Book review

Kuczok, Marcin, Stwora, Anna & Świerkot, Mariola (eds.). (2019).
Explorations in Humour Studies: Humour Research Project. **Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.**

The book *Explorations in Humour Studies: Humour Research Project* edited by Marcin Kuczok, Anna Stwora & Mariola Świerkot is an interesting piece of reading for all eager to look into the details of analyses of different topics on humour. The volume consists of 11 chapters, Appendix and the information about the Contributors. The title rightly underlines the practical, general character of the study, and broad scope of the papers included in the volume. The authors deal with different disciplines, genres, timespan and cultural backgrounds, e.g. American, British, Chinese, Polish, and Romanian. The collection is diversified and valuable, so the book is an interesting read.

   Chapter I: Introduction to Explorations in Humour Studies: Humour Research Project by Marcin Kuczok, Anna Stwora & Mariola Świerkot. In this chapter, the editors present definitions of humour and approaches to humour research from the perspectives of language, culture and media studies, showing their expertise in the disciplines and preparing a theoretical background to be explored in the chapters that follow. The general aim of the first chapter is to introduce the main issues discussed in the volume and explain the reasons standing behind the idea of the whole publication. The next three chapters show different aspects of humour in the Chinese culture and language related issues.

   Chapter II: Culture and comedy Among Disney deuteragonists: A sociolinguistic analysis of humour in Mulan, by Taylor Breckles. The author describes film as a sociological tool, including topic of the "sidekick" as a comic sociological character trope, discussing also the genre of the *Mulan* movie and presents a partial summary of the plot. The sociolinguistic analysis of funny quotes from one particular scene is provided, based on Propp's (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale* and Attardo's (1994, 2008) humour theories classification. The humorous aspects of Disney productions are discussed in a convincing way, pointing out the possibilities to combine literary and film analyses to study the cultural force and values of certain movies perceived as cultural markers.

   Chapter III: Analysis of humour translation from Chinese to Polish in 'Balzac and The Little Chinese Seamstress' by Izabella Drozd. The author presents the advantages and disadvantages of different types of audio-visual translation (subtitling, voice off, voice over, and dubbing), introduces the differences between the Western and the Chinese view on humour, and discusses the problems of humour translation to show a very detailed comparison between the original text and its translation in the case study that uses the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (Attardo 1994) and proves its usefulness as a tool for translators of humorous dialogues. The paper is interesting both for translators and the speakers of Polish fascinated with the Chinese language.

   Chapter IV: "Hey, why aren't you laughing? 'At the same time' and 'colleagues'… Do you get it?!" The understanding of Chinese word-play by Polish students by Katarzyna Knoll. The author presents some information about Chinese humour, especially its different forms, and

points out the cultural role of homophony in the Chinese language. The paper is a description of an interesting study of investigating Polish students' understanding of Chinese jokes based on homophones. The jokes were evaluated (on the 1-5 scale of funniness) by both 12 native speakers of Mandarin and by 12 Polish learners of Mandarin. The comparison of the amusement among the Polish students and the Chinese appreciation of jokes was conducted and interesting results were obtained, suggesting that the teaching of the Mandarin language should include more exercises that allow the development of sensitiveness to the possible double meaning of Chinese expressions in learners coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Chapter V: "Who put the sword in the stone in the first place?" – Humour in subverted tropes in Terry Pratchett's Discworld Series, by Mariola Świerkot. A well-written paper analysing humorous effects in fantasy novels consists of several interesting parts including: The allure of the familiar – the power of tropes in literary and cultural texts; Expecting the unexpected – *Discworld* and its inspirations; A trickster's toolbox – elements of the theoretical foundation of *Discworld*'s humour; A witch by any other name – a play on Shakespeare in *Wyrd Sisters*; Guardsmen and dragons – *Guards! Guards!* vs. legends of the old. In the well-conducted analysis, the author proves that tropes are "a powerful storytelling tool" (p. 76).

