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8 Humor and Figurative Language

Abstract: This chapter will address the following questions: What is figurative language, and how does it differ from ‘literal’ or ‘zero-degree’ communication? When does a figure of speech become humorous? And how does figurativeness relate to key concepts in linguistic theories of humor, such as script opposition? After a terminological preamble, we will review existing scholarship from linguistics, semiotics, and literary studies, focusing on the relation between humor and different kinds of figurative language – namely metaplasms (e.g. puns), metataxis (syntactic play), metasemes (metaphor and metonymy), and metalogisms (hyperbole, irony, parody, etc.), based on the terminology proposed by Group μ in its foundational *Rhétorique Générale* (1970).

The chapter will provide a systematic overview of classic and recent studies on figurative language and humor (from Raskin’s early work on metaphor to interdisciplinary contributions in the field of cognitive linguistics), transcending the fuzzy boundary between the stylistic and conceptual dimensions of humorous expression – or, in different terms, between ‘figures of language’ and ‘figures of meaning.’ Moreover, we will highlight the potential for interdisciplinary collaborations on the topic, including for example new avenues for research on humorous interaction between verbal and non-verbal figures.

Keywords: figures of language, figures of meaning, irony, metalogisms, metasemes, metaphors, metonymy, multimodality, puns, wordplay

8.1 Introduction

The link between humor and figurative speech is a close and intuitive one; figures as diverse as alliteration, metaphor, exaggeration, or irony are omnipresent across humorous genres, from canned jokes to stand-up comedy or satire. This Introduction provides a working definition and typology of figures of speech. In the remaining sections we will discuss the relation of previous humor scholarship to different types of

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figurative language (Sections 2–3), and reflect on possible directions for future interdisciplinary research (4).

According to the traditional, although not universally accepted definition, figures of speech are a “purposeful deviation in sense or language from the ordinary simple form” (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 9.1.11; see Meyer, 2017, p. 143). The exact nature of this ‘deviation,’ and the norm that it is supposed to be set against, remain difficult to pinpoint. As we will argue, this definitional problem is closely related to ongoing debates in humor studies. However, in our working definition, we just characterize Quintilian’s “ordinary simple form” as a mode of communication which does not patently disobey the four maxims inherent to Grice’s Cooperative Principle – namely the maxims of Quality (be truthful), Quantity (be as informative as required), Relation (be relevant), and Manner (be perspicuous, and strive for brevity and order).¹

To put some order into the bibliography on humor and figurative language, we will adopt an orientative classification of figures of speech based on Group μ ’s *General Rhetoric* (Dubois et al., 1970), which still offers the most comprehensive taxonomy to date. Group μ divides figures of speech into four groups: 1) *Metaplasms*, altering or playing with a word’s graphic, phonic, or morphological features (among others, alliteration, palindromes, puns, and rhymes); 2) *Metataxes*, altering or playing with word (or sentence) order, for instance ellipsis (omitting one or more words), enumeration, or inversion; 3) *Metasememes*, replacing or connecting words based on their meaning (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, or oxymoron); 4) *Metalogisms* or ‘figures of thought,’ altering or playing with the logical value of a sentence or text, such as irony, allegory, exaggeration, and euphemism.²

Although Group μ explicitly focused on verbal language, many of these figures can be identified in visual and multimodal communication as well.³ While Group μ ’s approach has been criticized for their a-historical perspective, as well as their relatively obscure terminology and taxonomic ambitions (Abbott, 2006), their distinction between four macro-types of rhetorical figures is still used in more recent work (see for instance Meyer, 2017 and Plett, 2010).

While building on Group μ ’s classification, the present chapter will simplify this taxonomy by merging the first two types (metaplasms and metataxes) into the broader category of ‘figures of language,’ and the latter two (metasememes and metalogisms) under the umbrella term ‘figures of meaning.’ The distinction was already implied in Quintilian’s definition of figures as deviations “in *sense* [i.e., in this context, meaning]

1 On the relation between figures of speech and the Cooperative Principle, see for example Davis (2005).

2 As pointed out by Eco ([1983] 2003), the notion of metalogism is particularly difficult to circumscribe, as it can encompass a broad range of stylistic strategies, including for instance parody and intertextuality at large.

