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Multimodal and intertextual humor in the media reception situation

The case of watching football on TV

Cornelia Gerhardt

Based on natural data from media reception, the talk of television viewers watching football matches is analyzed with regard to humor. Remarks on television are often greeted by (shared) laughter of the fans. However, laughter as such does not necessarily indicate humor. Instead, the celebrating fans also often laugh after goals. Principally, the fans appropriate the media text humorously either by multimodally referring to the pictures on the screen or by intertextually hinging their talk on the televised language. Formally, second person pronouns or sequences co-constructed with the sports announcers are used. Functionally, humor marks the activity as leisure. It helps the viewers negotiate world-views serving as contextualization cue in the interpretation of the media text.

1. Introduction¹

This paper aims to describe the use of humor in the media reception situation. The larger context of this work thus lies at the hinge between mass media and everyday face-to-face interaction. It is concerned with “the social practices by which the discourses of the media are appropriated in common face-to-face interactions” (Scollon 1998: vii). Although mass media have acquired an enormous importance in Western societies and the television, being one important kind, takes a central place in the households of most people, linguistics has only recently discovered this particular setting (Scollon 1998, Baldauf 1998, Hepp 1998, Klemm 2000, Holly et al. 2001). The current chapter will focus on the role of humor in the reception situation. It is data-driven and based on a corpus of naturally occurring interaction in this setting, i.e. talk by television viewers in their homes. We will see that humor as a social practice plays an important part in the appropriation of media texts in the reception situation. Laughter is a recurrent phenomenon in the corpus, since watching football is a form of recreation for the viewers. Their

¹ The author would like to thank Neal Norrick heartily for commenting on her paper.

shared laughter mirrors their enjoyment of the situation and contributes to a feeling of belonging and warmth. They laugh joyfully in response to positive actions of their team. Furthermore, they laugh about humorous remarks on television. More importantly though, the television viewers create their own humor against the backdrop of the media text. By linking their talk to the pictures, they create humor multimodally, and by tying their words to the sportscasting, intertextual humor is constructed.

The study is based on the ATTAC (Analysing The Television Audience's Conversations) corpus, which consists of transcriptions from video tapes of naturally occurring talk. Five different groups of predominantly British English native speakers were recorded while they were watching football games on television. The recorded consist of families or groups of friends. The age range is wide with the youngest participant being a toddler and the oldest over 70 years of age. The recorded are mainly middle class and from a non-immigrant background. One group lives in Sheffield and the others in the Greater Thames estuary. They were all found through personal contacts by the author. Generally, the video camera was either given to them so that they could record themselves and get acquainted to the camera being present, or the researcher set up the camera herself and left the premises prior to recording. The ATTAC-corpus encompasses transcriptions of fourteen half-times from seven different games consisting, all in all, of more than 45,000 words.² Generally, the viewers are absorbed in the games so that they seem oblivious to the camera after a few minutes. Since the football fans are watching the World Cup, the televised program appears fully to grasp the attention of the football fans, as one of them puts it: *I have been waiting for four years*. The corpus exemplifies situated talk in the *reception situation* (Charlton et al. 1997), the verbal *appropriation* (Holly et al. 1993, Faber 2001, de Certeau 1980) of media texts. On the same ground, it instantiates talk-in-interaction in the presence of another text, i.e. the media text³, i.e. the televised program, consists of talk and pictures, both multimodality and intertextuality become an issue. Both concepts have found a lot of recent attention (Tannen 2007, Norris 2004, Schmitt 2007). Here the terms will be used restrictedly: multimodality will pertain to the relation of the viewers' talk to the pictures, and intertextuality will only be used to focus on the ties between the participants' language use and the language in the medium, i.e. *SAT sports announcer talk* (Ferguson 1982).

² The ATTAC-corpus is currently not available for use by the interested public because it is not in a format that would allow publication.

³ The term 'media text' will be used in the following to denote both the pictures on television as well as the accompanying football commentary.

