

# Accidental Humor in International Public Notices Displayed in English

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## Abstract

This paper examines accidental humor as it manifests itself in international public notices displayed in English. It shows that accidental humor, just like intentional humor, essentially stems from script opposition and script overlap (Raskin, 1985). However, it lacks intentionality, which plays a key role in contrived humor. In this way, accidental humor is based on the interaction between the text and the receiver, apart from the producer. In particular, accidental humor in interlingual communication is the output of the producer's language incompetence in the target language, whereas it is the result of the producer's landing in unintended ambiguity in intralingual communication. In such humor, therefore, the initiator infringes one or more maxims of conversation (Grice, 1975), unlike intentional humor, where the joke teller exploits conversational maxims for communicative purposes, in order to generate conversational implicature and, subsequently, laughter.

**Keywords:** accidental humor; intentionality; implicature; script opposition; flouting a maxim; infringing a maxim; interlingual communication.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Humor or joking is essentially a collaborative social act, or construct, in the words of (Veale, 2004), where a variety of socio-cultural functions relating to the joke teller, listener and butt are all simultaneously engaged (Freud, 1960 [1905]; Bentley, 1981 [1964]; Al-Khatib, 1999). Because of its interdisciplinary nature, humor has been discussed by psychologists (Ruch, 1992), linguists (Alam, 1989; De Bruyn, 1989); discourse analysts (Sherzer, 1985; Al-Khatib, 1997), ethnographers (Sacks 1974; Apte 1985), and sociolinguists (Martineau, 1972; Benton, 1988).

Generally speaking, there have been two approaches to the study of humor: the functional and the descriptive. The functional approach has emphasized the socio-psychological aspects of joke-telling (e.g. Benton 1988; Draister 1994). The descriptive approach foregrounds semantic and structural properties of jokes (e.g. Goldstein, 1970; Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994, 2001; Attardo and Raskin, 1991). Regardless of the approach, there is a consensus among humor researchers that joking, which typically results in laughter, is essentially an intentional act that evolves from both the joker and the joke itself, and is expected to be of interest to the listener, who usually turns into a key player once the joke has been cracked.

Meaning is never made explicit in jokes – it is typically worked out co-operatively between the joke teller and the listener by way of conversational implicature (Grice 1975) in a non-bona fide manner of communication (Raskin, 1985). More often than not, the joker flouts one or more of the maxims of conversation, in order to create more interest and suspense in his/her joke. By way of illustration, below is a Jordanian political joke that was heard among the Jordanian elite at the time of an Arab summit conference in Amman (1986), which was officially called *mu'tamar al-wifāq wal-'itifāq* (Conference of Reconciliation and Agreement) by the host country (Jordan):

Ronald Reagan (the then American president) was holding a press conference in Washington to discuss domestic issues. Out of the blue, a journalist stood up and posed this question: "Mr. President, what do you think of *al wi fak* and *al 'iti fak* Summit Conference in Amman?" The president had no idea what that was. Improvising, however, he responded: "I think we fuck, but we don't declare it".

As can be seen, the joke teller was working with two different thought-worlds: Arab versus American politics. On the one hand, he/she wanted to conversationally implicate that President Regan knew nothing about what was happening in the rest of the world, because he lacked a good education. To achieve this end, the joker made the journalist flout the maxim of manner by struggling with the alliterative pronunciation of the Arabic conference name, thus triggering a sexual scenario that was taken at face value by the president although it was far-fetched. In effect, the freshly emerging pronunciation goes well beyond the unfunny script (the actual Arabic name of the conference) to reach out for the humorous script (the sexual interpretation). On the other hand, he/she intended to conversationally implicate, by means of falling back on President Reagan's response, that Arab summit conferences were a futile enterprise that should not be taken seriously. To accomplish this goal, the joker had the president flout the maxim of relation, in order to sustain his face-value interpretation of the journalist's question. This two-stage implicature-laden contrivance succeeds in creating laughter based on both script opposition and script overlap (Raskin, 1985).

