

Challenges for EFL learners in understanding English humour: a pilot study

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Abstract

English humour is an area with great potential benefits for EFL teachers and learners, as a source of authentic linguistic and cultural input, and as a stimulus for creative output, provided that care is taken in selecting understandable materials. This paper is an attempt to examine what challenges learners face in understanding humorous texts, by describing and presenting the findings of a small-scale pilot study investigating the responses of a group of high-level EFL learners to five English jokes which display a variety of types and levels of humour. Analysis of participant responses shows that shorter jokes, which tend to be more lexically dense, were rated as less funny than longer, narrative jokes. The limitations of the current study are examined, and a number of potential avenues for future research are suggested.

1 Introduction

Understanding and using humour in a foreign or second language is a significant linguistic and cultural challenge for language learners. At the same time, humour provides a valuable opportunity for authentic and creative language input and output at levels from the sentence, to longer texts, and even beyond, as well cultural information, and potential strategies for entry into L2 discourse communities.

Research into, writing about, and analysis of humour has been undertaken over thousands of years in a variety of disciplines including philosophy and psychology, and more recently in the fields of linguistics, textual analysis and, increasingly, language teaching. Amongst the most recent research, Cook (2000) argues that humour is a manifestation of the phenomenon of language play that is central to human thought and culture, and that can and should take its place in the teaching and learning of language, at all levels of proficiency. Medgyes (2002) takes a practical approach, providing a large number of activities for using humour in the language classroom, whereas Wiseman's (2001) LaughLab experiment is a large-scale online investigation of the psychology of humour. Gardner (2008) summarizes recent research into the linguistic, cultural and affective benefits - and potential drawbacks - of classroom humour, concluding that jokes and humour must be understandable, appropriate and purposeful if their use is to be engaging and motivating, rather than distracting. This study represents an early attempt to examine in more detail the first of these three areas: the specific challenges faced by EFL learners in understanding English humour.

2 Background and research objectives

The author's first attempt to integrate humour into language teaching was in a dedicated course for a group to a group of intermediate-advanced, mature learners (Japanese L1). Material selection was largely instinctive, although designed to allow creative output as well as authentic input at an early stage, and therefore began with small, interactive texts in the form of simple riddles and short jokes, before moving on to joke sequences, longer narratives, stereotypes, humour in literature, satire, cartoons and captions, and eventually television comedy. Later, separate attempts to use the early part of this course - the apparently simple riddles and jokes - with lower-level learners proved much less successful, raising doubt as to the efficacy of this sequencing. That these doubts might be symptomatic of a larger pattern was hinted at by comments made by participants at a research workshop on the role of humour in a TEFL context (Hodson, 2008), many of which suggested that language learners found shorter jokes, many of them based on linguistic ambiguity at word, phrase or sentence level, to be much more difficult than longer texts.

The author's early approach to the sequencing of humorous material, and its underlying assumptions as to the nature of the difficulties faced by EFL learners in understanding English humour were thereby called into question. This questioning provided the initial stimulus for this pilot study, which presents a group of learners with a variety of humorous texts in an attempt to discover which texts participants found difficult to understand, which they found funny and which not, and what information their responses - as unprompted as possible - to these texts could provide about the specific challenges that humour presented for them, whether linguistic, affective, cultural or otherwise.

3 Research questionnaire

3.1 Participants and respondents

Nineteen adult L1 Japanese speakers taking part in a training seminar on reading skills were given a questionnaire on English jokes. All nineteen participants were EFL teachers working in public junior and senior high schools in Japan, and can therefore be considered to be relatively high-level learners of English, with both regular access to English texts, and with a background in TEFL. Questionnaires were completed during the course of the seminar, and returned by thirteen of the participants (68%). Two respondents did not answer, completely or in part, the first two sections of the questionnaire, and their responses have therefore been discounted for the purpose of analysis, leaving eleven more-or-less complete questionnaires (58% of the original sample). Of these eleven respondents, there was considerable variation in the amount and quality of their responses to the third section of the questionnaire.

3.2 Selection of materials

In constructing the questionnaire, five jokes were chosen from a variety of sources, to exemplify a number of typical features of English humour. The jokes varied from 6 to 158 words in length.

