

Reseñas/Reviews

Leonor Ruiz Gurillo y M. Belén Alvarado Ortega (Eds.) (2013). *Irony and Humor: From Pragmatics to Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. ISBN 978-90-272-5636-2, 270 pp. Precio: € 103

This volume includes a collection of articles written by well-known international experts that contains an updated account of the recent findings on the multifarious linguistic phenomena of verbal irony and humor. Every author approaches the subject from a different perspective and, in many cases, examines aspects of humor or irony that had never been explored before, a fact that brings a lot of fresh air to the treatment of both phenomena within the field of linguistics. The book covers a remarkable range of research in the field, covering genres and subgenres such as jokes, cartoons, monologues, mass media discourse or conversation, analyzed through the prisms of neo-Gricean Pragmatics, Relevance Theory, Argumentation Theory or Corpus Linguistics, among other approaches.

The editors introduce the volume with their article titled “The pragmatics of irony and humor”, in which they give a summary of its contents, as well as a very brief account of some theories of irony and humor. The book is then divided in three main parts, each one containing either three or four chapters.

The three articles included in *Part 1: Irony and Humor: Pragmatic Perspectives* provide a general and broad theoretical treatment of the pragmatics of both irony and humor. In the first one, “The power of inversion: Irony, from utterance to discourse”, Susana Rodríguez Rosique examines irony from a neo-Gricean perspective as an inverting procedure that goes beyond what is said and inferred, advancing into the realm of discursive typologies and textual traditions. By analyzing texts and corpora taken from different sources, she explains, for instance, how the inverted working of conversational principles is triggered by the transgression of quality, and how this process may also be embedded in various discourses, serving different purposes. Rodríguez Rosique’s view of irony both as a productive inversion procedure and as a phenomenon that is immersed in different genres in combination with persuasive strategies sheds evidential light on the treatment and comprehension of the phenomenon and stands out in contrast with the more traditional approaches to irony.

The second article in Part I, “Intentionality and irony” by Salvatore Attardo, constitutes one more of Attardo’s illuminating works on the subject, in which his evident pursue of rigor and objectivity does not allow for limited or restricted views. His perspective is always ‘doctrine-free’ and open-minded, as shown by his accurate explanation of irony as an ‘exemplar category’. This con-

cept, Attardo explains, comes from Mathematics and has been widely adopted in cognitive psychology to distinguish prototype theories of categorization from other approaches. Thus, exemplar categories do not necessarily have a ‘central or best’ example as prototype categories do. On the contrary, they may have three or four examples that define the category, which may or may not share some features. The author also argues in favor of the view that irony is very often processed subconsciously (in line with Gibbs, 2012), and that its meaning cannot be reduced to a proposition, considering its indeterminacy. It has to be added that Attardo manages to present his arguments with great clarity, a fact that readers will be undoubtedly grateful for, considering the inherent complexity of the concepts discussed and analyzed.

The third article in Part 1 is Francisco Yus’ “An inference-centered analysis of jokes: The intersecting circles model of humorous communication”. This is a very interesting and original piece of work in which Yus proposes a model for joke interpretation, the *Intersecting Circles Model*, which he uses to account for some interpretive procedures that may be manipulated for the production of humor. By means of this model, the author explains how utterance interpretation, make-sense frames and cultural frames may be exploited and combined for the production of humorous effects, showing a more realistic picture of the strategies used by jokers, beyond the black-or-white duality of utterance-centered versus culture-connoted jokes proposed by him in previous research. Therefore, the chapter constitutes a further contribution that has to be studied in relation to his previous classification of jokes (Yus 2009, 2012a, 2012b) for, among other things, in this new paper he introduces some changes that affect his previous categorization of jokes. Yus thus presents a very elaborate typology of jokes that strikes the reader as nothing other than the result of many years of hard work and reflection upon the subject, and can therefore be of great use for future analysts as a model to follow in their analyses.

The second part (*Part 2: Irony and humor in mediated discourse*) deals with occurrences of both irony and humor in mediated communication. The first chapter of this part is Elena Méndez-G^a de Paredes’ “Discursive mechanisms of informative humor in Spanish media”. Here, the author examines the main strategies used in the particular genre of media information humor, a parody genre that treats real news in a humorous way. The terms *infotainment* and *infoshow*, Méndez explains, precisely refer to the hybrid nature of this kind of humor, in which information is not necessarily a goal but is indissolubly linked to the material it is made of. The humor is thus based on a new contextualization of the current news. For her thorough analysis of different interventions or commentaries in Spanish infoshows, Méndez uses Charaudeau’s (1995) notion of *communication contract*, which permits to articulate an *external communica-*

tion space (related to the entertainment and pleasure these TV programs seek to provide to spectators) within an *internal locution space* (related to their ludic nature and aims). The author hence scrutinizes – with great precision and delicacy – the humor category of parody, showing how in this particular type of TV programs another statute is conferred to informative discourse, where the anchors are “journalist-clowns”, and the limits between reality and fiction become blurred.

