saving democracy from President George W. Bush. This approach to political humour overlooks rhetorical resourcefulness in the applications of humour to partisan identity, the credibility of an orator (known in rhetoric as ethos), and struggles over the moral high ground of politics involving the dissident comic ethos, amongst other things.

From 2015 when Donald Trump ran for president, Stewart, Colbert, and like-minded humourists were not rebels but champions of American political standards against an intolerable and chaotic interloper. In the view of critics, however, they were part of the liberal establishment that needed smashing and their dissident comic ethos had been appropriated by Trump posing as the outsider. He thereby earned a sneaking admiration even from those who detested him, such as comedians Louis C.K., John Oliver, and Bill Maher, as well as from liberal journalists who credited Trump as a genius of American insult comedy.

Trump's dissident comic ethos fitted with the outsider status sought by prominent right-wing populists and with a few precursors who were part of the evolution of right-wing media in the nineties. Nevertheless, Trump led the way from 2015 with a host of right-wing humourists, such as Milo Yiannopoulos, Dennis Miller, Anne Coulter, and Greg Gutfeld who applauded him. They were more like court propagandists who pampered Trump's ego, 'owned the libs', and reinforced political identity on the right, and less like satirists holding power to account on behalf of the public good.

Affiliation and conversational humour in initial interactions

Amir Sheikhan

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In conversation analysis, affiliation is the term used to categorise social actions as either preferred or dispreferred, where affiliative actions contribute to social solidarity and disaffiliative actions act as hindrances to it (Heritage, 1984). In conversational humour, which broadly encompasses (sequences of) utterances that are designed to 'amuse' participants or are treated as 'amusing' by participants across various types of social interaction (Bell, 2015), responses to humour bids can also be considered affiliative or disaffiliative. While with an affiliative response, the speaker displays agreement with the affective stance implemented in the laughable, a disaffiliative response rejects that stance.

The present study focuses on speakers' orientation to affiliation in episodes of conversational humour in initial interactions. The analysis examines episodes of conversational humour identified in 11 conversations in Video-Mediated English as a Lingua Franca Conversations (ViMELF) corpus and a further collection of 11 recordings of intercultural initial interactions. Using the framework of interactional pragmatics, the analysis focuses on the design of these humour episodes, the recipient's responses to humour bids, and their orientation to displaying affiliation.

Results indicate that participants orient to displaying different degrees of affiliation in responding to humour bids in initial interactions. Affiliation in this context ranges from non-affiliation and minimal affiliation through to strong affiliation. While a response to a humour bid can theoretically be disaffiliative, that is, a response that overtly rejects the speaker's jocular affective stance, no instances of disaffiliation were observed in the responses to humour bids examined in this study. The absence of disaffiliation could be posited as a function of the genre of initial interactions.

Extending the psycholinguistic study of verbal irony to second-language contexts

Stephen Skalicky, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia, and Lydia Chan

Victoria University of Wellington

It is generally assumed that a marker of second language (L2) proficiency is the ability to infer higher-level pragmatic information encoded in humorous and ironic language. Driven by such assumptions, a recent upsurge of psycholinguistic research has explored how language users process and comprehend verbal irony when English is their L2. To date, these studies have included participants from several first language (L1) backgrounds, including Mandarin Chinese (Ellis et al., 2021), Japanese (Shintani & Ellis, 2022), and Polish (Bromberek-Dyzman, 2021). Results from these studies indicate that literal uses of utterances are processed more quickly and more accurately than ironic uses, and also that greater L2 proficiency is associated with quicker and more accurate processing of verbal irony. When compared to the existing body of psycholinguistic research in L1 contexts, results from the L2 data suggest that L2 verbal irony processing is more similar than different to L1 processing. However, differences in methodologies and stimuli already threaten the ability to fully synthesize these results, raising the need for studies to replicate these effects.

Accordingly, we present an approximate replication of one of these studies, Ellis et al. (2021), who collected reading times and accuracy measures for verbal irony from Chinese learners of English. We improve upon existing limitations in the stimuli creation and measures of L2 proficiency and extend the experiment to participants from two additional first language backgrounds: Cantonese and Italian. Our results suggest similar effects to those reported by Ellis et al: participants are quicker and more accurate for literal versus ironic uses as well as prototypical negative versus positive irony. These results in turn suggest a successful replication. Our study thus contributes to the growing body of research exploring how humorous, creative, and ironic language can be used as a means to assess pragmatic competence in a second language.

The Language(s) of contemporary cabaret and burlesque

Will Visconti

UTS

This paper examines cross-cultural currents and diverse languages of humour reflected in contemporary cabaret and burlesque, which provide a "vocabulary" for performers to cite. The performers to be discussed as case studies, with information gleaned from their respective shows and from interviews that I have conducted, are Reuben Kaye, Meow Meow, Dusty Limits and Marisa Carnesky. Over the last few decades, most especially since the turn of the twenty-first century, cabaret and burlesque (sometimes referred to as "neo-burlesque") have become increasingly visible and popular, but more importantly, the vocabularies of references or elements of performance have become more extensive. Artistes have a broader range of cultural touchstones, which are in turn legible to an increasingly wide audience.

Not only are multiple languages deployed, but the cultural reference points connected to those languages are inherently important. Similarly, the capital of language both visual and verbal via song, art, or known performers are woven together to construct narratives bound by a unifying rote faden (red thread) as it is known in German cabaret. some of the more enduring of these include Weimar-era Berlin, fin-de-siècle Paris, Jazz Age New York, and various (re)imaginings of "Old Hollywood".

