

Humour

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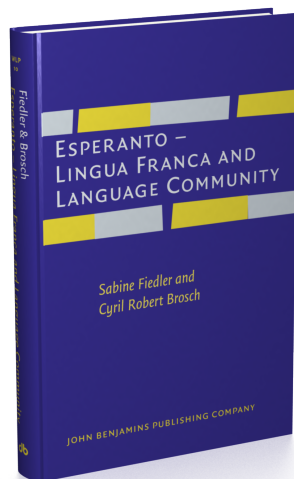
Pages 153–192 of

Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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Humour

20.1 Introduction

When we hear of a planned language for the first time and consider the definition that we gave in Chapter 7 (“a language consciously created [...] with the goal of facilitating international linguistic communication”), then play on words, allusions and humorous discourse are certainly not the first things that spring to mind. Instead, we would usually associate a planned language with efficiency, ease of acquisition, regularity with no exceptions, and an absence of ambiguity. Nevertheless, as the frequent occurrence of the symbol @ (indicating laughter) in the examples in this book illustrates, humour is ubiquitous in Esperanto communication and linguistic elements play an important part in evoking it. This is not only documented by dissertations on this topic (e.g. by Lloancy, 1985; Mel’nikov, 2004), by anthologies or collections of examples (e.g. Alòs i Font & Velkov, 1991; Ĝivoje, 1973; MacGill, 1986, 2012; Maul, 1987; Mel’nikov, 2008), but also experienced very quickly by people who acquire the language. Already in beginners’ courses, learners might greet one another by saying “Salaton!” (‘salad’) instead of “Saluton!” (‘[I express a] greeting’) and ask riddles such as “Kial ĝirafa neniam solas?” (‘Why is a giraffe never alone?’) (answer: “Ĝi havas kolegon.” It has a colleague/long neck; “kol-eg-o” from “kol-” [neck] and “-eg”, augmentative suffix).

Philippe (1991, p. 86), who considers speakers’ “linguistic play instinct” to be a factor triggering language change in Esperanto, points out:

Der vorwiegend agglutinierende Sprachbau, das produktive Wortbildungssystem, die im „Fundamento“ verankerte uneingeschränkte Aufnahmefähigkeit gegenüber fremdem Sprachmaterial wie auch die ethnische Ungebundenheit des Esperanto ermöglichen, dass sprachlicher Spieltrieb, Variationslust und Kreativitätsdrang des Menschen sich im Esperanto viel mehr ausleben lassen als in den überwiegend flektierenden, traditionsgebundenen Ethnosprachen Westeuropas.

[The predominantly agglutinative structure of Esperanto, the productive word-formation system, the unlimited ability to accept new material from other languages anchored in the *Fundamento* as well as the ethnic independence of Esperanto enable the human linguistic instinct, inclination for variation, desire to be creative to live much more than in the predominantly inflectional, traditional ethnic languages of Western Europe.]

An essential characteristic of the playful use of language is its intentionality. Misprints and slips of the tongue are not considered here, although they are of comic value occasionally, as (164) shows. The speaker pronouncing *historio* ('history') more as *histerio* ('hysteria') is obviously not aware of her slip of the tongue.

- (164) A: *Nia lingvo havas tiom da kulturo, tiom da histerio dum cent tridek jaroj, ke estas temo por- hm?*
 Several: ⊥[@(1)@
 B: ⊥*histerio*
 C: *Vi diris histerio.*
 A: *Histerio? @Ĉu? Nu de tempo al tempo@.*
 [A: Our language already has so much culture, so much hysteria during 130 years, that it is a topic for- hm?
 Several: ⊥@(1)@
 B: ⊥Hysteria
 C: You said hysteria.
 A: Hysteria? @Really? Well, from time to time@.]
[188 (hun; pres; Poznań) 12:33–12:55]

The humorous occurrences that we are concerned with here are conscious and deliberate on the part of speaker or writer. The deviations from ordinary language use serve specific purposes and are often performed according to recurrent rules, which will be described in this chapter.

The chapter consists of two parts. Drawing on the description of Esperanto in Chapter 11, the first will analyse what makes Esperanto a language that can be used for ludic communication. We will describe the main types of “language play” (Crystal, 1998) in Esperanto (such as playing around with proper names, initials, phraseological units and, above all, punning based on pseudo-homonymy) and compare these with techniques found in ethnic languages. This part draws on a large variety of written and spoken texts as well as on previous investigations of the topic (Fiedler, 1999, 2001a; Fiedler, 2004, 2010b). The second part is devoted to the pragmatic functions that humour serves in Esperanto communication. This includes an investigation of speaker attitudes and other extralinguistic factors that encourage creative language use in Esperanto. This second part will be based on the dataset described in Chapter 5. Before we start our analysis, it will be useful to shed some light on how humour basically works.

20.2 Humour theories

The majority of researchers explain humour and laughter from a cognitive point of view. They agree on the fact that it is based on incongruity; we laugh at things that surprise us, that present a conflict between what we expected and what actually occurs. The things that are out of place can take many different forms, such as the juxtaposition of a very tall, thin man and a short, round man as we find them in comic strip protagonists, or an ostentatiously dressed person at a party amidst a group of casually dressed guests, or the clown who wears outrageously large shoes. Our focus is on humour that is caused by incongruity in language, on situations in which normal expectations of language use are broken. Classic examples include riddles and jokes involving words with more than one meaning, like *kolego* from the example in the introduction, or the deliberate overuse of linguistic elements, as in (165), a love letter consisting only of affixes that are used with word class endings to form words, a peculiarity of Esperanto described in Chapter 11, or (166), the fake logos of well-known Esperanto journals. Here, in the satirical Esperanto journal *La KancerKliniko* ('the cancer clinic'), by adding a single letter, *Literatura Foiro* ('literary market') becomes *Literatura Foriro* ('literary departure'); and *Sennaciulo* ('nationless person') turns into *Senila nulo* ('senile nothing'), referring to the paper's outdated character, which is then further intensified by a large number of obituaries covering the entire front page.

- (165) *Etino mia, via foreco malebligas [...] nian geon, ĉu vi baldaŭe apudos min? Sen vi, mia indulino, kiel aĉas la hodiaŭo! For de vi, njo ineto mia, kial antaŭeni ĝis la morgaŭo? [...] endas ke plej baldaŭe ni ree geiĝu. Ek alenu al mi [...] mia idigonto. Mi senaĝigas vin, nenio plu sur vi: via ekstero superindas ĉion!*

[My little one, your absence makes (...) our being together as a couple impossible, will you be next to me soon? Without you, my worthy person, how awful is the present day! Away from you, my dear little one, why go forward to the next day? (...) it is necessary that we come together again at the soonest time. Come on, make me get into you (...), my future offspring producer. I take the things off you, so that nothing more is on you: your exterior surpasses everything!]

(*Kontakto* 4/1977 p. 10; quoted from Mel'nikov 2008: 10)

- (166) (false logos)



Example (167) represents the contrastive juxtaposition of stylistically different texts. It is a selection of four texts from Raymond Queneau's famous *Exercices de style* (1947) in the Esperanto translation by I. Ertl.¹⁰⁰

(167) a. *La bazo*

Sur la linio "S", en vigla trafikhoru. Ulo pli-malpli dudeksesjara, mola ĉapelo kun galono anstataŭ rubando, kolego kvazaŭ oni tiris ĝin. Multaj elbusiĝas. La pritraktata ulo ekindignas kontraŭ najbaro. Lia riproĉo: li ĉiufoje ekpuŝas lin, kiam iu preterpaŝas. Plendaĉa tono laŭintence malica. Ekvidante liberan sidlokon, li tuj ekposedas ĝin. (...) (p. 1)

[The basis

In the S bus, during the rush hour. A guy of about 26, a soft hat with a cord instead of a ribbon, a long neck as if someone had torn on it. Many people are getting off. The guy in question gets annoyed with a man standing next to him. He reproaches him for jostling him every time someone passes. An accusing tone with a malicious intention. When he sees a vacant seat, he takes it immediately.]

b. *Metafora*

Meze de la tago, ĵetita en la aron de sardinoj, kiuj veturis en koleoptero kun blanketa abdomeno, kokido kun granda, senpluma kolo subite ekpredikis al pacema sardino, kaj lia humide protesta oracio disvastiĝis en la etero. Poste, altirite de vaka spaco, la birdeto tien forflugis. (...) (p. 2)

[Metaphorically

In the centre of the day, tossed among the shoal of travelling sardines in a coleopter with a big white carapace, a chicken with a long, featherless neck suddenly harangued one, a peace-abiding one, of their number, and its parlance, moist with protest, was unfolded upon the air. Then, attracted by a void, the fledgling precipitated itself thereunto.]¹⁰¹

c. *Precizigoj*

Je la 12-a kaj 17, en aŭtobuso de la linio "S", 10 metrojn longa, 2,1 m-ojn larĝa, 3,5 m-ojn alta, en la distanco de 3600 m-oj de sia elveturpunkto, en momento, kiam ĝi estis ŝarĝita per 48 personoj, virseksa individuo, havanta la aĝon de 27 jaroj, 3 monatoj kaj 8 tagoj, pezanta 65 kg-ojn, de la alteco de 1 m 72, portanta sur la kapo ĉapelon 17 cm-ojn altan, ĉirkaŭitan de 35 cm-ojn longa rubando, alparolas alian individuon, havantan 48 jarojn, 4 monatojn kaj

100. In *Exercices de style*, the author tells the banal story of a man who rides an overcrowded bus in Paris, in ninety-nine different ways (e.g. as a dream, a technical description and a letter to authorities), demonstrating the enormous variety of styles in which storytelling can occur.