In the next article (“Narrative strategies in Buenafuente’s humorous monologues”), Leonor Ruiz Gurillo presents the results of her analysis of Andreu Buenafuente’s monologues in Spanish, published in different books during the years 2007–2011. Ruiz Gurillo’s point of departure is Raskin & Attardo’s *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (GTVH), but she proposes a modification of the GTVH model by adding certain elements (such as the logical mechanisms based on syntagmatic relationships or on reasoning) to its knowledge resources (as seen on p. 117). In her careful analysis, Ruiz Gurillo looks into the rhetorical aspects of Buenafuente’s monologues, and she then focuses on the knowledge resource known as *narrative strategy*. The author explores aspects such as register, text and genre as a first approach to Buenafuente’s monologues, taking into account the different variables that may affect the final humorous result, such as the differences in register realization between a monologue that is thought to be read, and one that is thought to be dramatized and uttered in front of an audience. All in all, this study not only throws relevant light on the structure and meaning of Buenafuente’s monologues, but also on the peculiarities and features of monologues in general. In addition, the reader will undoubtedly be grateful for Ruiz Gurillo’s clarity and good organization of ideas, as well as for her suitable use of diagrams and tables in both her theoretical proposal and empirical analysis.

The third article in this second part is centered on the analysis of cartoons (“Cartoons in Spanish press: A pragmatic approach”). Its author, Xose Padilla-García, pays special attention to the dialogue between the artist and the readers of the cartoons, by exploring the mechanisms used by both parties to ensure a successful communication. Padilla explores, among other things, the consequences of the multimodality of cartoons on the final interpretation of the message, their contextualization clues, and the different activated scripts coming from the three distinct interpretation levels identified. It is worth noting that the author approaches his analysis of cartoons in an eclectic but very “healthy” manner, by using elements from different theories (such as Cognitivism, neo-Gricean pragmatics or GTVH) that eventually proves to be very useful for the characterization of the genre under his scrutiny, a job that Padilla manages to accomplish with transparency and elegance.

Closing this part, “Phonological humor as perception and representation of foreignness” by Javier Muñoz-Basols, Pawel Adrjan & Marianne David touches on the interesting topic of “phonological jokes”, which are based on the imitation or parody of the sounds of foreign languages. The authors present a careful and thorough classification of the linguistic strategies employed to humorously represent foreignness in this type of jokes. Their framework for analysis is that of cultural, social, individual, and comparative humorous contexts (Oring, 2008), which proves to be appropriate for examining the complexity found in phonological jokes, where cultural identity and the implicit perception of foreignness is encoded. With their impeccable characterization of phonological jokes, Muñoz-Basols, Adrjan & David manage to make the reader understand that these jokes belong to a distinct category, other than “ethnic jokes”, because they do not focus on cultural stereotypes but on the playful distortion of words, sounds and tonalities of foreign languages.

The third and final part of the book (*Part 3: Irony and humor in conversational interaction*) is devoted to the use of verbal irony and humor in conversation. The first article, M. Belén Alvarado’s “Failed humor in conversational utterances in Spanish”, offers a proposal for the analysis of failed humor in those cases where the listener decides not to participate, and therefore does not show a positive appreciation or appraisal of the humorous tone initiated by the speaker. To use Attardo’s (2001) term, Alvarado here deals with cases of non-“mode adoption”, and in line with this author, Alvarado assumes that humor includes two stages: humor competence and humor performance, the latter having to do with the desire or the willingness to appreciate it. In her analysis of failed humor conversational strategies, she rightly makes use of (Im)Politeness Theory, and concludes by emphasizing that the importance of her study “lies in discerning whether the origin of failed humor is in the speaker or in the listener, since each one of them will use different image protection conversational strategies” (p. 214). I believe it can be stated that this claim of hers is fair and accurate, for she reaches interesting conclusions in this respect through both her qualitative and quantitative analysis of examples of conversational humor taken from the *Corpus de conversaciones coloquiales* (Briz & Val.Es.Co. group, 2002).