3 Metaphors can naturally be non-verbal and multimodal too – see e.g. Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009), where multimodal metaphors are defined as those whose source and target domains are represented by different modes such as images, gestures, or sounds.

or *language* from the ordinary simple form” (our emphasis). This approach provides our survey with a structuring principle, while attenuating the taxonomic rigidity of Group μ 's model – for example, it is difficult to discuss puns without considering syntactical aspects (thus merging metaplasm and metataxes), or to ignore the obvious overlaps between metasemes (such as metaphor) and metalogisms (e.g. allegory). In short, this simplified distinction is more economical and intuitive. Of course, meaning can play an important role in the former category as well – for example, the tension between different meanings also lies at the heart of figures of language, such as puns. However, figures of meaning are less dependent on the specific (phonetic, morphological, syntactic) features of a given language. Consequently, figures of meaning are more likely to stand the test of translation, as they travel more easily across languages (Eco, [1983] 2003).

Figures – whether of language or meaning – are closely related to humor, and can often be vehicles of the latter. Their deep connection lies in the fact that both figurative speech and most forms of humor constitute a deviation from Grice's Cooperative Principle (Raskin & Attardo, 1994) – although opinions differ as to whether these deviations represent a full-fledged violation (Attardo, 2017) or just a superficial flouting (Dyner, 2018) of the Principle. Both figures and humor entail some irregularity to be recognized on the part of the reader, who is prompted to make sense of said irregularity. The ultimate goal of figurative language is “to raise a question in the mind of the receiver” thereby activating the latter's inferential process (Meyer, 2017, p. 148), although this might vary depending on how (un)conventional a figure is. Similarly, humorous communication is typically based on the resolution of a perceived incongruity (for an overview of incongruity-based theories of humor, see Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017; Attardo et al., this volume). In light of the above, it is not surprising that the bibliography on humor and various types of figures is particularly vast.

8.2 Humor and Figures of Language

8.2.1 Defining Wordplay

Group μ classified figures of language according to four basic operations:

1. *Deletion*, including for instance truncation (e.g. ‘prof’ for ‘professor’) and ellipsis (omitting parts of speech that should be easily reconstructed from the context);
2. *Addition*: Portmanteau words (e.g. ‘glamping,’ from ‘glam’ + ‘camping’), alliteration, rhyme, enumeration, etc.;
3. *Substitution*, e.g. puns based on the replacement of one or more phonemes or graphemes (‘cats are *purr*-fect’);
4. *Inversion*: Metathesis or spoonerisms (inverting the order of syllables, e.g. ‘Is the bean dizzy?’ instead of ‘Is the Dean busy?’), anagrams, palindromes, syntactic inversion, etc.

While discussing several potentially humorous figures, Group μ 's overview is not exhaustive. For example, their classification excludes figures relying on the ambiguity of one given lexical unit or string, which too can play an important role in humorous communication (see homonymous puns in Section 2.2).

A useful starting point is represented by the category of *wordplay*, which clearly entertains a privileged link with humor. Wordplay has recently been the subject of increased attention in humor studies, especially thanks to the “Dynamics of Wordplay” book series (starting with Zirker & Winter-Froemel, 2015). In its narrow sense, wordplay can be defined as a “group of rhetorical plays on sound or content, ludically and surprisingly contrasting the meanings of similar sounding or homophonous words” (Winter-Froemel, 2009; transl. Braun, 2018, p. 175). Notably, wordplay scholars generally accept that the phenomenon is not limited to words, but can also concern “smaller or bigger linguistic units” (Winter-Froemel, 2016, p. 37). According to this strict characterization, some degree of semantic opposition – i.e. a contrast between two or more meanings evoked by a linguistic string – is a necessary condition for wordplay (Delabastita, 2018; Renner, 2015). Yet, Winter-Froemel herself also proposes a broader definition, where semantic opposition is not an essential requirement: “Wordplay is a historically determined phenomenon [...] that juxtaposes or manipulates linguistic items from one or more languages in order to surprise the hearer(s) and produce a humorous effect on them” (2016, p. 37). On a side note, the alleged universality of the link between wordplay and humor is far from uncontested, despite its prominence in western cultures (Attardo, 2018; Thaler, 2016). We first review previous research on humorous wordplay in the narrow sense, and then gradually move towards Winter-Froemel’s broader definition.