101. The English versions of this text were taken from Barbara Wright's translation of Queneau's book.

3 tagojn, pezantan 77 kg-ojn, de la alteco de 1 m 68, per 14 vortoj, prononcitaj dum 5 sekundoj, aludantaj certajn nevolajn, 15–20 milimetrajn translokiĝojn. Poste li sidiĝas ĉirkaŭ 2 m-ojn 10 cm-ojn pli malproksime. (...) (p. 4)

[Precision

At 12.17 p.m., in a bus of the S-line, 10 metres long, 2.1 metres wide, 3.5 metres high, in a distance of 3,000 metres from its starting point, at a moment when it was loaded with 48 people, a person of the masculine sex having the age of 27 years, 3 months and 8 days, weighing 65 kg, 1 m 72 cm tall, wearing on his head a hat 17 cm in height around which there was a 35 cm-long ribbon, spoke to another person aged 48 years, 4 months and 3 days, weighing 77 kg, 1 m 68 cm tall, using 14 words, speaking for 5 seconds alluding to some involuntary displacements of 15–20 mm. Afterwards he sat down about 2 m and 10 cm away.]

d. *Oficiala letero*

Mi havas la honoron informi Vin pri la sekvantaj okazintaĵoj, kiujn mi, ne malpli objektiva ol ŝokita atestanto, povis observi.

Ĉi tagon, en tagmezaj horoj, mi troviĝis sur la platformo de aŭtobuso, supreniranta la straton Courcelles en la direkto de la placo Champerret. La menciita aŭtobuso estis homplena, mi ne hezitus diri eĉ pli ol permeseble, ĉar la kontrolisto toleris la penetron de ĉiam pluraj veturantoj sen akceptebla motivo, instigita de troa filantropio, pro kio li kredis sin rajtigita malobservi la koncernan regularon, proksimiĝante al la limoj de nia indulgemo. Ĉe ĉiu haltejo, la ambaŭdirekta movado de la pasaĝeroj neeviteble provokis certajn frotadojn, kiuj instigis unu el tiuj pasaĝeroj al protesto, tamen timema. Mi ne povas lasi nemenciita, ke li foriris sidiĝi tuj, kiam tio fariĝis ebla. [...] Pro la skizitaj kondiĉoj, mi tre petas Vin, Sinjoro, indiki al mi, kiajn konkludojn mi devas tiri de la priskribitaj okazintaĵoj, kaj kian konduton, laŭ via opinio, mi devos teni en mia plua vivo.

Permesu al mi, Sinjoro, certigi Vin pri mia almenaŭ plej granda kaj perfekta konsidero. (pp. 7–8)

[Official letter

I beg to advise you of the following facts of which I happened to be the equally impartial and horrified witness.

Today, at roughly twelve noon, I was present on the platform of a bus which was proceeding up the rue de Courcelles in the direction of the Place Champerret. The aforementioned bus was fully laden – more than fully laden, I might even venture to say, since the conductor had accepted an overload of several candidates, without valid reason and actuated by an exaggerated kindness of heart which caused him to exceed the regulations and which, consequently, bordered on indulgence. At each stopping place the perambulations of the outgoing and incoming passengers did not fail

to provoke a certain disturbance which incited one of these passengers to protest, though not without timidity. I should mention that he went and sat down as and when this eventuality became possible (...) In view of these circumstances, I would request you to be so kind, Sir, as to intimate to me the inference which I should draw from these facts and the attitude which you would then deem appropriate that I adopt in re the conduct of my subsequent mode of life.

Anticipating the favour of your reply, believe me to be, Sir, your very obedient servant at least.]

As (165) to (167) show, Esperanto is able to express contrasts by using endogenous linguistic devices, such as its rich system of word formation, and it also has the capacity to mirror verbal humour in other languages by using these means creatively in translation. As regards the latter, it speaks for itself that Esperanto translators have not hesitated to deal with works as challenging in their language-based humour as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and the *Asterix* comic series.

Several researchers have described humour as a violation of Grice's conversational maxims (e.g. Attardo, 1994; Dubinsky & Holcomb, 2011, pp. 89–93; Kotthoff, 1998; Morreall, 2009, pp. 3f.). Grice (1975) proposed that in communication (in the sense of bona fide discourse) participants proceed according to an implicit overarching guideline that he terms the cooperative principle:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE.

(Grice 1975, p. 45)

A set of guidelines, called conversational maxims, underlie the cooperative principle:

Maxims of quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxims of quality:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of relation:

1. Be relevant.

Maxims of manner:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

(Grice 1975, pp. 45–46)

In comic discourse, humour is evoked by the deliberate violation of maxims. As regards our examples above, all of them actually draw their comic potential from a deviation from what Grice suggests in his set of default expectations. For example, (165) violates the maxim of manner, being obscure with its limitation to a specific group of vocabulary (affixes), while (167c) flouts the maxim of quantity, blatantly providing too much information. Our perception of something unexpected, inappropriate or exaggerated makes us laugh about these instances of language use.

As regards our feelings and the motivations involved, there are two different interpretations, a social and a psychological (or psychoanalytical) one. The first, which is often called superiority theory (or aggression theory), explains our tendency to laugh when someone we despise becomes the butt of the joke. Thomas Hobbes explains laughter as caused by both something unexpected and the triumph that we feel about mishaps or defects of others, speaking of “sudden glory”:

(...) [W]hatsoever it be that moveth laughter, it must be new and unexpected (...) I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly;

(Hobbes, 1987 [1650], p. 19)

Jokes in which other people appear stupid amuse us because we feel superior to them or we are simply happy about our own advantage, the fact that it was not us who slipped on the banana skin. In this context it might be interesting to ask the question of what Esperanto speakers laugh at. Who are the typical butts of Esperanto jokes? A categorisation of jokes sent in by Esperanto speakers on the website ridejo.ikso.net¹⁰² includes groups that might also be found in other speech communities.¹⁰³

¹⁰². It included 1,538 jokes (mainly narrative jokes, but also caricatures and memes) on 21 March 2017.

¹⁰³. See, for example, the project *LaughLAB. The Scientific Quest for the World's Funniest Joke* (2002).

Married life (*geedzeco*): 11.8%

Children (*infanoj*): 8.5%

Doctors and patients (*kuracistoj kaj pacientoj*): 7.9%

School (*lernejo*): 6.7%

Men (*viroj*): 6.8%

Women (*virinoj*): 6.5%

One type of joke often mentioned in support of the superiority theory is the so-called ethnic joke. In almost every country people tell jokes at the expense of another nation or group of people, although the group that is targeted varies. Jokes expressing prejudice and stereotypes, such as “Scots are mean” or “Poles steal cars”, do not seem to fit into a community aiming at solidarity and equal rights, and, indeed, they represent a small group of 1.8% of those on the website. The jokes in question seem to be translations from national languages, and as we know from Shifman et al. (2014), translated Internet jokes are among the “secret agents of globalization”. What is intriguing in this context is what occasionally counts as an “ethnic” group in Esperanto jokes. As a counterpart of the classic Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman who enter a pub, or three politicians from different countries meeting in heaven (or hell), representatives of different planned languages take centre stage here, as Examples (168) and (169) illustrate:

(168) *La mensogodetektilo*

Volapukisto, Esperantisto kaj Idisto amuziĝas per mensogodetektilo. Unue la Volapukisto:

- *Mi pensas ke mi povas plene ĝuste konjugacii la Volapukajn verbojn*
BIP
- *Do, almenaŭ mi scias bone la sonojn de la vokaloj.*
Ĝi ne reagas.

La Esperantisto sekvas:

- *Mi pensas ke mi neniam forgesas la akuzativon.*
BIP
- *Nu, mi pensas ke mi kapablas trapasi la C1-KER-ekzamenon.*
Neniu sono.

Jen la Idisto:

- *Mi pensas...*
BIP

[The polygraph

Three speakers of Volapük, Esperanto, and Ido have fun with a polygraph. First comes the Volapük speaker:

- I think I can conjugate the verbs in Volapük totally correctly.
BEEP

- OK, at least I know how to pronounce the vowels.
No reaction.
Followed by the Esperanto speaker:
 - I think I'll never forget the accusative.
BEEP
 - Well, I think that I'm capable of succeeding in a C1 language exam.
No sound.
Now the Ido speaker:
-I think...
BEEP]
- (See <http://ridejo.ikso.net/sxerco/>)

(169) *Kiom ofte*

Okaze de la vegetarisma seminario renkontiĝas volapukisto, interlingvaisto kaj esperantisto, ili konversacias kaj komparas siajn lingvojn.

La volapukisto demandas la interlingvaiston: “Dirü, kiöm öfte la literö ‘L’ apäras en la himnö dä interlingvö?”

La interlingvaisto kalkulas kaj respondas: “In nostra himna es 17 literas ‘L’! Et in vostra himna, senioro di Esperanto, quiomas literas ‘L’ es in himna di Esperanto?”

La esperantisto kalkulas longtempe kaj poste diras: "192."

Jen la volapukisto miras: "Tiöm mülte? Ĉu vi pövüs kanti tiön al ni?"

*Kompreneble, la esperantisto bonvolas: “En la mondon venis nova sento, la la la
la la la la la la la ...”*

[How often

At a vegetarian convention speakers of Volapük, Interlingua, and Esperanto meet, they converse and compare their languages.

The Volapük speaker asks the speaker of Interlingua: “Tell me, hōw öften does the letter L appear in the hymn öf Interlingüa?”

The Interlingua speaker counts and responds: “In our himna es 17 letteras L! And in you himna, senioro of Esperanto, how many letteras L es in himna de Esperanto?”

The Esperanto speaker counts for a long time and says: “192.”

The Volapük speaker asks surprised: “Sö müch? Could you sing it för üs?”

Of course the Esperanto speaker agrees: “En la mondon venis nova sento, la la la la la la la la la ...”] (See <http://ridejo.ikso.net/sxerco/1600>)¹⁰⁴

104. The existence of a hymn or anthem is a special feature of some planned languages. As regards Esperanto, Zamenhof's poem *La Espero* ('The Hope'), which opens with *En la mondon venis nova sento* ('Into the world came a new feeling'), and expresses the enthusiasm typical of the early days of the language, is considered the Esperanto anthem. Some parts and expressions of its text have become popular catchphrases among Esperanto speakers, as we will see in Chapter 21.

Ethnic humour is not only underrepresented in the collection of jokes on ridejo.ikso.net, it is also rare in our dataset, which will serve as a basis for our description of humorous discourse in the second part of this chapter. We find a riddle (Example (170)) and an example of self-ironic humour by a French tour guide (Example (171)). Note that in Example (171) the speaker adds an explanation of the joke. We will return to those comments in the second part of this chapter.

(170) A: *Kio estas la plej maldika libro en- de la mondo?*

[...]

B: *Mia ŝparlibro. @ [...]*

A: *Ne, famaj norvegoj.*

[A: What is the thinnest book of- in the world?

