



Humour as a new teaching perspective for all

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Do the teachers understand the language of humour?

- The importance of humour has been increasing the interest in its potential applications in a variety of professional domains.
- This is the case of education which was traditionally seen as a serious undertaking where there was no place for humour.
- However it is now understood that it is possible and very advantageous to make learning fun.
- In the classroom, teachers should assume the role of learning mediators.
- so it seems pertinent to assess teachers' ability to process humour information through humorous texts.

Cognitive aspects of humour

- Humour, perception and attitudes
 - Differences of gender
 - Humour and personality
 - Development psychology and humour
 - Humour sense (assessment)
- Information processing in humour
 - Conceptual interpretation
 - Mental lexicon
 - Memory
 - Humour appreciation and brain
- Cognitive mechanisms of humour
 - Cognitive dimension of humour discursive mechanisms
 - Mental spaces and sense construction theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

General structure of humorous texts

- Accepting the general research lines of Fauconnier (2002) and more recently of Ritchie (2006), every humorous text follows a mechanism in which there is an initial part, called the set-up, appearing to have one interpretation, and a final part, the punchline, which provokes a mental shifting and forces the reader or the hearer to perceive another point of view.
- This change of interpretation does not mean the former was incorrect, but it is needed because it is responsible for the incongruity resolution without which the humour language comprehension does not happen and consequently there is no humour appreciation.

Verbal humour information process

- Structural elements of verbal humour
 - Metaphor
 - Presupposition
 - Inference
 - Concept of *script*
- Ambiguity
 - Different types
 - Incongruity
 - Maxims and principles (Grice, 1975; Raskin, 1985)
- Sense production models
 - *Isotopy Disjunction Model* (IDM – Greimas, 1966, 1970 and 1972; Charaudeau, 1972; Attardo, 1994)
 - Incongruity Resolution Model (Ritchie, 2006)
 - Space Structuring Model (Coulson, 2006)

Humour and teaching

- Contributions of humour to teaching strategies
 - “Humour can be used to bring people closer together or to exclude them, to violate social norms or to enforce them, to dominate over and manipulate people, or to ingratiate oneself with others. Humor can also be used to reinforce stereotypes or to shatter prejudices, to resolve conflicts in relationships or to avoid dealing with problems, to convey feelings of affection and tolerance, or to denigrate and express hostility” (Martin, 2007:150).
 - “Pedagogical trends in recent decades have shifted toward the promotion of a more relaxed learning environment” (Martin, 2007:350).

Proceedings

- The incongruity-resolution model of humour (Ritchie, 2006) was tested by a series of humorous sketches each one followed by four possible endings among which the true funny punchline could be found.
 - Nonsense
 - Logical but expected
 - Surprising but illogical
 - Surprising and logical (the true punchline)
- It has been asked the participants to complete the sketches by selecting one of the four options which they thought it was the funny ending.

Conclusions

- Humorous text identification capacity:
 - Insignificant age differences
 - Older teachers reveal better performance as humorous text identifiers
- but
- “a major limitation of research comparing aspects of humor in older and younger adults is that this approach does not permit us to determine whether any observed differences are due to developmental changes that occur with aging, or whether they are due to cohort effects” (Martin, 2007: 264).

More conclusions

- Information processing about humorous texts
 - Similar performance of the teachers, taking into account age and gender
- There is no justification for the teachers to ignore humorous texts in their teaching activities.
- Humour “can easily be seen as a way of activating motivation and directing attention” (Maurice, 1988: 20).

More conclusions

- “the use of humor in the classroom has been shown to increase ease of learning and to be a good pedagogical research overall” (Attardo, 1994: 211).
- “humor continues to be a fascinating topic of research that promises many more interesting and useful discoveries” Martin (2007: 371).

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