A different picture is obtained in accidental humor, where the speaker's intention to amuse is lacking. The humor is accidentally conveyed and, as a result, laughter is generated. An interesting example is cited in Thomas (1995), in which the Liberal M.P. Mr. Cyril Smith who, speaking on a radio program in defense of the immigrant population in Britain, claimed to be someone who "... does a very very great deal of work amongst the immigrant population – I had sixteen of 'em for lunch at the House of Commons last Tuesday ...". What he said generated laughter from the audience although he failed to figure out why it was funny and insisted that the 'invitation' script was the only possible interpretation of his utterance. Clearly, Mr. Smith infringed the Maxim of Manner (namely the sub-maxim 'Avoid ambiguity') without intending to do so, hence the laughter from the audience. Technically, an infringement of a maxim contrasts with a flouting of a maxim in terms of speaker's intentions: the former involves the speaker's awareness that he is exploiting a maxim of conversation for a communicative purpose, whereas the latter lacks this awareness on the part of the speaker, i.e. the exploitation of the maxim is accidental – it is not intended by the speaker (for a detailed account of observance and non-observance of maxims of conversation, see Grice 1975 and Thomas 1995). Had Mr. Smith intended to generate humor, he would have been taken to flout the Maxim of Manner for a communicative purpose.

A similar Arabic example went round in Jordan in the early 1990's during the Jordanian government's lengthy deliberation over the issue of raising the state-subsidized price of bread and its serious effects on the poor. The then Jordanian Prime Minister, Abdul-Kareem Al-Kabariti, was allegedly reported to have said "... ad-daf' qabl al-raf' ..." [Payment before raising] with reference to the government's intention to compensate poor families financially before raising the price of bread. The alleged phraseology, which was purposely and mischievously interpreted as carrying a sexual import [i.e. a familiar rule in striking a deal with a prostitute], came to be on everyone's tongue in Jordan and generated considerable amusement among Jordanians. In the Jordanian culture, the sexual intercourse interpretation is derived from a folkloric, stereotypical sex position that involves the male's raising his partner's legs high before entering her. The Prime Minister, given the solemnity of his statement and the seriousness of the situation, could not have been taken to contemplate the humorous script; therefore, it must have arisen from his infringing rather than flouting the maxim of Manner.

In some cases, it is not easy to determine whether the intralingual language-based humor is accidental or intentional. The following example may illustrate this point: (In the window of a Kentucky appliance store) 'Don't kill your wife. Let our washing machine do the dirty work'. On the one hand, given this advertising context, one may reasonably assume that the producer is not aware of the humor in the above text, as he/she is promoting the product in question as a source of relief (rather than a source of mortality) for housewives. If this is so, then what we have here is accidental humor. On the other hand, it may be assumed that the producer is exploiting the maxim of manner to generate humor, in an attempt to break the ice and create an amiable atmosphere which may encourage potential customers to go shopping at that appliance store. In most cases, however, intralingual linguistic humor is intentional. Following are some interesting examples: (On a butcher's window) 'Let me meat your needs'; (On the door of a computer store) 'Out for a quick byte'; and (Pizza shop slogan) '7 days without pizza makes one weak'. The producers of these examples intentionally invest a linguistic resource (namely homophony in English) to promote commodities by amusing potential clients.

Despite the functional difference between intentional and accidental humor, script opposition seems to lie at the heart of both. It seems that humor has to evolve and, subsequently, derive from an enterprise of incongruity. The overt script at the beginning of the (un)intended joke must be overridden by a covert script that unfolds when the punch line is reached. However, whereas intentional humor is usually the output of fictional thinking (i.e. a reflex of social (subjective) rather than objective reality), accidental humor is the output of mishaps in actual communication (both intra- and inter-lingual), which derives from a real rather than fictional setting.

## 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study aims to analyze accidental humor as it manifests itself in a number of international public notices posted in English, which have been selected from Internet material (mostly from 'English Funniest Translations' at <http://www.thevoiceofreason.co.uk> and 'Funny Translation Errors' at <http://www.ojohaven.com/fun/translation.funnies.html>). The posting of English versions of native public notices in different parts of the world hardly needs an explanation, for English has become an international lingua franca in this age. This being the case, it is becoming more and more pressing for local services and businesses in most non-English speaking countries to juxtapose the native public notices with English translations.

Accidental humor is unintentional and is, in our case, an immediate consequence of the producer's imperfect command of the foreign language. Therefore, it is a clear example of infringing the maxim of manner accidentally, that is, the communicator fails to employ a phraseology that conveys the message embodied in the source language public notice in his/her English version. The English versions may be viewed as mere attempts at communicating in the foreign language (English in this case) rather than translations proper. The following example is illustrative: (At a Budapest zoo) Please do not feed the animals. If you have any suitable food, *give* it to the guard on duty.

