Frame Shifting

• Linguistic utterances usually build up clear and coherent conception of a state of affairs.

• Meanings of words/phrases constrain interpretation of following words/phrases
  – The United States of __________
  – Varicose ____
  – I went to Home Depot to buy a board.
  – I took my complaint to the board.
Frame Shifting

By the time Mary had had her fourteenth child, she’d finally run out of names to call her husband.

Everyone had so much fun diving from the tree into the swimming pool we decided to put in a little water.
Frame Shifting

• Joke quality
  – New frame is amusing
  – Sudden shift enhances enjoyment of frame
Frame Shifting

• Frame built up creates slots for expected objects

When I asked the bartender for something cold and full of rum, he recommended his wife.

• common part of customer/bartender interaction is bartender recommending a drink
• slot created for drink
• at wife reanalysis forced
• Common joke themes: sex, alcohol
Frame Shifting

- Frames include knowledge of goals as well as associated entities
- Joke may rely on thwarting presupposed goal

1. Arguments between couples are healthy; sometimes they even prevent marriage.
   - First clause invites interpretation that utterance will provide advice on staying together (default desirable goal)

2. Now that the Hollywood couple has ironed out the divorce settlement, they can finally go ahead with their wedding
   - Presumed goal: after divorce, couples want to go their separate ways and establish independent lives
Frame Shifting

- Nonconventional meanings
  - Reframe results in reanalysis of lexical item meaning
  - They redecorated the bar with new drunks.
    - Redecorate – conventional meaning to change interior furnishings
      - improved appearance
    - Drunks construed as furniture
  - He told me he just bought a set of balloon tires and I told him that I didn’t even know he owned a balloon
    - Conventional interpretation for NN compound
    - Reanalysis of NN relationship forced
Frame Shifting

- Idioms
  - She told him he looked like a million, and she meant every year.
    - Conventional expression *look like a million (dollars)* – look great
    - Switch from one non-compositional meaning to another – compliment to insult

- He didn’t kick the bucket, he kicked the bucket’s ass.
Frame Shifting

- Nonstandard meanings of phrases

1. He asked if I’d join him in the pool.
2. He asked if I’d join him in a cigarette.

He asked if I’d join him in a bowl of soup.
I said ‘okay’, but I’m not I’m sure we’ll both fit

One good way to invest in the country is to buy a congressman.
Humor Theory

• Joke quality in frameshifting
  - Conventional/unfunny frame built up
  - Sudden shift triggered at unexpected word
  - New frame is coherent and amusing

• Humor theory
  - Incongruity theory
  - Superiority theory
  - Humor is the result of situational comprehension which can be linguistically based or not
Humor Theory

• Incongruity theory (Nerhardt, 1976)
  
  – We find humor in the unexpected
  – Greater the deviation from expectation, greater the humor
  – Unexpected situation must be safe
Humor Theory

• Incongruity may be necessary but not sufficient for humor

  By the time he ate fourteen donuts, he was hungry.

  By the time Mary had had her fourteenth child, she ran out of names to call her husband.
Humor Theory

- Incongruity and resolution theory (Jones; Schultz; Suls, 1972)
  - Humor results when perceiver meets with an incongruity and then is motivated to resolve the incongruity either by retrieval of information in the joke or from his own storehouse of information.
  - Humor is perceived when incongruity is resolved.
Humor Theory

• Puns
  – Puns take advantage of homophony (or almost so)
  – Resolution when double entendre discovered

  *Listening to a bear shuffle through one's belongings can be an in tents experience.*

  *The racecar driver's wheels finally wore out. Maybe it's time to retire.*

  *A bear walks into a bar and says I’ll have a beer...*
Humor Theory

and some chips

bartender: alright, but why the big pause?
Humor Theory

• Slapstick, pratfalls, silly humor
  - Resolution is not necessarily a part of humor either
  - The Three Stooges – incongruity
  - Coyote/Roadrunner – incongruity
  - Carlin - verbal incongruity
    - Gobbledygook
Humor Theory

• Schultz Study
  – Children ages 6, 8, 10 and 12 rated funniness of jokes in original form, incongruity removed form, resolution removed form

Original form:
  • Doctor, come at once! Our baby swallowed a fountain pen!”
  • “I’ll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?”
  • “Using a pencil”
Humor Theory

Resolution removed form:
• Doctor, come at once! Our baby swallowed a rubber band!”
• “I’ll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?”
• “Using a pencil”

Incongruity removed form:
• Doctor, come at once! Our baby swallowed a fountain pen!”
• “I’ll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?”
• “We don’t know what to do.”
Humor Theory

- Result:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Funniest to Least funny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o. and over</td>
<td>Original &gt; no resolution &gt; no incongruity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 y.o.</td>
<td>Original or no resolution &gt; no incongruity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Incongruity more critical to funniness than resolution
Humor Theory

• Superiority/Derision theory
  
  – (Gruner) humor as winning
    • victory --> ‘thrashing’ laugh
    • laughter proportionate to struggle

“Man is a curious, aggressive and competitive creature…a primate who will strive to ‘get what he wants’ even by beating someone else out of it. And a creature who can even get pleasure out of symbolically beating a fellow human being through enjoyment of that character’s misfortune or flaw.”
Humor Theory

- Puns with attitude

An Arkansas State trooper pulls over a pickup truck on I-40. He says to the driver, "Got any ID?" The driver says, "Bout what?"
Humor Theory

• Jokes have familiar themes
  – Sex
  – Bodily functions
  – Death
  – Destruction
  – Ethnic
  – Lawyers, Doctors, Clergy
  – Alcohol
Humor Theory

- Sex, bodily functions

(Gruner) – “dirty jokes differ from clean jokes only in subject matter and language, not in form and technique”

Two engineering students, Lennie and Virgil, were walking across campus when Virgil said, "Where did you get such a great bike?" Lennie replied, "Well, I was walking along yesterday minding my own business when a beautiful woman rode up on this bike. She threw the bike to the ground, took off all her clothes and said, 'Take what you want.'"
Humor Theory

• Joke frames or 'comic scripts'

  - Jokes make use of familiar introductions that cue the following as a joke

    “An Irishman walks out of a bar”
    “Take my wife, please.” (Henny Youngman)

  - Jokes often uttered within context -- party atmosphere, stand up routine, etc.

    “I’d kill for a Nobel Peace Prize” - Steven Wright