Joke 1 (from the author's own knowledge, original source unknown), is a short narrative ending in a pun revolving around the polysemous noun 'tank':

Two fish were in a tank. One turned to the other and said, 'Who's driving?'

Joke 2 (Wiseman, 2001) is a narrative involving the syntactic ambiguity that results from ellipsis in speech, and that therefore leads to a breakdown of the 'cooperative principle' of conversation (specifically in terms of the maxim of manner; Grice, 1975):

Two hunters are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He doesn't seem to be breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other guy whips out his phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps, 'My friend is dead! What can I do?' The operator says, 'Calm down. I can help. First, let's make sure he's dead.' There is a silence, then a shot is heard.

Back on the phone, the guy says 'OK, now what?'

Joke 3 (Chiaro, 1992; Ross, 1998) is a riddle, also involving syntactic ambiguity, but which in this case would be clarified in speech by appropriate stress and intonation:

Q: How do you make a cat drink?

A: Easy, put it in a liquidizer.

Joke 4 (Ross, 1998) is an anagram deriving from a famous quotation:

Bad spellers of the world, untie!

Finally, Joke 5 (Wiseman, 2001)¹ is a longer narrative, the humour of which derives from the flouting by one of the speakers of at least three of Grice's conversational maxims:

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson go on a camping trip. After a good dinner, they retire for the night, and go to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes wakes up and nudges his faithful friend. 'Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.' 'I see millions and millions of stars, Holmes', replies Watson. 'And what do you deduce from that?' Watson ponders for a minute. 'Well, astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically, I can see that God is all powerful, and that we are a small and insignificant part of the universe. What does it tell you, Holmes?' Holmes is silent for a moment. 'Watson, you idiot!' he says. 'Someone has stolen our tent!'

Like most jokes, there is considerable variation in the text of this last joke. The version given here, and used in the questionnaire, differs in length and complexity from that cited by Wiseman (2001) and The British Association for the Advancement of Science (hereafter BA, 2002) as runner-up in their LaughLab experiment to find the 'funniest joke in the world'. The 'winner' (Joke 2 here) even appears in two different forms in the two official publications documenting the LaughLab experiment (Wiseman, 2001, and BA, 2002).

The five jokes therefore represent a number of different text types - one-liner, riddle, and narratives of varying lengths - and a number of different linguistic levels of humour: graphological in Joke 4, lexical in Joke 1; primarily syntactic in Joke 3; syntactic and pragmatic in Joke 2; and

¹ Found online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World%27s_funniest_joke (accessed August 2007).

primarily pragmatic in Joke 5. These levels are not mutually exclusive, and the humour of a joke may derive from more than one at a time, as subsequent examination will show. In addition to these linguistic and textual features, the five jokes can be seen to derive their potential for humour from a variety of cultural schemata. They can be further categorised with reference to three widely-recognised theories of humour: the incongruity theory (eg. Kant, 1790), in which humour comes from a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs; the superiority theory (eg. Hobbes, 1650), in which humour derives from a sudden sense of feeling ourselves superior to others; and theories of psychic release (eg. Spencer, 1860 and Freud, 1905), in which humour allows for the release of psychic tension in its treatment of usually taboo subject-matter. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the five jokes.

	text type	linguistic level of humour	applicable theory of humour	cultural schema
Joke 1	short narrative	lexical (pun) possibly also pragmatic	linguistic incongruity situational incongruity	pets
Joke 2	narrative	syntactic pragmatic	incongruity superiority (ridiculing one hunter) psychic release (death of one hunter)	hunting
Joke 3	riddle	syntactic possibly also phonological and morphological	linguistic incongruity psychic release (potential death of the cat)	riddles: a formal rather than cultural schema?
Joke 4	one-liner	graphological (anagram)	incongruity superiority (ridiculing bad spellers)	politics: based on, or parodying a quotation from Marx and Engels ²
Joke 5	narrative	pragmatic	incongruity superiority (ridiculing Dr Watson)	literature: the characters and typical roles of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson

Table 1: Five jokes and their main characteristics

² 'Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!' (Marx and Engels, 1848), popularly known in English as 'Workers of the world, unite!', although the Engels-approved English translation of 1848 actually gives the line as 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite!'

