

Children's development of humour in everyday interactions: two case studies in French and Brazilian Portuguese

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Abstract

In order to understand how children learn to recognize and use humour in their own cultural environment, we have chosen to study their production in two different languages and cultures. We studied a French-speaking monolingual child and a Brazilian Portuguese-speaking child, video-recorded once a month up to seven years old. The detailed multimodal linguistic coding of our data enabled us to draw the multimodal paths the two children followed from the first instances of shared amusement initiated by the adult, expressed mainly through reactive behaviour such as laughing, to the children's own verbal production of successful humour in dialogue. Our study demonstrates that the production of children's humour is closely linked to the family input (their micro-culture), and to children's multimodal linguistic and meta-cognitive development. We did not observe important differences between the two children at the macro-cultural level, but there were noticeable inter-individual differences.

Keywords: humour, children, French, Brazilian, development, microculture.

1. Introduction

Humour plays an important role in children's language socialization as it reflects the norms and values of the community in which it is grounded. Humour is not innate and every child's pathway to humour production is likely to be different. Just as they need a favourable environment filled with rich multimodal interactions to learn language, children are socialized to humour very early in life through daily practice in their family environment. Humour is part of the transmission of a culture and an identity, since it often results from transgressions of common ground and norms transformed into playful productions. It is therefore necessary to consider cultural norms in the analysis of children's humour, and to compare their production across languages and cultures. The analysis of humour is a complex area where many different aspects, which are difficult to disentangle, come into play simultaneously (Attardo 2003; Attardo 2008; Norrick 2003; Charaudeau 2006). From a cross-cultural perspective, there are at least four dimensions involved concurrently (Béal & Mullan 2013); each dimension can be a source of variation:

- a) The speaker/target/recipient interplay: some cultures may encourage self-deprecating humour (Fox 2004; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp 2006) while others favour *teasing* which is directed at the recipient (Goddard 2006; Haugh & Bousfield 2012), or third-party oriented humour (Béal & Mullan 2013).
- b) The preferred humour devices: in some cultures, linguistic devices such as play on words are particularly appreciated (Priego-Valverde 2003; Charaudeau 2006) while in others absurd fantasy scenarios may be a more important way of participating in social interaction (Jones & Andrews 1988; Hay 2001). Implicit references and shared knowledge can also be the source of many jokes between participants (Priego-Valverde 2003) and are therefore closely linked to the cultural background.
- c) The pragmatic functions of humour: alongside the immediate aim of amusing recipients, humour can fulfil a number of other interpersonal purposes linked to notions of face (Goddard 2009; Haugh 2010; Haugh 2011). It can be used to repair a real or potential threat to the other's face, or to protect one's positive face in self-defence (Béal & Traverso 2010), or even to create or reinforce collusion at the expense of a third party (André-Laroché 1984; Béal & Mullan 2013). All of these are linked both to the immediate context of interaction and to cultural values/expectations.
- d) The interactional dimension focuses on studying the dynamics of conversational humour as speakers take turns over whole humorous sequences. Supportive strategies are offered by recipients to the initial speaker to show their understanding and appreciation of his/her attempt at humour such as laughter, smiling or more humour (Dyner 2009; Norrick 2003). Some cultures favour the construction of whole collaborative humorous scenarios over several turns (Hay 2001).

All of the above are socially expected forms of linguistic behaviour, which are the result of a learning process dating back to childhood. They presuppose cultural experience, which needs to be shared with children in their everyday lives through the mediation of the adult input. It is initially mainly restricted to the family culture surrounding the children since their birth. It is developed in spontaneous interactions and is linked to the appropriation of conversational skills such as turn construction and turn taking, and of socio-cultural norms and values that vary according to the child's environment. Parents are usually children's first link with their culture. It is through their parents that children progressively discover what humour is. The family's micro-culture (Fine 1979) is part of a macro-culture, characterized by a specific geographical, socio-historical, and economic context. The effect of the macro-culture might be less obvious, probably because it requires a more elaborate knowledge of the world and higher cognitive

capacities, not yet accessible to children at this age.

The production of humour is not only embedded in social-cultural contexts, but requires specific cognitive, interactional, and linguistic skills (Tholander & Aronsson 2003). Patterns of humour development depend on children's construction of these advanced skills and on parental modelling or support for the child's efforts at humour. Humour is therefore an excellent marker of the attainment of new cognitive levels with the assistance of multimodal language and of "good-enough"¹ scaffolding.

The main questions that can be raised are the following: How are children's comprehension and production of humour woven into their cognitive, social, and linguistic development? What are the landmarks of the emergence of humour? At what moment and how is humour verbally expressed by children? What is the impact of the children's grounding in a macro-culture and of the family micro-culture in the development of humour?

