Deceptive Puns: The pragmatics of humour in puns

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1. Introduction

Mainstream theories of verbal humour nowadays all include (if not exclusively address) considerations on natural language interpretation. Accounting for how meaning is constructed has now become part and parcel of accounts of humorous discourse of all persuasions (be they semantically or pragmatically oriented), so much so that fairly recent linguistics textbooks take humour as a case in point to explore the linguistic construction of meaning (see Ritchie, 2004; Aarons, 2011; Goatly, 2012 and Yus, 2016, among others). In this chapter, we offer a contribution to this ongoing effort by presenting a cognitive pragmatic account of verbal humour, which takes stock of extant research and at the same time articulates a novel take which we apply here to the study of puns.

Drawing on classical accounts, we will consider that the notion of ambiguity is central for any incongruity-based account of verbal humour (see Attardo, 1994, chapter 1 for an overview) because the pivotal mechanism in verbal humour is, if we adopt the addressee's perspective, the resolution of interpretative incongruity. When it succeeds, humorous discourse typically leads the addressee to first form interpretative assumptions that need to be later on either abandoned, adapted or complemented in order to reach the intended humorous interpretation. Accordingly, linguistic accounts devoted to the study of meaning are on the frontline to explain not only how incongruity is verbally constructed, but also how it is interpretatively resolved in order to give rise to the humorous effect (see Forabosco, 1992). The account we outline here is thus part of this effort, as it builds on

a cognitive pragmatic account of meaning aptly suited to explain how incongruity resolution may be handled by the recipients of puns.

The original claim that will be put forward in this contribution follows from the elaboration of a formal parallel between the interpretative processes an addressee goes through when he processes puns and those that are characteristic of the processing of manipulative (or deceptive) discourse. Building on the cognitive pragmatic account we developed to account for manipulative discourse (Context Selection Constraint, CSC, see Maillat & Oswald, 2009, 2011, 2013), we will argue here that both the interpretation of puns and that of manipulative discourse start off similarly. Chiefly, the idea we defend is that while both manipulative (and deceptive) and humorous discourse require the addressee to perform sub-optimal interpretative steps at first, both phenomena part ways precisely after this common initial stage: while the success of manipulative discourse requires the addressee to stop processing the input, that of humorous discourse necessitates further interpretative steps, which amount to a revelation of the manipulative attempt. In fact, we will claim that from a processing perspective, successful humorous discourse is a type of manipulation revealed.[1]

In the next section of the chapter (section 2) we review some important assumptions about verbal humour and the resolution of incongruity, before moving, in section 3, to the presentation of our framework, in which our main claim regarding the processing proximity between humour and manipulation will be formulated. This will allow us to identify the interpretative constraints that bear on pun processing in section 4. The fifth section contains analyses of puns meant to illustrate said proximity and the applicability of the model. To conclude the chapter, we present avenues for further research in the study of verbal humour.

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1. We do not claim, however, that all cases where manipulation is revealed are instances of humorous discourse.

2. Incongruity resolution: a question of meaning interpretation

The study of verbal humour owes a great deal to the work of Victor Raskin, who, with the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH, Raskin, 1979, 1985), was among the first to formalise a linguistically-informed theory of humour. Drawing on a computational view of interpretation, Raskin proposed that verbal humour could be explained in terms of the nature of the interpretative procedures involved in its processing.

Raskin's account builds on script theory. In this framework, language users are deemed to rely on two sources of information: lexical entries on the one hand and "our knowledge of certain things about the world we live in" (Raskin, 1979: 329) on the other. The latter is a loose definition of the contents of scripts, defined as a "the 'common sense' cognitive structures stored in the mind of the native speaker" (*ibid.*: 325). Scripts are organised sets of information that language users have about basic and standard situations, routinized procedures, which allow them in turn to make sense of events happening in the world. Typically, language users are thus believed to have internalised scripts about daily events, transportation, relationships, institutional environments, etc., that can be mobilised to know what to expect and how to interpret events when the situation requires it. According to Raskin, scripts are mobilised when we interpret natural language; they are activated depending on the lexical items contained in the communicative messages we have to make sense of. Under this view, if your interlocutor tells you that they went Malta for their last holiday, you are likely to activate all information you have stored about holidays, like the fact that it usually involves traveling abroad, absence of work, pleasurable experiences, resting, etc. It should also be noted that by virtue of polysemy, different scripts might be relevant to the same lexical unit (for example, there would be at least two different scripts for the homonymic pair $bank_1$/$bank_2$, respectively financial institution/slope next to water stream). Scripts are thus typically

activated by lexical units contained in verbal material, which in turns means that the interpretation of any given utterance will correspond to a unique combinatorial option of the different scripts made available by the mere presence of different lexemes in the utterance.

