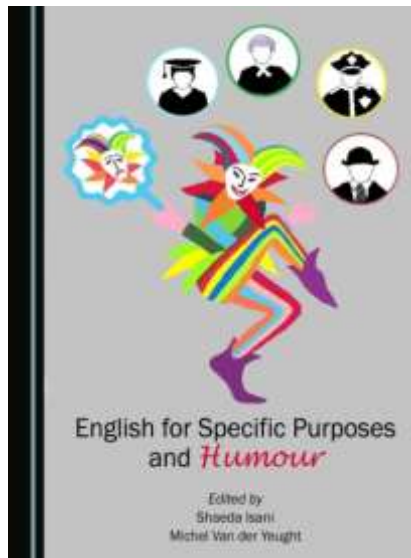


BOOK REVIEW



TICKLING THE MIND: EXPLORING HUMOUR IN ESP

Shaeda Isani and Michel Van der Yeught (Eds.). ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AND HUMOUR (2023), Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 335 pp., ISBN 978-1-5275-9205-6 (HBK); ISBN 978-1-0364-0126-9 (PBK, 2024).

The book *English for specific purposes and humour* delves into the intersection of humour studies and English language education, drawing from various disciplinary perspectives including linguistics, subject-domain specialisms, and humour theories. While humour studies gained academic recognition in the late 20th century, its application to language teaching within specialized communities is a relatively recent development. Back in 1976, the International Conference on Humour and Laughter was held in Cardiff, and there was general amazement and disbelief that researchers from all over the world would come to have conference such as this (Foss, 1977), and that academia would show any increased interest in humour as an opportunity for further research.

Through detailed analyses and case studies, this book underscores the multifaceted nature of humour in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), emphasising its role in fostering positive interpersonal relations and its potential implications for language learners and practitioners. It sheds light on the strategic use of humour in marketing, workplace communication, and pedagogical settings, highlighting its socio-psychological functions and its impact on cultural perceptions and language acquisition.

The volume explores three dominant theories in humour studies: incongruity-resolution theory, superiority theory, and relief theory, analysing their manifestations in linguistic expressions, particularly punning, within specific contexts such as advertising and workplace interactions. It examines how humour serves as a tool for communication, relationship-building, and even power dynamics

within organizational cultures, showcasing both benign and malign aspects of humour in the workplace.

English for specific purposes and humour is organized into six parts, each focusing on a distinct aspect of humour within specialized contexts. Part I *Court jesters* explores the use of humour in legal language and common law cultures. Part II *Humour in uniform* investigates the psycho-social functions of humour in police and military contexts. Part III *Bankers, brokers and jokers* is concerned with humour in financial and banking domains. Part IV *Lab and tech humour* examines humour within scientific and engineering discourse. Part V *Pedagogy and stand-up comedy* discusses humour in educational settings and across different discourse domains. Lastly, Part VI *Marketing fifty shades of nails* focuses on humour in marketing, specifically in the context of nail varnish advertising. Through these diverse perspectives, the book offers a comprehensive exploration of the role that humour plays in specialized English language contexts.

Part I comprises two chapters and explores the intricate relationship between humour and the legal domain, offering insights into how legal language and power dynamics manifest through comedic elements within common law cultures.

In Chapter One, Miguel Ángel Campos-Pardillos focuses on the pedagogical use of humour in legal language learning. Specifically, this author explores the integration of humour in legal education by presenting the case of a legal document titled "I Wish You a (Reasonably) Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year (Twelve (12) Months from the Date Hereof)". Through this example, the chapter examines how humour can aid in the comprehension and retention of complex legal terminology and concepts, but also gives an insight on how teachers are sometimes afraid to use humour in their classrooms due to factors such as time frame, losing control, or appearing nonprofessional (Morrison, 2008).

In Chapter Two, Shaeda Isani examines the intricate power dynamics present in curial humour within common law cultures. Isani analyses the interactions between the bench and the bar, shedding light on the ways in which humour is employed to navigate and negotiate authority within legal contexts. By scrutinizing instances of humour in courtroom settings, the chapter elucidates the nuanced dynamics of legal discourse and the role of humour in shaping professional relationships and hierarchies.

The next two chapters in Part II unveil the multifaceted role of humour within uniformed professions, its psycho-social functions and manifestation as a specialized social and linguistic register.

In Chapter Three, Audrey Cartron focuses on the psycho-social functions of humour within the context of English for Police Purposes. Police humour has been reported to be important for stress relief and detachment from dark aspects of policing (Gayadeen & Phillips, 2016). Cartron conducts a thorough investigation into how humour serves as a tool for communication, relationship-building, and stress relief within police forces. Through empirical analysis and theoretical frameworks,

the chapter explores the detailed ways in which humour functions as a coping mechanism and a means of fostering camaraderie among police officers.

Chapter Four explores the distinctive nature of US Military Humour as a specialized social and linguistic register. Anthony Saber examines the unique linguistic features and social dynamics that characterise humour within military contexts, shedding light on its role in reinforcing group identity, maintaining morale, and navigating the complexities of military life. As some scholars have argued, humour is part of military experience and it is a very important tool for socializing or calming nerves (Ben-Ari & Sion, 2005). Through detailed case studies and linguistic analysis, this chapter offers valuable insights into the ways in which humour operates as a form of social currency and solidarity within the armed forces.