Although there is a great amount of work on adult humour, there are fewer studies on children's humour, and most of them are conducted from a psychological and psychoanalytical perspective (Freud 1969 [1905]; McGhee 1979; Aimard 1988; Bariaud 1983; Feuerhahn 1993; Garitte 2005; Carausse & Carausse 2009) and with an experimental approach (Hoicka & Akhtar 2011; 2012). Some of the authors raise the question of when humour emerges in children, but the answers illustrate a diversity of viewpoints. For Aimard (1988) and Carausse (2009), three-month-old children are already on the path of humour since they are able to recognize the voices and faces of the people around them, which creates a context conducive to the emergence of humour. For Garitte (2005), a form of scatological humour is already present in the discourse of children from two to three years old. McGhee (1979), in relation to Piaget's developmental stages (Piaget & Inhelder 1966), distinguished four stages in the development of children's humour. During Stage 1, around 1-2 years old, they are fascinated by anything new that is viewed as incongruous, be it an object, an event or an experience. The perception of an incongruity can provoke either fear, curiosity or amusement. Children enter Stage 2 around 2-3 years old. As they develop language, they will start using incongruous labels for things or people or distort the phonological form of words. The production of verbal humour begins soon after the emergence of symbolic play (Johnson & Mervis 1997) and is made possible by the mastery of vocabulary and language concepts. Children learn to play with situations and words and are more and more able to appreciate the subtleties of their own language. The complexity of children's linguistic humour increases with age. As their language develops, children can intentionally manipulate its phonology, its semantics, its syntax or its conversational impact in order to provoke shared amusement, which leads them to Stage 3 from their third year on (3-7 years). From here, they will resort more to conceptual incongruity. The development of metalinguistic skills helps them to play with words and to understand the phonological, semantic, and discursive subtleties of their language. Later on, at around 7 years old, children reach Stage 4. Humour becomes more specific and sophisticated because they can manipulate causal relations, understand the logic of their discourse and have access to the polysemy of words. Apart from McGhee's important research (1979), most of the work on typical children's humour has underestimated their early capacities for understanding, sharing and especially producing humour except in Reddy (1991), Hoicka & Gattis (2008; 2012) and Hoicka & Akhtar (2011; 2012), Loizou (2005) (and see Mireault & Reddy [2016] for a more extensive survey). Producing humour is **meant** to make others laugh because we think it **can** make them laugh. Therefore, humour must also be considered as a competence linked to Theory of Mind (Baron-

¹ We derive the concept from Winnicott (1953) who refers to the "good-enough" mother who helps her child attain a higher level of cognitive development by balancing the satisfaction of the child's needs and some frustration.

Cohen 1995), which requires anticipating and understanding the mental states, expectations, beliefs, and emotions of others.

In her longitudinal analysis of the production of humour of a Brazilian Portuguese-speaking 2-year-old girl, Figueira (2000) has shown that the child does not seem to intend to make her audience laugh. The author therefore proposes that the production of humoristic utterances is linked to metalinguistic activity. This consideration has led her to distinguish intentionally produced humour from non-intentionally produced humour: when the child is indifferent to the effect produced by his innovation, the author categorizes it as anecdotal data – and not humoristic data. Later, in 2011, Hoicka & Akhtar try to examine the abilities of 106 thirty- and thirty-six-month-old English speakers to produce jokes, make the distinction between humorous and sincere intentions and distinguish between English – and foreign-language speakers (French and Italian). The results showed that children are sensitive to humorous versus sincere intentions and English (native) versus foreign languages. Additionally, they can create their own novel jokes, demonstrating an ability to innovate. This research showed that 30-month-old children are able to attend to specific types of incongruity and use them for their own jokes. Loizou's study (2005) demonstrates how humour can provide children with a sense of self, identity, and empowerment as early as 15 to 22 months. They were able to identify and create incongruous situations which violated their own and the others' expectations and gave them a sense of superiority. They used various vocal and gestural resources, such as laughter, facial expressions, gestures, as they had not yet mastered verbal language.

In line with those findings, in our previous longitudinal analyses (Del Ré 2011; Del Ré & Morgenstern 2010; Del Ré et al. 2015) we showed that specific social-cognitive co-present parameters are mandatory for the comprehension and production of humour in young children: a) incongruity; b) distancing; c) shared knowledge; and d) intentionality. The sequences involving intentional humour are identified thanks to different cues coded in the children's productions, such as smiles, laughter, or eye gaze. Hoicka & Akhtar (2012) have also interpreted those cues as indirectly indicating intentionality.

Norrick (2006) also insists on the fact that humour is triggered by the awareness of some incongruity – a discrepancy between our representation of an event and reality. When we find something incongruous, it leads to a break in the unfurling of a script (Kintsch & Van Dijk 1978), it creates a sudden semantic leap between two entirely different mental spaces (Coulson 2000) or some violation of conversational roles as defined for example by Levinson (1992) or Clark (1996). The discrepancy between the expectations of the interlocutors and the content expressed dialogically can provoke an emotional discharge. If the reaction to the incongruity is oriented positively, often through the current or previous scaffolding of adults, it is shared through smiling and laughter (Dodane et al. 2014). Once children become aware of this discrepancy, they can intentionally amuse the interlocutor and/or themselves. Shared knowledge between the interlocutor and the speaker is necessary in order for the child to observe and understand incongruity.

The results of our detailed multimodal linguistic coding of the four parameters in our data enabled us to describe the paths followed by the two children we studied, from the first instances of shared amusement initiated by the adult, which children express mainly through reactive behaviour such as laughing, to their own verbal production of successful humour in dialogue. The different social-cognitive parameters required for the full comprehension and production of humour were developed between 2;4 and 4 years old.

It seems important to analyse the construction of the ability to produce and comprehend humour in different cultures in order to capture humour as “an intentionally structured cultural product” (Meany et al. 2014: 4).

As very little is known about the roots and development of verbal humour in very young children and about its regulatory functions in social interactions, the analysis of children's

humour provides a challenge. Moreover, it forces us to consider a combination of social, cultural, and cognitive skills as well as multi-functional uses of language. In order to understand how children learn to recognise and use humour in their own cultural environment, we have chosen to study their productions in two different languages and cultures. Our hypothesis is that thanks to the adults' input, children can progressively learn about shared amusement and humour. If it is sufficiently provided in their environment, they will be more and more able to produce intentional humour as their cognitive and linguistic skills develop. We set up an exploratory study of a French-speaking monolingual child from the *Paris corpus* (Morgenstern & Parrisé 2012) and a Brazilian Portuguese-speaking child from the *NALingua* corpus (Del Ré et al. 2016). The children were recorded once a month up to seven years old. We try to demonstrate that the production of children's humour is closely linked to the family input and to children's multimodal linguistic and meta-cognitive development (for instance, some children with certain pathologies, like autism [Da Silva 2010], have difficulties in understanding or producing humour). In this study, we show how humour is constructed by children in daily spontaneous interactions in their family environment (micro-culture). We tried to measure the impact of the children's culture, context, and type of family in the development of humour based on the characterization of the two children in their familiar environment. We used a dialogical and discursive approach to language (Bakhtin 1987; Bakhtin 1997; Bakhtin & Voloshinov 1992). As our research is focused on language acquisition, we work in line with a functional and interactional perspective (Vygotsky 2005; Vygotsky 2007; Bruner 1984; Bruner 2004a; Bruner 2004b; Salazar Orvig 1999; Salazar Orvig et al. 2010; François 1994; François 2004). The addition of a cross-cultural perspective (Béal & Mullan 2013) helps us better understand how children's pathways towards intentional humour are grounded in their micro-culture.

