



# Review of *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* by Francisco Yus

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**Abstract**— This review offers a critical examination of Francisco Yus's *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* (2023), a comprehensive work that systematically applies Relevance Theory within a cyberpragmatic framework to the analysis of internet humour. The book's eight chapters progress from theoretical foundations and incongruity-resolution typologies, through definitions and classifications of internet humour, to contextual constraints interactive humour on messaging apps, humour on social networking sites, meme-mediated communication, and non-propositional affective effects. This review highlights the book for extending Relevance Theory into online communication, integrating it with Incongruity-Resolution Theory, and offering a replicable analytical framework supported by rich empirical data across messaging apps, social networking sites, and memes. However, three limitations are noted: the absence of a concluding synthesis, a somewhat limited scope in explaining humorous meaning, and issues with the presentation of visual materials. Overall, the book is deemed as a valuable resource for pragmatics, discourse analysis and internet communication research.



**Keywords**— *Cognitive Pragmatics, Cyberpragmatics, Internet humour, Memes, Relevance Theory*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the internet becomes deeply embedded in our daily life and online communication turns indispensable, internet humour has emerged as a notable topic. While existing research lacks a strong cognitive-pragmatic foundation to explain how humour is generated, interpreted, and contextualized in digital environments. Against this circumstance, the book entitled *Pragmatics of Internet Humour*, published in 2023 and authored by Francisco Yus, addresses this gap by systematically applying Relevance Theory to online humorous communication.

This work not only advances theoretical integration between cyberpragmatics, cognitive linguistics and

humour studies but also offers a robust analytical lens for examining multi-modal, interactive, and collectively produced digital discourse. The book provides significant insights into interface construction, audience participation, and meaning negotiation in network community, making it a valuable resource for scholars in cognitive-pragmatics, media studies, and digital communication, as well as for content creators and platform designers seeking to understand the mechanics of internet humour generation and engagement.

## II. REVIEW OF EACH CHAPTER

This book consists of 8 chapters. Chapter 1 presents a clear panorama for the whole book, preparing us to delve

deeply into the realm of internet humour. It achieves this by establishing the book's theoretical foundation in Relevance Theory and cognitive pragmatics, arguing that humour arises not from textual content itself but from inferential and contextualization processes performed by audiences. It also outlines key mechanisms such as explicature development, implicature derivation, and context retrieval, through which humorous effects are generated. The author emphasizes the predictability of inferential strategies, which humour creators exploit by guiding interpretations and then subverting expectations. Furthermore, the chapter highlights distinctive features of internet-mediated humour, including new user roles, multi-modal discourse forms, interactive interfaces, and diverse, active audiences. These internet-specific factors necessitate an adaptation of classic Relevance Theory assumptions, particularly regarding intention, context accessibility, and interpretive responsibility. This chapter concludes by summarizing the main content of each chapter, which lays the groundwork for readers to explore a relevance-theoretic analysis of internet humour.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth exploration of the relationship among Relevance Theory, humour and internet communication. It firstly outlines foundational concepts of Relevance Theory, highlighting the notions of intention, inference, and the inherent drive for relevance-seeking. It also distinguishes between the cognitive principle of relevance, which governs general attention focus toward potentially relevant inputs, and the communicative principle of relevance, which applies specifically to intentional communication. Building upon Relevance Theory, this chapter provides that humour comprehension fundamentally aligns with general communicative principles, where the human cognitive system is geared towards maximizing relevance by seeking a positive effectiveness between cognitive effects and processing effort. The addressers can take advantage of some inferential strategies to trigger humorous effect such as logical forms, reference assignment and disambiguation. Additionally, this chapter attaches great importance to the dynamic influences of context and mutuality of information on comprehending humour, which will lead to various plans and expectation of humour-generating. The last section specifies the incongruity-resolution humorous

strategy, which is divided into discourse-based type and frame-based type. It further proposes a typology of twelve incongruity-resolution patterns, systematically combining parameters of incongruity type—discourse and frame, location--setup and punchline, and resolution type—discourse-based, frame-based and implication-based. The included content all illustrates the accessibility of Relevance Theory into the analysis of internet humour, which lays a solid theoretical foundation for the discussion of internet-specific issues in the following chapters of this book.

