

“From Which Position Should I Get This Joke?!” A Relevance-Driven Joke Interpretation: Naive Optimism, Cautious Optimism, Sophisticated Understanding?

Magdalena Biegajło

University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Conversational humour and (canned)¹ jokes have been widely acknowledged as an interesting area of scholarly investigations in relevance theory (RT; Sperber and Wilson (1986 [1995]; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004), to mention but a few proponents: Yus (2003, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2012ab, 2013 forth.), Jodłowiec (1991ab, 2008) and Curcó (1995, 1996ab, 1997). The foremost aim of the present paper is to shed light on the comprehension of jokes in the context of relevance-based approach with a special emphasis on the three ways of utterance interpretation (naive optimism, cautious optimism, sophisticated understanding). In my opinion, the study of jokes with regard to a three-fold categorisation of the hearer's expectations may provide satisfactory results and establish a new way in a dynamic process of joke interpretation. Most importantly, it is argued that naive optimism is the least crucial procedure to ascribe underlying intentions to the speaker's input.

Key words: jokes, humour, relevance theory, comprehension

1. Introduction

In accordance with the lines of relevance theory, Yus (2003, 2004), advocating a similar postulate to Jodłowiec (1991ab, 2008) and Curcó (1995, 1996ab), believes that joke processing involves a two-stage model (devised by Suls 1972²) which is used to account for humour appreciation on the part of the hearer. In this way, the text of a joke is divided into two parts from which two interpretations are extracted (cf. Hockett 1972 [1977], Sherzer 1985, Attardo 1994, Attardo and Chabanne 1992).

In Francisco Yus's parlance, the setting of a joke, referred as the multiple-graded interpretations part, communicates the first highly accessible and relevant interpretation, which in turn provides the balance between cognitive effects and mental effort. The punchline of a joke, labelled as the single-covert interpretation part, creates a cognitive dissonance so that a different set of assumptions is made manifest. The extraction of the second interpretation is possible when the humorist plays with the hearer's ongoing assumptions and foregrounds the resolution of an incongruous material in a covert part of a joke.

One of the reasons why this paper was written is that, to the best of my knowledge, little or no attention has been paid to research into jokes in terms of three types of strategies of

¹ Dynel (2009) suggests that the epithet 'canned' is redundant because the notion 'joke' is always used to delineate these humorous texts which are repeated verbatim, for example in collections of jokes.

² Suls (1972: 82) suggests that "In the first stage, the perceiver finds his expectations about the text disconfirmed by the ending of the joke (...). In the second stage, the perceiver engages in a form of problem solving to find a cognitive rule which makes the punch line follow from the main part of the joke and reconciles the incongruous part."

utterance interpretation (Sperber 1994), viz. naive optimism, cautious optimism and sophisticated understanding. The core for these strategies is the notion of metarepresentation (cf. Sperber 2000).

Concerning naive optimism, the communicator is assumed to be benevolent and competent and as a result the hearer makes two assumptions: what the speaker conveys is worth his/her attention and an utterance the speaker uses make it easy for the hearer to arrive at the intended interpretation. In the naive strategy, the hearer stops the comprehension process at the first retrieved interpretation which is the most salient and easiest to derive. In the cautious pattern of inference, the communicator is benevolent but not necessarily competent and the hearer does not stop comprehension at the first interpretation that comes to his/her mind but the first interpretation which s/he assumes that the communicator might have thought would be relevant enough for him to yield cognitive effects. According to the sophisticated strategy, the hearer does not assume but only believes that the communicator is benevolent and competent. Consequently, the audience stops processing an utterance at the first interpretation which the communicator might have thought would *seem* relevant enough for him.

It is argued here that the naive strategy is the least crucial pattern for the derivation of humorous effects in jokes since, when we take for granted the speaker's benevolence, we are not entitled to derive any interpretation which is satisfactory in bringing about the humorous material. In order to get a joke, it is necessary to apply the cautious interpretation strategy and the sophisticated one. The comprehension of jokes with regard to cautious and sophisticated strategies is a complex inference process in which the two types of intentions (informative and communicative) are fulfilled.