The specificity of humorous messages like jokes, according to Raskin, lies in the fact that they induce specific operations in the management of scripts in the course of interpretation, akin to constraints on meaning. For Raskin, a given text can be deemed humorous if it fulfils two conditions: (i) the text should be simultaneously compatible with two different scripts, which should be opposed, i.e. incompatible in some respect,[2] and (ii) both scripts must fully or partially overlap, so as to license competing interpretations of the same verbal material. Now, in jokes and puns, the overlap is signalled by a trigger, which can take many different forms, ambiguity being only one of them. It is upon the identification of the trigger that incongruity is made evident, which in turn should make the addressee understand that there are two possible scripts to interpret the message, instead of one. What is crucial to our purpose here is the idea that two competing meanings are required to emerge in humorous discourse, one of them being less salient than the other. Only when the addressee realises, with some surprise, that an unexpected additional meaning is licensed by the verbal material, is the humorous effect triggered. What the SSTH offers, thus, is an account of verbal humour in which the identification of incongruity prompts the addressee to recognise the presence of two competing and overlapping scripts. This recognition in turn functions as the resolution of the incongruity that was encountered by the addressee.

The SSTH was later expanded to cater for more relevant aspects of verbal humour in the work of Attardo and Raskin,

2. And not necessarily contradictory. Here opposition should be loosely interpreted in terms of semantic incompatibility; opposition should thus be interpreted as non-identity.

who developed the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH, Attardo & Raskin, 1991). The GTVH encompasses more parameters, script opposition being only one of six knowledge resources (KRs) that are needed to make sense of jokes. In particular, the GTVH incorporates linguistic and pragmatic constraints on verbal humour, the idea being that the interpretation of jokes relies on different aspects of the narrative. These KRs are language (the actual linguistic choices made by the speaker), narrative strategy (the type of exposition the speaker opts for), target (who the joke is about), situation (activity, participants and other props), logical mechanism (the conceptual resources used to construct the incongruity, like analogy, figure-ground reversal, faulty reasoning, etc.) and script opposition (which inherits its characterisation from the SSTH). Each of them can be thought of as an information set that is instrumental to the understanding of a joke. They function like templates that are filled in a unique way in each possible joke. This also allows for a more systematic approach to jokes which can be used to establish strict comparison criteria to assess joke similarity (see Attardo & Raskin, 1991). However, for the purposes of this chapter, we will only retain the idea that the KRs function as pragmatic constraints on information, and that any variation in them will have repercussions on the interpretation of the joke.

The position we will defend, following in part Attardo and Raskin, is that the crucial mechanism at play in puns, as a specific type of verbal humour, is information selection. The interpretative processes at play in successful puns at first yields one interpretation, which is then found wanting, in the sense that it reveals some sort of contextual incongruity (usually arrived at as a failure to establish the contextual relevance of the utterance) that calls for further processing. Upon re-processing the stimulus in an enlarged context, the addressee then discovers an alternative but compatible interpretation which allows him to resolve the incongruity (see section 5 for examples). Under this view, the cognitive mechanisms that are responsible for the success of puns target which contextual information is accessed

in the two stages of interpretation. In other words, successive interpretations are constrained by the sets of information that are contextually selected and which become gradually available as interpretation unfolds. As we assume a relevance-theoretic stance in our account of these phenomena, we will claim that successful puns enforce a twofold constraint on the addressee's cognitive environment: (i) they manage to lead the addressee to first derive an interpretation that is found to lack contextual relevance, and (ii) once the incongruity is recognised and the is identified, they prompt the addressee to reprocess the utterance in a modified contextual set to uncover a second compatible interpretation, which then becomes salient and which allows the addressee to resolve the incongruity previously encountered. Resolving incongruity here is how contextual relevance is achieved, and this resolution supposes access to two interpretations which were not equally accessible in the addressee's cognitive environment at first.

As stated earlier, we think that this cognitive process has much in common with the cognitive processes at play in the interpretation of deceptive discourse. We therefore now turn to the details of our account of deception by starting with a discussion of our theoretical framework, so that the parallel between humour and deception can be fruitfully addressed.