8.2.2 Puns

The prototypical wordplay is best represented by the figure known as pun: “a type of joke in which one sound sequence (e.g., a word) has two meanings and this similarity in sound creates a relationship for the two meanings from which humor is derived” (Hempelmann, 2014, p. 612). A distinction can be made between ‘perfect’ or homonymous puns (same word or string, two meanings), puns based on graphic or phonic identity (respectively homographic and homophonic), and heteronymous⁴ or paronomastic puns (play between two similar, but not identical strings). Table 8.1 illustrates (with different examples) the taxonomy proposed by Hempelmann and Miller (2017):

⁴ In rhetorical jargon, a homonymous/single-sign pun is also known as *syllipsis*, a homonymous/double-sign as *antanaclasis*, and a heteronymous/double-sign as *adnominatio* (Hempelmann & Miller, 2017).

Table 8.1: Taxonomy of puns (based on Hempelmann and Miller 2017).

	Homonymous	Heteronymous
<i>Single sign or in absentia</i> [one word/string evokes two meanings]	They went to prom, but they didn't have a <i>ball</i> .	He's so fragile, we call him <i>crystal Paul</i> .
<i>Double sign or in praesentia</i> [play between two identical or similar words/strings]	I had a ball at the ball.	Crystal Paul has no crystal ball.

Despite its comprehensiveness, this classification does not consider a less frequent (but notable) type of pun, which we could call 'homonymous/zero sign.' An example is the sentence 'I am at two with nature,' which presupposes a homonymous pun between *one* (as part of the idiom 'to be at one with something') and *one* (as a number) – neither of which is present in the actual utterance (Aarons, 2017, p. 90). As to heteronymous puns, a more fine-grained classification can be achieved by identifying different mechanisms of word manipulation. For instance, Attardo (2018) and Guidi (2017) discuss the mechanisms of deletion, addition, substitution, and inversion and posit their universality in pun creation.

Scholars concur that puns (just like wordplay in general) are not limited to words – "they may exploit very small linguistic units, such as phonemes, and units as big as a sentence" (Aarons, 2017). Nonetheless, opinions differ concerning the role played by syntactic ambiguity (as opposed to lexical ambiguity) in puns. For example, Attardo (1994 and 2018) conceives of lexical-ambiguity and syntactic-ambiguity jokes as mutually exclusive categories, with the former type being far more common than the latter – in Attardo's view, the difference in frequency is due to the higher "processing cost" required by syntactic puns (p. 99). A prime example of such processing costs is offered by so-called 'garden-path sentences,' where readers are forced to rethink their initial interpretation of a syntactically ambiguous sentence (e.g. 'the old man the boat,' with *man* first interpreted as a noun and subsequently as a verb). Similarly, Bucaria's analysis of involuntary humor in newspaper headlines (2004) separates lexical ambiguity from four different types of syntactic ambiguity, although syntactic-ambiguity puns are far more common in her corpus.

Another debated issue is the role of puns in visual and multimodal communication. Hempelmann and Samson (2007) proposed a convincing taxonomy of purely visual puns, including 'perfect visual puns' (based on full visual ambiguity of one abstract symbol), 'imperfect visual puns' (visual resemblance between the pun and the target), and 'symbol puns' (usually characterized by a 'meta' component, where the symbol simultaneously stands for the real object and a drawn version of said object). Despite the specificities of each medium, visual and verbal puns do share a series of key requisites, including the combination of ambiguity and semantic overlap (or 'functional overlap' in the case of visual puns; see Hempelmann & Samson, 2007). As to multimodal (verbo-visual) puns, instead, several different types can be distin-

guished – from combinations of words and images where the verbal pun “can only be processed when the visual information included in the image is factored in” (Zenner & Geeraerts, 2018, p. 182, referring to internet memes), to occurrences where the letters forming a given word are assembled to resemble the object they refer to (e.g. the letters H-U-N-D, German for ‘dog,’ written in such a way that H evokes the ears of a dog, U and N the body, and D its behind).⁵ While existing studies offer valuable insights on specific types of non-(exclusively)-verbal puns, a comprehensive taxonomy is yet to be produced, and stands out as a promising direction for future research.