I will first give a short account of the principal features of talk in front of the television (Gerhardt 2008a) to furnish a basis for the ensuing discussion. This will be followed by a description of a very specific kind of laughter found in the ATTAC-corpus which cannot be taken as an indication of humor. How the viewers treat humor in the football commentary will be the following topic. Finally, in the two main parts, I will focus on multimodal and intertextual connections between the talk at home and the media text with respect to humor.

2. Talk in the football reception situation

Generally, the conversations by television viewers represent an *open state of talk* (Goffman 1981). Interactions in front of the television often consist of *free units* (Baldauf-Quiliatre 2004) or short *Gesprächsinselfn* (Baldauf 2002 ‘islands of talk’, my translation C.G.) only, i.e., there is no obligation to talk for the viewers. Also, the obligation to respond can be superseded. Different *footings* (Goffman 1979) account for the differing status of cohesion (Halliday et al. 1976) and coherence in the viewers’ talk. For instance during story-telling sequences, the participants’ talk-in-interaction is fully cohesive. No links to the media text may be found on the verbal level. However, even then, *view signs* (Scollon 1998) such as gaze or posture signal that the television is part of the viewers’ *contextual configuration* (Goodwin 2000). These view signs are *embodiments* (Goodwin 2000) of the constant likelihood of a shifting footing to the ‘watching football’ frame. *Contextualization cues* (Gumperz 1982) such as interjections or rise in volume mark these shifts to the ‘watching football’ frame. In other words, depending on the *notability* (Gerhardt 2008a) of a given scene on television, the talk may at any moment be interrupted or abandoned without any prior interactional work. Contrariwise, the *watch* (Scollon 1998) may also at any moment be reframed as a *with* (Goffman 1981), for instance during ‘story-telling’ or ‘catching up’.

Within the ‘watching football’ frame, the viewers’ talk is only coherent with reference to the media text. A number of cohesive ties (Halliday et al. 1976) such as personal pronouns link the interpersonal interactions of the viewers intertextually to the media text. Furthermore, the interlocutors at these moments also construct coherence interactionally (Schegloff 1990) e.g. by backchannelling to utterances on television or by using discourse markers. At times, the football fans intertwine their conversation and the commentary by producing discontinued talk which accommodates SAT into the gaps left in their interactions by granting turn-rights to the sportscasters. In this way a prohibition to talk may also be negotiated amongst the viewers. Besides the use of personal address (e.g. terms of address (cf. chapter 2), imperative verb forms or 2nd person pronouns), another intriguing finding is the co-production of adjacency pairs: then

the viewers construct coherent passages with the telecasters by furnishing second pair parts to the sports announcer talk. The (other) viewers may then only be 'present' (*anwesend* in Norris' terminology (2004)), that is, there is no interaction between the viewers.

Structurally in the viewers' talk-in-interaction, these passages of intense interaction with the sports casters or other TV personae often consist of *side-sequences* (Jefferson 1972), i.e. the viewers interrupt themselves to comment on the game. This is mainly the case for the groups of friends, who talk continuously, despite being part of a watch. Towards the end of the games and also for the families watching football, the interaction with the television represent the free units and islands of talk mentioned above, since mostly the viewers are silent and follow the game intently. This behaviour by the viewers mirrors the *para-social interaction* (Horton et al. 1956) on television. This common feature of media texts consists of the direct address of the viewers at home, for instance when a show host greets the audience at home: *Good evening, ladies and gentlemen*. So both the viewers and the persons on TV attempt to bridge the *co-presence gap* (O'Keeffe 2006) between presenter and audience in this mediated discourse.

Regarding multimodality (Norris 2004), the media text takes on high modal density in the interaction of the viewers, when the viewers do 'watching football'. 'Watching television' is foregrounded, which may go so far as to a prohibition of inter-viewer communication when the television is granted turn-rights. In contrast, when the participants move into e.g. a 'story telling' frame, the television in the viewers' talk takes on much less modal density. Instead e.g. states of gaze take on more importance as a communicative mode (Gerhardt 2007) e.g. to negotiate turn-taking among the viewers. To sum up, the role of the pictures and talk on television in the viewers' interactions can be represented on a continuum ranging from a full orientation to the medium to being *nearly* utterly disregarded e.g. when the viewers sort out the mail, or talk on the phone (Baldauf 2001).