This paper is based on linguistic pragmatics and more specifically a cognitive approach to human cognition and communication. Relevance theory tries to identify and elaborate the two phenomena. Not only do Sperber and Wilson specify the theoretical foundations of the use of language in practice (and how relevance is achieved) but also they determine cognitive processes occurring in one's mind (these mental procedures are believed to be general and hence can be applicable to every type of utterance).

The present paper is structured as follows. First, I present the following concepts from relevance theory: the communicative principle of relevance and the cognitive one, the comprehension heuristic, which help explain the tendency of why jokes, as any other type of ostensive-inferential communication, can be investigated within this framework. Second, a more detailed account of the three ways of understanding an utterance is provided. Third, the analysis of jokes from my corpus³ is presented, which is one of many aspects which testifies to the fact that relevance theory offers the theoretical tools to study the humorous material and to explain the humour enjoyment/ amusement.

2. Relevance-theoretic framework

The claim that human communication and cognition are relevance-oriented laid the foundation for the relevance-theoretic account (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995]; Wilson and

³ In particular, jokes are culled from Rovin's (1987) collection of jokes. They were selected randomly.

Sperber 2002, 2004)⁴. It is suggested that relevance is a property of an input to cognitive systems, be it utterances, thoughts, conclusions of inferences. The relevance of an input is greater when its processing yields a great deal of cognitive effects and relevance decreases when an audience has to spend more effort which is not compensated in terms of effects. Positive cognitive effects are changes in human cognitive systems and of which they are several basic types: contextual implications, or they are used to strengthen, revise or abandon existing assumptions.

a. Two principles of relevance

The core assumption about cognition is explained in terms of the cognitive principle of relevance: “Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance” (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 7). From this principle follows that our cognitive systems devote attention to the most relevant stimulus and then process it in the most relevant way. In other words, individuals’ cognition endeavours to extract the maximum effects at the least possible mental effort.

Relevance theory also makes predictions about communication which is explained in terms of the communicative principle of relevance (1) and the presumption of optimal relevance (2). It is argued that the main role of an ostensive stimulus is to attract audience’s attention and direct it to the speaker’s intended meaning. By the communicative principle we assume that every ostensive stimulus, both perceptible or inferable, will be highly relevant and hence worth our mental (processing) effort:

- (1) Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own relevance (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 9).

The presumption of optimal relevance is conceptualised in a following way:

- (2) An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience iff:
 (2a) It is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort;
 (2b) It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences
 (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995], 2004: 256)

According to the clause (2a), an audience towards whom an ostensive stimulus is directed has a strong presumption that processing a stimulus would be worthwhile, i.e. a balance between effort and effects is achieved. As for the clause (2b), it is in the communicator’s best interest to convey a stimulus, consistent with his/her preferences and abilities, which can be easily processed by his/her audience.

⁴ To list all relevant literature on relevance theory is impossible, however, see the most crucial books: Blakemore (1987) and Carston (2002), as well as Yus’s bibliography on RT: <http://www.ua.es/personal/francisco.yus/rt.html>.

b. A Relevance-Theoretic Heuristic

Sperber and Wilson (1986 [1995], 2004) devise the comprehension procedure which is a heuristic guiding the hearer towards the recovery of the communicator’s intended meaning. This comprehension procedure is described in terms of two clauses:

- (3a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguation, reference resolution, implicatures etc.) in order of accessibility.
- (3b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995], 2004: 259)

It is a ‘fast and frugal’ heuristic in which the audience is assumed to arrive at the interpretation relatively quick and at lowest cost. Within the procedure (3a, 3b), the hearer should spend as least effort as possible to obtain the first salient interpretation and at the same time, s/he should stop the comprehension process at this first interpretation which best satisfies his/her expectations of relevance. Sperber and Wilson’s heuristic is divided into three sub-tasks:

- (4a) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (in relevance-theoretic terms, EXPLICATURES) via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes.
- (4b) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED PREMISES).
- (4c) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED CONCLUSIONS) (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995], 2004: 261)

These sub-tasks are not performed simultaneously or sequentially, rather the hypotheses about explicature, implicated premises and conclusions are tested and formulated against the hearer’s expectations.