8.2.3 Other Forms of Wordplay

Moving on towards broader definitions of wordplay, a figure comparable to puns is *blending*, namely “a deliberate creation of a new word out of two (or more) previously existing ones in a way which differs from the rules or patterns of regular compounding” (Ronneberger-Sibold, 2006, p. 157). Examples of potentially humorous blends include *glamping* (glamorous + camping), *sexting* (sex + texting), as well as the German *Ostalgie* (Ost [East] + nostalgia). However, as pointed out by Braun (2018), blends differ from puns in the strict sense for at least two reasons – their outcome is the creation of a new word, and their meaning is usually understandable without the need of contextual cues (“blends speak for themselves,” p. 188).

Other types of innovative wordplay which might result in humor include, for example, word-creation by means of subtraction and analogy (such as **ept* from *inept* or **consolate* from *disconsolate*, see Aarons, 2017), ludic deformation of conventional spelling (e.g., French *bouledogue* from *bulldog*, Winter-Froemel, 2016), and nonce-formations or occasionalisms, i.e. new words “coined by a speaker/writer on the spur of the moment to cover some immediate need” (Bauer, 1983, p. 45 – see also Terry, 2021). These figures do not necessarily qualify as wordplay in the strict sense, as they do not always involve a tension between different meanings; however, they may still belong to wordplay based on the broader definition provided at the start of this section. The same applies to the cluster of figures that is commonly labeled as soundplay (or, in some instances, graphic play), including among others rhyme, alliteration, anagrams, palindromes, and the like. For recent overviews on the relation between these figures and the notion of wordplay, see in particular Attardo (2018), Thaler (2016), and Winter-Froemel (2016).

Before addressing some general issues concerning figures of language and humor, it is worth mentioning one more group that is rarely discussed in studies on wordplay, but is still relevant to humorous discourse – namely figures based on accumulation or

⁵ This type is labeled ‘symbolic meta pun’ by Hempelmann and Samson (2007); see also Giorgadze (2015) for similar examples.

enumeration. A case in point is *synonymia* or *interpretatio*, namely “mass[ing] together words with roughly the same meaning” (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 12). Although this device has not yet been studied systematically in relation to humor, its potential is well exemplified by Monty Python’s ‘Dead Parrot’ sketch (1969): “*Mr. Praline*: ‘E’s not pinin! ‘E’s passed on! This parrot is no more! He has ceased to be! ‘E’s expired and gone to meet ‘is maker! ‘E’s a stiff! Bereft of life, ‘e rests in peace! If you hadn’t nailed ‘im to the perch ‘e’d be pushing up the daisies!” (Monty Python, 1989, p. 104).

Enumeration has a long history in literary humor, with Renaissance author François Rabelais standing out as one of its most innovative champions – see Eco, 2009 for a comprehensive overview, which, however, does not focus specifically on humor. Among several examples in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–1564), a particularly memorable one takes place when the giant Gargantua lists all the different (unlikely) objects he has used to “wipe [his] bum.” As argued by Bakhtin, this episode epitomizes Rabelais’ ‘carnavalesque’ laughter:

All these various objects used as swabs are uncrowned in order to be regenerated. Their half-effaced image reappears in a new light. In this long list every object emerges quite unexpectedly. [...] This new standard invites the reader to look at the object in a different light, to measure it, so to speak, for its new use. [...] The hood, the neckerchief, the earpieces, the cap, are apparel for the face and head, that is, for the upper part of the body. Their function as swabs is literally a transfer of the upper to the lower bodily stratum; the body turns a cartwheel. (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 372–373)

Rabelais’ carnivalesque lists illustrate the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to humor and figurative language. While linguistics (represented by most of the studies mentioned so far) might be better equipped to classify different types of wordplay based on formal criteria, literary studies (e.g., Bakhtin on Rabelais) can provide access to a diverse corpus of humorous devices that might otherwise escape the attention of linguistics-oriented humor research – as has indeed been the case with enumeration so far.⁶