3. Laughter as jubilation in the football reception situation

I will first present an instance of laughter by the participants which cannot be taken as an indication of humor. In the first example, one of the participants laughs out loud over a prolonged stretch of time. The kind of laughter we find in this scene is typical for the football reception situation. It does not however signal the presence of humor.

This transcript represents the first half of England versus Brazil, one of the quarter finals of the World Cup. From an English perspective this represents their

most important game in this series. The video has been recorded at the home of a young family with Andrew, Ursula, and their 18-month-old toddler Laurie. The following scene represents the English goal which results in a lot of physical and verbal excitement by Andrew.

Transcript 1 EB1A 25:44-26:06⁴

1	TV	Owen's sprinting away,=
2		=for the left here,=
3		=to get to [Lucio.]
4	Andrew	[OH] [{jumps up}]
5	TV	MICHAEL OWEN,
6		GREAT HEA[DER,...]
7	Ursula	I can't-
8		I can't SEE.=
9		{jumps from left to right on the sofa to see past husband}
10	Andrew	=YEEEEEEEEAAAAAHHHHHHH.
11		{screams at the top of his voice finishing in laughter}
12	Ursula	I didn't see,
13		you were [blocking it from] me, {laughingly}
14	Andrew	[I'm sorry,]
15		{laughs hysterically, jumps up and down}
16		{laughs}
17		{jumps with his head on his wife's lap}
18	Ursula	stop that. {smiles}
19	Andrew	{laughs hysterically}
20	Ursula	what's (?)ing you.= {smiles}
21	Andrew	=well I can't help that? {in a high pitched coarse voice}
22	Ursula	[but you should HAVE]
23	Andrew	[{laughs}] {sits down again}

The first three lines of the transcript deliver the media context for the ensuing reaction: Owen, one of England's principal strikers, attacks. Andrew can anticipate the outcome: he jumps up in excitement (line 4) when Owen chips the ball over Marcos, the Brazilian goalie. Andrew then screams at the top of his voice finishing in laughter of pure joy (line 10). While his wife laughingly complains *I didn't see, you were blocking it from me*, (lines 12 – 13) he jumps around in the living room

⁴ The letters and numbers indicate the game (here England vs. Brazil), the half-time (here the first half), the recorded group (here Andrew's family), and the time in the recording, which is roughly also the game time. It can be used to retrieve the passages under discussion in the ATTAC-corpus. TV refers to the commentator and pundit to the color commentator.

saying *I'm sorry* (line 14). His answer is more a reflection of the normative nature of a complaint in making an answer relevant (Sacks et al. 1974) than an actual apology. Andrew continues in his jubilation by laughing again (line 15) while jumping up and down. Then he laughs again (line 16), before putting his head on his wife's lap and, concurrently, jumping with both feet high into the air. After Ursula makes him stop, he again laughs hysterically (line 19). Finally in line 23, the whole passage ends with his laughter while he sits down again. Hence, the whole scene is interspersed by laughter (lines 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, and 23) and by smiles (lines 18 and 20). However, these cannot be taken as markers of a reflex to humor. Laughter here is part of the jubilation of an important English goal (in a quarter final, in the World Cup, against Brazil, the best ranked national football team in the world). It can be taken as a sign of psychological relief. (cf. *catharsis* Aristotle's "Poetics") since the England team fights vicariously and the fans at home live through these fights (cf. Sloan 1979 for this function of sports in society). Also, laughter represents a contextualization cue here which displays the viewers' orientation to the media text. This kind of high involvement by the viewers tends to appear in clusters. The football fans use an array of vocal and bodily means to signal their stance at the media text to their co-viewers: singing, laughter, moaning, sighing as well as clapping, getting up, and jumping up and down can be found in the corpus. To sum up, this kind of jubilating laughter will not be taken as a marker of humor.