3. The pragmatics of deceptive discourse

As was pointed out above, the account we wish to put forward in this paper is anchored within a cognitive approach to pragmatic phenomena. We argue that puns correspond to a communicative strategy that tries to trick the interpretative processes of the hearer in order to mislead them. Once the trick becomes apparent, the intended humorous effect is triggered. Our proposal follows some of the ideas already discussed in previous accounts in that it relies on an interpretative tension between two competing interpretations for one and the same utterance in order to explain the humorous effect. The novelty put forward in

our approach comes from the fact that by capturing these phenomena within a cognitive pragmatic framework – i.e., Relevance Theory (as per Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995 and Wilson & Sperber, 2012) –, we are able to explain the cognitive processes that underpin the effect generated by puns.

As we saw in the previous section, a pun misleads the hearer to derive a first – erroneous – interpretation before signalling the error to the hearer by providing a cue. In that respect, the first interpretative step required in the processing of a pun is very similar to what happens when a manipulator tries to deceive the hearer. In the following paragraphs, we will review briefly what a pragmatic derivation of meaning is in normal circumstances and following a series of proposals we made (Maillat & Oswald, 2009, 2011, 2013), we will explain how deceptive discourse misleads the interpretative process. With these two accounts in hands, we will then be able to explain the specificity of the form of deception displayed in puns for humorous purposes. Yet, in order to establish a pragmatic model of the processes involved in understanding manipulative discourse, it is necessary to recall some bases of the theoretical framework proposed for this analysis, namely the cognitive pragmatics of Sperber & Wilson (1995, Carston, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 2012).

3.1. Relevance theory

The pragmatic theory of relevance (henceforth RT) is a rewriting of the Gricean project which seeks to explain the processes behind the construction of meaning in human communication. Rather than basing the theory on a principle of rational order – Grice's Cooperative Principe –, RT focuses its explanation on the general mechanisms that govern the cognitive system. The meaning-making system activated during ostensive-inferential communication is thus perceived as subordinate to the general guiding principles that manage all cognitive activity in human beings. In particular, the cognitive principle of relevance which is defined as follows (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 260):

"Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance."

The maximisation of relevance corresponds to an attempt by the human cognitive system to allocate its resources in such a way as to generate the most positive cognitive effects while minimizing the resources needed for their development. As a result, the cognitive mechanism that manages any cognitive process is based on an optimal ratio between the cognitive effort required and the cognitive effects produced.

It emerges from the above that human communication is itself subordinated to this principle. Consequently, communication processes are based on a second principle of relevance, the Communicative Principle of relevance (*ibid*.): "Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance".

In this context, the understanding of a statement is conceived as the incremental construction of a set of contextual assumptions in which the hearer (adapted from Clark, 2013, p. 37):

> (A) follows a path of least effort derived from cognitive effects; by testing the interpretations in the order of accessibility (e.g. disambiguation, assignment of referent, implicatures, etc.)
> (B) stops when the expectations of relevance are satisfied.

However, by its very nature, this interpretative process is neither exhaustive nor robust. Sperber & Wilson (1995, p. 138) point out that:

"The organization of the individual's encyclopaedic memory, and the mental activity in which he is engaged, limits the class of potential contexts from which an actual context can be chosen at any given time. [...] [N]ot all chunks of encyclopedic information are equally accessible at any given time".

Since the hearer's cognitive environment is an ordered structure of contextual assumptions, and the interpretive process is not exhaustive, it follows that only a selection of contextual

assumptions can and will effectively be accessed when interpreting an utterance U. In other words, the fact that there are levels of accessibility and that context selection is an incremental process implies that not all sets of (contextual) information that are compatible with an utterance U will be activated. This prediction is based on the general hypotheses of RT concerning ostensive-inferential communication. It is now a matter of seeing how deceptive discourse will act on these processes in an attempt to exploit them for manipulative purposes. In this perspective, a detour through lexical pragmatics will allow us to better understand the phenomena that underlie deceptive discourse.

Relevant research on the construction of lexical meaning is particularly illuminating in this respect insofar as it shows how the incremental construction of meaning – at a level as basic as that of lexical content – is subjected to the pressure of the principle of relevance to determine a lexical meaning by optimizing cognitive effects and allocating resources. Consider the following statement

> (1): How many animals of each species did Moses place in the ark?

As Allott & Rubio Fernández (2002) explain, a majority of readers will answer this question without noticing that it incorporates an error since it is Noah and not Moses who is the agent in the episode of the ark. Under experimental conditions, Erickson & Mattson (1981) showed that more than two thirds of participants did not detect lexical dissonance. Allot & Rubio Fernández suggest that the lexical meaning of the word *Moses* is superficially treated by the system, i.e. shallow-processed, which will somehow simplify the treatment of the word *Moses*, as it is not at the heart of the meaning of the utterance, in order to reduce the resources allocated to its treatment: this is what relevance-theoretic pragmatics calls an *ad hoc* concept (in this case, it is lexically adjusted by broadening the meaning of Moses to MOSES* = biblical figure).