8.2.4 General Remarks

Bakhtin’s analysis of Rabelais’ list offers an ideal transition towards a general issue underlying our discussion – what exactly makes a figure of language humorous? Bakhtin’s reference to the reversal between “upper” and “lower bodily stratum,” and to the regeneration of everyday objects in their unexpected swabbing function, leads us back to the role of semantic opposition as a condition for humorous wordplay (Hempelmann & Miller, 2017, p. 100). The importance of semantic opposition is unde-

⁶ See Zirker and Winter-Froemel (2015, pp. 1–2) for a similar case in favor of interdisciplinary word-play research.

niable, and particularly evident with puns or blends, for instance. Nevertheless, with some of the potentially humorous figures mentioned above, one could be hard pressed to find a contrast between meanings – suffice it to mention the use of *synonymia* in the Monty Python sketch, as well as palindromes like ‘Madam I’m Adam’ or tongue-twisters such as ‘she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore’ (inasmuch as one might find them funny).⁷ One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is by resorting to a broader idea of Script Opposition – occurring not necessarily between two specific semantic scripts, but more generally between two distinct functions of language (or linguistic meta-scripts).

Using Jakobson’s terminology, wordplay entails a shift from the everyday *referential* function of language to the *metalinguistic* function (i.e. language exhibiting or foregrounding its own rules and structures). While not always leading to humor, a metalinguistic component does seem to be necessary for the humorousness of a given figure of language. As claimed by Aarons (2017), for example, puns “are essentially metalinguistic devices, because they ask the participants to pretend that language is other than it is.” Specifically, they imply a contrast between a Cratyllic view of language (erroneously positing that two similar-sounding words must be connected semantically) and the actual arbitrariness of the relation between sound and meaning. Likewise, other forms of wordplay in the broader sense – including alliterations, palindromes, etc. – also appeal to the metalinguistic function, as they “playfully question the functioning of language and make creative use of its limits” (Zirker & Winter-Froemel, 2015, p. 6).

In short, the common denominator underlying all forms of humorous wordplay seems to be the contrast between two different functions of language (referential v. metalinguistic), resulting in a deautomatization of linguistic conventions (Pajona, 2018). When geared (at least partly) towards mirth and amusement, this deautomatizing operation allows for the humorous processing of figures of language. As will be discussed later, the link between humor and deautomatization might be relevant in the case of figures of meaning as well.

8.3 Humor and Figures of Meaning

8.3.1 Metasemes

A metaseme is defined by Group μ as “a figure that replaces one sememe by another” (Dubois et al., 1970, p. 34). This broadly embraces the categories of metaphors, metonymies, and synecdoches, variously defined and discussed by scholars since the time of Aristotle. To start with the basics, figurative language at large tends to be de-

⁷ With regard to humor appreciation, see also the chapter by Kerkkänen & Findlay, this volume.

defined as non-literal, the literal being based on concrete or dictionary meanings. This is problematic in itself as the literal may appear to be non-figurative only due to a convention, and its figurativeness may be shrouded in forgotten etymology (Tabakowska, 2005). Turner (2005) argues that there is no essential difference between the way we process literal and figurative language ('the sun is a star' vs 'the sun is a jewel'). On the other hand, he defines figurativeness as a gradual category that depends on the degree of 'generative entrenchment,' i.e. an established conceptual connection between the categories involved:

'Life is metabolism' sounds (to me) literal and definitional; 'Life is a play' sounds (to me) half-way between literal and figurative; 'Life is a cast of dice' sounds figurative and commonplace; 'Life is an isosceles triangle' sounds wildly figurative. It also sounds unintelligible to me, until I finally find a connection: Life is like an isosceles triangle; it always has its irregular side. (Turner, 2005, p. 27)