(...)

B: *My savings book. @*

A: *No, famous Norwegians.* [5 (swe; infl; Poznań) 84:24–85:05]

(171) A: *Do vera internacia grupo. [...] Estas belgoj, estas britoj, bulgaro, ĉinoj, danoj, finnlandanoj, francoj, germanoj, hispanoj, hungaroj, israelano, italoj, japanoj, kanadanoj, nederlandano, poloj, tajvano, usonanoj. Imagu!*

B: *Kaj bretono!*

all: *@(.)@*

A: *Ĉu- @(.)@ Kaj bretonano. Ĉu vi scias, ke Bretonio ne estas Francio, @(1)@ Estas aparta lando.*

[A: So, a really international group. (...) There are Belgians, there are Brits, a Bulgarian, Chinese people, Danes, Finns, French people, Germans, Spaniards, Hungarians, an Israeli, Italians, Japanese people, Canadians, a Dutchman, Poles, a Taiwanese, US-Americans. Imagine!

B: *And a Breton!*

All: *@(.)@*

A: *Do- @(.)@ And a Breton. Do you know that Brittany is not France, @(1)@ It is a separate country.* [130 (fra; tour; Lille) 3:37–4:31]

Ethnic humour leads us to a third humour theory, the relief or release theory, which is closely related to Sigmund Freud. It links laughter and humour to breaking taboos. When we tell or listen to a joke about a topic that we are embarrassed to confront, such as sex, death, bodily functions or authority figures, we override our internal censor. In Freud's view, comedy is an instrument for people to free themselves from inner tensions and to gain psychic release because they are able to vent their instincts without restraint. For Freud (1905, p. 159), laughter is "Ausdruck der lustvoll empfundenen Überlegenheit" (it expresses a pleasurable sense of superiority), which again refers to the close relation to the superiority theory. As Raskin

(1985, p. 40) points out, the three approaches actually “characterize the complex phenomenon of humour from very different angles and do not at all contradict each other – rather they seem to supplement each other quite nicely.”

20.3 The linguistic resources of Esperanto for creating humour

20.3.1 Language-based humour

Humour is very diverse in nature and can be studied from different perspectives. In this section we are concerned with linguistic or language-based humour. Our dataset includes a large number of humorous situations. In (172), for example, a speaker opening a debate attempts to produce humour by beginning on a pleasant note, which is shown to be appreciated by participants’ laughter.

(172) A: *Kelkaj demandoj estas tre facile respondeblaj – tiujn mi povas mem respondi – aliaj estas multe pli malfacilaj kaj mi (do) transdonos la taskojn al la aliaj.*

all: @(.)@

[A: Some questions can be answered easily – those I can answer myself – other ones are much more difficult, and (so) I hand the tasks over to the others.

All: @(.)@]

[114 (swe; disc; Lille) 47:00–17]

Although the humour in this example is definitely linguistically conveyed, uses like these will not be discussed here as it is not the language itself that gives rise to funniness. Our focus in this section is on language-dependent humour, on manipulations of language and the breaking or bending of rules for producing a humorous effect. Language is not only a means of communication; beyond this primary function, it can also become the subject of communication. Alexander (1997) speaks of “verbal humor”. Hockett (1977) illustrates the difference by his distinction between poetic (i.e. language-based) and prosaic (i.e. situation-based) jokes.

Linguistic humour is intentional, as we mentioned above in the context of Example (164). This means that the deviations from standard use that will be addressed in this section are not mistakes or the result of insufficient learning, which are frequent in a language that is almost entirely acquired as an L2, but deliberate innovative uses with the aim of evoking humour or producing intellectual pleasure. Language play can have a rich variety of forms. Authors produce ambiguity, they toy with names, dialects, styles and the two possible readings of idioms, they overuse certain types of morphemes or sounds and play with graphological elements. The great variety of forms necessitates classification. Most authors base their typologies on the levels of the language system (Alexander, 1997; Ermida, 2008; Fiedler, 2003a;

Ross, 2005), but we think that the most suitable starting point for discussing linguistic humour in Esperanto is the actual occurrence of this phenomenon. Together with the material collected for previous studies on the topic (Fiedler, 2001a, 2004), the dataset described in Chapter 5 represents a rich basis for gaining an insight into the scope of language play in Esperanto and the techniques favoured by its users. We will structure the presentation according to the levels of the linguistic system to allow for a comparison with other languages.

20.3.2 Main types of language play in Esperanto

A. *Creating pseudo-homonymy*

Ludic communication occurs in all languages. Nevertheless, individual languages show preferences for particular techniques that serve language play (Redfern, 1984, pp. 156ff.), and peculiarities can be expected for Esperanto too. Mark Twain, in his famous essay “The Awful German Language”, wrote that this language did not contain words but “alphabetical processions”. The potential of the German language to create long compound words is often exploited for humorous purposes (as in the classic *Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitänsgattin*). Although overlong word creations are not among the most typical forms of language play in Esperanto,¹⁰⁵ the language does offer the potential to employ this technique. An example is *dinitropolisakarozydoputinidometilenoido*, a word invented by Gonçalo Neves for his story *Fakistoj* (1991) to mock scientists and their language.

English, by contrast, is famous for its puns based on homonymy, as in Shakespeare’s sonnet 138:

(...)
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our lies we flattered be.

As described in Chapter 11, international vocabulary is adapted to Esperanto according to specific rules, so that instances of homonymy are restricted to exceptional cases.¹⁰⁶ In addition, there are identical forms:

105. As a rule, long words are not characteristic of Esperanto. Studies for a frequency dictionary for Esperanto (Quasthoff et al., 2014) which is mainly based on Internet sources revealed that the most frequent longest words in Esperanto texts are words from other languages.

106. Cherpillod (2003, p. 286) mentions examples such as *lukso* (a) ‘luxury’, (b) ‘lux’ (the unit of illuminance).

- of an appellative and a name, e.g.
ramo ('battering ram') – *Ramo* ('Ram/Rama', avatar of Vishnu)
liro ('lyre') – *liro* ('lira' [currency])
- of an affix used with a word class ending and an appellative or proper name, e.g.
ero (*er-o* 'element, part') – *ero* ('era')¹⁰⁷
ina (*in-a* 'female') – *Ina* (female name)
- of an appellative, a proper name or affix and an abbreviation, e.g.
amu ('love', imperative) – *AMU* for Adam Mickiewicz University
la pena ('the arduous/laborious', from *peno* 'effort') – *la PEN-a* [*komitato*] (referring to the writers' association – *Lapenna* (referring to Ivo Lapenna) (see our introductory example in Chapter 1).

Furthermore, we might speak of morphological homonymy (or pseudo-homonymy) in examples such as the aforementioned *kolego*, i.e. when a lexeme consisting of a morpheme and a word class ending (*koleg-o*) and a word that results from word formation (*kol-eg-o*) have identical forms. Further examples are:

etaĝo (*etaĝ-o* 'floor, storey') – *etaĝo* (*et-aĝ-o* 'little' + 'age' + N)
tubero (*tuber-o* 'bump, knot') – *tubero* (*tub-er-o* 'tube' + 'part' + N)
konkludi (*konklud-i* 'to conclude') – *konkludi* (*konk-ludi* 'shell' + 'to play').

This can also concern the syntagmatic level:

literaturo ('literature') – *litera turo* ('letter' Adj + 'tower' N)
piediri (*pied-iri* 'foot' + 'go', i.e. 'to go on foot') – *piediri* (*pie diri* 'pious' Adv + 'say', i.e. 'to speak piously').

These types of intentional misinterpretations of morphological structures, which are often referred to as "mistranĉoj" (miscuts) in Esperanto (see Mel'nikov, 2008, pp. 82–84), have a long history in the language. Raymond Schwartz (1894–1973), the master of Esperanto punning and one of the instigators of a Parisian Esperanto cabaret ("La Verda Kato" 'The Green Cat') in the mid-1920s, wrote the following poem about the various periods (*aĝoj* 'ages') in a man's life:¹⁰⁸

107. Nowadays the usual word form is *erao*, in order to avoid this homonymy.

108. The poem is here reproduced from Dahlenburg (2013, p. 26). For a detailed analysis of Schwartz's Esperanto language play see the doctoral dissertation by Lloancy (1985).

*En supra ĉambro, lulo ... lulo;
Anĝele dormas la etulo: Et-aĝo.*

*Sed baldaŭ li el dorm' sin ŝiras
Kaj pri la bela mondo miras: Mir-aĝo.*

*Jam ne plu side li tamburas,
Sed tra la dom' explore kuras: Kur-aĝo.*

*Kun vundoj li (kaj sen rubandoj)
Revenas el stratbubaj bandoj: Band-aĝo.*

*Kaj baldaŭ sekvas li kun ĝojo
Knabinon ĉien sur la vojo: Voj-aĝo.*

*Al ŝi li donas sian nomon
Por fondi kune novan domon: Dom-aĝo.*

*Li tiam estas tre utila
Fortika viro, kvankam vila: Vil-aĝo.*

*Kaj post rapida tempopaso
Postrestas nur senviva maso: Mas-aĝo.
P.S.*

*Ni ne apliku al Virino
Ĉi tiun viv- kj rimo-saĝon,
Ĉar de l'komenco ĝis la fino
Ŝi ĉiam havas saman aĝon: Avant-aĝo.*

[In an upper room, rock-a-bye
Angelically the little one sleeps:
Second-storey/Young age.

But soon he tears himself from sleep
And wonders at the world:
Mirage/Age of wonder.

No longer does he sit and drum,
But runs exploring through the house:
Courage/Running age.

Now with wounds (without his ribbons)
He comes home from his street gangs:
Bandage/Gang age.

And soon he follows with joy
A girl everywhere on the street:
Voyage/Street age.

To her he gives his name
To found a new home:
A shame/Home age.

