

RECENZII / COMPTES RENDUES / REVIEWS

SALVATORE ATTARDO, *The Linguistics of Humor. An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, 465 p.

Salvatore Attardo is one of the most important scholars for linguistic approach to humour. His books and articles have been highly influential since the early 1990s: “Script Theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarity and joke representation model” (1991, with Victor Raskin), *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1994), *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis* (2001), to mention only a few. He also edited *The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2014) and *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor* (2017). His 2020 book, *The Linguistics of Humor. An introduction*, is written with a pedagogical aim (as claimed by the author in the *Preface*), for both students and scholars interested in humour but lacking the linguistic background.

The volume has four parts (I. *Humor Studies*, II. *Humor Competence*, III. *Humor Performance*, IV. *Applications*), followed by a glossary, an ample list of references, and two indexes (authors and subjects). The parts of the volume, as well as the chapters, are very thoroughly organised. In the style of textbooks, every chapter ends with a “Further readings” section, mentioning the most relevant studies for the topic under discussion.

The first part of the volume comprises 5 chapters. The first chapter (“Humor studies: a few definitions”) deals with the terminology of humour, offers an overview on humour studies, and comments on the distinctions between linguistic and verbal humour, and humour and meta-humour. The second chapter (“Methodological preliminaries”) starts with the distinction between competence and performance (the key point to organise the second and third part of the volume). The author discusses the usual markers of humour (smiling and laughter) and brings forward the basis of a triangulation approach in order to avoid misinterpretations regarding the reactions or the evaluation triggered by humour; mirthful and non-mirthful laughter are distinguished. Attardo mentions *keying* (from Hymes 1972, see also *framing* from Goffmann 1974). The third chapter (“Theories of humor and their levels”) presents not only the three most famous theories (humour as release/relief, incongruity, and aggression/superiority), but also other theoretical proposals, like the evolutionary theories or Koestler’s (1964) bisociation theory (sections 3.5, 3.6). Incongruity and resolution theory has a separate chapter (chapter 4), in which different types of incongruities (fore- and backgrounded) and resolutions (full or partial) are summarised, alongside the French isotopy-disjunction model (Greimas 1966). The first part of the volume ends with a chapter titled “Semiotics of humor”, where Attardo discusses the relation between communication and semiosis, the semantics and semiotics of humour, along with connotative semiotics, a perlocutionary definition of humour (p. 98:

“The only definition of a humorous text general enough to apply to all humor is that of a text whose perlocutionary goal is to be perceived as humorous.”), and the defunctionalisation of the (linguistic) sign.

The second part of the volume, devoted to humour competence, begins, unsurprisingly for the readers who are familiarised with the field, with the presentation of Raskin’s (1985) Semantic Script Theory, aka SSTH (chapter 6), and with the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), developed by Raskin and Attardo (1991) (chapter 7). The key notions of *script*, *script oppositeness* and *script overlapping* are presented, along with the definition of *non-bona-fide* communication. In the presentation of GTVH, Attardo discusses the 6 parameters of the knowledge resources (language, narrative strategy, target, situation, logical mechanism, and script opposition), also mentioning the application of the theory on various types of texts, in different languages. Chapter 8 (“Pragmatics of humor”) reviews the main pragmatic notions that can be used to explain humour and irony (speech acts, the cooperative principle, implicatures, and presuppositions), commenting on humour intentionality as well. Verbal humour (puns) is discussed in chapter 9, starting with the definition of puns, a taxonomy, (semantic and phonetic) mechanisms used in puns, and ending with the resolution and the psycholinguistics of puns.

A review of the most significant studies on the performance of humour opens the third part (“Humor performance”) of the volume. The author then focuses on the highly influential studies of Hymes (1964, 1972), Gumperz (1964, 1972), and Goffman (1974) in discourse and conversation analysis (chapter 10). The next two chapters are closely related, since there is inescapable overlapping between the areas of conversation analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (chapters 11 and 12). Chapter 11 presents the classical CA theory stemming from the seminal work of Sacks (for example, 1974, 1978) and the studies that are relevant for humour research, while chapter 12 foregrounds the groundbreaking works by Tannen (1984), Davies (1984), and Priego-Valverde (2003), the types of interactions in which humour has been studied the most (conversation among friends and family, conversations in the workplace, or medical interactions), and highlights the importance of the corpus, as well as thorny issues like pinning down humorous intentions, identifying humour, failed humour, or humorous cooperation. Chapter 13 (“Sociolinguistics of humor”) starts from the idea that humour competence is universal, while humour performance varies across different cultures. Attardo reviews several studies concerned with the social variables (gender, social status, age, etc.) that impact humour (section 13.2, “Variationist humor theory”), and with the way humour is socially built (Crawford 2003, Kotthoff 2006, Holmes 1995, Holmes *et al.* 2001, Davies 2010, 2017, etc.).