Another significant element of the language of contemporary burlesque and cabaret is how these points of reference are combined with the language of decolonisation and diversity, exemplified by shows such as Marisa Carnesky's "Street of Showwomxn" (2023). These performances speak to a few key factors: more globalised audiences and performers, the rise of the university-educated artiste (Walters 2018); and playing to a predominantly left-leaning audience which is therefore conscious of "punching up" in its humour (Kuipers 2015).

FROM KYLIE MOLE TO NANETTE:
Some thoughts on a recent trend in the performance of Australian humour, from 'theatrical troupe' to 'Ted talk'

Steve Vizard

Monash University

The Australian 'comedy boom' of the 1980s and 90s saw a proliferation in all media of the performance of humour using character and dramatic forms largely derived from revue and vaudeville (eg Mavis Brampston, Australia You're Standing In It, D Gen, Comedy Company, Fast Forward, The Big Gig ,Fat Pizza etc). This prevailing mode of performance was typically characterized by small ensemble groups of writer-performers, employing fictional characters positioned in simplified narrative structures (both sketch and sitcom), and which carried a range of ideological and moral representations, often unresolved or even oppositional, largely to be interpreted by the audience.

Thirty years later, the predominant form of comedy performance had become individualised, delivered usually in the form of monologue (Hannah Gadsby, Peter Helliar, Dave Hughes, Tom Gleeson etc). The common characteristics of this form of performance have typically seen the performer deploying the self as character and narrator, representing personal experiences as charismatic autoethnography, utilizing diverse narrative structures and devices, with an express purpose of harnessing personal testimony to directly and authentically represent the performer's ideologies and values.

This paper explores this recent trend in the performance of Australian humour. It examines such shifts in authorial voice, personae, rhetorical form, framing and discourse and explores its social, political, cultural, industrial and technological causes. And particularly it seeks to offer some preliminary thoughts about the shifting ways in which such performance conveys values, morals and meaning. And whether such shifts might be to the benefit or cost of humour?

Jocular complaint in ELF workplace interactions

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Complaints are a possibility in any workplace context, and in some settings, they may be expected to be an essential part of the interactional task. Customer complaint calls, for example, pertain to properly handling complaints and helping solve or alleviate customer problems. Research on complaining in workplace discourse to date has focused on conflict talk in relation to its interactional sequences in institutional conversation. However, humorous complaining, although the issue has become a subject of marketing research (e.g. McGrew, et al., 2015), remains scarce. This study attempts to describe a jocular complaint, the expression of dissatisfaction that is designed to evoke a response characterised by the amusement or the appraisal that something is laughable from colleagues in the context of ELF workplace interactions. Preliminary results indicated the relatively frequent occurrence of jocular complaints. This study investigates thus how jocular complaints are co-constructed and sequentially organised in ELF workplace interactions using the framework of interactional pragmatics. The dataset for this empirical study is approximately 10 hours of audio recordings face-to-face encounters between colleagues retrieved from ACE corpus (ACE, 2020). Instances of jocular complaint were identified based on three criteria: (1) it expresses feelings of dissatisfaction about some state of affairs, a third-party or oneself within a single turn of talk, (3) but is oriented to non-serious engagement. Through careful sequential analysis, jocular complaints consist of the sequence of a tripartite structure with two alternative actions in the third position: (1) opportunity to complaint, (2) jocular complaint, and then (3) laughter (laughing appreciation or acceptance) or minimal response. As with indirect complaints, jocular complaints are used to build interpersonal relationships (Drew & Walker, 2009; Rodriguez, 2022). ELF speakers tend to show affiliation with the situation-oriented complaints to increase solidarity, while less affiliation with third party-oriented (Konakahara, 2017) and self-oriented complaints.

Why so serious?
Challenging the notion of seriousness as the default mode of talk

Lara Weinglass and Evelyn Ansell

The University of Queensland

When it comes to the analysis of conversational interaction, seriousness has long been thought to be the default. Conversational humour is treated as a side-sequence, where speakers disgress from the serious business at hand to engage in a spate of humorous talk, before returning again to seriousness. To remove subjective opinion about what is humorous or funny, scholars have employed technical jargon for use around potentially humorous talk, describing it as 'non-serious' or a 'laughable', even proposing 'interpolated particles of aspiration' be used to describe laugh-like sounds in talk. No such technical language has been seen to be necessary when it comes to serious talk, however, which is just accepted to be the norm.

Further evidence is given when we consider that spates of humorous interaction are shown to be 'framed' or 'keyed' for humour, or that humour is 'marked', in both senses of the term – meaning that a linguistic marker indicates that humour is occurring, and also that humour is not 'default', with seriousness therefore being 'unmarked'.

In certain contexts, such as conversations amongst friends in casual settings, humour is welcome and expected, so why the presumption of a default to serious talk?

This paper explores the use of humour where it is the main activity between participants, continuing over long spates of talk. Analysed using methods from conversation analysis and interactional pragmatics, data comprises audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions recorded in a variety of settings in Australia. Findings suggest that despite ostensibly serious settings, humour is treated as the main business while seriousness is relegated to a side-sequence. This research calls into question the alleged 'default' nature of seriousness in talk and provides evidence against this in a variety of contexts in Australia, challenging the long-held view that seriousness is the default mode of interaction.