The two core concepts in relevance theory mentioned above include implicature and explicature. The notion of explicature is elucidated as follows: “an assumption communicated by an utterance U is explicit if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by U” (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995]: 182). It is claimed that the explicit content of an utterance is pragmatically inferred and it is a result of inferential processes, be it ambiguity resolution, reference assignment or ad hoc concept construction. Relevance theory dubs the two types of implicatures: implicated premises (implicated contextual assumptions) and implicated conclusions (contextual implications of an utterance).

3. Strategies of Attributing Intentions

3.1. General Considerations

Relevance theory develops and reconceptualises several Grice’s (1975 [1989]) seminal claims on communication as a matter of ascribing intentions to a communicator’s utterance. Sperber and Wilson expound ostensive-inferential communication in terms of two intentions:

(5a) *The informative intention:*

The intention to inform an audience of something

(5b) *The communicative intention:*

The intention to inform the audience of one’s informative intention (Sperber & Wilson 1986 [1995], 2004, p. 255)

The former intention (5a) is aimed at communicating the fact that the interlocutor wants to convey certain information whereas the latter (5b) is used to delineate the speaker’s willingness to fulfil the informative intention in a purposive and deliberate way. For successful communication, the communicative intention has to be fulfilled on the part of the hearer because when the communicator’s intention is recognised, it necessarily entails the attribution of the informative intention.

In general terms, the attribution of intentions in verbal communication is not as simple as it may seem. Very frequently, the communicator’s intentions are uncritically accepted, questioned and then reconsidered or rejected. Let me analyse a simple sentence, which Carol utters to John, to show how different strategies are applied to utterance comprehension:

(6) Carol: It’s late.

Before I analyse the utterance above, an explanatory note on metarepresentation is necessary. Sperber (1994) argues that a first-order meta-representation⁵ is connected to a simple informative intention; a second-order is when the hearer knows that the speaker has an informative intention; a third-order meta-representation is when the speaker has a communicative intention so that s/he intends his audience to know about an informative intention and finally a fourth-order meta-representation is connected to the speaker’s attribution of a communicative intention to the hearer.

3.2. Naïve Optimism

According to the naive optimism strategy, John assumes that Carol is a benevolent and competent communicator and following the path of least effort John stops at the first interpretation that comes to his mind and it is accepted as intended by Carol. Other possible interpretations are ordered according to their ease of access. John aims at easy relevance since he identifies the first idea suggested by the linguistic sense. The conclusion of this inference is a second-order meta-representational attribution of a first-order meta-representational intention. The pronoun *it* would not have a specific referent represented in John’s mind and the adjective *late* would be comprehended as something late with reference to the present time. Consequently, John understands Carol’s statement literally as: *It’s late now*.

⁵ Our comprehension is feasible due to our abilities to metarepresent attributed thoughts, attributed utterances and abstract, non-attributed representations. Wilson (1999: 127) defines metarepresentation as “a representation of a representation: a higher-order representation with a lower-order representation embedded within it”. A lower-level representation includes public representations (e.g. utterances), mental representations (e.g. thoughts) or abstract representations (e.g. sentences, propositions).

3.3. Cautious Optimism

In the cautious pattern of comprehension, John assumes Carol’s benevolence but not necessarily competence. Carol, in turn, cannot envisage the interpretation John thinks of and as a result she may easily fail to communicate relevant information. Unlike to the naive optimism strategy, in cautious optimism John cannot stop his comprehension process at the first interpretation that comes to his mind but the first interpretation that Carol might have thought would be relevant to him: *It’s time to go home*. The cautious pattern is possible when John evaluates his interpretation in the light of what he knows and thinks about Carol. Sperber (1994) claims that a second-order meta-representational attribution of a first-order meta-representational intention serves both as premises and conclusions.

3.4. Sophisticated Understanding

In the sophisticated strategy, John assumes that Carol is neither benevolent nor competent but Carol intends to seem benevolent and competent. John follows the path of least effort and stops at the first interpretation that Carol might have thought would seem relevant enough to him. As a result, John may access a number of alternative interpretations: *Carol is tired so it’s time to go home* or *Carol wants me to take her home*.