3.3 Questionnaire tasks

Participants were asked to complete three tasks. After reading each of the five jokes, they were first requested to assess, from 0% to 100%, their own understanding of the English of the text, in response to the question 'How much of the English did you understand?' In task two, humour ratings (to be done at the same time as the English understanding task), they were asked to circle one of four possible responses to the question, 'Did you think the joke was funny?': 'I think it's very funny' (referred hereafter as rating A), 'I think it's quite funny' (rating B), 'I understand why it's a joke, but I don't think it's funny' (C) and 'I don't understand why it's a joke' (D). The third task (reflection) was the most complex. Participants were asked to choose one or two of the jokes to which they had responded that they did not understand why the text was a joke or, if this was not applicable, those to which they had responded that they did not find the joke funny (ratings D and C, respectively), and explain - in either English or in the participants' L1, Japanese³ - their reasons for giving that response. After group discussion of the five jokes, and a brief explanation of each of them by the researcher, participants were allowed to add to or revise these initial 'raw' responses, in a separate section of the questionnaire, if they wished to.

4 Findings

4.1 Participant responses: English understanding and humour ratings

Table 2 shows the responses of the eleven participants to the five jokes. The score marked ' % '

Respondent	Joke 1		Joke 2		Joke 3		Joke 4		Joke 5	
	%	rating	%	rating	%	rating	%	rating	%	rating
1	80	D	80	B	50	D	30	D	70	B
2	100	B	100	B	80	C	90	D	60	C
3	90	D	100	B	90	C	70	D	90	A
4	80	D	80	B	70	B	70	D	60	B
5	80	A	60	C	80	D	0	D	60	A
6	100	C	100	C	90	D	1	D	70	D
7	90	D	80	B	90	D	50	D	50	B
8	100	B	100	A	80	C	80	C	90	A
9	65	B	80	B	70	B	60	D	90	A
10	70	D	80	B	60	C	80	D	40	B
11	50	D	50	C	30	C	45	D	50	C
Average	82		83		72		52		66	
Average ex. 5&6	81		83		69		64		67	

Table 2: Participant responses to five jokes, by joke

³ None of the participants in fact wrote their answers in Japanese.

shows each participant's self-assessment of their English understanding of each joke. Respondents 5 and 6 both gave extremely low assessments of their understanding of the English of Joke 4, an idiosyncrasy which may reflect a problem with the task itself: it is highly unlikely that learners at this level of proficiency would not understand any of the individual words or grammatical structures in this text. Instead, it seems likely that these respondents, at least, were extending their interpretation of 'understanding' to include the whole illocutionary force of the text, and not merely its propositional meaning. Table 3 shows the average English understanding of the jokes of the eleven respondents, with the number of jokes that each rated A-D, and the number that each rated as funny (ie. ratings A or B).

Respondent	average understanding	rating A	rating B	rating C	rating D	ratings A & B	
						no.	%
1	62%	0	2	0	3	2	40%
2	86%	0	2	2	1	2	40%
3	88%	1	1	1	2	2	40%
4	72%	0	3	0	2	3	60%
5	56%	2	0	1	2	2	40%
6	72%	0	0	2	3	0	0%
7	72%	0	2	0	3	2	40%
8	90%	2	1	2	0	3	60%
9	73%	1	3	0	1	4	80%
10	66%	0	2	1	2	2	40%
11	45%	0	0	3	2	0	0%

Table 3: Participant responses to five jokes, by participant

No respondents found all of the jokes funny; the highest rater being Respondent 9 with three jokes rated B and one rated A. Respondent 11, who also claimed the lowest level of English understanding (45%), did not find any of the five jokes funny. Table 4 shows the ratings for each of the five jokes.

	Joke 1	Joke 2	Joke 3	Joke 4	Joke 5
rating A	1	1	0	0	4
%	9%	9%	0%	0%	36%
rating B	3	7	2	0	4
%	27%	64%	18%	0%	36%
rating C	1	3	5	1	2
%	9%	27%	45%	9%	18%
rating D	6	0	4	10	1
%	55%	0%	36%	91%	9%
ratings A & B	4	8	2	0	8
%	36%	73%	18%	0%	73%

Table 4: Humour ratings for five jokes

Jokes 2 and 5 were most highly rated as funny, whereas none of the respondents found Joke 4 to be funny.