We hypothesize that manipulative discourse exploits a similar (but not necessarily lexical) phenomenon. Concretely, manipulation affects the process of selection of contextual assumptions so as to reduce the number of assumptions that are likely to be taken into consideration in the interpretation. The idea is to say that shallow processing can be applied to the set of contextual assumptions that the hearer selects when processing the meaning of an utterance. Thus, manipulative discourse is conceived as a communicative strategy aimed at preventing the hearer from accessing certain contextual assumptions. We will show later on that the same is true for the interpretation of puns – specifically in their first interpretative stage.

3.2. Context selection constraint

In view of this, the proposed theoretical model attempts to account for deceptive strategies from an interpretative perspective. The considerations on meaning construction reviewed before all have in common the fact that they seek to constrain the process of context selection. The manipulative strategies are therefore considered from the interpretative point of view as Constraints on the Selection of Context (CSC) which is defined as follows (see Maillat & Oswald, 2009, 2011; Oswald, 2010, Maillat, 2013):

> *Constraint on the Selection of Context (CSC)*
> Manipulative communication is a binary process by which a restriction of the context selection mechanisms is combined with a target utterance U so as to force the interpretation of the latter in a restricted context C favourable to the integration of U in the cognitive environment of the hearer and to prevent an extended, unfavourable context C' from being activated.

As has been shown above, the key mechanism of this model of manipulative discourse is based on the interaction

between the process of interpretation of meaning as defined in relevance-theoretic pragmatics and the properties of the mental representations that constitute the cognitive environment of the addressee.

According to RT, the cognitive environment (CE) is an ordered set of contextual assumptions in which the order relation determines a degree of accessibility for each of the contextual assumptions that constitute it. Sperber & Wilson (1987, p.703) thus propose a general order for contextual assumptions in the cognitive environment:

At any moment, an individual has at his disposal a particular set of accessible contexts. There is first an initial context consisting of the assumptions used or derived in the last deduction performed. This initial context can be expanded in three directions: by adding to it assumptions used or derived in preceding deductions, by adding to it chunks of information taken from the encyclopaedic entries of concepts already present in the context or in the assumption being processed, and by adding input information about the perceptual environment. Thus each context except the initial one includes other contexts: The set of accessible contexts is partly ordered by the inclusion relation. This formal relation has a psychological counterpart: order of inclusion corresponds to order of accessibility.

On the basis of this theoretical hypothesis, we can better understand how manipulation strategies will attempt to derail the interpretative process: they will cause a set of contextual presumptions C', which is supposed to be relevant for the interpretation of the target utterance U, to not be activated during the interpretation of U. To achieve this they will play with the ordered structure of the cognitive environment of the hearer to ensure the greatest accessibility of a set of contextual assumptions C in which the cognitive effect of the target utterance U will meet the expectations of the principle of relevance.

CSC therefore proposes a mechanism of manipulative discourse that unfolds in two stages. It is a binary pragmatic strategy that attempts to control the process of selecting contextual

assumptions for a target utterance U by making a set of assumptions C so prominent that it becomes cognitively inevitable (to the detriment of another set C' known to the speaker):

Stages involved in manipulation through CSC

(i) constraint on context selection (CSC): $C \subset CE_H$ and C is more salient than another set C'

(ii) target utterance U is found relevant in C in CE_H

In view of the above, we can propose a pragmatic definition of manipulative discourse:

Manipulation is a discursive strategy deployed to ensure that a set of relevant contextual assumptions C', belonging to the hearer's cognitive environment in which the target utterance U is weakened or contradicted, is less accessible than another relevant set of assumptions C during the interpretation process.

In that sense, it appears that deceptive discourse seeks to exploit the cognitive principles that govern communication, which resonates with Sperber & Wilson's prediction of the limitations of the system: "[t]here may be many shortcomings, many cognitive sub-mechanisms that fail to deliver enough effect for the effort they require, many occasions when the system's resources are poorly allocated" (1995, p. 262). Sperber, Cara & Girotto (1995, p. 90) identified this same grain of sand in the mechanics of understanding as a form of incorrigible cognitive optimism that leads people to attribute very high reliability to their cognitive processes and to not call them into question. Our model precisely captures how these limitations might be exploited to fulfil manipulative.