This last example may sound mildly humorous due to its surprise effect – a cognitive puzzle finds its quick, surprising, and somewhat appropriate solution. Attardo (2015) considers the intuitive differences between the classical conceptual metaphor 'life is a journey' and other metaphors, 'life is an apple' and 'life is a box of chocolates,' in terms of the 'distance theory' advanced a.o. by Pollio (1996). In fact, the stretched cognitive 'distance' postulated as the basis of a humorous effect (the more distant the funnier) is indeed difficult to measure and seems arbitrary.⁸ In Attardo's view, part of the difficulty in distinguishing between humorous and non-humorous metaphors is the diversity of phenomena subsumed under the former notion: metaphors that are funny as such, metaphors that refer to potentially amusing objects, and failed metaphors of various kinds.⁹ Thus, he suggests that there is no uniform explanation for the humorous effect, which will be different depending on the subcategory. He suggests that metaphor can be regarded as a type of logical mechanism (as per GTVH), which would explain why some metaphors are humorous and why some are not, "depending if they enable or bring about an incongruity and/or partially resolve it" (Attardo, 2015, p. 108). This is in agreement with Oring (2003), who distinguished the two by claiming that humor always offers a partial resolution of incongruity (thus retaining some form of opposition), while metaphors aim at the complete resolution and 'conflate' the opposed meanings, thus appealing to reason and aiming at synthesis (cf. Müller, 2015, p. 115; and Attardo et al. this volume, where types of incongruity are

⁸ See, however, Giora (2003 and later) and her Optimal Innovation Hypothesis, which is based on the notion of gradable salience of meanings in the lexicon and accounts for pleasurable effects of humor. Metaphors, irony, and other types of figurative language are claimed to be based on that principle; although, as Giora et al. (2015, pp. 140–143) claim, it is not metaphors, but innovation that is found pleasurable by audiences. See also Wawrzyniuk (2020) for similar conclusions.

⁹ Piata (2016) identifies yet another type of metaphor called 'recycled metaphor,' which consists in an unusual and thus incongruous use of a conventional metaphor.

discussed). This is also broadly in agreement with Piata's (2016) claim that humor and metaphors can be distinguished only at the pragmatic/discursive level as they both have an evaluative and persuasive function. This resolution-based approach would make the analysis of humorous metaphor conform to humor theory in general, which is an additional advantage.

Müller (2015) emphasizes the 'duality' of both humor and metaphors, referring to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (which identifies duality as the source of pleasure in both jokes and metaphors). Relatedly, the 'split focus' approach assumes that humorous metaphors retain the boundaries between the two domains they evoke, thus generating 'witty effects'; while non-humorous metaphors tend to have an 'integrated focus' generating emotional effects (Tsur, 2003; Semino, 2008). This is corroborated by Pollio, as well as Giora with her 'Marked Informativeness Requirement' – the latter theory claims that the salient meaning is suppressed in jokes until the punchline, while (serious) metaphors simultaneously refer to two domains, with one being foregrounded. The notions of *deautomatization* of metaphors (Kyratzis, 2003) or *double-grounding* (Brône & Feyaerts, 2005) represent more specific mechanisms, which may account for humorous effects of metaphors. *De-blending*, on the other hand, is a mechanism that draws on the blending theory of metaphors by Fauconnier and is argued by Müller to be a more widely applicable mechanism: the humorous effect is located "in the relationship between the blended space and its input spaces" (Müller, 2015, p. 116), i.e. in the oscillation between an integrated and a split focus on the two domains of a given metaphor (see Klos and Samson, this volume, on blending).

Moving to another type of metonymy, *metonymy* (including synecdoche) was known in ancient times as a subtype of metaphor, while Jakobson ([1956] 1971) considered it one extreme of the conceptualization spectrum, the other being metaphor. Nowadays, in cognitive linguistics, metonymy is defined as a "process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model" (Radden & Kovecses, 1999, p. 21). Barcelona (2003) stresses the 'ready-made' (conventional) nature of metonymic pointers, which, being normally automatic, speed up text interpretation greatly. Relatedly, Panther (2006, p. 149) stresses the importance of world knowledge and linguistic context for these 'generic [metonymic] prompts' to be 'fleshed out,' i.e. elaborated into target meanings.

Scholars highlight the peripheral nature of metonymic shifts: e.g. *I broke the window* is metonymic, the target being the window pane (rather than the central meaning of 'window'), while *She came in through the bathroom window* is non-metonymic, as the opening is central (Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 2003, p. 127). The question arises why peripheral features are preferred to central ones, and it led Brône and Feyaerts (2003, p. 16) to stress expressivity and innovation as "a speakers' deviance from purely conventional referential language use for the purpose of expressing attitude or being creative. Although expressivity cannot be viewed as fully isolated from the referential function of language, expressivity and referential transparency can compete as oppos-

ing forces”; which is what we also argued in Section 2, discussing the opposition between the referential and metalinguistic functions.