4.2 Participants' responses: reflections

As the most complex of the three, the third task generated the least consistent responses from participants. Table 5 shows which jokes the eleven participants chose to respond to, both before and after group discussion of the five jokes.

Respondent	Jokes chosen		Jokes chosen		Jokes chosen	
	before discussion		after discussion		total	
1	Joke 1	Joke 3			Joke 1	Joke 3
2						
3	Joke 1		Joke 1	Joke 4	Joke 1	Joke 4
4		Joke 5				Joke 5
5	Joke 4	Joke 3	Joke 4	Joke 3	Joke 4	Joke 3
6	Joke 2	Joke 1	Joke 2	Joke 1	Joke 2	Joke 1
7	Joke 3				Joke 3	
8	Joke 3	Joke 4	Joke 3	Joke 4	Joke 3	Joke 4
9	Joke 4		Joke 4		Joke 4	
10			Joke 1	Joke 4	Joke 1	Joke 4
11			Joke 3	Joke 1	Joke 3	Joke 1

Table 5: Participants' choice of jokes for reflection task

Jokes 1, 3 and 4 each received five responses, and Jokes 2 and 5 one response each. As Jokes 2 and 5 received the highest humour ratings by a considerable margin (both receiving 73% A & B ratings), this would seem to confirm that participants had followed the questionnaire instructions successfully. One participant (Respondent 2) did not comment on any of the jokes, and Respondents 10 and 11 recorded responses only in the post-discussion phase of the task.

5 Analysis

5.1 Lexical analysis of jokes

After the survey had been conducted, each of the five jokes was examined to determine its level of potential difficulty for the reader in two areas: lexical density, and level of vocabulary used. To obtain an estimate of the latter, each word form in each joke was assigned a value based on its frequency level as indicated in the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary*. Words in the COBUILD top frequency band were assigned a value of 1, and words in the bottom band a value of 5. Proper nouns were excluded, inflected forms were assigned the value of their base form, and words that fell outside the five COBUILD frequency bands (which cover a combined total of approximately 14,700 words) were given a value of 6. The values for each word form in each

joke were then averaged to give an average level for each joke, albeit one which does not take into account a number of lexical factors including the use of compound nouns, phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions. Table 6 shows a lexical analysis of the five jokes.

	Tokens	Word forms	Lexical density	COBUILD vocabulary level
Joke 1	15	15	100%	1.20
Joke 2	78	58	74%	1.47
Joke 3	13	12	92%	1.62
Joke 4	6	6	100%	2.50
Joke 5	158	98	62%	1.88

Table 6: Lexical analysis of five jokes

As we would expect, the shorter jokes have a higher lexical density (there is a correlation coefficient of -0.98 between number of word forms and lexical density), but there does not seem to be any correlation between lexical density and vocabulary level (-0.07). The shortest joke, Joke 6, is also clearly the most challenging in terms of vocabulary level, due to its use of the word 'liquidizer' (vocabulary level 6).

5.2 Tasks 1 and 2: English understanding and humour ratings

Analysis of the results of the first two questionnaire tasks reveals a clear consensus among the 11 participants as to which of the five jokes were the funniest: namely, the two longer narratives, Jokes 2 and 5 (both 73% A & B ratings). The third funniest joke was the shorter narrative pun, Joke 1 (36%). There seems to be a fairly strong positive correlation between the length of a joke and its humour rating (number of tokens/number of word forms to A & B ratings: 0.86/0.89),⁴ and an equally strong negative correlation between the lexical density of a joke and its humour rating (-0.87). Interestingly, these factors seem to be slightly more significant than COBUILD vocabulary level (-0.47), or than the participants' self-assessed understanding of the English of each joke (average understanding/average understanding excluding respondents 5 and 6, to A & B ratings: 0.56/0.49). When participants' English understanding is compared to the lexical properties of each joke, there appears to be a relatively strong negative correlation between understanding and COBUILD vocabulary level (-0.97/-0.83),⁵ but the correlations between both understanding and joke length, measured either in number of tokens (0.07/-0.04) or in number of word forms (0.14/0.04), and between understanding and lexical density (-0.14/-0.03), seem to be negligible.

