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### **Toward a Cognitive Theory of the "Humorous Effect"**

From a cognitive and functional point of view, a verbal text is to be considered a trigger by which a sender elicits a response from a recipient. I postulate that different responses are the result of different cognitive processes triggered in the recipient's mind by different kinds of humorous texts. This paper investigates the complexity of the phenomenon commonly defined as "humor." This term commonly refers to profoundly different textual constructions, triggering not only distinct, but in some cases opposite cognitive effects. It consequently requires that we make distinctions among the different mechanisms generating different responses. This is the case of jokes ("funny" humor), in opposition to what Luigi Pirandello called "umorismo" (non-jocular humor). The theoretical model proposed by the Italian writer (1908) is re-cast in an up-to-date multidisciplinary terminology. Unlike jokes, which are a formal, almost rhetorical overlapping of two scripts (see Raskin 1985), Pirandellian "umorismo" seems to function as the Zen paradoxes (koans): it produces a cognitive subversion in "de-programming" the dominant human binary evaluation system. The experience of cognitive indecidibility keeps the mind in a paradoxical condition of pleasure/displeasure (this can explain the phenomenon of "laughing through tears"). In the many humorous typologies of the Western verbal and literary tradition (irony, self-irony, parody, self-parody, satire, puns, jokes), the target is a person or an ideology. In the non-jocular humor the target seems to be the recipient's binary evaluation system. The theoretical model can be of particular interest in the discussion of "human universal" mechanisms, of "intelligent systems," and of interlinguistic translation.

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