He is very productive then,
 A strong man, if hirsute:
 Village/Hairy age.
 And as time rapidly passes,
 Only a lifeless lump remains:
 Massage/Lump age.
 PS:
 Let us not apply to a woman
 This rhyming wisdom about life,
 For from beginning to end
 She has the same age:
 Advantage/Advanced age.]¹⁰⁹

Uses like these are not restricted to collections of puns and jokes, however. Manipulating language for the sake of comic effect at the micro-level of the morpheme is widely employed in everyday spoken and written Esperanto communication, as the following examples illustrate:

- (173) *Tuŝis min la ĉagreno de John Stanley [...], kiu dum multaj jaroj serĉas perditan rimajon pri kato. Vera kata-strofo! Kvazaŭ lia kato malaperis senreneve en kata-kombon.* [I was touched by John Stanley's annoyance (...), who has been looking for a lost rhyme about a cat for many years. A real cat-astrophe! As if the cat had forever disappeared in a cat-acomb.] (*Monato* 6/95, p. 6)
- (174) *Trie, Kiam amo regas (ne konfuzu kun Kiam amoregas aŭ Kia mammo regas!!!)* [Thirdly, *Kiam amo regas* ('When love is ruling'; book title) (not to be confused with – approximately: 'When love is made intensely', from *amor-eg-i* 'make love' + intensifying suffix, or with – approximately: 'What a breast is ruling'!!!)] (*Kontakto* 156, 6/96, p. 14)
- (175) *Gratulon kaj dankon, do, al Hauptenthal pro tia premierigo de la granda E.T.A. en nia literaturo.* [So, congratulations and thanks to Hauptenthal for introducing the great E.T.A. (*eta* 'small') into our literature.] (*Fonto* 203, 11/97, p. 15; about E.T.A. Hoffmann)

In (176), as frequently found in journalistic texts, the reader will only be able to understand the playfully cryptic headline (*eraro* 'mistake' vs *er-ar-o* 'collection of particles') having read the complete article, which enhances suspense and intellectual joy.

109. Translated into English by Jordan (1988, pp. 148–149).

(176) *De eraro al er-aro*

La ĵusan septembron sinjorino envagoniĝinte en Hamburgo, rimarkis en Kolonjo, ke ŝia valizo mankas. Jam en la kolonja stacidomo ŝi raportis pri ties ŝtelo. La faktoj montriĝis tamen iom aliaj, kiam la fervoja polico post iom da telefonado raportis, ke oni estas trovinta ŝian valizon en Hamburgo sur la kajo. Ŝi evidente simple estis forgesinta porti ĝin en la vagonon. Tamen ŝia feliĉo ne daŭris tre longe. Sciigis, ke la hamburga fervoja polico estis suspektinta, ke tiu strange orfa valizo entenas bombon. Do oni pro sekuro per eksplodigilo tuj neniigis ĝin.

(From ‘mistake’ to ‘collection of particles’. This September a woman who had got on a train in Hamburg noticed in Cologne that her suitcase was missing. Still at Cologne station she reported it as stolen. The actual situation turned out to be a bit different, however, when the railway police reported after a couple of phone calls that her suitcase had been found in Hamburg on a platform. Obviously, the woman had simply forgotten to take it with her into the carriage. But her luck did not last very long. It became known that the Hamburg railway police was suspicious that the strangely orphaned suitcase might contain a bomb. So they detonated it for security reasons.] (Monato 11/95, p. 4)

Occasionally, visual elements are used to illustrate the ambiguity of a word, as in Example (177), a creation of the Hamburg Esperanto group, playing around with the words *kanto* (‘song’), *konkurso* (‘contest’), *konko* (‘shell’), and *urso* (‘bear’).

(177) (*Esperanto* 5/2015, p. 106)

Occasionally, play on words is based on correct morpheme analysis. As we described in Chapter 11 using *lernejo* (lit. ‘place of learning’, conventionally used for ‘school’) as an example, despite the compositional and highly transparent character of the Esperanto word formation system, words are lexicalised. The accentuation of individual elements, then, is a playful way of recalling their motivational basis.

A case in point is the name of the language, *Esperanto*. Speakers generally use it without being aware of its meaning as ‘somebody who hopes’,¹¹⁰ so that the creative actualisation of its elements and their meaning, as in Examples (178) and (179), has surprising effects including a jocular note:

- (178) *Ni estas Esperantistoj, ni povas esperi.* [We are Esperantists, we can hope.]
[79 (pol; oth; Lille) 17:35]
- (179) *Nome de la belgaj esperantistoj mi deziras al vi la plej specialan kaj neforgeseblan pacan, Esperantegan kongreson* [On behalf of the Belgian Esperantists I wish you the most special and unforgettable peaceful Esperanto congress/intensive-hope congress]
[69 (nld; cerem; Lille) 110:47]

B. *Playing with abbreviations*

Acronyms and initialisms are a fruitful source of language play. For example, funny new readings of common initialisms abound (see Example (180)).

- (180) *IKU = Internacia Kongresa Universitato. Aŭ: Iuj Kafeje Umadas* [IKU = International Congress University. Or: Some hang around in a café]
[*Esperanto* 9/95, p. 151; caption]

The following text, the introduction to a newspaper section that is announced as dealing with Esperanto in relation to education, science and culture, toys with the acronym *UNESCO*, combining it with all possible interrogative pronouns in the system of correlatives (see Chapter 11, Table 7) in order to stress the large variety of possible topics:

- (181) (...) *Do antaŭen per UNESKiO, UNESKiE(N), UNESKiA, UNESKiAL, UNESKiEL kaj UNESKiU.* [So let’s go ahead by means of ...] [Esperanto 4/2014 p. 41]

In Example (182), the author makes fun of the organisational structure of the speech community by mentioning the abbreviations of some Esperanto institutions in rapid succession and adding some that blatantly do not exist.

110. As mentioned in Chapter 8, “Esperanto” was the pseudonym that Zamenhof used in the *Unua Libro* (‘first book’).

- (182) *Nek ĉe la Akademio, nek ĉe CED aŭ IEMW, UEA, SAT, ĈIT, GUT aŭ TUTEPAPP (Tutmonde Universala Transnacia Esperanta Provizejo por la Amasigado de Paperoj kaj Polvo) [...]*

[Neither at the Academy, nor at CED or IAMW, UEA, SAT, ĈIT, GUT or TUTEPAPP (Globally International Universal Transnational Esperanto Place for Provision with Masses of Paper and Dust) (...)]

[Johansson, 1996, *Ĝis revido, krokodilido!*, p. 61]

Increasingly, punning acronyms are gaining ground in Esperanto, with founders of organisations and initiatives taking care to choose names whose initial letters form a word to create a pun, such as *TIR* (*tir-i* ‘draw’) or *AMO* (*am-o* ‘love’):

- (183) *Tutmonda Inform-Reto [...] kiu tiras la tutan agadon* [Global information network (...) which drives the entire activity] ([99 (hun; disc; Lille) 4:15])

- (184) *AMO – Aktivula Maturigo*
[...] La unua AMO – ne forgesbla! [AMO – maturation of active members.
 One’s first love – unforgettable!] [*Esperanto* 5/2014, p. 109]

In Example (185), the punning acronym is further combined with a wordplay based on the similarity between *AM-bilancio* (‘Aktivula-Maturigo balance sheet’) and *ambulanco* (‘ambulance’), which gives rise to a metaphorical extension. In Example (186), the acronym is part of a catchphrase including a sophisticated pun that gains its effect from the conscious shifting of word boundaries.

- (185) *AM-bilancio pri 2014 pozitivis*
Ni pesu la unuan jaron de la nova programo de UEA pri Aktivula Maturigo (AMO). Kiun verdikton? Ne necesas ambulanco – post la naskiĝo sen grandaj malfacilaĵoj, la paciento bone fartas kaj kreskis pli rapide ol atendite. [...]

[AM results for 2014 are positive. Let us evaluate the first year of the new UEA programme about the maturation of active members (AMO). What is the verdict? There is no ambulance necessary – following a birth without any great difficulties, the patient is doing well and growing more rapidly than expected. (...)] [*Esperanto* 1/2015]

- (186) *En AMO, festas ni, EK! Sep-oka;*
Sen AMO restas vi – eks-epoka.

[in AMO/love, we celebrate, off! Seven-eighth; Without AMO/love you stay – in a former epoch.] [*Esperanto* 2/2015, p. 35]

Finally, at the morphological level, blends or portmanteau words are occasionally created for humorous purposes. As in Freud’s (1905, p. 18) classic example “Ich saß neben Salomon Rothschild und er behandelte mich ganz wie seinesgleichen, ganz familionär (‘I sat beside Salomon Rothschild and he treated me quite as his

equal, quite familionairely') (from familiär/familiarly + Millionär/millionaire), two words are combined into one whilst removing material from one or both of the source words. Although they are not part of Esperanto word formation, mother tongue influences mean that blends are now creeping into Esperanto usage too. One example is "kilogramatiko" as a popular name given to the 598-page Esperanto grammar *Plena Analiza Gramatiko* by Kalocsay and Waringhien (1985). More recent expressions include *Muzaiko* (*muziko* 'music' + *mozaiko* 'mosaic'), the name of a 24-hour Internet radio station, and *SeminaRIO*, an Esperanto seminar in Rio de Janeiro. Spontaneous creations such as *kompufono* (from *komputilo* 'computer' and *telefono* 'telephone') to designate a smartphone or *Breliro* (from *Brita* 'British' and *eliro* 'exit') as an equivalent to Brexit, which has been heard occasionally, do not seem to have gained currency.

C. Toying with proper names

Proper names can also represent a popular basis for creating humour. As word-class endings can, in principle, be used without exception, the creative modification of personal or place names knows almost no bounds. Expressions such as *ŝerlokolmsaĵo de Doyle* (Esperanto 12/1999, p. 217; 'a Sherlock-Holmes-ism by Doyle') or *la lepuila gazeto* (*La Gazeto* 6/1997, p. 19; '[Jacques] le Puil's newspaper') are amusing to Esperanto readers, who might derive pleasure from deciphering the basis of these creations and become aware of the expressiveness of Esperanto word formation when looking for equivalents in their mother tongue. In a similar vein, the name *Karlo* has become the focus of interest in (187):

- (187) [...] *Post baptofesto, la bebo havas sian nomon. Oni ankoraŭ estas konscia, ke ĝi povintus esti alinoma, ke anstataŭ Karlo, oni povintus lin nomi Petro. Sed semajnoj, monatoj, jaroj pasas, kaj fatofare, paralele je lia knabiĝo, Karlo karliĝas. Rigardu lin: li havas karlan buŝon, karlajn okulojn, karlan paŝadon, karlan voĉon ... mallonge, li estas Karlo kaj ne plu estas imageble, ke oni povus lin nomi Petro.*
 [(...) After baptism, the baby got his/her name. One is still aware that he/she could have received another name, that instead of Karlo (Carl) one could have named him Petro (Peter). But weeks, months, years pass, and fate decrees that parallel to his becoming a boy, Carl is becoming Carl (lit. Carl is carling). Look at him: he has got a Carl-ish mouth, Carl-ish eyes, a Carl-ish gait, a Carl-ish voice ... in short, he is Carl and it is no longer conceivable that one could call him Peter.]
 (*La Gazeto* 4/94, p. 3)

It is popular to exploit the similarity between Esperanto appellatives and proper names to produce humour, as with *ĉe-ĉe-ni* ('at/with at/with us') and *Ĉeĉeni* ('Chechenia', i.e. Chechnya) in (188) or *Trump* and *trumpet-* ('trumpet') in (189).