The humor in the above example results from the communicator's inadvertent employment of the verb in italics, i.e. 'give', which conveys the salient message of 'serving the food to the guard on duty' more than the marginalized message of 'leaving the food with the guard on duty'. This error succeeds in generating laughter from readers who are aware of this lexical mishap. It should be noted that interlingual humor belongs to situational rather than fictional humor (Morreall, 2004). The humor-generating situational act is unconscious on the part of the producer, but conscious on the part of the receiver. As for the text itself, it is a victim of accidental humor, which derives mainly from interlingual rather than intralingual script opposition and overlap; it is largely the legitimate child of interlingual linguistic mishaps (for intralingual mishaps, however, see Chiaro 1992), which are rooted in language itself rather than in social reality that finds its way through language, as is the case in intentional humor.

A clear assumption in this paper is that accidental humor resulting from attempting to communicate in a foreign language is a linguistic mishap that involves socio-cultural implications. On the one hand, it enhances intercultural communication by introducing an amiable atmosphere among interactants belonging to different cultures and, subsequently, strengthens social relations. An example that comes to my mind involves a man Jordanian professor (who lacks enough English proficiency) posing the question 'How is your under' to a man Australian professor (a native speaker of English) at a cocktail party. They were stuck at that point in the conversation and, being nearby, I was summoned to explain what that question meant. When I pointed out that the question (a direct literal translation from Arabic) was about sexual potency, not only did the three of us engage in laughter but we made it public to several other invitees who joined in the laughter, which sparked off friendly conversations on relevant topics. On the other hand, linguistic mishaps in interlingual communication may create both dismay and prejudice on the part of native speakers. At language conferences and elsewhere, I often heard cynical remarks made by native speakers of English about the English used in public signs and notices in foreign lands. For instance, recently an American professor at a language conference in Turkey told me how the guards stopped her from taking pictures of some public signs at an archeological site in a foreign country. She (maybe mistakenly) interpreted this as having to do with the funny English employed in the signs.

In the following pages, there will be an attempt to explore some of the linguistic resources that may improvise accidental humor in international public notices displayed in English translation in different parts of the world. These resources can be divided into lexical and grammatical.

### 3. LEXICAL RESOURCES

#### 3.1. AMBIGUITY

Ambiguous words in English can be either polysemous or homonymous. On the one hand, polysemous words are probably the most prominent resource of accidental humor in translated public notices. A polysemous word is one that has two or more related meanings in any given language. That is to say, polysemy represents variations of the basic sense of a word. Insofar as English is concerned, polysemy is so common that it is difficult to find a content word that escapes this phenomenon. The multiple senses of core words such as *foot*, *head*, *eye*, *chair*, *table*, *hot*, etc. are only a few examples from a multitude. This pervasive property of the English lexicon provides rich ground for accidental humor while attempting to communicate messages from any given language into English, as can be illustrated in the mishaps in (1) and (2) below (henceforth the humorous words/expressions will be printed in italics):

1. [In a Bangkok temple] It is forbidden to *enter a woman* even a foreigner if dressed as a man.
2. [In a Japanese hotel] You are invited to *take advantage of* the chambermaid.

The mishap in (1) stems from the erroneous employment of the verb 'enter' causatively based on its mono-transitive use, e.g. *enter a room* and *enter a competition*. However, the humor is heightened by the use of the noun 'woman' as a collocate of 'enter', thus giving rise to an amusing sexual reading, which emanates from the fact that the verb 'enter' is polysemous. It could be the case that the source language allows the use of the verb corresponding to 'enter' causatively; whereas English would require a causative verb, e.g. 'let a woman enter', other things being equal. Thus this is a case where polysemy interacts with grammar to produce accidental humor. Similarly, the humor in (2) is caused by the polysemous expression 'take advantage of', which can mean either 'make use of services' and/or 'exploit financially or sexually' depending on context. Being unaware of this subtle polysemy, however, the communicator opted for the ambiguous expression 'take advantage of' in the hotel context above, thus bringing forth to the foreground the unexpected script of 'exploiting the chambermaid sexually', instead of the intended script of 'making use of the services that the chambermaid can see to', which only remains lingering in the background.

As can be observed, polysemy may sometimes produce unambiguous utterances in accidental humor (example 1 above), although the intended script in the utterance is contextually recoverable by the reader. That is, given the context of (1), the reader can readily work out the producer's intended script, despite the fact that the humor is generated by the linguistically based accidental script in the utterance. In such cases, therefore, script opposition is interactionally rather than linguistically recovered. In other cases of polysemy (example 2 above), the utterance will linguistically tolerate two scripts, i.e. will produce ambiguity, with one script coming to the foreground while the other staying in the background. In both cases of polysemy, the foreground – background distinction is useful for differentiating between the prominently humorous script on the one hand and the intended, but linguistically failed, humor-free script on the other. Whereas the former always resides in the foreground, the latter invariably lingers in the background.