Chapter VI: The dangers of ethnic humour – The curious case of Irish stereotyping by Małgorzata Furgacz. The author presents Irish stereotypes in different genres seen in the historical background. She writes about the following: Historical backdrop of Irish America; The anti-Irish sentiment in cartoons and caricatures; and The stereotyping force of Irish jokes and gibes. The works of Christie Davies – the recognised ethnic humour researcher[1] – are rightly used as methodological tools. The paper is accompanied by precisely described pictures. This informative chapter is well structured and pleasant to read.

Chapter VII: "If we don't have a sense of humour, we lack a sense of perspective": Hi/story of humour in visual arts by Małgorzata Wronka. The author in the first part of the chapter gives information about different theories of humour, and in the second one, she describes chronologically comic aspects of visual art. Her pointing out of different aspects of humour in visual artefacts is highly interesting, especially taking into consideration the fact that the chapter is nicely designed and well illustrated. It includes examples of early Egyptian, Greek and Roman art, together with the medieval Persian and Flemish artists' works. French Renaissance and contemporary art pieces are also introduced and skilfully analysed.

Chapter VIII: Types of comic and stereotypes in Ion Luca Caragiale's Play A Stormy Night, by Irina Vrabie. The paper introduces the play written by "one of the most representative Romanian writers employing humour" (p. 117), depicting Romanian society at the beginning of the 19th century. By presenting how social status, stereotypes and comic language could be involved in the analysis of characters (e.g. an adulterous wife trying to keep up appearances), the author gives us insight into culture-specific issues, but also into universal problems of people's weaknesses and different ways used to hide them. The introduction of comic characters and discussions about the stereotypes are also included in the chapter. The background knowledge about the author and the play is given, together with a brief description of the historical, political and social situation of Romania on the days when the play was being written.

The next two chapters deal with different aspects of multimodal advertising discourse.

Chapter IX: The thin invisible line – Between funny and distasteful multimodal advertising discourse by Anna Stwora. This paper is well-developed from a theoretical point of view. The *General Theory of Verbal Humour* framework (Attardo 1994) is competently applied to the analysis of advertisements. The author examines "whether there is any line between the appealing and the appalling in contemporary advertising discourse" (p. 129) by using qualitative

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[1] It is worth mentioning that humorous journals have special issues dedicated to his memory (e.g. *The European Journal of Humour Research* 2017, *Humour: International Journal of Humour Research* 2019).

analysis and carefully prepared questionnaires distributed among 130 participants. The questionnaires used for the study are included in the Appendix, so the experiment can be validly repeated.

Chapter X: Towards enhancement, distraction or oblivion – Studying the impact of humorous language in advertising by Anna Stwora & Grzegorz Zemełka. The paper presents the results of a "survey checking how humorous language affects memory for ads" (p. 153). Some of the subchapters include the following topics: Emotion measurement in advertising; Language for humorous purposes; The effects of humour on attention (positive and negative). The study of 10 advertisements was carried out in the form of questionnaires distributed among students. The data retrieved from 52 respondents was analysed in a detailed way. The study sheds light on the effects of using humour in advertisements. We could agree with the authors of the paper that this subject is indeed a very promising area of study from "both the linguistic and marketing point of view" (p. 171).

Chapter XI: Understanding the online humour in the example of American political cartoons by Beata Bury. The last chapter of the book deals with research on political cartoons, and the role of humour in this popular genre. The author provides both the qualitative analyses and the illustrative material consisting of the cartoons featuring Donald Trump and comments on his presidency. The chapter can be both interesting and entertaining not only for scholars, but also for a more general audience.

Conclusions: All the above-discussed chapters are written with a good knowledge of the theoretical background in humour studies and are informative on how to do practical research on different humorous genres. It is worth mentioning that the contributors – mostly young doctoral students or PhDs full of enthusiasm and fresh ideas – produced thorough studies that could be inspirational for their peers and other academics.

The volume may be interesting for both experienced humour scholars and those who want to start their adventure with humour research. Since it covers various intriguing subjects, it can be of interest to philologists, cultural and media studies researchers, linguists and literary scholars, historians, artists and the general public, who want to get some insights into the rapidly-developing, multidisciplinary area of contemporary humour research – the revealing and pleasant path to be followed.

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