(188)

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* politika * kultura * skandalema * ajnista *

Fin-hik-fine, ni 'stas ĉe-hik-ĉe ni! [Fin-hick-finally we're at/with at/with us]

(LKK 1–3/1995, p. 1)

(189)



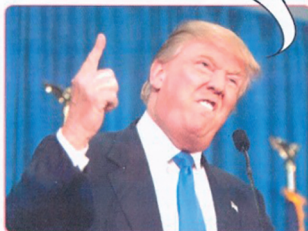
Donald Trump trumpetas ion ajn !



*Mi malpermesos al ĉiuj
muzulmanoj eniri Usonon,
krom al tiuj, kiuj bone parolas
Esperanton !*



*Mi malhelpos meksikanojn
eniri Usonon, ĉefe tiujn, kiuj
parolas volapukon aŭ idon !*



*Mi punos la virinojn kiuj
abortis, krom la edzinoj de
esperantistoj !*



*Mi taksos draste ĉiujn
produktojn el Ĉinio, krom la
poemoj de Mao Zifu (kiujn mi
taksas bonaj) !*

[Donald Trump trumpets anything! Speech balloon top left: I forbid all Muslims to enter the USA, except for those who speak Esperanto well!; top right: I will hinder the Mexicans from entering the USA, mainly those who speak Volapük and Ido!; bottom left: I will punish women who miscarried [sic; Presumably it should be *abortigi* 'had an abortion'], except for the wives of Esperantists!; bottom right: I will charge drastic tariffs on products from China, except for the poems by Mao Zifu [= an Esperanto poet], which I rate highly!]

[LKK 4–6 2016, p. 1; the use of *taksi* ('rate') as a false friend ('to tax') in the first part of the sentence seems to be deliberate here]

The two examples represent the front pages of the long-standing Esperanto satirical magazine *La KancerKliniko*, which is known for language use of this kind. Play of this type can also arise spontaneously in oral communication (see Example (194) below and further examples in Chapter 26).

Occasionally, the identity or similarity between a word or an expression in an ethnic language and a word or expression in Esperanto is employed to produce humour. Example (190), which comes from our personal email correspondence with a Swedish Esperanto speaker, illustrates this.

- (190) *Alteriĝinte en Schiphol 2014–05–10 mi tuj vidis reklamon por iu Rabobank. Tiu nomo laŭ mi montras grandan honestecon. En Svedujo kaj aliaj landoj ja ekzistas rabobankoj, sed ili kaŝas sin malantaŭ aliaj nomoj.*

[After my landing in Schiphol 2014–05–10 I immediately saw an advertisement for a Rabobank (“Robberybank”, *rab-i* ‘rob’, *bank-o* ‘bank’). In my mind this name shows a high degree of honesty. In Sweden and other countries robberybanks do exist, but they conceal themselves behind other names.]

(16 May 2014)

In literary works, we find so-called telling names, which express a semantic relation to a character’s features, such as appearance or profession. They are often playful and humorous, as the examples from Julio Baghy’s satirical novel *Hura!* (1986/1930) illustrate:

- (191) *s-ino Korsenmon* [Mrs Heart-without-Money]; *s-ro Vilibald Hakperman* [Mr Willibald Chop-with-the-Hand; a butcher]; *generalo Venknejam* [General Victory-not-yet]; *Goliat Mordlanaz* [Goliath Bite-the-Nose; policeman]; *Oskar Blindfid* [Oskar Blind-Trust]; *s-ino Banksef* [Mrs Banksafe]; *ĵurnalo Ĉioscio* [journal Omniscience].

Mistero ĉe nigra lago [‘Mystery at Black Lake’] by Sten Johansson (1997), a story about six Esperanto-speaking children who have an adventure during their holidays, shows that names of literary characters do not just serve humorous effects. Here the name of one of the protagonists, *Timo* [‘fear’], is relevant for the story. The boy, who is rather shy and frightened at the beginning, is frequently teased by the slogan *Timo ne konas timon* [‘Timo doesn’t know fear’/Timo’s never timid]. A translator from Esperanto into another language might be challenged by the task of finding an equivalent wordplay in the target language.

D. *Phraseology – a treasure trove of verbal humour*

Humour and intellectual pleasure can also arise from items that are larger than words, such as catchphrases, proverbs, formulae, which we will describe and classify in more detail in Chapter 21. Their polylexemic character and relatively fixed structures and meanings make them an ideal basis for linguistic play. Because listeners expect them to occur in their stable forms, a deviation from this stability causes surprise, attention and often laughter as described above in our introduction. The following headline is an example of such a playful modification, in this case of the well-known proverb, *All roads lead to Rome*, which has found its way into Esperanto as *Ĉiuj vojoj kondukas al Romo*.

- (192) *Ĉiuj vojoj al La Chaux-de-Fonds kondukas al kaoso*. [All ways to La Chaux-de-Fonds lead to chaos] (La Letero de l'Akademio 1–3/1992, p. 3)

The addition of *La Chaux-de-Fonds*, the location of an Esperanto cultural centre, catches the reader's attention, while the substitution of the place name *Romo* with *kaoso* turns the generally positive content of the proverb into a negative one.

Creative reshapings of catchphrases, slogans, proverbs and other types of pre-fabricated speech are widespread in Esperanto. They will be extensively presented in Chapter 21. It is the pleasure that people experience when they recognise something familiar in modified catchphrases that makes uses like these so attractive, and this pleasure is increased further when the humorous manipulation concerns highly reputed works of Esperanto literature, as in our final example, from the Esperanto youth journal *Kontakto*, in which a series of cartoons encourages people to use condoms (see Example (193)). A young man, who is obviously embarrassed, asks the way to a pharmacy, and an elderly woman sitting nearby remarks that condoms can be bought from the vending machine in the petrol station. This cartoon would probably work in a number of languages and cultures. What makes it interesting is the title of the cartoon series, *La bona ingo* ('The good cover'), an obvious euphemism for 'condom', but also an allusion to the book *La bona lingvo* ('The good language'), an influential work on the merits of Esperanto.

(193)

*Kontakto* 145 (1995:1)

20.4 Humour as a discursive strategy

The first part of this chapter has provided a survey of the enormous potential that Esperanto has to create wordplay and evoke humour. The examples that we have chosen, from both oral and written communication, offer evidence that many speakers make ample use of the opportunities the language provides. In the following sections we present the findings of our examination of humour as a discursive strategy on the basis of the dataset described in Chapter 5, with a focus on the functions that humorous discourse aims at, on recurrent text types or genres that are typically used to evoke humour in Esperanto and on the humorous devices that are mainly employed.

Holmes (2000, p. 163) defines humour as “utterances which are identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic and discursual clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants”. We consider laughter as such a clue to identifying humorous talk, but laughter can also serve other functions, such as hiding embarrassment or nervousness, and humour is not always successful and not necessarily followed by laughter. In addition, in our experience there are many different types of laughter, which we attempt to consider by marking its intensity (through various combinations of the symbol @) and providing information on tone, loudness, etc. using comments in parentheses.

20.4.1 Functions of humour in Esperanto interactions

Studying humorous discourse in Esperanto communication is intriguing for at least two reasons. The first is the international character of the speech community. Although humour is a universal phenomenon, the way it is produced and perceived in interactions varies across languages and cultures (Holmes & Hay, 1997; Lewis, 1999). As Chiaro (1992, p. 5) points out, “[t]he concept of what people find funny appears to be surrounded by linguistic, geographical, diachronic, sociocultural and personal boundaries”. How then is humour used in Esperanto by speakers influenced by differing assumptions about humour because of socialisation in their particular native languages and cultures? Furthermore, for almost all of its speakers Esperanto is a foreign or second language. To be humorous in a foreign language is a challenge, as Davies (2003) and Bell (2007) have shown for English. In ethnic languages, deviating from a standard form or bending a linguistic rule (which is what verbal humour finally consists in) for humorous or expressive reasons can even be a risk for non-native speakers, as it might be taken as a language mistake, as Piller (2002) and Prodromou (2007) have shown. As a foreign language Esperanto is always spoken with different levels of proficiency, and for a joke to be successful it should be jointly appreciated by all participants in a communicative setting.

As research shows (see, for example, Holmes & Marra, 2002; Rogerson-Revell, 2007), humour can be used to both positive and negative effects. It can serve to include or exclude participants. In our dataset, humour is mainly used as an inclusive strategy. In accordance with Brown and Levinson’s (1978) description of joking as a positive politeness strategy, it serves to entertain, to establish solidarity and intimacy and to pursue and achieve affiliation. Humour is, in the words of Attardo (1994, p. 323), “a tool to facilitate in-group interaction and strengthen in-group bonding”. In this function it can be found in all communicative settings included in our dataset, such as working group meetings (see Example (194): here a speaker places the focus on the place name *Orlando*, which is also the first name of one of the participants), excursions (Example (195)) and lectures (see Examples (196) to (198)).

- (194) A: *Ni havas iom da sperto pri tio [...] Ĉio dependas de la membreco. Estas grandaj konferencoj, kiuj ne taŭgas, malgrandaj, kiuj tamen taŭgas, ĉu ne. Mi povas, <name>, pensi pri du spertoj [...]*
 B: *Jes, ni estis en Orlando.*
 C: *En Orlando? @*
 Several: @@
 B: *Jes, mi rememoras, ke ni estis en Orlando, ĉar [...]*
 [A: We have some experience with this (...) Everything depends on the membership. There are huge conferences, which are not suitable, small ones that fit, however. I can think of, <name>, two events (...)]