4. Joke Comprehension and the Three Strategies

4.1. General Considerations

Given the dearth of studies of jokes in accordance with three patterns of inference in pertinent literature the present paper confines to a further discussion of the comprehension procedure which, at the same time may contribute to the dynamics of the way in which the humorist makes the hearer attribute his/her intentions. These strategies come in handy to advance an empirically plausible explanation of why in some jokes humorous effects are easily entertained by an audience.

Among many factors, such as the context, the discussion here is narrowed down to the fact that in accepting one of the strategies, successful humorous communication depends on two aspects: first, what the hearer knows about the communicator and, second, which interpretations the communicator assumes that the hearer would have easy access to and hence other interpretations are not fully represented in the hearer’s mind and second, what postulates concerning the communicator’s benevolence and competence are drawn by the hearer. If these two determining criteria were mutually known to the two parties in humorous conversation, the attribution of intentions to others would be a flawless and intact endeavour.

4.2. Jokes in Naive Optimism

Following the naive optimism interpretation strategy, the communicator can easily predict a number of interpretations represented in the hearer’s mind. On hearing following jokes (7) – (8):

(7) Worried because they hadn't heard anything for days from the widow in the neighboring apartment, Mrs. Silver said to her son, "Timmy, would you go next door and see how old Mrs. Kirkland is?"

A few minutes later, Timmy returned.

"Well," asked Mrs. Silver, "is she all right?"

"She's fine, except that she's pissed at you."

"At me?" the woman exclaimed. "Whatever for?"

"She said it's none of your business how old she is." (Rovin 1987: 17)

(8) His philandering wife was constantly going about in the skimpiest of outfits, and Mr. Clemens has had enough. Deciding he'd like to see her in something long and flowing, he pushed her in the Mississippi River. (Rovin 1987: 242)

the hearer should identify ambiguity, conveyed both explicitly and implicitly, inherent in the production of humorous effects:

(7a) "to see how old Mrs. Kirkland is" = to find out her age

(7b) "to see how old Mrs. Kirkland is" = to find out if she feels well

(8a) "to see her in something long and flowing" = to see someone in long and flowing clothes

(8b) "to see her in something long and flowing" = to see someone in a river

In realistic terms, for joke comprehension it is important for the communicator to be able to predict which interpretations are more accessible and relevant for the hearer. Along naive optimism, the hearer consciously decides that s/he believes in the communicator's competence and benevolence when s/he tries to convey a piece of information. As soon as the hearer derives the first relevant interpretation, s/he attributes it to the humorist and suspects and it was supposed to be communicated by him/her. The schema of intention inference is slightly different in two examples (7) – (8).

As for the joke (7), I believe that a naive audience, on every occasion, accesses the interpretation (7a) which happens to be extracted from the set-up part of a joke and as such it ties up with the resolution of the punchline. In other words, when a character in a joke is asked to see how old Mrs. Kirkland is, s/he understands an utterance literally to learn the age of an old lady (7a). The first literal interpretation is the most salient and easily accessible and hence it does not require from the hearer to assign various interpretations to one utterance. Since the communicator is benevolent and competent the hearer does not have to spend more effort than is needed. The pattern of comprehension applied by a naive hearer results in positive cognitive effects, but not humorous ones. Consequently, an audience has not discovered the informative intention in which the communicator aimed at a humorous resolution. As regards the communicative intention, it has been fulfilled because the utterance itself is an ostensive stimulus which conveys the presumption of relevance and it cannot be discarded as irrelevant and unworthy of audience's mental effort.

The question arises about the relevance of this utterance (joke) to the hearer's cognitive system when it is processed along the naive optimism strategy. From the point of view of the hearer, the comprehension of this joke is an input to his/her cognitive system and in this way it leads to the emergence of new assumptions which may tie up to some old assumptions

which eventually result in contextual implications. From the point of view of the communicator, the production of a humorous utterance is redundant because his/her intention to amuse his/her audience is not fulfilled. When the hearer cannot ascribe appropriate intentions as s/he follows the naive strategy the humorist may easily fail to present information as relevant or more relevant than others. The naive interpretation strategy is a plausible explanation of why some jokes fall flat: either because the communicator has not managed to make a humorous interpretation relevant or it is the hearer's fault who is oriented towards easy relevance and cannot recover the speaker's meaning.