There are clear limits to our study as we were not able to conduct such detailed analyses on a larger number of children and to observe the effect of variables such as socio-economic factors, the adult's gender (and study the children in interaction with both their mother and their father), or older children. These analyses could have enabled us to grasp macro-cultural differences in line with what can be found in the literature. French humour has been shown to favour mockery towards others (Chabrol 2006) where Brazilian speakers prefer self-mockery and play on words (Saliba 2002). However, by conducting a longitudinal and qualitative study, we had the rare possibility of observing very fine details (micro-analyses of a micro-culture). Those details give us important information about the characteristics of each child's development of humour.

2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus and data analysis

We analysed the data of two monolingual children, a French child (Ana) and a Brazilian child (Gus), videotaped during one-hour sessions in natural interaction with their parents in their home. The data are taken from two different corpora, the first one collected by the CoLaJE team (Morgenstern & Parrisé 2012)² and the second one, by the NALingua team (Del Ré et al. 2016)³. Each video was entirely transcribed in CHAT⁴ format with CLAN software, developed in the CHILDES database⁵ and translated/adapted for Portuguese (Del Ré et al. 2012). For each child, we selected the videos and transcriptions corresponding to the following ages: 24, 30, 36, 42,

² Website: <http://colaje.scicog.fr/>. Project financed by the French National Research Agency.

³ Website: <http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/espelhogrupo/4240032996711008>, and <http://gruportalingua.com.br/>.

⁴ In order to confirm the coding, it was checked by a second coder. The differences were very minor and were discussed among the authors.

⁵ Child Language Data Exchange System: <http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/>.

48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78 and 84 months (11 videos per child, with a total of 22 videos). When the age did not correspond exactly, we selected the video that was the closest to the required age. For each video, we selected all the sequences containing utterances with markers of amusements (smile, laugh) produced by the child and/or the adults. There is an asymmetry between adults and children. Children can produce utterances without the intention to make the others laugh because of their lack of shared knowledge and experience but it can still be amusing for the adults. Children can also produce utterances that amuse them and not the other (such as in so called “scatological humour”). Adults can produce humour that is not understood by the children, but the children might nevertheless be eager to participate in the subsequent fun and laughter. We coded all those productions but restricted the label “shared amusement” to the instances where both adult and child were actively involved. For this article, 209 utterances in total were analysed in context, 104 for the French corpus and 105 for the Brazilian corpus (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of utterances analysed for each of the two children (Ana, Gus), according to their age.

	2;0	2;6	3;0	3;6	4;0	4;6	5;0	5;6	6;0	6;6	7;0	TOTAL
Ana	21	23	3	18	19	9	1	4	1	2	3	104
Gus	13	15	11	4	8	17	8	6	16	7	—	105

We established a coding grid to analyse:

- who initiated the utterance in the sequence (the child, the adult or the situation);
- if it was triggered by an incongruity;
- if this incongruity was verbally shared between the child and the adult or not and if the other understood it or not;
- if it was intentional⁶ or not.

Thus, we categorized our utterances into different types of productions from amusement to intentional humour statements, such as play with sounds/words, scatology, mockery, jokes or irony⁷:

- Play with words/sounds: when the child or the adult plays with the sounds of words of their native language in order to make their audience laugh.
- Scatology: when the child laughs about everything that concerns scatology and produces words such as “poop” and “pee”, etc. (potty or toilet humour).
- Mockery: when the child or the adult make fun of people and laugh at them.
- Jokes: the production of a story with the intention to make oneself and/or the others laugh.
- Irony: we consider a statement to be ironic when the child or the adult say something and mean the opposite. However, we are aware of the complexity of the concept and of the possibility to describe a wider range of ironical markers in a more elaborate way than by following the classical conception (Sperber & Wilson 1978).

⁶ As we cannot know for certain what was in the child or adult's mind, we decided to code a statement as intentional by using the reaction of the interlocutor in context.

⁷ Those categories are the results of an analysis conducted in a previous study (Del Ré 2011) and then, were based on the analysis of the data collected for this study.

In the following analyses, we will first characterize the type of humour produced by the parents in interaction with their children and illustrate it with some examples of humoristic productions. We will then present the first sequences with intentional humour produced by each child and the different types of humour produced. We will conclude with a discussion on the influence of the specific type of humour produced by the parents on the development of their children's humour.

2.2. Humour produced by the parents in interaction with their children

2.2.1. The Brazilian context

Gus is a Brazilian boy and an only child, born on January 13, 2008 in a middle-class family living in Sao Paulo. He produced his first word combinations at two and already used play on words and sounds at that age. His father spent a lot of time imitating various characters and altering situations to create incongruities. This led to numerous episodes of shared amusement in their everyday lives, which are captured in the data. In a sequence filmed at 2;1 for instance, the father exaggerated the last syllable of the word “carrao”⁸, by lengthening the rhotic phoneme and imitating the sound of a motor with a rising then falling intonation. That made Gus laugh and he then imitated his father. In this situation, Gus thus took up the play on sounds initiated by his father in a pleasant atmosphere permeated with shared amusement.