⁴ Results from the LaughLab experiment shed further light on the significance of a joke's length. On average, jokes submitted to the experiment averaged 40 words, with the shortest containing just three words, and the longest, 339. The jokes rated as funniest contained 103 words: 'It seems that if a joke is too short then people don't get "into" it, too long and they lose interest' (BA, 2002: 63) .

⁵ As above, and hereafter, the first figure is for the average understanding of all 11 respondents, and the second figure is for the average understanding excluding the potentially anomalous respondents 5 and 6.

These results suggest that, for this group of learners, the longer and less lexically-dense a joke is, the more likely it is to be found funny, and that these factors are more obviously influential than either the vocabulary level of the joke itself, or than the respondents' overall English understanding of it. The vocabulary level of the joke seems to influence English understanding - and we must always bear in mind (see 4.1, above) that it may not be possible to draw a clear distinction between understanding the propositional meaning and the illocutionary force of a text - to a greater extent than it does the transition of humour; implying that, when length and lexical density allowed them to, respondents may have been able to find the humour in some individual jokes even without complete language understanding. The higher vocabulary level, and lower understanding assessment of Joke 5 did not result in its being rated as less funny than Joke 2, for example, whereas the shorter and more lexically-dense Joke 1 was assessed higher in terms of understanding than Joke 5, but rated considerable lower for humour. At the other end of the spectrum, the shortest and least funny joke, Joke 4 (0% A & B ratings), also had the highest vocabulary level (2.50), joint highest lexical density (100%), and lowest understanding assessment (52/64%).

5.3 Task 3: reflections

Task 3 asked participants to comment only on jokes to which they had given low humour ratings (C and D), so this questionnaire does not aim to give us any insight into what it was that participants actually found funny, although some respondents did comment on this independently. Instead, it attempts to take a first step towards understanding the challenges that participants themselves were able to identify as facing when attempting to appreciate an English joke. That this task may be something of a challenge in itself becomes clear when the quantity and quality of responses to the reflection stage of the questionnaire is considered. As Table 4, above, showed, only four of the eleven respondents commented on two jokes in the pre-discussion, with another three commenting on one joke only. Two respondents made no comment at this stage, one of whom also made no comment after discussion.

Of the total of 25 pre- and post-discussion comments, the majority (13) dealt wholly or in part with the respondent's difficulty in understanding the meaning of individual, specified words. Words identified as posing difficulties were 'tank' (Joke 1, 4 respondents), 'liquidizer' (Joke 3, 2 respondents), 'untie' (Joke 4, 3 respondents) and (possibly, as this particular response is unclear) 'speller' (Joke 4, 1 respondent). All of these words are important in understanding their respective jokes. 'Liquidizer' (a British English usage) could have been substituted for a synonym such as 'blender' that would have been closer to the participants' L1, and to their experience of American English (although its COBUILD vocabulary level would not have changed). In fact, Respondents 1 and 8 commented that its meaning was, or should have been, guessable; and Respondent 8 had gone as far as to posit an alternative meaning: 'Is it the liquid for an animal to be put [in] to look alive even though they are dead?' By contrast, 'tank', the pun around which Joke 1 revolves, and 'untie', the anagram from Joke 4, are crucial items, failure to understand which renders the joke incomprehensible. Respondent 5's comment is typical: 'I

don't understand the meaning of untie, so I don't understand this joke at all'.

A further three comments dealt with the syntactically ambiguous phrase ' a cat drink ' in Joke 3, Respondents 1 and 11 reporting (pre- and post-discussion, respectively) that they could not understand it, and Respondent 7 that ' I couldn't imagine ' it. Problems with whole-sentence meaning were reported by two respondents: Respondent 9, who had assessed Joke 4 at 60% understanding in Task 1, commented that ' I can't understand the meaning of this sentence, so I can't find its joke ' ; and Respondent 1, who commented thus on Joke 1:

I understand all words in this sentence. However, the last part ' driving ' made me confused. I first thought I understood this sentence 100%, but I changed my mind like ' is there any other meaning of driving, which I don't know '

Lack of background knowledge was cited by only two respondents, both with regard to Joke 4, and both only in the post-discussion phase. Joke subject-matter, which relates to the theories of humour and content schemata recorded in Table 1 above, was mentioned only by Respondent 6, on Joke 2 ([pre-discussion] ' He is dead so not funny ' and [post-discussion] ' Do you call it black joke? '), and possibly - although this is unclear - by Respondent 5, on Joke 3 ([pre-discussion] ' It's an awful joke ' and [post-discussion] ' Now I think it's a funny joke! ').