The proposal we make in this paper is to consider puns, at least in part, as a specific form of deceptive discourse. In the following section we will show how puns use the very same interpretative mechanisms we described above to trigger their intended humorous effect.

4. Puns as deceptive strategies

We are vindicated in drawing this parallel between deceptive discourse and puns since both types of discourse strategies share a cognitive property: they both try to mislead the hearer. More specifically, following our model, both strategies ensure that the hearer interprets the utterance in a sub-optimal set of contextual assumptions. Thus, initially, both manipulation and puns try to restrict the interpretative mechanisms of the hearer by applying constraints on the processes governing context selection. In that sense they correspond to the same communicative strategy, whereby the speaker attempts to interfere with the cognitive processes that unfold during interpretation.

However, there is a big difference between the two strategies in that puns are *intended to be recognised* as attempts at derailing the interpretative process, while manipulation can only succeed to the extent that the hearer remains unaware of the interpretative trap he has fallen into. It follows from these remarks that puns can be regarded as a form of deceptive discourse in which a second context selection procedure takes place in order to correct the (erroneous) path of least effort followed during the first interpretative attempt. Thus going back to the proposed CSC model for deceptive discourse presented above, puns require that the hearer process C and C' sequentially in order to be successful, whereas the success of manipulation requires that the hearer never goes past C and that he never accesses C'.

In that respect, CSC offers a new take on puns by bringing out a central cognitive aspect of their functioning: puns are manipulative snippets whose communicative effect lies in the fact that they reveal themselves as attempts to trick the interpretative process. That is to say that puns can be regarded as combining manipulation with the revelation of this very prank.

As we will see in the next sub-section, in which we will analyse examples of humorous deceptive uses of language, puns rely on the presence of a trigger – for instance a lexical trigger – to induce the revelation of the manipulation for the hearer.

When he encounters that trigger, the hearer realises how the pun constrained his interpretative process, by forcing the comprehension of the pun down a salient interpretative path, which – upon processing of the trigger – turns out to be the wrong interpretation. As a result, when he hits the trigger, the hearer is forced to revise his interpretation and start the context selection procedure anew, thereby selecting a second subset of contextual assumptions whose salience has been increased during the processing of the trigger – C' in our model.

Humorous deceptive discourse is therefore advantageously re-analysed as a form of manipulation which is crucially revealed, along the following lines (mirroring the abovementioned manipulative strategies):

Stages involved in puns through CSC:
(i) constraint on context selection (CSC): $C \subset CE_H$ and C is more salient than another set C'
(ii) target utterance U is found relevant in C in CE_H
(iii) a trigger in U suddenly alerts to the existence and the salience of C'
(iv) target utterance U is found relevant in C' in CE_H

As we see in the schema above, steps (i)-(ii) are identical in both strategies. Humorous deceptive uses, however, combine these initial steps with a revelation – step (iii) – which leads to a re-interpretation of the target utterance in C' (step (iv)).

5. Analysing humorous deceptive discourse with CSC

In this section, we put the explanatory power of a CSC-based account of humorous strategies to the test by analysing some complex examples of humorous uses of language.

With our first example ((2) below), we focus on the parallel between manipulative discourse and humorous discourse. Indeed, based on the predictions made by a CSC approach of humorous strategies, we predict that the same forms of strategies

used to manipulate a hearer can be used for humorous purposes. In that respect, it seems quite revealing that certain forms of verbal humour, as they have been identified in the literature devoted to its study, offer a perfect match with structures that have been identified in the literature on fallacious argumentation. In the example below, we draw a parallel between a type of joke known as the skid and a type of manipulative argument known as the straw man fallacy.

Consider the following example due to Nash (1985; quoted in Goatly, 2012, p. 234).

(2) A: Now, you take the whale, that's just about the oldest fish in the ocean.

B: It isn't a fish. It's a mammal. The whale is a mammal.

A: Well the Bible says it's a fish. The holiest book in the world says it's a fish.

B: Look, they just didn't know enough in those days. They had a naive taxonomy. If it swam in the sea they classified it as a fish. We know better now, we know the whale is a mammal.

A: You're telling me the author of the Bible didn't know what he was doing? The Bible? The book you swear on in court?

According to Nash's categorisation of humorous exchanges this is an instance of skid: where from talking about the categorisation of whales, one ends up disputing the authority of the Bible.