As the child's lexicon developed, his parents played a lot with sounds and words. They then started making fun of him and imitating him. Those interactive situations served as models for Gus who then used them himself. For instance, at 2;6 Gus's father asked him who the little car they were playing with looked like. Gus immediately answered “Sarney”, who was the ex-president of Brazil, famous for his great moustache. Gus was used to this answer because his father had previously made the joke. Gus's little car also had a moustache, which explains the metonymic parallel originally created by the father. The child thus replicated his father's joke but he had no knowledge about Brazilian presidents and could not conceptualize the underlying critiques that this type of humour is constructed upon by himself. Gus did not have sufficient knowledge to understand the humour in this sequence, but he was fully aware of the impact his answer had on his audience. The child had the intention of amusing the adults when he produced that type of answer without fully understanding the humorous content itself. Thus, even though the utterance was produced by Gus, the actual author of the humorous content was his father. The father knew that his son was going to make that particular answer when he asked the question as he had taught him to do so. However, at some point in his development, thanks to the repetition of similar situations, Gus learnt how to create his own humour thanks to this type of model. In the same vein, Gus's parents made fun of him overtly when he was 2;6, and the child similarly began to make fun of his family members as of 3;0.

Gus's father often used irony and liked to gently make fun of his son. The child spent a lot of quality time at home with his father. Between 3;0 and 3;6, Gus often imitated his father and produced ironic utterances, even if he did not always fully understand them.

These examples illustrate the role of the family environment on the child's development of humour. Gus's development of humour was tightly linked to his linguistic development. Once his lexicon developed, his mispronunciation of certain words made his parents laugh. Gus did not understand that his productions were non-standard at first, he did not intentionally make his audience laugh and did not have enough shared knowledge to distance himself from what he said. Nevertheless, he also tried to produce humour that did not amuse his parents, as what was funny for him was not always funny for his parents (when he made scatological comments for

⁸ Big car in Brazilian Portuguese.

instance). Reversely, his parents produced humour that was not understood by the child as he did not have enough knowledge. As of 4 years old, he had mastered the phonological repertoire of Portuguese and could play on the sounds and meanings of the words he produced. The type of humour used then diversified and irony was produced intentionally more and more frequently.

2.2.2. The French context

Ana is a French girl born on July 24, 2006 in a middle-class family. She lives in a small town one hour away from Paris. She is the third child and has two older brothers. Her linguistic development was somewhat faster than Gus's; she produced her first two-word utterances at 18 months and resorted to rich non-verbal means to complement her words (facial expressions, gestures, eye gaze, posture). She was extremely creative in how she constructed speech as she invented her own rules, especially at the level of verbal morphology and of gender marking. At 3 years old, her language development was quite advanced: her communicative intents were essentially expressed through verbal means, her utterances became more complex and she started making complete narratives on her own. Humour was very present in the family. Very early on, Ana was exposed to it through her daily interactions with her parents and her brothers as well as numerous children's books and films. The humour used by Ana's mother was very different from that used by Gus's father. Ana's mother did not play with words as much, but she liked to laugh a lot. She systematically took up her daughter's verbal productions when she found them amusing. Thus, at 3;6, Ana compared the shape of the bench on which she was sitting to the shape of a ski. This made her mother laugh and she told her daughter that if she put a bench under each foot, she would not move very fast on a ski slope. That type of humour was not understood by Ana who continued what she was doing without paying any attention to what her mother had just said. However, even if the mother's humour was not always understood by the child, throughout our longitudinal data, she led the child to distance herself from literal meaning in order for her to acquire the necessary metalinguistic skills to comprehend and produce humour. She introduced variations in her representations, provoking incongruities in the situation or in speech and clarifying them when necessary. The transition from literal to figurative meaning was very often scaffolded by the mother's explicit comments until the child could verbalize non-literal productions herself. Ana's mother regularly played on the difference between reality and fiction, using all the devices at her disposal, such as drawings, pictures and toys in order to do so. For instance, at 1;7, when she told Ana "*Attention il va te mordre !*" (Be careful, he is going to bite you!), as she suddenly brought a plastic crocodile right near her daughter's fingers, Ana was frightened and her mother then verbalized her pretend play by saying: "*c'était pour de faux, pour rigoler*" (I was pretending, it's just for fun). But then, at 2;8, Ana pretended that the crocodile was eating her mother's hand and intentionally played on the difference between reality and fiction to make her mother laugh. At 2;11, even though she was still a little destabilized by the game initiated by her mother, as she was torn between her knowledge about toy crocodiles and what her mother playfully was saying "*Attention, il va te manger le doigt!*" (Be careful, he is going to eat your finger), she could verbalize the difference between the representation her mother was inducing and her knowledge: "*Non il mange pas, regarde, il peut pas!*" (No, he is not eating me, look, he can't). Very often, her mother made incongruous proposals in order to induce shifts in her daughter's representations and to perceive the discrepancy as regards to the norm. For example, at 3;8, she asked Ana if she had hung an April fool fish drawing on the teacher's back with a nail or at 4;8 she suggested raising elephants in her school after Ana had told the story of how they were raising ladybugs in her class.

2.3. The first productions of intentional humour

As Ana's mother and Gus's father demonstrate, each adult has a specific sense of humour, which models the child's future productions of humour. However, other parameters are also important such as the children's motor, cognitive, and linguistic development as well as the particular context in which the child is raised and the daily situations they experience. The various components involved in humour (complicity, intentionality, distancing) are transmitted during their daily interactions with their parents. The ingredients necessary for the construction of humour do not emerge in a specific order as they depend on the interlocutors, the situations, the context etc. The various possibilities provided by spontaneous dialogue scaffold the children into their own production of humour. Thus, some of the elements can develop in a different order for each child, but their combination is the key to the unfolding of sequences in which humour can be shared by the interlocutors involved in the dialogue.

