

Meaning and Humour

How are humorous meanings generated and interpreted? Understanding a joke involves knowledge of the language code (a matter mostly of semantics) and background knowledge necessary for making the inferences to get the joke (a matter of pragmatics). This book introduces and critiques a wide range of semantic and pragmatic theories in relation to humour, such as systemic functional linguistics, speech acts, politeness, and Relevance Theory, emphasising not only conceptual but also interpersonal and textual meanings. Exploiting recent corpus-based research, it suggests that much humour can be accounted for by the overriding of lexical priming. Each chapter's discussion topics and suggestions for further reading encourage a critical approach to semantic and pragmatic theory. Written by an experienced lecturer on the linguistics of the English language, this is an entertaining and user-friendly textbook for advanced students of semantics, pragmatics and humour studies.

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Meaning and Humour

ANDREW GOATLY



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To my family: past, present [and future?]

For me humor studies is fundamentally an interpretive exercise. It is an attempt to say what people are talking about even when they don't say so themselves. It is an attempt to wrest meaning – sometimes significant meaning – from ludicrous and seemingly discountable expressions.
(Oring 2003: 146)

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And not to forget the Pope and Sarah Palin . . .

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- *italics* for word-form as type
- //slants for phonological form as type
- ‘single inverted commas’ for meaning
- “double inverted commas” for words as token
- SMALL CAPS for lexemes
- *asterisk** after the initial uninflected part (stem) of a lemma
- [+ CAPS IN SQUARE BRACKETS] for componential features of meaning
- * before grammatically unacceptable sentences
- * at the end of lemmas
- ^ for ‘followed by’