B: Yes, we were in Orlando.

C: In Orlando? @

Several: @@

B: Yes, I remember that we were in Orlando, because (...)

[198 (eng-eng-hun; disc; Lisbon) 100:45–103:20]

(195) *Ekskurso ne estas kurso* [An excursion is not a course]

[118 (fra; tour; Lille-Boulogne) 9:39; note the similarity between *ekskurso* ('excursion') and *kurso* ('course')]

(196) *Tiu ĉi Kleriga Lundo devas esti ankaŭ klariga lundo* [This Education Monday must be a clarification Monday too] [86 (eng; pres; Lille) 1:47; note the similarity between *kleriga* ('educational') and *klariga* ('clarifying')]

(197) *MK- Ĉu vi mokas?* [Are you mocking?]

(85 (deu; pres; Lille) 13:20; *MK* is pronounced in the same way as the noun *moko* formed on the basis of *moki* 'to mock']

(198) *Vi eble renkontis, denove ĉe la Reto, la tiel nomatajn paroladojn TED. Bedaŭrinde tiu mallongigo TED ŝajnas maltaŭga por prezento de paroladoj* [Perhaps you, again on the Internet, have come across the so-called TED lectures. Unfortunately, the abbreviation TED ('to bore') doesn't seem suitable for the presentation of speeches] [86 (eng; pres; Lille) 22:45–23:05]

Humour can be used as a strategy to cope with difficult communicative situations. As Norrick and Spitz (2008) show, it can be a resource for forestalling or mitigating conflict in interactions. There are a number of situations in our dataset in which interactants with different opinions or confronted with delicate questions use humour as such a strategy (see also Example (163) in Chapter 19.3.4). In Excerpt (199), a formal meeting at which board representatives of the Universal Esperanto Association answer members' questions, a participant (A) asks why he cannot find detailed statements on how much money the association spends on organising its annual international congresses. A board representative (B) provides a convincing explanation, but has to admit that it would be possible to publish a report that is accessible to all members. When the questioner then asks whether the board representative (B) will ensure that this will be done in future, the latter agrees, emphasising his attitude towards transparency by using an Esperantised foreign word (*glasnosto*). The unconventional word choice is successful in producing humour, as the audience's reaction shows.

11. *Por ke lingvo estu internacia, ne sufiĉas nomi ĝin tia* ['For a language to be international, it is not enough to call it so'] was Zamenhof's motto that formed the epigraph of the first Esperanto textbook, *Unua Libro* (Zamenhof, 1887).

(200) A: *Mi trovis la interesan informon [...] pri la Rhohingva, pri tiu popolo, kiu estas forpelata de Birmao kaj do mi iomete estis ŝokita, ke budhanoj eĉ mortigis kelkajn homojn [...] Oni ja nun vidas, ke la Islamo estas kelkfoje tre energie ne nur defendi sian terenon, sed ankaŭ etendiĝi al aliaj terenoj; kaj ili estas plejparte ne inkludaj. Pro tio mi opinias, ke la budhistoj en Birmao volis elŝovi tiun religion, kiu eble ĝenos la pacon. Kion vi pensas pri tio?*

B: *[...] en la klasikaj kronikoj [...] oni povas legi, ke [...] oni uzis budhismon kiel ilon por batali, [...] kaj dum la tuta historio [...] ofte budhismo miksiĝis kun aliaj religioj. Kaj tiel okazis eĉ inter la Tibetanoj, [...] similiĝis al tio en Eŭropo, en la Eŭropa mezepoko, inter Francio kaj Anglio, kiuj [...] havis eĉ centjaran militon inter si; eh do por esti bona- por esti bona budhano ne sufiĉas nomi sin tia.*

Several: @@@ (cautious, suppressed)

[A: I've found the interesting information (...) about the Rohingya, about these people, who are expelled from Burma and so I was a bit shocked that Buddhists even killed some people (...) Now you can see that Islam sometimes has energy not only to defend its territory, but also to reach other territories; and mostly they are not inclusive. Because of that I think that the Buddhists in Burma wanted to expel this religion, which might put peace in danger. What do you think about that?

B: (...) in the classical chronicles (...) you can read that (...) Buddhism was used as a weapon of war, (...) and throughout history (...) Buddhism often mixed with other religions. And so it happened even among the Tibetans, (...) it became similar to what we find in Europe, in the European Middle Ages, between France and England, which (...) even fought a hundred years' war with each other; uh to be a Budd- to be a good Buddhist it's not enough to call yourself one.

Several: @@@ (cautious, suppressed)] [83 (deu-?; disc; Lille) 38:18–41:47]

Example (201) presents part of a conversation among colleagues during a coffee break. Speaker A complains that her programme has not been funded by their umbrella organisation (= organisation 1) as generously as another programme (organisation 2), when speaker B informs her in a polite way (*eh ne pardonu* 'uh no excuse me') that her complaint is not justified because the money for the other project did not come from the holding organisation, but from a different fund. Speaker A then argues that this information should have been made public, but speaker C replies that several journals reported on it. The conversation continues with an exchange about content and the people responsible for the two projects concerned, but a kind of tension can be felt, which can also be seen in the fact that,

in contrast to the talk before this point, four of the total of seven interactants fall silent. Speaker C tries to ease tensions by saying that she and her organisation have always appreciated A's work and reported on it. This is welcomed by speaker A, who adds that people often focus primarily on their own project or support people from their region (*bone jes vi estas @@ tamen @ lokalpatriotoj* 'well yes you are @@ however local patriots, after all') and followed by a five-second pause. Afterwards (see the lines in bold letters) speaker A takes up the conversation by mentioning in a jocular voice that a fund (a bequest) has to be found for A's project and her proposal is followed by her own laughter. This attempt at humour is quickly accepted and highlighted (*aŭskultu, aŭskultu* 'hear, hear' and *notu tion, notu tion* 'note this, note this') by other speakers, who join in common laughter after someone proposes to murder someone. In the following turns, the interactants compete in modifying and further extending the proposal. Interventions are often followed by general laughter, thereby showing that the introduction of humour successfully reanimated the conversation and re-established a relaxed atmosphere.

- (201) A: *eh se mi komparis nun (.) la- (.) kiom da MONO <nomo de organizaĵo 1> pretas investi por (.) eh <nomo de organizaĵo 2> TIE estas la granda diferenco (.)* *Leh:*
- B: *⌊ hm ne:: (.) pardonu tio estis heredaĵo kun la celo- tio ne estis mono de <nomo de organizaĵo 1> (.) estis heredaĵo kun la celo por la <nomo de organizaĵo 2> ⌊ĉu?*
- A: *⌊ kio ki- KIE kie (ĉar) tion oni ne skribis*
- C: *estis (.) en pluraj komunikoj: en gazetara komuniko de <nomo de organizo 1> mi ne memor- me- ne ⌊mi memoras estis <name>(.) nederlandanino, kiu havis kurson [...] kaj heredis monon.*
- A: *⌊ mhm*
- B: *kaj tiun monon uzis <nomo de organizo 1> do ne por (.) subtaksi vian laboron, simple estis (.) CEL:-DONA; (.) heredaĵo.*
- A: *do tion oni ne klare- oni anoncis [...]*
- ⌊ fakte*
- B: *⌊estis gazetara komuniko certe.*
- A: *°mhm° (.) bone (.) (do mi ne volas) (.) (konkurenci (.) mi fakte) (.) ĉiuj (.) volas kunlabori kaj ankaŭ kun (.) eh <nomo> ĉu ne, mi invitis lin ĉi tien kaj (.) eh en la lasta momento li (.) tamen rezignis ĉar- [...] 9:10*

- B: [...] (.) informoj ja aperis, eh: (.) kompreneble eble ne en sufiĉa (.) KVANTO sed (estas) skribitaj materialoj en la gazetaro. (.) sed ni ĉiam, (.) ni ĈIAM (.) per la sondokumentoj @(subtenis vin)@
 L@(2)@
- A: L do bone jes vi estas @(2)@ (.) tamen @ lokalpatriotoj, ĉu ne @
 kaj (vi disaŭdigas nin,) @(2)@
- B: jes: kompreneble ĉar tiuj ja- (.) kaj estas tiu eh estas (atingeblo) la tuta komunumo ĉi tie. (.) sed ne nur eh (.) ne, ĉi tie estas (pli) internacie (.) eh valorata, do BONE ke- (.) ke tio (.) nun trovas kroman emfazon (5) se estus specifa heredaĵo por <nome de la nuna projekto> @
- Several: @@
- C: Aŭskultu aŭskultu
- B: Notu tion, notu tion
- D: Montru kiun mortigi
- All: @@@@
- B: Ne mortigi. Al tiu persvadi heredigi la monon.
- C: Unue Lpersvadi
- E: Ldevus esti tre riĉa persono
- F: Ne rigardu min.
- All: @@
- [A: uh: when I compare now (.) the- (.) how much MONEY <name of organisation 1> is ready to invest into (.) uh: <name of organization 2> there is a big difference: (.) Luh
- B: Lhm no:: (.) sorry that was an inheritance intended- this was not money from <name of organisation> (.) was an inheritance intended for the <name of organisation 2> Lwasn't it?
- A: Lwhat whe- WHERE where (because) one didn't write about this
- B: it was (.) in several communications, in press releases of <name of organisation1>. I don't remem- mem- I remember (<name of donor>) (.) a woman from the Netherlands who took a course [...] and donated money
- A: mhm
- B: and this money was used by <name of organisation 1> not uh to (.) underestimate your work, simply was (.) aim:-giving: (.) inheritance.
- A: well this wasn't clearly announced [...] L in fact
- B: L There was a press release certainly.