The last part of the volume consists of three chapters: one dedicated to “Humor in literature”, another to “Humor and translation”, and the last one to “Humor in the classroom”. In chapter 14, the author mentions expansionist (*i.e.* Chłopicki 1987 and Holcomb 1992) and revisionist approaches to literary texts based on SSTH (Attardo 2001, but also Ermida 2008, Triezenberg 2004, 2008, etc.), and some other approaches that use insights from narratology and stylistics (Galiñanes 2005, Antonopoulou 2002, etc.). Chapter 15 summarises the most important studies dedicated to humour translation:

Zabalbeascoa 1996, 2000, 2005, Eco 2003, as well as skopos theory (originating from Vermeer 1989) or studies based on relevance theory. Audiovisual translation (with different problems for dubbing, subtitling, or interpreting) and the translation of puns are included. The last chapter, on humour in the classroom, presents several studies on which one can conclude that the only constant function of humour is to “improve the students’ attitude and perception of the learning experience”, without an obvious positive impact on learning or retention (p. 380).

The conclusion of the book is that humour as a “complex system” needs a trans-disciplinary approach: “the only way to make progress toward that goal [explaining all the phenomena that humour encompasses] is to embrace a trans-disciplinary approach, to supersede the interdisciplinary approach humor studies has long boasted of and in some ways pioneered.” (p. 383).

The volume has many merits. The first one is the ample synthesis of “classical” and up-to-date research. Another one is that it brings to the fore some studies that have been disregarded either because their potential influence on humour studies went unnoticed (for example, the work of Goffman 1974 or Tannen 1984), or because they were written in Romance languages, for example in French (Bally 1909, Greimas 1966, Priego-Valverde 2003), less frequented by the large community of English-speaking scholars.

The revision of the author’s own influential theory also contributes to the importance of the volume: Attardo mentions that the language parameter from GTVH’s knowledge resources should be considered a “semiotic strategy” (p. 141), since language (the system of verbal signs) is one of the various systems of signs, having complex relations with other visual or audiovisual signs, for example. There is a useful distinction with regard to the type of target (pp. 144-147): humour is oriented toward different participants; if this orientation involves aggression, then the participant(s) become(s) a target/targets; if there is no aggression, then the humour is only oriented toward the self, the hearer, or a third. Logical mechanisms are considered optional (pp. 149-150), while in older studies they seem mandatory, since they have a prominent position in the hierarchy of the knowledge resources, where they rank second, after the opposed but overlapping scripts (Attardo 1994: 227).

Another merit consists in the humour generalisations, that can help construe humour (at least in the field of linguistics) as a phenomenon characterised by intentionality, a phenomenon with a semantic basis (since all meaning differences are potential triggers) but also a pragmatic basis (humour can appear from the violation of pragmatic rules) (pp. 107-108, 157, 174).

If one wants to be finicky, there are some aspects which can raise questions. For example, there are some definitions or explanations lacking clarity or precision: in the subchapter about semiotics, the explanation: “when a sign is used as the signifier of a connotative semiotics, its primary meaning as a sign is lost, and the connotative semiotics acquires a secondary meaning, proper to the connotative semiotics, and independent from the primary meaning” (p. 98), is unclear, while some of the definitions from the Glossary could puzzle the reader due to oversimplifying: for example, ambiguity is “For a linguistic sign, the property to have more than one meaning” (p. 385), while polysemy is “The property for a sign or word to have more than one meaning” (p. 390). In the detailed interpretation on “it drizzles” instead of “it rains/pours” as a token of ironic use (pp. 169-170), the notion of ironical understatement could have been used.

The volume is indisputably a comprehensive presentation of the linguistic approaches to humour. Dense, presenting different theoretical linguistic and semiotic frameworks, and agreeable, it is an indispensable reading for both linguists and non-linguists interested in the complexity of humour phenomena.

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MIHAELA-VIORICA CONSTANTINESCU
 University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters
 mihaelaviorica.constantinescu@litere.unibuc.ro

LIVIU GROZA, *De pe vremea lui Pazvante. Imagini ale vieții din trecut în expresii românești*, București, Editura Vremea, 2022, 108 p.¹

Lucrarea *De pe vremea lui Pazvante. Imagini ale vieții din trecut în expresii românești* face parte din categoria studiilor dedicate de către Liviu Groza frazeologiei limbii române. Un domeniu

¹ Recenzia de față reprezintă un modest omagiu adus domnului profesor Liviu Groza, care a plecat mult prea devreme dintre noi. L-am cunoscut „la catedră”, când i-am fost studentă la cursurile *Didactica limbii și literaturii române* și *Frazeologie românească*, dar și ulterior, când am devenit membru al Departamentului de lingvistică. În ciuda acestui fapt, ca simplu asistent, nu mă consider îndeajuns de demnă să pot afirma că am fost colegă de departament cu domnul profesor. Am avut onoarea și privilegiul să lucrez sub îndrumarea dumnealui în ultimii ani de activitate înainte de a se pensiona, fiindu-i asistent la disciplinele *Lexicologie și semantică* și *Didactica limbii și literaturii române*. Prin sfaturile prompte și oneste, spuse întotdeauna cu blândețea caracteristică, domnul profesor Groza mi-a devenit mentor și a avut o contribuție esențială în parcursul meu academic și nu numai. Îi mulțumesc pentru tot sprijinul pe care mi l-a acordat atât ca profesor, cât și ca om.