A different case is exemplified by the joke (8) in which the audience is forced to derive two distinct interpretations (8a and 8b) to enjoy it humorously. However, following the naive strategy is problematic in this situation. When the hearer follows the path of least effort and stops at the first interpretation that comes to his mind, s/he extracts the interpretation in (8a) in which *something long and flowing* is understood as "clothes".

It is still assumed that the humorist is both competent and benevolent and knows what will be relevant to his/her audience. But does the humorist think about the following part of a joke in which a different set of assumptions is mutually manifest to the communicator and his/her audience? Without a doubt, the assumptions from the setting are reversed when it comes to the punchline and the hearer should look for another interpretation.

First of all, the audience has to acknowledge the utterance as a joke but and I claim that at the basic (naive) layer of interpretation s/he cannot acknowledge this type of discourse as a joke. On the other hand, the humorist is competent and every utterance conveys a presumption of optimal relevance so the audience cannot give up utterance interpretation all over. The only possibility for the hearer is to perceive the text in terms of a two-fold structure in which two unconnected interpretations are extracted. In this way, the hearer does not reject the text.

The joke below (9) is also dependent on the recovery of two divergent interpretations and as a result the hearer would not discover its humorous part:

(9) "Mom," little Alexander asked, "does Jesus use our bathroom?"
 "Why, no!" his mother said sweetly. "Why do you ask?"
 "Cause every morning, daddy kicks the door and yells, "Christ, are you still in there?" (Rovin 1987, pp. 36–37).

(9a) Jesus Christ may live in their bathroom

(9b) Jesus Christ is used as a vocative

To sum up the discussion on naive optimism, it may prove to be useful for typical utterances which do require only literal readings. In the case of jokes, an audience has to first identify a text as a joke and then to uncritically process it. It is not possible to derive any comic effects when the naive optimism strategy is followed since jokes, as many other type of ostensive-inferential communication, depend on attentive readers/ hearers who do not stop at the first interpretation that comes to their mind. I attempted to show that jokes, as a type of discourse, are not rejected and the hearer still recovers an interpretation but it is not of humorous nature.

4.3. Jokes in Cautious Optimism

Cautious optimism is a more complex pattern of inference than naive optimism, however, a full attribution of intentions to others is not a fail-safe process. In the cautious optimism strategy, the hearer arrives at the first interpretation that comes to his/her mind, then evaluates it with respect to what s/he knows about his/her communicator. Consequently, s/he looks for the interpretation which the speaker might have thought would be relevant. The accessibility and relevance of the humorous interpretation depends on the communicator's abilities to make it more accessible than the others.

Take for example the joke in (7). It is maintained that following naive optimism, the hearer finds the first literal interpretation of the phrase "*to see how old Mrs. Kirkland is*" which is comprehended as a request to find out the age of Mrs. Kirkland. Accepting the cautious strategy, the hearer cannot take this interpretation as true. The hearer's belief in the humorist's competence is limited but s/he has to decide which interpretation the communicator might have been thought would be relevant. At this point, there are two possible ways in which the comprehension procedure may go. The first option is that the hearer stops his/her inferential process at the literal reading of the utterance assuming that it is relevant for the communicator, even when this interpretation is reconsidered. The second possibility for the speaker to attribute intentions is to make the hearer find the second humorous interpretation (7b) postulating that it is more relevant than the interpretation in (7a).

The cautious optimism strategy enables the audience to grasp the funny part of a joke but only in 'simple-structured jokes'. By using this term I mean humorous texts in which the literal interpretation is very similar to the non-literal one. The literal reading of an utterance would not lead to humorous effects but at the same time would not require from the hearer to spend more mental effort or even worse, to question the speaker's benevolence. In simple structured jokes, the first interpretation extracted from the setting part of a joke suffices for the conclusions and comprises the punchline. Nevertheless, not every joke can be interpreted in a comparable manner as simple jokes. There are jokes such as (8) which require the fully-fledged cautious strategy in which conclusions of inference are always humorous, at least in theory.

