

Resonating humor

A corpus-based analysis of creative cross-turn parallelisms in spontaneous conversations

According to Clark's (1996) *joint action hypothesis*, language use fundamentally involves the coordination of individual linguistic acts and broader joint actions between participants of a usage event. Although this view on language as resonating on both psychological and social processes may seem uncontroversial to usage-based models such as cognitive linguistics (CL), the social-interactive dimension of language use is traditionally relegated to the periphery in cognitive research (Kemmer & Barlow 2000: ix; Deppermann 2002; Tummers et al. 2005). Only recently, a number of studies in cognitive-functional linguistics have started to explore the cognitive structure and interpersonal dynamics of interactional discourse in response to a growing appeal within CL to extend its scope of investigation towards authentic, multi-agent discourse (Langacker 2001; Dirven 2005; Deppermann 2007).

One of the key features of multi-agent discourse that provides a valuable gateway to the cognitive-social underpinnings of joint actions is the establishment of structural mapping relations across turns in a conversational setting, as described in the model of 'dialogic syntax' (Du Bois 2001, 2003; Sakita 2006). Whereas traditional linear syntax describes structural relations *within* single sentences, dialogic syntax deals with structural similarities *between* immediately co-present segments in a broader conversational context. A key concept of this model is *resonance*, which is defined as the 'activation of intrinsic potential affinity across instances of dialogic language use' (Du Bois 2001: 8). In the present paper, we zoom in on two dimensions of resonance activation that have not been fully developed in dialogic syntax: (i) the *creative* cognitive processes involved in establishing cross-turn mapping relations, and (ii) the *interpersonal* aims and effects of resonance activation in multi-agent discourse. The example in (1) illustrates the potential of resonating structure for communicative, creative and interpersonal purposes (acknowledgment, disagreement, irony, etc.):

- (1) Marci: [(TSK) Don't forget] to buy yourself a cookie sheet,
.. before you go to make cookies
Kevin: [And don't forget] to take the Tupperware out of the oven,
Wendy: you] --
Kevin: before you turn it on
(Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, Pt I, Appease the Monster) (Sakita 2006: 470)

In order to systematically analyze the impact of creative and humorous resonance activation, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative corpus study, on the basis of the Corinth Corpus (Corpus Interactional Humor), a newly compiled Dutch corpus of spontaneous interactions. First, we show how the technique of lexical chaining can be used to automatically retrieve cross-turn resonance patterns in multi-agent discourse settings. Second, on the basis of the output of the corpus retrieval technique we propose a typology of creative resonance phenomena. We show how speakers opportunistically reframe linguistic input at different levels of linguistic representation, exploring the vast potential of language in its semantic and sociocommunicative function.

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