Specific key vocabulary, then, appears to have been a crucial barrier to understanding for many respondents, for whom, as we have seen from analysis of Tasks 1 and 2, short, lexically-dense texts may have been intrinsically problematic. Particularly interesting in this regard is the one comment on a favourably-rated joke, Joke 5, which the respondent (Respondent 4) had given a humour rating of B, but an understanding assessment of only 60%, lower than both that participant's average for all jokes of 72%, and than the average for Joke 5 of 66/67%:

There are many difficult words so it is difficult to read. But [even] if I can't read detail, I understand the joke. I like this one. [my interpolation]

As the analysis of Tasks 1 and 2 had suggested, the longer, less lexically-dense narrative nature of this joke seems to have allowed this participant at least to compensate for its relatively high vocabulary level, and consequently to appreciate its humour.

6 Limitations and future research

6.1 Limitations of the current study

This study has a number of shortcomings and limitations, the most obvious of which are a result of its small size, in terms both of the number of participants, and of the amount of humorous material covered. However, there are a number of other, potentially more fundamental problems. Task 1 called for self-assessment of English understanding, which is itself, as we have seen, a problematic concept, and the anomalous responses of two participants may only represent the most visible symptoms of a wider difficulty in this area. Selection of materials to include different types of humour resulted in large variations in the length, lexical density and vocabulary level of the five joke texts, which may be to some extent unavoidable given the nature of jokes themselves (BA, 2002: 63), but which also means that the difference in responses may well be due as

much to these purely textual variations as to the variations in humour itself.

Finally, the reflection task (task 3) did not generate as much respondent data as had been hoped. This may have been due partly to lack of time for participants to respond, but also to the nature of the task itself: in order not to create bias in responses, participants were not given any information about the jokes beyond the mere fact that they were jokes,⁶ until the discussion phase, and were therefore being asked to carry out a critical analysis of the texts and their responses to them, possibly without possessing the tools necessary to do so. The lowest-rated joke, Joke 4, for example, needs specific background knowledge on the part of the participant, but it is extremely unlikely that a participant lacking in that background knowledge would actually be able to identify themselves as lacking it.

6.2 Potential for future research

These problems and limitations suggest a number of avenues for possible future research, expansion of the study being only the most obvious: the LaughLab experiment, for example, gathered approximately 1.5 million ratings on over 40,000 jokes (BA, 2002). More reliable methods of defining and measuring both participant English understanding and text difficulty are important early steps. The sheer variety of English jokes is both a blessing and a curse for the researcher, and future investigation would most likely take the form of surveys that attempt to control and reduce some of the variables involved: by comparing responses only to a number of short puns, for example, or to narratives of similar length but demanding differing levels of background or vocabulary knowledge. Finally, the potential benefits of allowing participants to analyse their own responses freely need to be weighed against the greater volume and quality of data that might be obtained from more directed questioning. The ultimate goal of such research would be an attempt to resolve, at least with regard to the language of humour, the major problem identified by Cook (2000: 194), of:

how to find materials exemplifying language play... which are socially and linguistically suitable for students of various backgrounds and levels of proficiency, and which also ensure active production of playful language as well as its passive reception.

7 Conclusion

Although limited, the results of this small pilot study seem to go some way towards confirming anecdotal evidence from learners in the author's earlier classes and workshops: specifically, that shorter, lexically-dense jokes present more of a challenge for learners than longer, less dense ones, in which readers are more easily able to compensate for lack of vocabulary knowledge. The presence or absence of a narrative, more likely to be present in a longer joke, may also be a contributory factor. Beyond this, given the huge number of variables involved - such as, for exam-

6 A process which may well have served to activate certain content and formal schemata, as the pre-discussion comment of Respondent 8 to Joke 4 suggests: ' " Spellers " and " unite " are the keys, I guess. But it is not clear for me to understand the joke ' [my underlining].

ple, the extent of cultural knowledge demanded, affective factors related to joke subject-matter, and the different levels and types of humour present in different jokes, and even in the same joke - it is clear that much more research is required before more comprehensive conclusions can be drawn.

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