On the other hand, homonymous words are those ambiguous words whose multiple senses are completely unrelated to each other; for example, the word 'sage' can accidentally mean 'a wise man' and 'a kind of herb'. The source of humor in example (3) below is homonymy:

3. [Advertisement for donkey rides in Thailand] Would you like to ride on your own *ass*?

As can be seen, the humor in (3) is caused by the homonymous lexeme 'ass', which can tolerate two senses in the above context, that is, 'donkey' or 'buttocks'. The communicator could have avoided the ambiguity by using 'donkey' instead of 'ass'.

It should be noted that polysemous and homonymous words may operate differently in accidental humor. On the one hand, polysemous words may generate humor by introducing an incongruent, but prominent, script into the context on hand, without causing lexical ambiguity (1 above), or, alternatively, by introducing an incongruent, but prominent, script into the context while maintaining lexical ambiguity. On the other hand, homonymous words cater for humor by giving

rise to two competing scripts in a given context, although the humorous script usually takes precedence over the other one, as has been shown in (3) above.

### 3.2. SEMANTIC OVERLAP

In many cases, accidental humor results from the producer's inability to observe overlapping in the meaning of semantically related words. Following are some examples:

1. [In a Zurich hotel] Because of the impropriety of *entertaining* guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.
2. [In a Bangkok dry cleaners] Drop your *trousers* here for best results.
3. [In a Rome laundry] Ladies, leave your *clothes* here and spend the afternoon having a good time.

The communicator's inadvertent choice of 'entertaining' instead of 'receiving' results in accidental humor in the context reported in (4) above. Semantically, 'entertainment' is a common aspect of 'reception', which may be considered a superordinate term that may include 'entertaining'. The humor, however, is heightened by reversing the normal scenario or script in banning 'entertaining the opposite sex' in hotel bedrooms (which may function as natural venues for such activity), while licensing it in hotel lobbies (which may not function as possible venues for such activity). As a result of this script overlap, the intended message is turned up side down and accidental humor comes into being.

As for the humor in (5) and (6) above, it arises from the translators' confusion about the sense relations in the set: trousers – clothes – laundry. While trousers are a hyponym of clothes (i.e. a kind of clothes), trousers and clothes are potential items of laundry. Neither of them can replace the common noun 'laundry', which may include clothing and non-clothing items. In (5), the verb 'drop' may collocate with 'laundry' to mean 'leave your laundry'; however, it is not supposed to collocate with 'trousers' to mean 'take off your trousers' at the dry cleaners, hence the accidental humor. Similarly, the humor in (6) is triggered by the collocation 'leave your clothes' at the Rome public laundry and is subsequently heightened by wishing the then 'nude customer' to have a good time on that afternoon, which represents the punch line, without which the sexual script would not be part of the meaning of the text. That is to say, the second part of the text constitutes a script-switch trigger that instantiates the sexual reading, whose absence would have weakened the fortuitous humor tremendously.

As can be seen in (4)-(6) above, semantic overlaps that feature various inclusion relations constitute a rich area for interlingual mishaps that create script opposition or overlap and, as a result, accidental humor. However, these overlaps dynamically interact with collocational restrictions in different contexts. In most cases, the humor instantiates because the producer fails to employ the correct word from a set of lexemes related to each other by inclusion or part-whole (e.g. hyponymy and meronymy, respectively) and, as a result, he/she falls victim to inadvertently emerging collocational and contextual humorous scripts.

### 3.3. LEXICAL GAPS

Lexical gaps, which refer to the holes in the semantic blanket in any given language (Rabin 1958; Ivir 1977; Dagut 1981), are a common feature of all human languages, because that blanket can never be intact. This does not mean that human languages may variously not be capable of expressing some propositions due to lexical gaps. In fact, every language has the ability to improvise ways and means to fill in the lexical gaps communicatively, i.e. independently of lexical compression where one specific lexeme is employed. In some cases, accidental humor results from the communicator's inability to handle lexical gaps in the target language (English in our case). Following are two illustrative examples:

1. [In a Vienna hotel] In case of fire, do your best to *alarm* the hotel porter.
2. [In an advertisement for a Hong Kong dentist] Teeth are extracted by the latest *Methodists*.