Brône and Feyaerts also adopt Langacker’s notion of reference-point structures, since in metonymic expressions “the intended target needs to be inferred metonymically from a prominent reference point” (2003, p. 5). They argue that when the hearer detects a reference-point word or expression they scan the entire ‘dominion’ for the suitable target, which then becomes salient. This approach is applicable to humorous texts, where there is a tendency to use the less salient reference points, which require an extra cognitive effort and as a result bring pleasurable results. For instance, in the short joke: “Did you take a bath?” “No, only towels. Is there one missing?”, the metaphorical expression “take a bath” saliently refers to bathing, but literally the dominion of ‘taking’ includes various, usually small objects (like towels) and a bath is not one of them, thus, in the punchline, stealing is metonymically pointed at via the mention of a missing bath. The question is whether, as Attardo (2006, p. 344) wonders, these pointers, prompts, or reference points are any different in humorous and serious texts. Tabacaru and Feyaerts (2015) consider the role of metonymy in humorous interactions to be essentially pragmatic and link it to the non-serious pretence space, where humor is generated by contrasting it with the serious discourse space. Radden and Kovecses (1999), however, draw attention to the semantic preferences in metonymy, primarily for the human and specifically for certain tension-provoking or taboo areas, such as sex, money, food, danger/death. These areas may well be potentially humorous, although their place in joke structures is important too: “the setup and punch line have varying roles in that regard, the setup usually making the apparently conventional metonymies salient, the purpose of which is to facilitate comprehension for the audience, whose active role in the process is essential in humor. However, sometimes the punch line utilizes metonymies too” (Chłopicki, 2017a, p. 37).

8.3.2 Metalogisms

Metalogisms are ‘figures of thought’ which play with the logical value of a text, thus embracing a.o. paradox, hyperbole, euphemism, irony, or parody. There is no room here to discuss the vast literature on the subject (especially on irony), therefore it must suffice to outline some basic distinctions. Logic as such is taken up by a few humor researchers, notably Ziv (1984) with his notion of *local logic*, which has gained remarkable currency in its sense of context-sensitive causality that only applies in the world of the joke. According to Ziv (1984, p. 98), humor occupies a “middle position between logical and pathological thinking (i.e. fantasy or absurdity).” This is compatible with Fry’s (1963) notion of joke frame; the punchline creates a paradox of sorts in the mind of the joke hearer, who is left oscillating between reality and the unreal (joke) world.

Logical Mechanisms, proposed by Attardo & Raskin (1991) as one of the key Knowledge Resources that inform the world of humor, are essentially joke schemas which are also applicable to humorous lines occurring in longer texts (called jab-lines, cf. Attardo, 2001). They include exaggeration, false parallelism, false analogy, garden path, juxtaposition or ignoring the obvious (closest to euphemism), and other examples of logical fallacies (Attardo, 2001). Logical Mechanisms have also been interpreted as joke resolution (Attardo, 1997), thus in terms of logic we can talk about full and partial resolution. The full resolution, however, rarely occurs (Oring, 2019), while partiality may be understood in terms of a continuum: nonsense jokes or cartoons would be the least resolvable, followed by verbal humor, while situational or referential humor tends to be the most resolvable. In the latter, the residual incongruity is the smallest – see the ‘fully’ resolvable humorous riddle (a paradox of sorts) from Rothbart & Pien (1977, p. 37): “How far can a dog run into a forest? Only halfway. After that he’ll be running out of the forest.”

In the study of another metalogism, i.e. irony,¹⁰ defining its relation to humor is highly relevant, but far from obvious. According to Attardo, humorous irony is a type of discursive contrast that is both relevant and inappropriate and leaves behind the ‘residual inappropriateness,’ much like a joke leaves ‘residual incongruity’ (Attardo, 2020, pp. 176–177). Non-humorous irony draws on a discursive contrast too, but one that tends to be more explicit (see Hirsch 2020, who discusses contrast in reference to translation strategies). Simpson identifies irony as one of the central mechanisms of satirical discourse and distinguishes two phases of satirical irony: the *prime*, namely an intertextual phase drawing on a given genre or model, followed by the *dialectic* phase, introducing a critical/satirical component. Irony is therefore echoic (following Sperber & Wilson, 1995) in the first phase and oppositional in the other. While Simpson mostly focuses on satirical uses of irony, Dynel (2018) offers a broader, unified description of irony and humor in terms of (predominantly) ‘overt untruthfulness,’ contrasting them with deception as ‘covert untruthfulness’ –see Keisalo, 2022 for a review.