In the next article, “Humor and argumentation in everyday talk”, Amadeu Viana explores the relationship between humor and argumentation in an exhaustive and illuminating manner from three different perspectives: the theoretical, the methodological and the empirical, arguing in favor of the necessity and relevance of discussing these three levels if we want to understand how arguments work in everyday humorous talk. In this way, the author skillfully shows that there is, indeed, a convergence between argumentation and humor-

ous utterances in everyday conversation, thereby posing relevant questions about issues such as the purposiveness or operational background of the argumentation, or the contrast between the serious and the ridiculous found in humor. Viana is very cautious not to make categorical affirmations about his findings, but I believe it can be stated that his approach in this paper has opened an alternative way of analyzing the topic in question, by pairing the pragmatic force to reorganize frames and contents found in conversational humor with its argumentative value, thus showing that humor can also involve purposive action and effectiveness.

The last article of Part III, and of the book, is Kurt Feyaerts' "Tackling the complexity of spontaneous humorous interaction: An integrated classroom-modeled corpus approach". The author argues that an adequate analysis of both humor and irony should be performed on different layers, given the fact that language is a dynamic intersubjective process. For his analysis, Feyaerts uses and presents the Corinth Corpus (Corpus Interactional Humor), developed by him and other members of his research group, and focuses on its technical design and development in sections 3 and 4, where he also shows and illustrates the semantic complexity of the corpus data by looking at the in-depth parameter annotation for two long sequences. His view of language is a socio-cognitive one, and for his description of the parameters of humor, he draws on Raskin's (1985), Attardo & Raskin's (1991) and Attardo's (1994) models of humor analysis. To judge by Feyaerts' analysis and exposition, the Corinth Corpus seems to be a very good option as an empirical research tool for humor analysts, for it offers a wide range of humor genres and types, as well as a parametric annotation grid which – among other things – may help the researcher in the characterization of the linguistic features used in the primary humorous turns in conversation. The corpus, therefore, seems powerful as a research tool for the analysis of humor, but so far it only contains data for the Flemish variant of Dutch. I am certain that humor researchers all over the world would welcome the inclusion of other languages in it.

In summary, the volume presents the results of relevant, updated, and original research on the topics of irony and humor that no specialist should miss. At the same time, the book could also be of interest to the curious non-specialist, given its subject matter, which will always put a smile on the reader's face through the presentation of the many samples of humorous discourse analyzed.

References

- Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Attardo, S. (2001). "Humor and irony in interaction: From mode adoption to failure of detection". In Anolli, L., Ciceri, R. & Riva, G. (Eds.), *Say not to Say: New perspectives on miscommunication* (pp. 166–185). Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Attardo, S. & Raskin, V. (1991). "Script theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarity and joke representation model". *Humor* 4 (3–4), 293–347.
- Briz, A. & Grupo Val.Es.Co. (2002). *Corpus de conversaciones coloquiales*. Madrid: Arco Libros.
- Charaudeau, P. (1995). "Catégories de langue, catégories de discours et contrat de communications". In Moirand, S., Ali Bouacha A., Beacco, J.-C. & Collinot, A. (Eds.), *Parcours Linguistiques de Discours Spécialisés* (pp. 315–326). Berna: Peter Lang.
- Gibbs, R. W. (2012). "Are ironic acts deliberate?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 44, 104–115.
- Oring, E. (2008). "Humor in Anthropology and Folklore". In V. Raskin (Ed.), *The Primer of Humor Research* (pp. 183–210). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Reidel: Dordrecht.
- Yus, F. (2009). "Estrategias y efectos en el Discurso humorístico". Paper delivered at *II Jornadas de Lingüística y Cognición*. Cádiz, Spain: University of Cadiz, March.
- Yus, F. (2012a). "Relevance, humour and translation". In Walaszewska, E. & Piskorska, A. (Eds.), *Relevance Theory: More than Understanding* (pp. 117–145). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Yus, F. (2012b). "Strategies and effects in humorous discourse. The case of jokes". In Eizaga Rebollar, B. (Ed.), *Studies in Linguistics and Cognition* (pp. 270–296). Berlin: Peter Lang.

Laura Alba-Juez: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Edificio de Humanidades, Paseo Senda del Rey, 7. Dcho. 617. Ciudad Universitaria 28040 Madrid, SPAIN, E-Mail: lalba@flog.uned.es