Part III of the book contains four chapters and focuses on *Bankers, brokers and jokers* to search within the world of humour within financial institutions. It examines the convergence of finance, language, and humour, particularly within banking discourse and language of the financial sector. It offers insights into how humour is strategically employed by financial professionals and explores its impact on communication dynamics and insider-outsider relationships within these specialized domains.

In Chapter Five, Laurence Harris investigates the phenomenon of *Bankspeak humour* through an analysis of the Governor of the Bank of England's Mansion House Speeches. In particular, the author examines how linguistic playfulness and irony are utilized within the speeches of high-ranking banking officials, exploring the ways in which humour serves as a rhetorical device to convey complex financial concepts and maintain public confidence in the banking sector. He claims that all humour in relation to the money and banks is intentional and deserves a serious study.

Chapter Six, authored by one of the book coeditors, analyses the deciphering of insider/outsider humour in specialized languages. Michel Van der Yeught employs an intentional approach to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in insider jokes within professional circles. Through linguistic analysis and sociolinguistic theories, the chapter sheds light on the role of humour in constructing and reinforcing group identities, as well as in negotiating power dynamics between insiders and outsiders.

The two chapters in Part IV explore the lighter side of scientific and technical fields, presenting a collection of humorous anecdotes and insights. From witty observations in academic discourse to amusing tales from marine engineering, these chapters offer a refreshing perspective on the often-serious world of laboratory and technology environments.

In Chapter Seven, Larissa Manerko examines the incorporation of humour within scientific academic discourse. With her meticulous analysis, Manerko unveils the strategic use of humour as a rhetorical tool in scientific writings, conferences, and publications. Through scrutinizing linguistic and contextual cues, the chapter illuminates how humour enhances engagement, conveys intricate concepts, and cultivates scholarly communities. Manerko's exploration highlights the multifaceted

role of humour in scientific discourse, elucidating its capacity to bridge understanding and foster camaraderie among researchers. This complex examination underscores the significance of humour as an effective communicative device within the scientific community. Verbal wordplay and metaphors are common in scientific discourse, but interpretations range from amusing to ambiguous depending on the recipient's cognitive schemata and knowledge. This variability underscores the cognitive focus of linguistic humour research, as it seeks to understand how humour is perceived and processed within scientific communication.

Silvia Molina-Plaza's Chapter Eight takes a multimodal and cognitive approach to humour in the marine engineering context. Molina-Plaza discusses how humour is conveyed through various modes – such as text, images, and gestures within the specialized domain of marine engineering – and claims that affiliative humour style aims to unite specialized community members. By applying cognitive theories of humour, the chapter uncovers the cognitive processes underlying the comprehension and appreciation of engineering-related jokes, and anecdotes, offering valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics of technical professions.

Part V comprises two chapters and explores the intersection of pedagogy and stand-up comedy, offering scholarly perspectives on humour within educational contexts and specialized language learning. Katia Peruzzo analyses the use of humour in mental health TED Talks, revealing how speakers employ it to engage audiences and destigmatize mental health discussions. By scrutinizing humour targets, the study unveils its impact on audience perception and understanding. An extension could involve examining talks by domain specialists lacking personal experiences with mental disorders, exploring humour's efficacy in destigmatization. This deeper analysis would provide insights into humour's role in communication within mental health discourse, refining practices and sensitivities involved.

In Chapter Ten Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli focuses on the analysis of humour across discourse domains and ESP genres. The author employs a corpus-assisted approach to examine the linguistic features and communicative functions of humour within specialized language contexts. By analysing humorous expressions across different genres and discourse domains, the chapter provides valuable insights into the role of humour in enhancing language learning and communication skills among ESP learners.

Part VI of the book comprises only one chapter and explores innovative marketing strategies. Isabel Espinosa-Zaragoza analyses how a US-based cosmetics company uses linguistic creativity to establish an international brand name because, through paronymic colour name games, the company captures consumer attention, fosters brand recognition, and influences purchase decisions. Espinosa-Zaragoza's examination highlights the pivotal role of linguistic ingenuity in marketing effectiveness, illustrating how humour and linguistic play enhance consumer engagement and differentiate products in the competitive cosmetics market.

The comprehensive exploration of the diverse manifestations and applications of humour across various professional domains and linguistic contexts makes

English for specific purposes and humour a valuable contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship. Through meticulous analyses and insightful case studies, the book illuminates the intricate interplay between humour, language, and professional practice. Each section offers unique perspectives, ranging from the psycho-social functions of humour in uniformed professions to its role in scientific discourse and educational settings.

The chapters provide intricate insights into the communicative, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions of humour, shedding light on its power to foster engagement, facilitate learning, and navigate complex social dynamics. Nevertheless, while the book effectively highlights the significance of humour in specialized contexts, some chapters could benefit from deeper theoretical engagement and methodological rigour. Additionally, a more extensive exploration of cross-cultural variations in humour and its implications for language teaching and professional communication could enrich some scholarly contributions. All in all, and despite these minor limitations, this volume serves as a valuable resource for researchers, educators, and practitioners seeking to understand and harness the transformative potential of humour within specialized domains. It offers a thought-provoking examination of the multifaceted nature of humour and its implications for language education and professional practice. Moreover, its interdisciplinary approach and rich empirical insights make it a commendable addition to the growing, but still scarce, literature on humour studies and applied linguistics.

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