Irony detection is facilitated by what Simpson calls *metonymic* and *metaphoric* strategies, which can also be seen as major metalogisms underpinning satirical discourse. Metonymic strategies include saturation (or exaggeration), attenuation, and negation (or reversal); metaphoric strategies, instead, entail the merging or juxtaposition of elements coming from different conceptual domains. Similarly to Simpson’s saturation and attenuation, Ermida (2008) refers to these uses of irony as hyperbole (overstatement) and understatement respectively, the former being the usual strategy that betrays parody (2008, p. 163). Parody, in general, can be seen in two possible ways. On the one hand, Simpson argues that parody, contrary to satire, does not nec-

¹⁰ Or sarcasm – as a more aggressive form of irony, *sarcastic irony* in Dynel’s (2018) terms, i.e. “irony aimed at a disparaged target” (p. 89).

essarily have a dialectic component – it can be innocuous, playful, closer to what Genette (1997) defines as *pastiche*. In contrast, Hutcheon (1985, p. 8) argues that parody is always a ‘stylistic confrontation,’ a form of ‘critical distance’ rather than just a ‘nostalgic imitation of the past’ (see Capellotti, this volume, for a thorough review of literature on satire and parody, as well as Baumgartner, this volume, for political satire).

To conclude, it is difficult to summarize the relationship between metalogisms and humor. A promising direction for future research is outlined by Ritchie (2014), who claims that there is no evidence so far that the inferential mechanisms of jokes are any different from those of conventional logic (such as consequence and causation), even though jokes are sometimes argued to be based on some form of distorted logic (e.g. Hurley et al., 2013). Ritchie specifically points out that to determine exactly what deviations from ‘sound logic’ are appropriate may well require “a detailed examination of the logical flaws within a wide variety of jokes, to see what generalisations (if any) can be made” (p. 58).

8.4 New Avenues and Interdisciplinary Connections

As illustrated above, the potential overlap between figurative language and humor is extensive and multi-faceted – from wordplay to metaphor and irony. Yet, there is no easy answer to the question: how exactly does a figure of speech become humorous? Some of the notions evoked in the previous sections seem to play an important role in the process – e.g. de-blending, pseudo-logic, and meta-script opposition between the referential and metalinguistic functions of language. However, further research on the topic is clearly needed. In particular, more insights in this respect could come from interdisciplinary endeavors extending the analysis to non-verbal or multimodal figures, such as visual puns and metaphors. While some exploratory work has been already carried out on this subject (as mentioned in 2.2 and 3.1), this still stands out as a potential area for more systematic dialogue between humor stylistics and multimodal semiotics. This line of inquiry would also include further research on memes as a new breeding ground for multimodal humorous figures (e.g. Piata, 2020, Mitsiaki, 2020, and Laineste and Shilikhina, this volume).

Another step towards a comprehensive theory of humorous figures could be achieved by bridging stylistics and narratology, with a view to analyzing the relationship between humor and ‘narrative figures’ at plot level – e.g. strategies of escalation, variation and accumulation (Chłopicki, 2017b) or undersupply of information (Ermida, 2008, comparable to Simpson’s attenuation on a macroscopic level). Likewise, it would be useful to systematically examine the overlaps between figurative language and the logical mechanisms identified by the GTVH, which could also result in a more methodical classification of the latter (thus addressing some of the issues pointed out by Oring, 2019).

On a different note, recent scholarship has also shown the potential of more applied, context-sensitive work on humor and figures of speech – e.g. psychological studies on humor processing and appreciation (Gibson, 2019; Martin & Ford, 2018), cross-disciplinary legal research on humorous figures and hate speech or defamation (Godioli & Young, 2023; Godioli & Little, 2022; Capelotti, 2018, see also Capelotti, this volume), as well as discourse-analysis-oriented work on the role of humor in political rhetoric, from populist rallies to online trolling (Weaver, 2022; Polak & Trotter, 2020).

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