The humor in (7) derives from the producer's filling an English lexical gap based on the lexicon of German (the source language), in which the verb 'alarmieren' means 'to alert' and counts as a false friend

of the English verb 'to alarm'. By contrast, English employs the two verbs 'sound the alarm' and 'alarm' to mean different things. In other words, there is a lexical gap in English because the effected object in the collocation 'sound the alarm' cannot be verbalized for the same import. Being unaware of this lexical gap, however, the producer verbalizes the effected object, thus causing laughter by bringing to the foreground a humorous script.

Similarly, the communicator in (8), being unaware of English derivational restrictions and modeling *doer* nouns such as specialist and receptionist, erroneously subjects the noun 'method' in dentistry to this derivational pattern. To his/her confusion, the wrongly coined lexeme coincided with a far-fetched homophone 'Methodist' from the Christian religious register, thus accidentally creating a humorous script.

### 3.4. MORPHO-PHONOLOGICAL SIMILARITY

In some cases, fortuitous humor is caused by the producer's erroneous use of a lexeme that bears some morpho-phonological resemblance to the target word. Following are three illustrative examples:

1. [In a Hong Kong tailor's shop] Ladies can have a *fit* upstairs.

(10) [In a Paris hotel elevator] Please leave your *values* at the front desk.

(11) [In a Bed & Breakfast in France] The genuine *antics* in your room come from our family castle.

The humor in the three examples above results from the communicator's confusing 'fit' with 'fitting' in (9), 'values' with 'valuables' in (10), and 'antics' with 'antiques' in (11). Apparently, the producer's search for words in his mental lexicon was based on vague morpho-phonological similarity, which produced humorous scripts, thus effectively landing him/her in the happy trap of accidental humor.

## 4. GRAMMATICAL RESOURCES

### 4.1 REFERENCE

Mishaps in reference may alter the intended meaning and give rise to various humorous scripts. Examples (12) and (13) below illustrate this point:

(12) [From the then Soviet Weekly] There will be a Moscow Exhibition of Arts by 15,000 Soviet Republic painters and sculptors. *These* were executed over the past two years.

(13) [In a Safari Park] Elephants Please Stay In Your Car.

The anaphoric reference marker 'these' in (12) refers back to 'Soviet Republic painters and sculptors', thus effectively telling the reader that they were executed over the past two years, thereby generating humor. In terms of intentions, the communicator wanted the reference marker 'these' to refer textually to the distant referent "Arts" or, perhaps, exophorically to "the painters' and sculptors' works". However, this intended reference script fails in the presence of a close, eligible textual referent in (12), i.e. "15,000 Republic painters and sculptors". Although the emerging script opposition is readily resolvable in terms of world knowledge, it succeeds in producing laughter from receivers.

Similarly, the implicit reference marker 'you' and its explicit, co-referential anaphor 'your' in (13) fail to refer exophorically to 'people visiting the park', as intended by the translator, and, instead, the explicit anaphor 'your' picks up 'elephants' as a textual referent, thus causing the humorous script. Further, example (13) indicates the importance of punctuation as a cohesion device. Had the producer of (13) used an exclamation point after 'Elephants', he/she would have ruled out the humorous reading, i.e. the anaphor 'your' could, in that case, only be interpreted exophorically.

### 4.2. WORD ORDER

Word order refers to the way words relate to each other in a sentence, which sometimes gives rise to structural ambiguity. In such cases, the wrong placement of a phrase in relation to the other constituents

in the sentence usually triggers the humorous script, as can be illustrated in (14) and (15) below:

(14) [In the lobby of a Moscow hotel across a Russian Orthodox monastery] You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists and writers are buried *daily except Thursday*.

(15) [In a Tokyo bar] Special cocktails for the ladies *with nuts*.

The humor in (14) is accidentally caused by the wrong placement of the adverbial phrase 'daily except Thursday' as a post-modifier of the act of 'burying Russian and Soviet composers, artists and writers' instead of the act of 'visiting the cemetery'. Apparently, the communicator wanted to avoid the awkwardness of placing the post-modifier after the appropriate act, not being aware of utilizing parentheses to enclose an awkward adverbial in such a case. At the same time, he was well aware of the moveability of adverbials in English, which, to his misfortune, made him fall in the snare of a humorous script.