Let us see it on the example (8). Basically, the pattern of inference is the same as in a naive optimism stage with respect to the first interpretation that comes to the hearer's mind: *to see her in something long and flowing* is understood as "to see someone in long and flowing clothes". When the punchline is processed the hearer is aware of the fact that the communicator is not necessarily competent and the first interpretation needs to undergo re-evaluation. The hearer's knowledge about the humorist's competence helps him/her recover the second interpretation "to see someone in a river" (8b). A successful process of interpretation makes the hearer know that the utterance is a joke and the communicator's production of a joke is not in vain. In this way, the humorist has expected that the non-literal reading of the phrase would eventually occur. Jokes (7), (8), (9) are successfully interpreted in the cautious optimism interpretation strategy so that the informative and communicative intentions are fulfilled.

4.4. Jokes and Sophisticated Understanding

Generally, the hearer displays a fully-fledged communicative competence when the communicator is not benevolent and competent but only intends to seem as one. The informative intention may fail to be fulfilled because the hearer does not perceive the intended interpretation as true, however, the communicative intention succeeds.

Given the possibility of failing to successfully convey the informative intention which is crucial for humour appreciation a joke may still fall flat. Nevertheless, this part of the sophisticated understanding strategy should not be considered in the comprehension of jokes since when the hearer extracts the interpretation that the speaker might have thought would seem relevant enough to his/her audience s/he finds the interpretation which brings about humorous effects. Consequently, the hearer cannot abandon the humorous interpretation since it surely yields humorous effects and makes the utterance production create overall relevance.

The interpretation of one example suffices here to demonstrate that acceptance of the sophisticated strategy guarantees the humour resolution. On hearing a joke (7), an audience rejects the first interpretation (7a) claiming that the communicator has a humorous intention because this utterance interrupts the natural flow of conversation. Then, the hearer looks for another interpretation which the speaker might have thought would be relevant enough and as a result s/he finds the second highly accessible interpretation (7b). Since the communicator’s benevolence and competence are suspended the hearer has to double check whether this interpretation is intended by the communicator and should be held as true by the audience. In other words, the hearer has to consider whether the second interpretation is the same in the speaker’s and hearer’s minds. If it is, the communicator has managed to attribute the communicative intention to his/her audience (see Fig. 1).

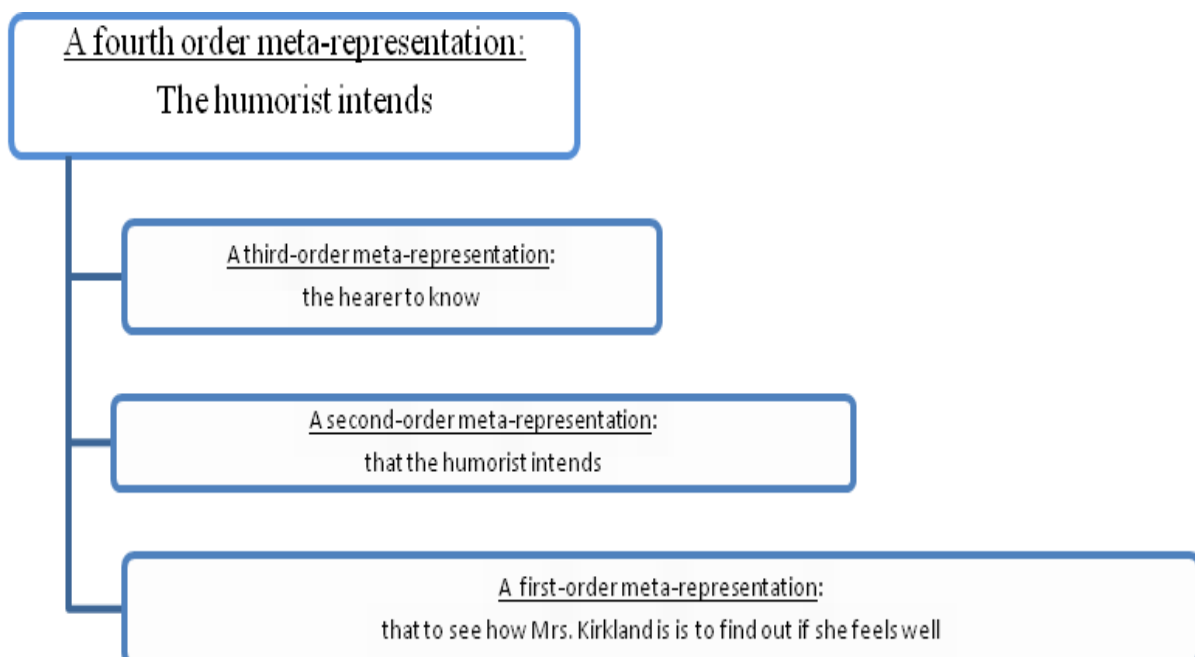


Fig. 1. Orders of meta-representation.