2.3.1. Gus

One hundred and five occurrences in total were analysed in Gus's data for the whole period under study. Table 1 indicates that there are more occurrences between 2;0 and 4;7 and then after 6;2. If we look at the different types of amusement initiated by Gus, we can notice that play is predominant until 2;0. Gus played with sounds, with words and imitated his parents' productions during that period. As his language developed, he started mixing reality and fiction. He spoke more and made more non-standard productions, which amused the adults in his audience. The child did not intentionally try to make the others laugh; the adults attributed a comic meaning to his productions (this corresponds to what Figuera [2000] calls anecdotal sequences). At 2;4, Gus's father tried to make him drink orange juice. Gus refused because he wanted to watch the movie *Cars* on television. His father did not give in and tried to negotiate: he offered to put the film on for him while he drank his juice. Gus then laughed and produced an unexpected utterance “*(Es)tá fazendo firula*” (Dragging on). This was a comment on the fact that he was doing everything he could, not to drink the juice. This indicates that even though he could not produce a very elaborate utterance at that age, the child was able to use all the necessary ingredients to produce shared humour. The production is not creative as the child replicated a construction often used by adults. However, the fact that he chose to use that particular construction at that particular moment illustrates a certain level of metadiscursive awareness and creates a discrepancy in the dialogue, which is propitious to shared amusement. We would not expect a child of that age to admit that he is doing everything possible to avoid drinking juice and produce a typically “adult” expression. His laughter as he used the expression indicates that he was aware that his comment was amusing. The effect is very clear as everyone started laughing with him. This production serves as a playful diversion: his father totally forgot about the orange juice and started asking him questions about the film they were watching.

When Gus was 2;6, another sequence of intentional humour was produced in a very ordinary situation. Gus and his mother were in the dining room, playing. Gus wanted his mother to put on a film. He liked to watch films when he came home from school. But since the video-recordings were taking place for our study, his mother tried to distract him with games and toys in order for him not to watch a movie and be more productive for the purpose of our research.

Example 1 (Gus, 2;6):

1. Mother: *você quer assistir o filme do MacQueen tirando sujeira?*
'Do you want to watch the film in which MacQueen is cleaning the house?'
2. Gus: *é pega o disco do Macqueen*
'Takes the MacQueen video'.

3. Mother: *lembra que você estragou o disco do MacQueen? Lembra que você estragou? Que o MacQueen fica pulando o disco toda hora porque você estragou? Né? Ele arranca os filmes da capa e sai andando ((rindo))*

‘Do you remember how you ruined the MacQueen video? Do you remember that you ruined it? And that now MacQueen does not work well because it is ruined? Do you? *He rips the covers off the videos and walks out ((laughing))*’.

4. Gus: *ô mamãe pega o disco do MacQueen*

‘Mummy took the MacQueen video’.

In this sequence, Gus insisted on watching the MacQueen video and his mother tried to explain that she could not give it to him because it was damaged. He insisted by lengthening the vowel [i:] (line 2). It was the first time in this recording that Gus produced a marked lengthening of the vowel [i:] of MacQueen. He of course might have done that previously off camera. His mother was very surprised by that production and has confirmed that it was the first time he did that in front of her. This created discontinuity in the dialogue and made her laugh. But what is even more interesting, is that in the next turn, Gus repeated that lengthening of the final vowel in “MacQueen” (utterance 4). Gus was fully aware of the adults’ reaction to his production and repeated his utterance, looking at the camera as if he were looking for the observer’s support. This illustrates the importance of the interlocutors in the construction of shared humour. The child succeeded in making the adults laugh. As his mother understood his strategy, she continued the dialogue by changing the topic and asked him to narrate a story for the observer. All those verbal and non-verbal cues indicate that the humoristic production is deliberate on the part of the child.

2.3.2. Ana

We analysed 104 occurrences of shared amusement in the period studied in Ana’s data (2;1 to 7;5). Table 1 indicates that there were more occurrences between 2;1 and 4;8 than in the rest of the data. When we look at the different types of situations in the shared amusement sequences in detail, we note that at 2;1, comic situations predominate (where something unexpected happens but is not verbalized). It could be a person falling down or appearing suddenly. The fact that the child identifies those situations as salient, constitutes her first step into the comprehension of incongruity, which is a key element of humour.

At 2;8, we found non-standard productions that are due to her lack of expertise in language skills and of shared knowledge with the adult. Those productions trigger discrepancies and laughter as well as amused reactions on the part of the adults with some gentle sarcasm, which the child does not understand but the repetition of those instances socialize her to humour. At 2;8, she could also launch into pretend play: for example, she transformed a felt pen into a candle (using her knowledge of the resemblance between the two objects) and sang “happy birthday”.

The following example is the first instance of intentional verbal humour on the part of the child in our data. The observer asked Ana if she was going to eat in a restaurant for her birthday and what she would like to eat.

Example 2 (Ana, 2;11):

1. Observer: *Alors dis-moi, tu vas aller manger où pour ton anniversaire? Tu sais? Tu vas aller au restaurant?*

‘So tell me, where are you going to eat for your birthday? Do you know? You’re going to the restaurant?’