- A: °mhm° (.) well (.) (then I don't want) (.) (to compete (.) I actually) (.) all (.) want to cooperate and also with (.) uh: <name> don't we? I invited him to come here and (.) uh: in the last moment he (.) nevertheless refused because-(...) 9:10
- B: information did appear, uh (.) of course not in sufficient (.) QUANTITY but (there is) written material in the press. (.) but we always, (.) we ALWAYS (.) by means of sound documents @ (supported you) @ L @ (2) @
- A: L well yes you are @ (2) @ (.) however @ local patriots, after all) @ and (you broadcast us) @ (2) @
- B: yes, of course as these are- (.) and this is uh (an achievement of) the whole community here. (.) but not only uh (.) no here it is (more) internationally (.) uh appreciated so it's GOOD that- (.) that it (.) (receives additional emphasis) this year (5) **if there was a (specific) inheritance (.) for <name of the project at hand> @**
- Several: @@
- C: **listen, (.) listen**
- B: **note this, note this**
- D: (you) **indicate who is to be killed**
- All: @@@@
- B: **not killed (.) to be persuaded (.) to bequeath the money**
- D: **first L to persuade**
- E: L **it would have to be a very rich person**
- F: **Don't look at me**
- All: @@] [2 (hun-pol-fra-deu-?; infl; Poznań) 7:06–10:43]

Exchanges like the one in bold letters above strengthen interpersonal relationships. A good laugh helps to establish rapport. In-group bonding can also be established at the expense of others, however. As Cameron (2001, p. 174) argues, “collectively disparaging and ‘trashing’ people who are absent increases solidarity and intimacy among those who are actually present”. Successful joking of this type requires the fulfilment of two conditions (see Brkinjač, 2009): first, the person who is the butt of the joke has to be known to everyone, along with his or her particular foible. Second, participants have to approve of such humour and agree with making the person the topic of humorous conversation. The two preconditions are not necessarily easy to fulfil in the heterogeneous speech community of Esperanto. In the dataset we find only one example of joking about absent others. It refers to Marjorie Boulton (1924–2017), a British author and poet, who is highly valued in the community, but also known for her charming English way of pronouncing Esperanto. It seems to fulfil the two conditions mentioned, as the laughter reveals.

- (202) A: *Iam ĉe la bankedo sidis Marjorie Boulton* L_{apud Ivo Lapenna}
 B: L_{@@}
 C: @jes
 A: *kaj ŝi diris* (imitating an English accent) *Ĉe mi ĉio estas internacia*
 Several: @@
 A: *Kaj li diris: escepte de la elparolo*
 all: @@@
 [A: Once at a dinner Marjorie Boulton sat L_{next to Ivo Lapenna}
 B: L_{@@}
 C: @yes
 A: and she said (speaker is imitating an English accent) with me
 everything is international
 Several: @@
 A: and he said: with the exception of your pronunciation
 All: @@@] [37 (ita; infl; La Chaux-des-Fonds) 47:15]

‘Conflict talk’ (Norrick & Spitz, 2008) is altogether rare in our dataset. There are, however, situations where people express their criticism or discontent openly. Examples include a meeting at which a speaker shows her strong dissatisfaction with the small print and coloured print that an Esperanto journal has introduced, saying the following in a loud and harsh tone:

- (203) *Laŭ mia opinio la revuo estu legEBLA; legINDA aŭ legENDA estas alia demando, tion aliaj povas juĝi, sed la revuo estu legEBLA*
 [In my opinion the journal should be readable, (whether it is) worth reading or necessary to read is another question, others can judge this, but the journal should be readable] [72 (deu; disc; Lille) 47:37–52].

The second example occurs when two groups claim the same meeting room. When the people who already occupied the room kept being disturbed by the others’ opening the door and protesting, a speaker said, using a zeugma, “Fermu la pordon, sed antaŭ ĉio la buŝon!” (‘Shut the door, but, above all, your mouth!’). The two examples show that it is not only in collaborative interactions that speakers exploit Esperanto’s abundant opportunities for creative word formation and stylistic expression.

20.4.2 Humorous devices in conversation

Working with a dataset allows us to identify preferred types of humorous discourse. Joke-telling and other narrative forms of humour that are relatively independent genres in themselves and that interrupt the flow of interaction are not typical of the language use under examination. Humour in Esperanto is mainly interactive. The devices that we found to be characteristic are closely related to and situationally embedded in the flow of conversation: teasing, allusions, and interruptions (heckling).

A. Teasing

In our dataset, teasing occurs in informal settings, such as conversations during meals, but also in debates and working group meetings. Researchers often state that teasing occurs among people who know each other well or have shared a history of interactions to which the teasing can be linked (Günthner, 2013). In fact, it seems necessary that interactants know at least one detail about the other to confront them with this detail in a provocative way. In Example (204), participant A invites another speaker to join him for dinner at a table that he has already shared with a group of six to eight other people whom he met only a short time before. In Example (205), taken from a debate, speaker A teases a member of the audience because of his preference for a certain suffix that he is known for (both *-uj* and *-i* can be used to designate countries). Note the metacommunicative comment that he adds, obviously, to ensure that the remark is accepted as an attempt at humour:

(204) *Estas multaj germanoj, multaj. Tamen ili ne krokodilas.*

[There are many Germans, many. However, they don't "crocodile / behave like crocodiles", i.e. speak their native language in an Esperanto surrounding.]

[124 (eng; tour; Lille-Boulogne) 19:08]

(205) *Tio jam okazis, ekzemple inter Francio kaj Italio. Aŭ Francujo kaj Italujo. Mi omaĝas vin per la uzo de tiu sufikso, <name>.*

[This already happened, for example between France and Italy. Or France and Italy. I pay tribute to your use of this suffix, <name>.]

[100 (spa; disc; Lille) 39:08; the person addressed is known by Esperanto-speakers to accept the latter version only]

As the object of teasing in these examples is simultaneously a person (or, as in Example (204), several people) and a characteristic of the language and its community (namely, the habit of using one's mother tongue in Esperanto circles – see Chapter 21 on *krokodili* – and the fact that there are different schools and opinions concerning the use of some linguistic elements in Esperanto), the two speakers can be sure that their teasing will not be misinterpreted as an attack.

Teasing is often employed as a type of criticism, however. In Example (206), a working group meeting, speaker A presents himself as the leader of the group:

- (206) *Se la germanoj ĉesus klaĉi, tiam ni povus komenci la kunsidon.* [If the Germans stopped gossiping, we could start the meeting.] [158 (eng; disc; Lille) 0:51]

The example shows the ambiguous nature of teasing (Schnurr, 2009): it can function as an expression of solidarity or as an insult. The members of the group in (206) knew one another very well and had developed a shared repertoire of linguistic practices during their regular meetings that included supportive humour. Therefore, this example can be considered ‘bonding teasing’ (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997) employed to emphasise common ground, which was answered accordingly by the participants addressed, namely by the playful remark “*La germanoj neniam klaĉas!*” (‘The Germans never gossip!’ 158 (deu; disc; Lille) 1:08), which merely feigned indignation.

B. Allusions

In this section we will address allusions, i.e. intertextual references. Although they are considered a form of indirect wording or hidden formulation, we do not just presuppose that allusions are intentional on the part of the speaker but that they are also meant to be recognised by the recipient. As in Example (207), speakers often refer to well-known phrases taken from Zamenhof’s works.

- (207) A: *Bonvenon!*
 B: *Bonvenon, vi povas aliĝi al nia grupo, jes.*
 A: *Al rondo familia.*
 A-E: @@
 [A: Welcome!
 B: Welcome, you can join our group, yes.
 A: Our family circle.
 Several: @@] [(128 (hin-urd; disc; Lille) 33:10]
- (208) *Mi kore salutas vin [...] kaj deziras al vi belegan kaj fruktodonan centan Universalan Kongreson kun multaj amikoj, kunvenoj inter homoj kaj homoj.*
 [I greet you cordially (...) and wish you a wonderful and fruitful 100th World (Esperanto) Congress with many friends, meetings between people and people.]
 [69 (deu; cerem; Lille) 1:56:38]¹¹²

In Example (209) the speaker relies on the audience’s knowledge of Kennedy’s phrase *Ich bin ein Berliner* and, transferring its semantic value to the current communicative event (the speaker’s speech at the 100th World Esperanto Congress)

112. Allusion to Zamenhof’s words in his speech at the First Esperanto Congress in 1905: “[...] hodiaŭ inter la gastamaj muroj de Bulonjo-sur-Marco kunvenis ne francoj kun angloj, ne rusoj kun poloj, sed homoj kun homoj (‘... today between the hospitable walls of Boulogne-sur-Mer, there meet not Frenchmen with Englishmen, not Russians with Poles, but people with people.’”

attributes special importance to it. The effect of Example (210) results from the different character of the things that are juxtaposed, a song by an Esperanto pop group (*Kajto*) and a lecture on Einstein's theory of relativity.

- (209) [...] *Por diri la saman aferon per aliaj vortoj: En certa mezuro ĉiu esperantisto sentas sin ankaŭ Bulonjano.*

[...] To say the same in other words: to a certain extent every Esperanto speaker also feels like an inhabitant of Boulogne.] [69 (eng; cerem; Lille) 70:50]

- (210) *Laŭ nia nuna teorio [...] ĝi estas la praeksplodo, nome ke la universo komenciĝis en iu momento kaj [...], la plej bonan respondon [...] donis Kajto antaŭ unu horo: En la komenco estis nenio, kaj tiam eĉ tio eksplodis @@@*

[Given our present theory (...), the Big Bang Theory, namely that the universe started at a certain moment and (...), the best answer (...) was given by Kajto an hour ago: in the beginning there was nothing, and then even that exploded @@@] [73 (heb; pres; Lille) 58:36–59:13]

The 'text' that an intertextual reference uses as a basis is not necessarily a written or spoken piece of communication. It can also be people's experience, a fact or frame of knowledge or the values people share. In this context, allusions in Esperanto communication frequently refer to the world of Esperanto or planned languages. Examples (211) to (214) illustrate the often self-ironic character of these references. Here, speakers mock the restricted dissemination of Esperanto (211), other planned languages (212), US-Americans (or, more precisely, native speakers of English) (213) and the inefficiency of the work of the Esperanto Academy (214).

- (211) *En la kazo, ke [la proceso] estas en la kastilia, komprenas nur la juĝisto, kaj la advokatoj; en la kazo, ke estas en la kataluna, [...]; en la kazo, ke estas en Esperanto, komprenas neniu @@@.*

[In the event that it (the lawsuit) is in Castilian, only the judge will understand, and the lawyers; in the event that it's in Catalan, (...); in the event that it's in Esperanto, nobody will understand @@@.]