Sperber (1994) argues that the hearer has to possess a fourth-order meta-representational attribution of the communicator's intentions. This claim holds as true also in the comprehension of jokes. On the basis of a joke (7), the communicator intends that the hearer should be aware of his/her intention to inform him/her that "'to see how Mrs. Kirkland is' is to find out if she feels well". In this case, then, the communicator has two informative intentions (cf. Sperber 2000): a first-order informative intention that the hearer should believe in (7b) as well as a second-order informative intention that the hearer should be aware of the communicator's informative intention. A second-order informative intention is tied up to a third-order metarepresentation: the communicator has a communicative intention to be fulfilled. As soon as the humorist manages to attribute a communicative intention to the hearer, s/he is on a fourth-order metarepresentational stage.

Furthermore, in this article I have provided the comprehension of jokes from the point of view of more than a sophisticated understander. Similar term to Dynel's (2011) idea of a *metarecipient* who consciously analyses fictional media discourse, I think that a researcher who investigates jokes is an *upper-sophisticated understander* so that s/he is able to distinguish cognitive mechanisms underlying humorous effects. An upper-sophisticated understander also predicts which interpretations are at the hearer's disposal during the comprehension process and which interpretations should be made more relevant than the others by the humorist.

5. Conclusions

Drawing upon relevance theory, the present paper addressed three strategies, coinciding with the hearer's expectations of relevance which range from unsophisticated to more complex, as applied to the comprehension of jokes. In being more specific, Sperber (1994) compiled a list of three patterns of inference depending on the hearer's assumptions concerning the speaker's benevolence and competence which in turn affect the quality of the first accessible interpretation. The attribution of intentions to others is connected to meta-representational abilities so that each strategy requires an additional layer of metarepresentation in which naive optimism is the least complex. The paper aimed to adduce evidence that jokes can follow the same comprehension strategies as any other type of ostensive-inferential communication.

In the naive optimism strategy, given a vast array of jokes which differ with regard to their complexity and the way a humorous effect is created and adjusted there is no unequivocal answer. As I tried to show, there are jokes in which the hearer finds the first relevant interpretation from the setting of a joke and holds it as true to the end of the processing time. These jokes are simple-structured so that the literal interpretation is sufficient for a naive optimist who assumes that the communicator is benevolent and competent but the humorous effects never emerge. Also, I presented the study of a joke in which two discrepant interpretations have to be identified but it is impossible at this stage of inferencing to derive humour.

Accepting the cautious optimism pattern, the hearer may be led to entertain a humorous resolution but still humorous communication is not fail-safe. It happens that the hearer does

not believe that this interpretation is intended by the communicator because the extracted interpretation is not humorous for the hearer.

On a sophisticated strategy, the hearer surely finds the humorous intentions as the communicator successfully attributed these intentions to his/her audience.