Chapter 3 highlights the specific scope of internet humour for the purpose of the research of this book. Based on Shepherd and Carolyn's (1988) cyber-genres, the author concludes the types of internet humour from his perspective, including replicated internet humour, spontaneous internet humour and hybrid internet humour. The second one will be mainly focused on the analysis, which "were either created on the Net or designed offline exclusively to be uploaded and interpreted online" (Yus, 2023, p. 63-64). Moreover, this chapter also reviews the existing academic viewpoints upon the features of face-to-face humour and online humour. The differences proposed by Fiadotava (2020) offer a broaden understanding for further analysis, which appear mainly on performative devices, spatiotemporal level and temporal patterns of communication. Lastly, this chapter classifies three types of humorous internet discourses according to its modal. Textual one relies on word play, nicknames, text alteration or emojis to generate humour. Visual type is processed with the development of technology to share humorous points through some visual forms such as humorous photos and videos. Multi-modal one is the main trend in recent years, which usually combines text with images, memes or short videos. This chapter provides the foundational definition and classification system for internet humour, establishing a clear scope for the book's analysis by distinguishing it from offline humour and exploring its unique forms and environments.

From author's point of view, the comprehension of internet humour relies on adequate inference of schematic discourse with certain context so that the explicature and implicature can be obtained. Chapter 4 delves into the contextual constraints on the effectiveness of internet

humour, which consist of interface-related contextual constraints and user-related contextual constraints. The former is illustrated with vivid examples on messaging apps and social networking sites. It is proved that interface affordances such as asynchronous information or limited screen size will influence users' communicative practices. The latter is discussed by demonstrating how the users' personality and inherited attributes such as sex, ethnic origin and nationality influence their perception of humour. The author specifically introduces the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes on internet humour which heavily affects the production and reception of humour, particularly sexist jokes. The internet can amplify their spreading due to anonymity and context collapse, leading to various audience's reactions based on the resonance of personal beliefs with those stereotypes. While a minimizing effect often alleviates the offensiveness of such humour, counter-movements like (post-)feminist humour also spare no effort to utilize the cyberspace to challenge these entrenched stereotypes.

Chapter 5 focuses on the interactive humour on messaging apps, with specific concern on the construction and management of turn for the purpose of generating the sustained humour. This chapter begins with the exploration of the suitability of Relevance Theory applied into the analysis of humorous conversations in messaging apps. And then five elements in the analysis of humorous interactions emerge: framing devices, reactions, sociocultural parameters, reasons or goals and genres. The author also mentions the pragmatical significance of laughter and different shapes of laugh particles, which unfolds that there is no intrinsic relationship between their presence and humorous effects. The core of the chapter presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of Spanish WhatsApp interactions to identify prototypical turn-taking patterns. The results reveal that while humorous interactions can be initiated in various ways, a single image is the most frequent opener. However, these often result in brief, two-turn exchanges closed with an emoji. Sustained humour more commonly happens when a humorous text plus emoji is used to shift an ongoing conversation into a playful mode. In the last section, a cross-cultural comparison with Chinese WeChat use suggests that different interface affordances and cultural

norms such as politeness in high-context cultures do influence humorous interaction. This chapter ends up that users still manage to navigate platform constraints to co-generate humour through supportive strategies.

Chapter 6 discusses humour on social networking sites. The author deems that the social networking sites are the humour repositories where the users also play the roles of producers. Featured with persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences, these platforms can support several kinds of humorous discourses and interactions. Through the respective analysis of humour production on different subjects--single user, compiled, collective and corporate, various kinds of humour strategies can be figured out, including incongruity-resolution, self-deprecation, jocular mockery, mutual awareness of context accessibility, implicated premises and conclusions and so on. Each subject shows their own purposes and matched strategies to achieve their humorous effects. It can be concluded that the interface affordances of social networking sites present an ideal venue for humour-generating with certain non-propositional effects such as the affective bonding and the sense of belonging.

