Funny story... Reasoning and perspective taking in humorous interaction

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Humour is inherently dialogical, even in canned joke tellings and contexts such as social media, as example (1) shows.

(from Twitter:https://twitter.com/andrealongchu/status/1246445034792239106)

1) @andrealongchu: guys will stand 5'8" from you and call it 6 feet

   @chodedc: Most guys can't tell what six inches look like let alone six feet. . .

Interpreting humour requires multiple perspective taking, which has been described using the notion of different "story worlds" in the analysis of jokes (Ritchie, 2018). This perspective taking is inherent in a dialogical approach to interaction in general (Linell, 2009), and involves us making inferences based on topoi, principles of reasoning recognised within a socio-cultural community (Breitholtz, 2020).

One important consequence of the dialogicity of humour is the possibility that interlocutors might interpret the same piece of discourse in distinct ways, and the source of humour is often a play on this potential for multiple interpretations. We argue that it is the juxtaposition of contrasting topoi which creates the humorous effect. For example, (1) relies on two contrasting topoi: a corona-specific "safe-distance" topos that people should stay 6 feet apart and a "dating website" topos that men who are 5'8" tall often claim to be 6", with "6 feet" as a point of overlap between the two.

In this talk we show how a dialogical account of humour using dialogue semantics (Cooper and Ginzburg, 2015; Ginzburg, 2012) and topoi allows us to account for written jokes with an idealised audience (Breitholtz and Maraev, 2019) as well as joke tellings in interaction (Maraev et al., 2020) using examples from the British National Corpus and social media examples such as (1). Our account gives a fine-grained precise formal definition of the notions of script compatibility and opposition from theories of humour (Raskin, 1985; Attardo and Raskin, 1991) whilst also taking the incremental processing of jokes into account (Ritchie, 2018).

References

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