References

- Attardo, Salvatore. 1994. *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Attardo, Salvatore and Jean-Charles Chabanne. 1992. “Jokes as a Text Type”. *HUMOR*, 5(1-2), pp. 165–176.
- Blakemore, Diane. 1987. *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carston, Robyn. 2002. *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Curcó, Carmen. 1995. “Some Observations on the Pragmatics of Humorous Interpretations. A Relevance Theoretic Approach”. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 7, pp. 27–47.
- . 1996a. The implicit expression of attitudes, mutual manifestness, and verbal humour. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 8, pp. 89–99.
- . 1996b. “Relevance Theory and Humorous Interpretations”. In: J. Hulstijn and A. Nijholt (eds.), *Automatic interpretation and generation of verbal humor*. Enschede, The Netherlands: University of Twente.
- . 1997. *The Pragmatics of Humorous Interpretations. A relevance theoretic approach*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, University College London, London, United Kingdom.
- Dynel, Marta. 2009. “Beyond a Joke: Types of Conversational Humour”. *Language and Linguistics Compass. Semantics and Pragmatics*, 3, pp. 1284–1299.
- . 2011. “‘I’ll Be There for You!’: On the Participation-Based Sitcom Humour”. In: Marta Dynel (ed.), *The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Grice, Paul. 1975 [1989]. “Logic and Conversation”. In: P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3*. London: Academic Press.
- Hockett, Charles. 1972. “Jokes”. In: E. Smith (ed.), *Studies in Linguistics in Honor of George L. Trager*. New York: Mouton. Reprinted in: Charles Hockett, *The View from Language: Selected Essays 1948–1974*. Athens, Georgia, U.S.A.: University of Georgia Press, 1977.
- Jodłowiec, Maria. 1991a. “The Role of Relevance in the Interpretation of Verbal Jokes: A Pragmatic Analysis”. Ph.D. dissertation, Jagiellonian University.
- . 1991b. “What Makes Jokes Tick”. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 3, pp. 241–253.
- . 2008. “What’s in the Punchline?” In: Ewa Wałaszewska, Marta Kisielewska-Krysiuk, Aniela Korzeniowska and Małgorzata Grzegorzewska (eds.), *Relevant worlds: Current perspectives on language, translation and Relevance Theory*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Norrick, Neal. 1993. *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rovin, Jeff. 1987. *1001 Great Jokes: From the Delightfully Droll to the Truly Tasteless*. New York: New American Library.

- Sacks, Harvey. 1974. “An Analysis of the Course of a Joke’s Telling”. In: R. Bauman and J. Sherzer (eds.), *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, pp. 337–353.
- Sherzer, Joel. 1985. “Puns and Jokes”. In: T. van Dijk (ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. London: Academic Press.
- Sperber, Dan. 1994. “Understanding Verbal Understanding”. In: Jean Khalfa (ed.), *What is Intelligence?* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, pp. 179–198.
- . 2000. “Metarepresentations in an Evolutionary Perspective”. In: Dan Sperber (ed.), *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 117–137. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. 1986 [1995]. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Suls, Jerry. 1972. “A Two-Stage Model for the Appreciation of Jokes and Cartoons: An Information-Processing Analysis”. In: J. Goldstein and P. McGhee (eds.), *The Psychology of Humor*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wilson, Deirdre. 1999. “Metarepresentation in Linguistic Communication”. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 11, pp. 127–162.
- Wilson, Deirdre and Dan Sperber. 2002. “Relevance Theory”. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 14, pp. 249–287.
- Wilson, Deirdre and Dan Sperber. 2004. “Relevance Theory”. In: Laurence Horn and Gregory Ward (eds.), *Handbook of Pragmatics*, (eds.), 607–632. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Yus, Francisco. 2003. “Humour and the Search for Relevance”. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(9), pp. 1295–1331.
- . 2004. “Pragmatics of Humorous Strategies in *El club de la comedia*”. In *Current trends in the pragmatics of Spanish*, edited by R. Márquez-Reiter and M.E. Placencia. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- . 2008. “A Relevance-Theoretic Classification of Jokes”. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 4(1), pp. 131–157.
- . 2011. “A Pragmatic Analysis of Jokes”. Paper delivered at the Seminar *Meaning in Interaction*. Seville, Spain: University of Seville.
- . 2012a. “Relevance, Humour and Translation”. In: Ewa Walaszewska and Agnieszka Piskorska (eds.), *Relevance Theory. More than Understanding*, 117–145. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- . 2012b. “Strategies and Effects in Humorous Discourse. The Case of Jokes”. In: Barbara Eizaga Rebollar (ed.), *Studies in Linguistics and Cognition*, 271–293. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG.
- . forthcoming 2013. “An Inference-Centred Analysis of Jokes: The Intersecting Circles Model of Humorous Communication”. In: Leonor Ruiz Gurillo and Belén Alvarado Ortega (eds.), *Irony and Humor: Highlights and Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Address correspondence to Magdalena Biegajło, at magdalena.biegajlo@gmail.com