[39 (ita; pres; La Chaux-de-Fonds) 4:05–21]

- (212) *Estos sur via konto. Mi nur donas al vi tion [= la kvitancon] pro sekureco, se intertempe okazas la fina venko de Ido.*

[It will be on your account. I'm giving this (the bill) to you only for security, in case the final victory of Ido occurs in the meantime.]

(personal communication 28 July 2015, Lille)¹¹³

113. This remark is humorous for several reasons. *Fina venko*, a term normally associated with Esperanto (see Chapter 8), is used here in connection with Esperanto's competitor, Ido.

- (213) *(Havu plenan) respekton al la kunparolanto, eĉ se la kunparolanto estas usonano; mi ŝercas @@.*

[Have full respect towards your interlocutor, even if your interlocutor is an American; I'm kidding @@.] [172 (eng; pres; Havana) 48:37]

- (214) *De tempo al tempo en la Akademio okazas diskuto pri kio entute faras aŭ devus fari la Akademio. Do evidente oni sciis kion fari en la jaro 1923 aŭ 24 kaj intertempe forgesis. (all: @)*

[From time to time in the Academy there is a discussion of what the Academy actually does or should do. Obviously, they knew what to do in 1923 or 24, and they have since forgotten. (all: @@)]

[164 (eng; oth; Lille) 75:03–21; at an auction, a 1924 book with the title *Jarlibro de la Lingva Komitato kaj de ĝia Akademio. Difino kaj devoj de la lingvaj institucioj* ('Yearbook of the Language Committee and its Academy. Definition and Duties of the linguistic institutions') is offered]

Allusions can also refer to people's familiarity with visual elements such as logos (see also Example (166)):

- (215) The word Esperanto in the style of the Coca-Cola logo
(source: <http://www.ikso.net/de/projektoj/eldonajxoj.php>)



- (216) (Modification of the famous British home front poster of the Second World War, *Keep calm and carry on* [source: <https://medium.com/@wendyecotta/keep-calm-and-speak-esperanto-601aa01163ba>, see also Fiedler, 2019a])



C. Heckling

Humorous interjections can be observed in various types of interactions. Example (217) occurred in a lecture. It was especially appreciated by members of the audience because of its reference to the lecture's content (*nigraj truoj* 'black holes'). Comments like these make interactions coherent and establish a kind of cooperation between lecturer and participant. Other forms of heckling represent ironic comments on a statement. In Example (218), a singer announces the group's next song, and a member of the audience reacts to the banal content as if it were full of excitement. In another cultural programme, in Example (219), after an obviously mediocre presentation, the artist's confession of her lack of professionalism is laconically commented on by a member of the audience by *ĉu*.¹¹⁴

- (217) A: *Kaj poste mi liberigos vin, vi povos forkuri per la rapideco de forkuro @@.*
 B: *Ĉi tie estas nigra truo.@@@*
 [A: And after that I'll let you go, you can run away with escape velocity. @@
 B: There's a black hole here. @@@] [82 (heb; pres; Lille) 4:25–37; the term *rapideco de forkuro* ('escape velocity') was used in the lecture]
- (218) A: *Juna knabo sekrete amas junan virinon.*
 B: *Nekredeble*
 Several: @@@
 [A: A young man secretly loves a young woman.
 B: Unbelievable
 Several: @@@] [13 (ndl-?; tour; Poznań) 38:40])
- (219) [...] *mi ne estas profesia kantistino – Ĉu? [...]*
 [I'm not a professional singer – Really?] [166 (zho-deu; tour; Lille) 107:17]

Self-reflexive humour can also be found in this subtype, as Examples (220) and (221) show. Examples (222) and (223) provide evidence of the popularity of spontaneous wordplay: the homophonic clash of *ili sin taksas* ('they consider themselves') with *sintaksas* ('to syntax') gives rise to a creative analogy, *morfologias* ('to morphology'), which is widely appreciated (222). In Example (223), a discussion about the reflexive pronoun *sin* ('oneself'), a speaker plays with the misinterpretation of the verb *singulti* ('to hiccup') as *sin gulti*.

- (220) *Mi neniam aŭdis pri teroristoj-esperantistoj. – Aŭ ĉiuj estas.* [I've never heard of Esperanto-speaking terrorists. – Or all are.]
 [79 (pol-deu; disc; Lille): 15:05]

114. The particle is used to signal alternative questions in Esperanto. It can be found in a large number of pragmatic functions (Wennergren, 2020, Chapter 17.2, 22.2; Libert, 2016).

- (221) A: *Do, ĉu ni formu cirklon?*
 [...]
 B: *Rondon.*
 A: *Rondon? Nu, ĝi tamen estas cirklo.*
 C: *Cirko, aha?*
 A: *Pardonu, sinjoro prezidanto de la Akademio.*
 C: *Cirkon ni faru? Nu, la tuta kongreso estas cirko.*
 Several: @@@
 [A: Well, should we form a circle?¹¹⁵
 (...)
 B: A round.
 A: A round? Well, but it's a circle nevertheless.
 C: A circus, aha?
 A: I apologise, Mr. President of the Academy.
 C: We should form a circus? Well, the whole congress is a circus.]
 [158 (eng-swe-deu; infl; Lille) 0:18–0:40]
- (222) *Estas homoj, kiuj sin taksas – Kaj @morfologias@.* – All: @@@
 [There are people, who think of themselves / do syntax – And @do morphology@. – All: @@@] [19 (por-spa; edu; Poznań) 69:41]
- (223) A: *Temas pri la refleksiva pronomo “sin” [...] En kelkaj slavaj lingvoj ĝi estas uzebla sendepende de la persono de la subjekto [...] En Esperanto [...] “mi sin duŝas” laŭ mi estas eraro, “mi MIN duŝas” estas la ĝusta.*
 [...]
 B: [...] *kaj ŝerce, <nomo> ĉu mi rajtas diri “mi singultas”?*
 [A: The topic is the reflexive pronoun “sin” (...) In some Slavic languages, it can be used independently from the person of the subject (...) In Esperanto (...) in my opinion “mi sin duŝas” (‘I shower myself’) is a mistake; “mi MIN duŝas” is correct.
 (...)
 B: (...) and just for fun, <name>, can I say “mi singultas” (‘I hiccup’)?¹¹⁶]
 [114 (nor-?; disc; Lille) 60:23–62:18]

These examples illustrate Esperanto speakers' predilection for ludic behaviour and at the same time the important role that language-based humour plays in it. They can hardly resist an opportunity for spontaneous punning over the course of an interaction.

115. In Esperanto, *cirklo* is used as a term to designate the face in geometry, a disc, and (often with a capital letter) the parallels describing the pole regions, as in *la arкта cirklo* (‘the Arctic Circle’).

116. The root *singult-* does not include *sin* as a pronoun but is monomorphic.

20.4.3 Failed humour

We began this chapter by raising some doubts as to whether humour as we know it from our mother tongues might be possible in an international speech community using a planned language. Subsequently, after more than sixty examples of creative wordplay and other types of humour, these doubts will surely have been dispelled. This does not mean, however, that all attempts at humour are necessarily successful. As Bell and Attardo (2010) describe and exemplify, there is a variety of reasons why humour can fail, i.e. why participants do not notice a speaker's intention to amuse. Non-native speakers might simply not know the meaning of words (for an example concerning English, see Pullin Stark, 2009, p. 167) or not understand the incongruity of the joke or they might not recognise the specific pragmatic force of an utterance such as irony. In the examples of failed humour in our dataset, various reasons seem to overlap. In Example (224), a conversation over lunch, people are talking about the schedule of a symposium they are attending. Having discussed the menu, with the majority deciding on a soup, one of the participants plays with the innovative creation of *supozio*, a combination of *simpozio* ('symposium') and *supo* ('soup'), to which, however, no one reacts with laughter. One explanation is that participants simply did not hear it, misheard it as *supozo* ('supposition') or were focused too much on the topic of their conversation, the organisational frame of the symposium, that they did not expect a witty comment:

- (224) A: <nomo> (.) *kiam komenciĝos la simpozio?*
 B: *eh morgaŭ ma Ĵtene je la naŭa kaj kvin*
 C: *Ĵla supozio estas*
 A: *kaj mia kontribuo estas morgaŭ ankaŭ?*
 B: *via (kontribuo) estas postmorgaŭ*
 [A: <name> (.) when will the symposium start?
 B: uh tomorrow mor Ĵning at five past nine
 C: *Ĵthe soupposium is*
 A: and my talk is tomorrow, too?
 B: your (talk) is the day after tomorrow]

[1 (span-hun-hun; infl; Poznań) 15:22]

At the beginning of this chapter, we also described how ethnic humour is seldom part of our dataset and noted that it does not play an important role in the collection of jokes at ridejo.ikso.net. Its absence may result from adjustments on the part of Esperanto speakers, who obviously do not consider this type of humour appropriate for the speech community. Example (225) confirms that interactional trouble can occur if participants lack the background knowledge necessary to enjoy humour based on national stereotypes. The reaction is in stark contrast with those in Examples (211) to (214), where people burst into laughter because allusions emphasise what Esperanto speakers have in common.

20.5 Some concluding remarks on humour in Esperanto

The study confirms that Esperanto communication is often marked by humour. It helps to establish rapport and to nurture solidarity among the members of the speech community. Teasing, alluding and heckling have been found to be major types of humorous discourse. To a considerable extent, humour is language-based, with Esperanto speakers making use of the planned language's morphological and syntactic potential to invent humorous wordplay. Another characteristic of Esperanto humour is the frequent reference to the culture of the speech community, above all its literature, speakers' behaviour, and peculiarities of the planned language including unresolved language questions. A shared knowledge of these characteristics forms a solid basis for successful humour. The humorous manipulation of titles of highly reputed works of Esperanto literature shows that self-referential and self-ironic language uses are characteristic of the community: Esperanto speakers are definitely able to laugh at themselves. Further studies should consider the role of Esperanto speakers' first languages and cultures to address the question of how speakers communicating in Esperanto transfer their cultural conventions or adapt them to the needs of the multicultural speech community. An in-depth analysis of this complex issue will require a larger and more differentiated dataset than the one on which we have based our investigation.