It is quite revealing in that respect that the very same example can be analysed using an argumentation theory approach. In this second framework, the exchange above can be taken to instantiate a traditional case of straw man fallacy (see e.g. Lewiński & Oswald, 2013; Oswald & Lewiński, 2014 and references therein), which is defined as a refutational move in which the interlocutor displaces the focus of an opponent's argument towards another standpoint (or premise) misattributed to him, in an attempt to reject the initial standpoint on the grounds that the new standpoint is untenable. This is arguably the strategy adopted by A in this dialogue, as he tries to argue against the standpoint expressed by B (whales are not fish) by accusing B of

questioning the cultural and societal value of the Bible, which is clearly not a standpoint embraced by B during the exchange.[3]

In line with the predictions of the CSC model, the linguistic structure of a skid and that of a straw man can be shown to be identical and the above example can serve as an illustration for both types. The difference between the two discursive strategies is triggered by the hearer's ability to detect the constraint imposed on the interpretation of the initial standpoint through the strategy of misattribution. In the case of the skid, this attempt is made salient by the thematic distance between the original standpoint (whales are not fish) and the misattributed one (the Bible is not a cultural landmark). That is to say that for a skid to work as a joke, the misattribution attempt must be revealed by some trigger – in this instance topical irrelevance – while a straw man must keep the misattribution covert in order to achieve its intended manipulative effect.

In our second example ((3) below), we look at the kind of interpretative expectations generated when the hearer recognises that he is dealing with a pun. Due to the specificities of the comprehension process of puns described in the CSC model, the speaker can use the interpretative expectations triggered by the very recognition by the addressee that he is processing a pun to achieve certain communicative effects.

In the following example, which was part of an advertising campaign published in the United Kingdom, the international courier company UPS relies on the addressee's recognition of punning to communicate the intended message.

(3) "No time Toulouse"

3. We should clarify here that even though A's last turn is formulated as a sequence of questions, these can plausibly be taken to function as rhetorical questions, thus giving the utterance assertive force and thereby allowing us to postulate their (mis)attributive nature.

Figure 1 - British advertisement by UPS for their international courier service

In this ad, the comprehension process (of the main body text) fails to converge on any relevant subset of contextual assumptions C. In other words, the initial interpretation of no time Toulouse crashes and fails to deliver any meaningful representation for the utterance (see Yus' (2003) category of absurd jokes). However, the processing of the advertisement does not end there and upon re-inspection of the various textual elements in the ad, the addressee is able to retrieve a meaningful interpretation whereby there is no time to lose thanks to UPS as they will deliver your goods across Europe the very next day.

Crucially, in connection with the proposed model, the second interpretation is sought and arrived at because the addressee recognises that he is processing a pun, which as we saw before requires that a second interpretation be calculated when a trigger reveals the new interpretative path the cognitive system should take. For this second interpretative process to start, however, the addressee must correctly identify that he is interpreting a punning utterance. In our example, there are two main reasons that vindicate the addressee's expectation of a pun. The first expectation is triggered by the addressee's recognition that he is processing an advertisement which is a playful form of discourse that often resort to puns. The second expectation is the result of a culturally salient humorous usage of no time to lose

in the British culture. The phrase was indeed part of the very well-known absurd Monty Pythons' Flying Circus skit on a 'no time to lose advice centre' (1973). In other words, the phrase no time to lose/Toulouse is culturally associated with a pun.

As a consequence, the addressee is led to recognise that he is in the presence of a pun which demands that he finds a trigger in order to be able to process a second initially less salient interpretation. The complex strategy deployed by the advertiser in this case is fully predicted and explained by the account given of the interpretation of puns within the CSC model.

In order to take a closer look at the interpretative mechanisms underlying the processing of puns, we move on to our third example, which comes from an internet meme picturing a large wind turbine. The caption reads

(4) *"Renewable energy? I'm a big fan"*[4]

Figure 2 - Meme: I'm a big fan

4. Available at http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/3psqq4, last accessed 21.07.2017.

Here the humorous nature of the meme is built around the ambiguity of the term *fan*, which acts as the trigger which can either denote a supporter or a ventilator. Specifically, the funniness of the pun precisely derives from the relevant applicability of both definitions to the picture, either literally or figuratively, making this a double-retention pun (Dynel, 2010).

In this example, the context selection constraint lies in the question-answer format of the upper line of text. Upon reading it, identifying the consistency of the picture with the topic of the question and interpreting the question as a prompt for more information on the topic of renewable energy, the reader should form assumptions in C about what sort of contents will become relevant and therefore about what to expect next. Specifically, upon reading the first line he should expect to learn more about the speaker's opinion on renewable energy – and this is what the pun hopes to achieve in C. Now, by the time the bottom line has been read, the reader is left with an interpretative challenge: through mere linguistic parsing he does get to the idea that the speaker is a big supporter of renewable energy, but it remains unclear who the speaker is. The interpretation of the meme, which is then found wanting in terms of relevance, would be something like (5):

(5) $I_{\text{speaker unspecified}}$ am a big fan of renewable energy.