Chapter 7 delves into the meme-mediated humorous communication. It begins with the basic notions on the features of internet memes, including fidelity, fecundity and longevity, while they will also change according to some specific contextual environments. In order to let readers fully understand the different forms of memes, the author states the interdependent combinations between text and image, which are the most frequent and pragmatically significant. Furthermore, it deals with the incongruity-resolution patterns applied to memes for humor interactions. The most distinctive type for memes is discourse-image based one, allowing the viewer to back-track and compute new verbal-visual implicatures. Additionally, meme families exploit the ad hoc visual referent adjustment where the identical images are narrowed or broadened by accompanying captions, sustaining template productivity with preserving recognizability. This chapter also specifically highlights the unique role of Covid-19 memes, which reveals the salient function of the collective awareness of pandemic. Covid-19 memes further reveal that when collective

common ground is salient, Throughout, relevance-theoretic explicature derivation, implicature recovery, and context accessibility will operate in parallel, guiding the viewers to integrate typographic, visual and inter-textual cues into a coherent humorous interpretation of related memes.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter which explores other relevant affective effects on the internet communication. The author initially proposes that users always communicate propositions, simultaneously display feelings, emotions or other non-propositional information. These effects will also emerge in internet humour. Then, the author illustrates relevant non-propositional effects from internet humour according to the perspectives of personal, interactive, medium-sized group, and large group level. Through the analysis, it can be concluded that individual and collective identity are constructed due to successful comprehension of humour, appearing with some common non-propositional affective outcomes such as self-esteem, bonding or bounding effects, self-worth and so on.

### III. EVALUATION

Apparently, this book analyzes the internet humour with various kinds of online discourses from the perspective of cognitive-pragmatic viewpoint. Theoretically and practically, this book not only makes great contributions to further studies on relevant topics but also offer some hints for humour-generation in the cyberspace.

First and foremost, in the aspect of theoretical level, this book provides a meaningful and novel understanding of internet humour, particularly in the analysis of the external and internal factors that influence the successful comprehension of humour discourse. In addition, Yus expands the applicability of Relevance Theory from the conventional field into the online communication. He illustrates the suitability of this theoretical framework by demonstrating comprehensive and insightful research on internet humour interaction. He also constructs the combination between Relevance Theory and Incongruity-Resolution Theory with abundant examples and data, which offers an adaptable and replicable framework of analysis for future internet humour communication. Furthermore, this book mentions the

significant notions of contextual constraints and non-propositional effect, which show the author's comprehensive consideration towards internet humour and offer the possible direction for future studies on internet communication and humour interaction. Moreover, in terms of practical level, this book covers the large number of specific analysis of humour with adequate data in messaging apps, social networking sites and memes. Throughout this analysis, several kinds of humour-generating strategies are shown up for the readers. This approach can enlighten the relevant subjects to rethink and adjust their plans for the purpose of humour-generating. Specifically speaking, the designing of platforms makes significant impacts on humorous effectiveness, including its interface size or tools. Yus also stresses the quality of users themselves will influence the interpretation of humour such as their familiarity of interface, their knowledge of internet technology or even their personalities.

Nevertheless, from my point of view, there is still some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, this book ends up in a hurry without a concluding chapter of the key findings of the entire work. This circumstance may lead to readers to retrieve some information back to each chapter again and again if necessary. Secondly, when it comes to the understanding of the specific analysis on different humorous discourses, the author does offer some supporting explanation for readers to understand their humorous punchlines. However, these explanations emerge mainly for the consideration of phonetic or semantic differences, resulting in some humorous discourses being under-comprehended. It will be more advantageous if full factors of comprehending humour can be taken into account, such as the readers' cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Lastly, a series of figures, tables and diagrams are accompanied by specific analysis. But they are not readers-friendly enough when they are quite long or complex, because the explanation or conclusion are often given before them. This form may hinder reading productivity and engagement. A parallel modal that shows explanation or conclusion and figures, tables and diagrams simultaneously is highly suggested.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, Francisco Yus's *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* can be regarded a valuable resource to the research on internet humour. It provides a thorough cognitive-pragmatic exploration of internet humor, grounded in Relevance Theory and discourse analysis. By bridging theory and practice, this work not only advances academic research on internet humour but also presents practical frameworks for understanding humor in online environments. It offers valuable theoretical and empirical insights applicable to researchers, content creators and communicators in the cyberspace. Despite its specialized focus, the book also remains accessible and instructive for both experts and newcomers to the relevant field, making it a thought-provoking resource in the studies of internet communication.

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