2. Ana: *oui*.

‘yes’

3. Observer: *Qu'est-ce que tu aimes manger ?*
'What do you like to eat?'
4. Ana: *Du piment !*
'Hot pepper!'
5. Observer: *Du piment ?*
'Hot pepper?'
6. Ana: *Non ! Non ! ((rire))*
'No! No!' ((laughing))
7. Observer: *Oh ! ça pique !*
'Oh! It's hot!'
8. Ana: *Oui !*
'Yes'

All the ingredients necessary to express shared and intentional humour are present here, including amusement marked both by the child and by her interlocutor. In this sequence, the adult laughed because of the incongruity of the child's response. The observer did not expect that type of answer from a child! Children usually do not like to eat pepper and Ana produced that response intentionally to provoke the adult. The observer was probably expecting a very stereotyped answer such as French fries. The child's production, "hot pepper" created discontinuity in the dialogue and was fully intentional on her part. It triggered the observer's surprise and laughter and gave the child power over the interaction (Loizou 2005). But when the adult asked for her confirmation, she very quickly negated what she said, implying that of course she did not like hot pepper and was just joking. This is thus an example of intentional humour that includes several important cues: the child's initiative, bonding with the observer, markers of amusement on both parts, discontinuity, and intentionality. This type of humour is very similar to that of the mother's as she often made incongruous assertions in order to elicit her daughter's reaction when faced with discrepancies between a given situation and what was expected.

2.4. Different types of intentional humour

2.4.1. Gus

After Gus's first production of intentional humour at 2;6 based on the vocalic lengthening in the word "MacQueen" (example 1), we counted 28 other occurrences of intentional laughter between 3;0 and 6;7 (Figure 1).

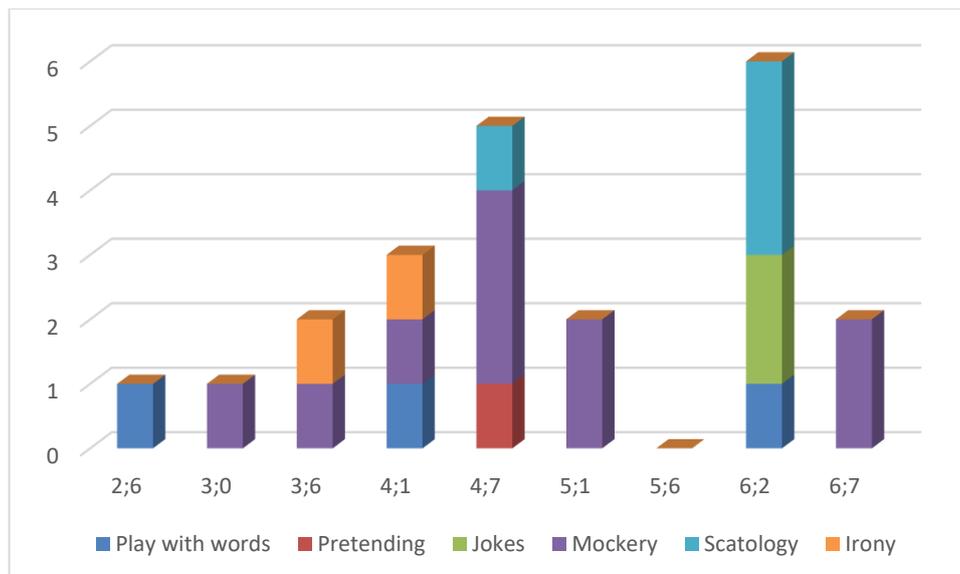


Figure 1. Different types of intentional humour in Gus's productions

As of 3 years old, mockery was used, probably under the influence of the father and it constituted the most frequent category of humour in Gus's subsequent productions. There is a very good example at 3;6 when Gus took up a phrase his father often said to him.

Example 3:

1. Father: *e os outros dois que vão correr.*
'And the other two are going to run'
2. Father: *agora, esses tudo pode por tudo dentro da caixa, vai!*
'Now, these can all be put in the box, do it!'
3. Gus: *o que, o que, o que, o que, rapaz! Veja se tem um carrinho aqui! De corrida!*
((riso))
'What, what, what, what, boy! Check if there is a little car here! A racing car!'
((laughing))
4. Father: *não tem nenhum!*
'There is none!'
5. Gus.: *é bom!*
'That's good!'

Gus produced an utterance taken up from a humorous TV show. In this situation, by imitating the speech in the show, he was clearly making fun of his father who had just asked him to put his cars away. He slightly rose from his seat at the beginning of his utterance, then sat down again and used a deeper and faster voice as well as cyclic gestures that emphasized the rhythmic quality of his vocal production. He thus took his father's role both vocally and gesturally in order to make fun of him and created a sense of empowerment (Loizou 2005). This actually made his father a bit nervous, but he finally laughed at the same time as the observer.

In the same session, we also found an ironic utterance. Gus had a cold and was using an inhalator to clear his nose. He moved his arms around as if he were trying to scatter the smoke that was coming from the inhalator and said: "oh, it's delicious" (example 4, utterance 3), which made all the adults present laugh as what he obviously meant was the contrary: that it really smelled very bad...

Example 4:

1. Gus: *esse fedor ((riso)). (Diz isso mais duas vezes até que seu nariz começa escorrer e ele quer tirar o inalador. Seu pai pede para ele mantê-lo, que ele vai limpar o nariz dele. Ele limpa).*

‘It stinks ((laughing))’. (Gus says that again twice until his nose starts to run and he takes the inhalator away. His father asks him to keep the inhalator and tells him he is going to clean his nose. He cleans it).

2. Father: *põe (o inalador) para terminar.*

‘Put it back to finish’

3. Gus: *uhn uma delícia (espanta novamente a fumaça, sorri, fala com uma entonação diferente, tipicamente irônica)*

‘Oh, it’s delicious’. (Gus scatters the smoke around again, smiles and talks with a different intonation)

4. Observer: *((riso))*

‘(laughing)’

5. Gus: *(ri logo em seguida, junto com a Pes. olhando para o pai)*

(Gus laughs with Obs; as he looks at his father)

6. Observer: *deve ser bom mesmo pra respirar, né?*

‘It must feel good to be able to breathe again, doesn’t it?’