As a consequence, making the question-answer pair relevant in this unspecified context in which no speaker is straightforwardly identifiable remains problematic, and this is the incongruity that the reader faces. Once the incongruity is represented, a search for its resolution starts, and the obvious candidate to start looking for it is the lexeme *fan*, precisely by virtue of its polysemous nature. This is then presumably when a subset of the context C' is accessed, in which the second interpretation, i.e. the one resolving the incongruity, is secured. Here, this second (expanded) processing stage allows the reader to establish that the speaker behind the upper and bottom lines of the meme

is a personified wind turbine, namely the one represented in the photograph. As C expands into C', C is temporarily abandoned to make room for the interpretation found in C', as the bottom line gets enriched to 'I am a big ventilator' as the most relevant interpretation at this stage:

(6) $I_{\text{wind turbine depicted}}$ am a big fan of renewable energy.

Yet, it should be noted that both interpretations remain simultaneously valid, which is why this is categorised as a double-retention pun. In fact, in order to get the pun, you not only need to represent the ambiguity of *fan*; you also need both interpretations at the same time to understand that the speaker identified in the second interpretation provides an answer to the interpretative challenge found in the first (namely the incongruity of finding a statement in the first person singular with no immediately identifiable speaker). Moreover, it is vital to this pun that you recognise that both interpretations remain simultaneously valid because only this meta-level processing will resolve the incongruity.

The proximity between manipulation and humour is therefore also apparent in this example: both phenomena require a first processing stage where interpretation will be constrained within a subset C of the cognitive environment. The difference lies in the presence of a trigger in humorous discourse, which encourages the addressee to expand C into C', and which is crucially absent in deceptive discourse. Additionally, this example shows how the CSC model may be able to shed light on the specific interpretative constraints used in punning.

The last example we want to discuss is another internet meme; we believe it is relevant to our discussion inasmuch as it exploits the relationship between deception and humour in very intricate way. The meme depicts a sleeping lion with the following caption:

(7) "At any given time, the urge to sing 'The Lion Sleeps

Tonight' is just a whim away. A whim away, a whim away, a whim away...'[5]

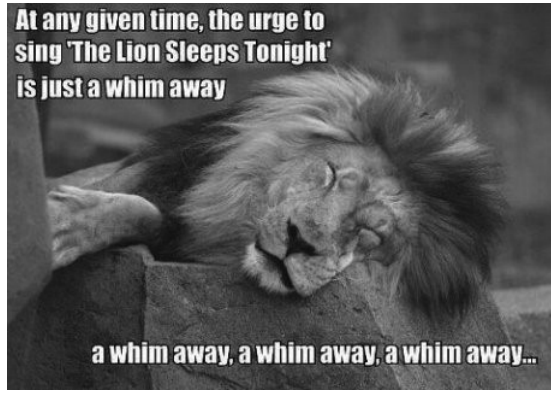

Figure 3 - Meme 'Lion sleeps tonight'

This pun functions in a way that is different from the previous one. Here there does not seem to be any lexical ambiguity. Only one interpretation of the text seems to be available, namely (8):

> (8) Singing the song 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' is just a whim away.

(8) thus seems to be the only interpretation of the stimulus, and we have a priori no linguistic clues prompting us to start enriching the context. There is no ambiguity, there does not seem to be any second meaning and we see no obvious trigger to signal any ambiguity of sorts. C' therefore seems to be semantically undefined, it not altogether empty. The incongruity here could be described in terms of the lack of relevance of the statement, which is difficult to connect to any purpose: why would

5. Available at https://www.memecenter.com/fun/839464/a-whim-away, last accessed 21.07.2017.

someone say that we feel the urge to sing that song at any given point? Not knowing what to do with the contextual relevance of the text, upon encountering this meme, the reader would a priori be at a loss. Nevertheless, at the same time he should presumably be aware that the material presented therein is meant to be humorous as there is room to suspect that a generic effect will obtain here. Such realisation and expectation, we argue, will act as a switch that triggers further processing of the data.