Similarly, the humor in (15) results from the erroneous placement of the prepositional phrase 'with nuts' as a post-modifier of 'the ladies' instead of its intended use as a post-modifier of 'cocktails'. Although the mishap is triggered by mistaken word order, it would have remained an awkward rather than a humorous translation error had it not been for the polysemous word 'nuts'. Thus, if the word 'nuts' were replaced with 'cashews' in (15), the humorous script would just disappear, leaving the reader with nothing but an awkward language error that could hardly merit a smile. It should be noted that attachment sites of prepositional phrases are a notorious source of ambiguity in English (for more details, see Oaks 1994, 1995).

### 4.3. MODALITY

Modality, which can either refer to the way the language user views the world around him in terms of different degrees of certainty (epistemic modality) or his attitude toward social factors such as obligation and permission (deontic modality), probably constitutes the subtlest resource for accidental humor. English modality may be expressed grammatically by employing modal verbs such as *must* in 'John must resign' or semantically by paraphrasing the modal verb lexically as in 'It is necessary that John resign'. The subtlety of this resource in accidental humor stems from our inability to pinpoint it because the humorous script may relate to the semantics of the overall text rather than a particular word or phrase that, in other resources of accidental humor, may function as a lexical or grammatical trigger. The following examples illustrate this point:

(16) [On the door of a Moscow hotel room] If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.

(17) [In a hotel in Athens] Visitors are expected to complain at the office between the hours of 9 and 11 A.M. daily.

The conditional sentence in (16) gives rise to a conversational implicature that constitutes the basis of the humorous script, i.e. 'If this is not your first visit to the USSR, you are not welcome to it'. The producer was not aware of this implicature – he/she only wanted to give a special welcome to first timers in the USSR. Accidental humor that derives from the overall structure of the text is coherence-based (mostly related to conversational implicature) rather than cohesion-based (e.g. reference and word order). It should be noted that whereas conditional modality may not work in contexts similar to (16) in English, it may work in some languages like Arabic (or probably Russian, with which (16) affiliates). The modality behind this in Arabic runs as follows: If you are not a first-timer, the place in question is your second home, so you do not need welcoming; however, if you are a first timer in this place, you are deserving of welcoming to it. This culture-sensitive modality can be a rich resource for accidental humor as (16) above clearly demonstrates.

Similarly, the humorous script in (17) stems from the translator's option for a modality that embraces 'obligation' instead of 'possibility' toward the state-of-affairs in question, i.e. 'complaining at the hotel office'. Therefore, what is modally supposed to be a visitor's right is modally presented as a visitor's obligation by the communicator. Again, this may have to do with culture-sensitive modality, which aims

to urge dissatisfied customers to file complaints, as this is one of their rights (i.e. an obligation toward themselves). It is unfortunate that this subtle toning of modality does not work in English because *right* and *obligation* involve strict polarity, regardless of any toning or beautification.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Accidental humor differs drastically from contrived humor in terms of intentionality. Whereas the former lacks the producer's intention to amuse the receiver despite the fact that amusement is an immediate consequence of it, the latter is inherently built on the producer's intention to amuse the receiver. Therefore, whereas humor-related conversational implicature lies at the heart of the activity of joke telling, it is strictly lacking insofar as the producer of accidental humor is concerned. As for the status of the receiver in both modes of humor, it is also different. In accidental humor, the receiver is an interventionist competent agent who can read from the initiated text more than what the producer is aware of. By contrast, in intentional humor the receiver is initially a collaborator and, subsequently, a key player in joke-telling. However, in terms of the joke itself, the two modes of humor are strikingly similar in that they are both activated through script opposition and script overlap.

The two modes of humor also differ in their pragmatics. On the one hand, the humorous script in intentional humor is usually activated by the producer's flouting one or more of the maxims of conversation (Grice, 1975) for a communicative purpose (in this case the creation of humor). On the other hand, accidental humor comes about by the producer's infringing one or more of the maxims of conversation unknowingly. All the same, the potentially feasible humorous script is readily picked up by the receiver, giving rise to accidental humor.

Humor arising from interlingual communication has been shown to be a clear example of accidental humor. The producer's language incompetence in the target language is to blame for the occurrence of such humor. It is humor in the full sense of the word, for it essentially evolves, just like intentional humor, from script opposition/overlap through the employment of various morpho-phonological, lexical and/or grammatical triggers. However, it is only the linguistic coding of the message and the receiver that emerge as the key players in the creation of humor, absolutely apart from the producer of the joke-to-be.

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