7. Gus: *delícia, delícia! (espanta novamente a fumaça)*

‘It’s delicious, it’s delicious!’ (Gus scatters the smoke around again)

At the beginning of the sequence, Gus kept saying that the smoke of the inhalator smelled bad and he made large movements to scatter the smoke around. When in turn 3 he said that it was delicious, he said it with a smile and a higher pitched intonation as usual, doing at the same time a spinning gesture with his right hand as he was playing someone else’s role, which lead us to interpret this utterance as ironic. He meant the contrary. He thus marked a deliberate intention to make the adults laugh by creating a surprising effect with an atypical utterance, thus demonstrating his own sense of empowerment (Loizou 2005) in a more sophisticated way. This is probably a replication of another episode that has not been filmed in the data in which his father says the same thing in a similar situation. However, Gus understood the effect that this type of utterance in this type of situation has on the audience and reproduced it in order to make the others laugh. As of 4;1, Gus’s humorous productions diversified with the emergence of scatological humour and pretend play. False or absurd utterances meant to make his audience laugh were used (to eat a wheelbarrow for example). The more he accumulated verbal and practical experience, the more he understood the adult’s humour and could replicate it. He worked out what one can or cannot laugh about. Multimodal aspects were progressively integrated in Gus’ productions in order to emphasise the content of his speech. He used gaze, smiles, and body movements to embody specific characters (example 3). He could change the tone of his voice, which demonstrates distancing and metalinguistic awareness. He also started to produce utterances that do not make sense (at 6;7) just to amuse the adults, as well as ironical productions. He was able to interpret mockery, to identify the function of key multimodal elements (such as certain gestures, a tone of voice, facial expressions) in utterances used by the father to make fun of him and could ask him to stop making fun of him. At 6;2, he finally started making successful jokes himself.

2.4.2. Ana

In Ana's data, we found the first occurrence of intentional humour at 2;8 in a situation of pretend play – a sequence in which she pretended that the crocodile was eating her mother's hand, thus imitating previous episodes initiated by the mother (Figure 2).

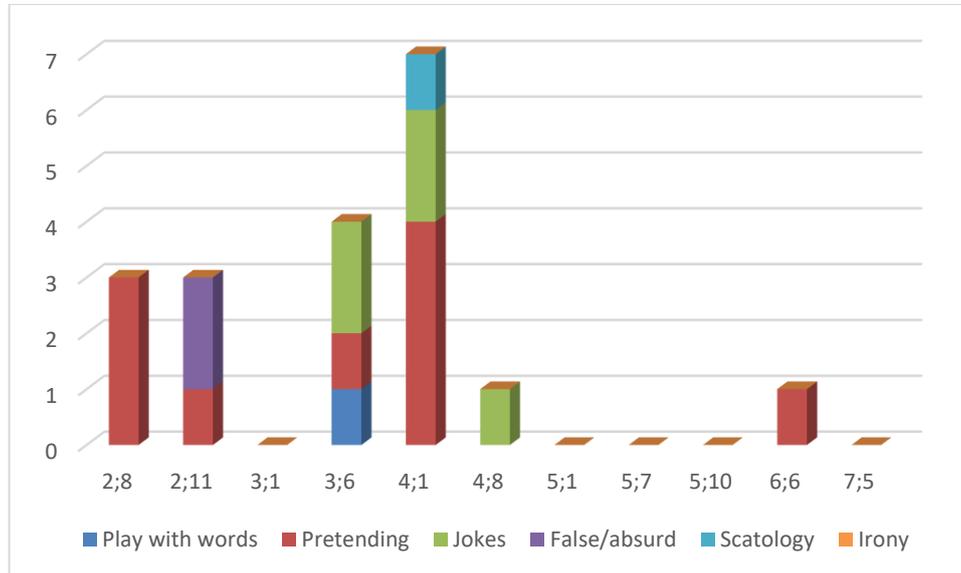


Figure 2. Different types of intentional humour in Ana's productions.

At 2;11, the sequence involving the hot pepper was based on an answer ad absurdio to the adult's question. Later on in the data, we counted 19 other occurrences of intentional humour, between 3;1 and 7;5 (see graph 2). At 3;6, she began to make jokes as well as play with sounds and words. She used pretend play situations to make the adults laugh. At 4;1, she performed a lot of pretend play (snoring, sleeping, imitating a rabbit, animating toy characters etc...). She produced scatological humour, repeating the onomatopoeia "prout" for example, which imitated the sound of farting. She also made jokes: she said she was eating a wheelbarrow, or that they wouldn't eat Winnie the Pooh because he was not cooked enough. At 4;8, she continued to make jokes, she was capable of defining what a joke was ("to say something that is not") and to give an example ("Mummy, there is an elephant behind your back"). Those examples illustrate how the ingredients of humour are progressively developed first in comprehension and then in production and are based on the difference between reality and fiction, on the ability to pretend first in her own actions and then in her speech. From this age on, there were very few examples of intentional humour in our videorecorded sessions until the end of the data under study. At 6;6, she imitated the dog but it did not make the adults laugh. At 5;1 and 7;5, she laughed as she narrated situations in which there were scatological elements such as to pee on the rug in a song, a monkey with a face in the shape of buttocks or a monkey who was playing with his poop.

3. Discussion

Perception and production of humour are very much based on one's ability to distance oneself from literal meaning, on the ability to pretend and to play on different levels of meaning. These abilities are developed at first in pretend play and imitation of situations of shared amusement and then in speech (play on words, use of polysemy, homonymy, metaphors), then in irony and sarcasm; these elements depend on the context and the amount of shared knowledge with the interlocutor.

Our results have shown that the types of amusement found in the two children's data diversify according to their age, in parallel with their linguistic development. This progression not only depends on the children's linguistic development but also on the family micro-culture in which the children were immersed since they were born. Their gender and the interlocutor's gender could also be relevant as part of what this micro-culture might encourage. The different types of humour produced by the parents model their children's first humoristic productions. Then other elements influence the evolution of each child's humour, such as school, friends, their own personality. We thus found it necessary to describe the type of humour used by the parents of each of the children under study. The various components of discursive humour are established in a dialogic relationship with the other: first the adults initiate humour, and do not necessarily make the children laugh as they do not share the same knowledge about the world and do not have the same definition or conception of what is incongruous. Progressively, the children construct the different elements that we identified as components of humour, with each child following his or her own pathway.

