

Graeme Ritchie (2004). *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes*. London: Routledge, ix, 243 pp.

Graeme Ritchie's excellent book is an attempt to provide a detailed and rigorous analysis of jokes with a high degree of scientific precision and formality. A possible outcome of such a project will be to construct a model of jokes that will enable the analyst to write a computer programme for the generation of jokes by following a series of instructions and procedures derived from the model. Indeed the discussion of recent work on computer modelling is one of the most fascinating sections, covering among others the LIBJOG joke generator, the Tom Swifty, HCPP and WisCraic pun generators, the VINCI and JAPE generators of riddle jokes and the HA HA acronym manipulator. The success of these programmes is such that we, the consumers, cannot easily distinguish between the jokes they generate and those found in Christmas crackers. Ritchie also provides a clear methodological paradigm for building and evaluating joke generators; he is particularly strong on the need for data sources that are pure and work according to general rules and for independent human evaluation of the output.

Ritchie's strategy works best for those kinds of jokes whose success depends most directly on aspects of language such as puns. Indeed he provides an exceptionally detailed and sophisticated analysis of puns that is far superior to any of its predecessors. His discussions of humour theory, of the nature of humorous incongruity and of the very varied mechanisms that make jokes work are likewise enlightening. Ritchie has written a notable book that belongs in the library of anyone interested in linguistic analysis or indeed in humour.

The one section about which I have doubts is that outlining his criticisms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor developed by Attardo and Raskin (1991). The devisors of the theory claim it is falsifiable. Ritchie says it is not, yet his own discussion of joke similarity and identity indicates that it is, for the experiments to test the hierarchical core of the theory that he cites do or at least could test whether or not it is valid. The rather narrow view he takes of the nature of scripts and of script opposition is also unhelpful. This accounts for Ritchie's misunderstanding of a classic Irish joke where he fails to see that Irish stupidity far from being an unnecessary stereotype grafted on to the joke is an accepted fictional and conventional script without which the joke would be less effective. All this is made clear in Raskin's (1985) work which I found essential to my own comparative sociological studies of ethnic jokes (Davies 1990, 2002). Once the nature of this script is understood all manner of new and original joke transformations become possible. All elephant jokes, for example, are potentially Hibernian or at least Pachydermilesian:

A visitor to the zoological gardens in Dublin noticed that the elephant was wearing socks. She said to the keeper: "Tell me, Mr. Behan, why is the elephant wearing yellow socks?"

Keeper: "Well you see his red ones is in the wash".

By doing this we have shifted the joke from one of absurdity to one of appropriate and misresolved incongruity. By introducing a conversation within the joke we have also completely changed the relationship between the teller of the joke and its recipients. Yet none of this can be easily reduced to a formal linguistic model. It needed a knowledge of Raskin on scripts to do it.

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References

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A.-M. Simon-Vandenberg, Miriam Taverniers, and Louise Ravelli (eds.) (2003). *Grammatical Metaphor: Views from Systemic Functional Linguistics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, vi, 453 pp.

In the preface to this volume, J. R. Martin writes: “like everything else in linguistics, grammatical metaphor is an unfinished project through the lens of which we catch a glimpse of language as it instantiates itself around us moment by moment”. We are to infer that this volume represents work in progress, and the contributions are substantial and varied. The book is organised into five sections, covering many of the areas in which Systemic Functional Linguistics has already acquired a reputation, including language development, textual analysis, and the interpersonal dimension of meaning.

The topic of grammatical metaphor is given prominence here by way of complementing the extensive treatment that has been given to lexical metaphor both within and beyond the SFL framework. Appropriately, the work of Halliday is the reference point for most of the discussions. Here language (by contrast with other linguistic theories, such as Cognitive Grammar) is not regarded as a system internal to the “mind”, but as a social semiotic. This social semiotic is articulated in terms of the idea of a system of meaning choices in a network. Metaphor in general is to be construed as a variation in the expression of meaning. One important difference with some traditional treatments of metaphor is that a strict dichotomy of the literal and the metaphorical gives way to what SFL theorists describe as a scale of “congruency”. In the first paper, Louise