The obvious candidate that the reader would focus on to start exploring alternative paths to relevance is the repetition of 'a whim away' at the end. The repetition of linguistic strings is informationally redundant, which is why it is usually used to fulfil other purposes, notably rhetorical ones. In this meme, we submit that the uninformative repetition will trigger a search for relevance deployed on additional linguistic dimensions, in particular the phonetic dimension. Moving beyond semantic considerations to explore phonetic ones, the reader is likely to realise that 'a whim away' phonetically resembles the chorus of the song referred to. Originally *uyimbube* in IsiZulu,[6] meaning 'You are a lion', the chorus having evolved to sound like 'wimoweh' in later versions. The humorousness of the pun therefore lies in the fact that it is only after a second processing stage that you are led to access a context C' in which the repetition of a specific string becomes so salient that it triggers the realisation of the phonetic parallel between what is written and the chorus of the song. The context selection constraint here lies in (i) the absence of linguistic ambiguity, which generates the incongruity out of contextual irrelevance, (ii) the generic effect linked to the memetic nature of the material and (iii) the repetition; the incongruity is then resolved by the recognition of phonetic resemblance scoping over the repeated sequence and the chorus of the song referred to in the first part of the caption.

But there is more to this pun. In fact, while our account

6. On the origin of the song, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lion_Sleeps_Tonight.

captures the standard two-stage processing of puns, it also allows us to capture an additional effect that obtains in this meme, which is, this time, a purely manipulative one – and, as such, one that may escape the reader's awareness. We have seen how the pun achieves its relevance by generating an incongruity that is then resolved. But in this particular pun, something else happens: in the process of figuring out phonetic resemblance, the reader might tentatively be led to sing the song, if only for himself. And if this happens, then the first part of the caption becomes true: at any given time, we indeed feel the urge to sing 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight'![7] This means that the pun is self-referential. Depending on the recognition of this fact, two scenarios can be envisaged. If the reader does not realise that he has been tricked into singing the song, then the meme will be processed as a pun, end of the story – and, crucially, manipulation will have succeeded, the hearer being left none the wiser. However, if the reader becomes aware of the self-referential nature of the text, he will realise that he has been successfully manipulated into singing the song and he is forced to admit, from direct first-hand experience, that the meme is indeed true. In other words, he has experiential confirmation that the interpretation yielded in context C actually was the case. In such case, the generic effect is cancelled out, since the reader is led to realise that the pun was simply instrumental to fulfil a manipulative intent. And, provided the reader has some measure of self-mockery, an additional humorous effect will arise out of the amusement of having been 'caught'.

In cognitive terms, this multi-layered example is interesting for its unique combination of humour and manipulation. Like all puns, it starts off as manipulation (through context selection constraint) by forcing a constrained interpretation, which is then contextually enriched as the punning nature of the meme is identified, thereby triggering the humorous effect. But the in-

7. This analysis obviously assumes that the reader knows the song referred to. If the reader does not know it, chances are that the pun – and its additional manipulative twist – will fail.

terpretative mechanism does not stop there, as it may result in a final step which shapes up as the realisation of a deeper-level manipulative attempt (which can or cannot be identified as such) by which the reader is led to sing the referred song.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter we have defended the idea that puns can be analysed as instances of deception that are revealed as deceptive strategies, and that this is actually pivotal in their success as instances of humorous discourse. We have presented how a theoretical account meant to capture deceptive discourse, namely the Context Selection Constraint model, can be used to account for puns on the processing side, by looking at the type of interpretative constraints that define them. We have also illustrated how these cognitive processes work by applying the model to a range of examples and in doing so we have illustrated what a pragmatic model of puns that takes on board their proximity with deception should look like.

To conclude, we would like to stress two ideas. The first is that the sort of cognitive mechanisms accounted for here are general enough to warrant an applicability of the model to additional types of humour. While we devoted this chapter to puns, similar accounts can be proposed to capture different types of jokes, for instance cases of humour built around fallacious argumentation. The example of the skid we discussed (example (2) above) is in this respect telling. These jokes precisely work by calling attention to the fallacious nature of the reasoning involved – here in the form of a straw man fallacy, but there are countless other examples involving circular reasoning, false analogies, etc. – and they are in this sense representative of the more general scheme of incongruity resolution. The second idea we believe it is important to highlight is that the sort of research presented here stands to benefit greatly from interdisciplinary convergence. We illustrated a clear bridge to be exploited with the field of argumentation theory, but we foresee other disciplinary can-

didates to be compatible with the model presented here. This is because the cognitive nature of the CSC model, in principle, makes it a viable tool in the explanation of phenomena whose success bear on the exploitation of informational selection in the course of meaning derivation tasks – and that includes virtually all instances of communicative phenomena which rely on such mechanisms along the humour-deception continuum.

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