Among these elements, intentionality is key to child humour. In Gus and Ana's data, we observed that the productions of the two children evolve towards more and more deliberate and controlled humour at the end of their fifth year, which gives them a sense of agency and empowerment. Humour was a key element in the construction of both their social identity and in their progressive empowerment as skilful interactive participants. We then found many more occurrences in Gus's data, whereas Ana was more focused on other language practices and especially on learning how to read and write.

The children's humoristic productions are different from those of the adults, not only in terms of their level of knowledge about the world, but also in multimodal terms, through the presence of markers of amusement (laughter, smile). The children's first intentional humorous productions are always accompanied with either laughter or a smile. Those marks enabled us to identify the sequences we wanted to study (apart from the sequences in which the children made the adults laugh unintentionally with naïve or non-standard productions).

The children tried to make themselves and the adults laugh, they wanted to have fun, to play with words just for pleasure, to attract the others' attention or to make fun of them, but sometimes they used humour in order to reach another objective. Thanks to those metalinguistic manipulations in dialogue, the children internalised an important pragmatic dimension of language which they were then able to redeploy in other language practices: the ability not to stick to reality, to play with discrepancy, with incongruity, with unexpected situations that they could encounter in their daily lives.

In this study, we have shown that intentional humour can be found much earlier than what is usually presented in the literature – as early as 2;6–3;0 in the two children we have analysed. We have also observed the emergence of humour in children, a little boy and a little girl, from two different cultures with different languages, and we were able to shed some light on how humour can be used in each of those cultures, even though we cannot present a clear difference between French and Brazilian culture based on two families as this was not our purpose in this article. The Brazilian parents for instance used more wordplay than the French parents. We could only ascertain individual differences: each person has a different type of humour. For example, Ana's mother used a lot of irony. The parents' type of humour influences each child's style. It is clear that if one of the parents produces a lot of humour, there is a great chance that the child will be inspired by that form of humour. The type of parental humour also depends on the culture. As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, some authors say that French humour is very sarcastic and targeted at others, and opponents are stigmatized through features of their identity (Chabrol 2006), whereas Brazilian humour is mostly focused on self-mockery (Saliba 2002). However, in our results, it is mostly Gus who laughs at his father, not Ana who laughs at her mother, and there seems to be more of a gender difference with a mother-daughter

as opposed to a father-son type of relationship. It is difficult to make generalisations about specific cultural differences in humour based on two cases studies with such young children as they probably have not fully internalised all the key elements of their specific macro-cultures and have been mostly plunged in their family micro-culture.

However, the language addressed to the children plays a fundamental role in the development of their humour. It facilitates the transmission of cultural characteristics and of the world vision they underlie. We encounter a lot of similarities between children coming from different cultures at the beginning of language acquisition, as their cognitive development is quite similar. Once their cognitive and linguistic development enables them to mark subtler differences, they use more elaborate productions that become closer to the instances of the adult humour found in their cultural environment.

It is important to add that even though data collected from a larger group of children would have highlighted cultural differences according to the two countries we have studied (those analyses on larger groups are currently being conducted), we think that as humour is extremely linked and even dependent on the language acquisition process, this dependency might attenuate the differences. Indeed, during the period studied (between 2 and 7 years old), we have mostly found a large number of similarities in the children's productions of humour. Differences will probably increase in time, once the children master the complexity of their native language and are more socialized to their culture.

4. Conclusion

The roots of humour can be observed very early on. Our detailed analyses of the first instances of shared and non-shared amusement with their circumstances and specific features can help us understand the blossoming of the development of humour with its cognitive, pragmatic, and social implications. During the language acquisition process, the use of humour seems to depend a lot on the family's micro-culture, which is greatly responsible for its transmission. The family shows the child what can or cannot be laughed at throughout their everyday lives.

Our main objective in this article was to present a detailed analysis of the types of scaffolding parents offer their child as a function of age within child-parent interaction, rather than to identify factors or variables to explain the differences between the production of humour in young children from different cultural backgrounds.

However, one must also take socio-economic factors into account as these could have an influence on the children's productions. It is thus very difficult to talk about variations that would be specific to one culture in our study in which we only analysed the productions of one Brazilian and one French child in their family environment. Many other variables are to be considered. Gus is a little boy who mainly interacts with his father in our recordings whereas Ana is a little girl who mainly interacts with her mother. The parents' humour could also differ according to their own gender and according to their child's gender.

As far as the relation between humour and cognition is concerned, similarly to the results of Hoicka & Akhtar (2012: 598), our results do not sustain the idea that they are as interrelated as had been suggested by McGhee (1979). Humour seems to reflect cognitive development but only up to a certain point. Around 2 years old, children understand that they can create incongruities in their actions. As they develop verbal language, they also realise that they can create incongruities in their own verbal productions (metalinguistic awareness). Our results illustrate the links between humour, language development, social interaction, the speakers involved and their micro-culture. Within those relations, different types of humour will develop through the violation of social rules, by integrating taboos (for example scatological speech and

swearwords). We have thus provided data that illustrates how humour cannot be considered as innate but is tightly linked to children's socio-cultural background and adults' scaffolding.

In order to disentangle the impact of the different variables, more longitudinal follow-ups of children in Brazil and France, preferably up to 10 or 11 years old must be conducted. Studies of bilingual children being raised in the two cultural identities, with the two languages would also be fruitful and we thus intend to compare monolingual children from each culture and bilingual children. We hope to have provided elements worth pursuing in order to better capture the influence of cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural factors on children's entry into humour.

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