4. Humor in the media text

Sportscasting as a genre for discourse studies has a long tradition by now (Ferguson 1982, Gerhardt 2008b, cf. Lavric et al. 2008 for a recent bibliography). However, humor in sportscasting has not been described so far. As we will see with the help of the following examples, the telecasters construct watching the matches amongst other things as a pleasurable and entertaining enterprise by using hyperbole, funny expressions or other means of making humorous remarks. The ATTAC-corpus shows that these jokes are indeed taken up by the viewers. The fans at home accept the invitation to be entertained. This may take the form of a simple laugh as in the following example:

Transcript 2 ES1R 05:56-06:02

1	TV	here we go,
2		for another white-knuckle ride,
3		with the England football team.
4	Gerard	uchu {short snorty laugh}

In line 4, Gerard, who is watching England versus Sweden together with his wife and their teenage son, signals his appreciation of the humorous hyperbole in the SAT *white-knuckle ride* (line 2). This establishes his general willingness to be

positively distracted by the game and the accompanying SAT. Some jokes also make him laugh out loud:

Transcript 3 BB1R 12:13-12:36

1 TV the uh-
2 England headquarters is,
3 only about twenty-five miles,
4 from Kobe,
5 but the press corps,=
6 =that have been travelling around,=
7 =with uh- England,
8 have been-
9 stationed in this city,
10 much to the delight,
11 of the local bar tenders.
12 Gerard [{laughs}]
13 TV [only kidding boys,]
14 Gerard {continues laughing}

In this example, *much to the delight of the local bar tenders* (lines 10 – 11) triggers Gerard's mirth. It plays on the image of the football fan and, in extension, also the football commentators as 'one of the boys': regular fellows who like to drink (a lot) in pubs (cf. Wanta et al. 1988 on the use of clichés in SAT). In response, Gerard laughs out loud for a longer amount of time. This appreciative laughter by the viewers is often accompanied by head-turns to fellow viewers (Gerhardt 2007) so that a feeling of belonging and sharing can be built in this way. This can be seen in the following example:

Transcript 4 EB2R 41:30-41:45

1 TV and uhm,
2 FOUR minutes,
3 plus stoppage time,=
4 for England,=
5 =to rescue their World Cup chances,
6 that's where we're at now,
7 (3.4tv)
8 having breakfast in the LAST-chance saloon.
9 (0.8TV)
10 TV Rivaldo,
11 Gerard {laughs and turns to wife}

Here, the creative expression *having breakfast in the LAST-chance saloon* (line 8) makes Gerard laugh, albeit a little belatedly. In line 11, his shift of posture and change

of gaze direction invites his wife to join him in his laughter. In this way, he tries to negotiate a mutual stance and, again, his laughter serves as a contextualization cue in the interpretation of the media text (Gerhardt 2007).

The ATTAC-corpus in general does not contain any talk-in-interaction which does not involve laughter and humorous remarks: each and every transcript contains passages where the viewers laugh, giggle, snigger or smirk, be it triggered by humorous passages on television or be it about a remark they themselves make (see below). By enjoying jokes from the television, they directly react to SAT taking up the commentators' invitation to enter into a quasi-communicative situation.

5. Multimodal humor in the reception situation

After having considered cases where the humorous remarks are to be found in the media text, we will now turn to instances where the viewers themselves create humor against the backdrop of the media text. We will first consider connections to the televised pictures, before turning to the field of intertextuality, i.e., connections to SAT, in the next section.

Let us recall at this point that the term *multimodality* is used here to describe ties between the pictures shown on television and the talk by the viewers at home. The term *multimodal* is used because it denotes a connection from one mode (pictures) to another (spoken language) or physically from changing colored dots on a screen to streams of sounds. For the production format this implies that the viewers are automatically *authors* (Goffman 1981), i.e. they have to verbalize physical events. Linguistically, multimodality is often achieved in the ATTAC-corpus through the use of pronouns (Gerhardt 2008a). For instance, a player visible on the screen (and *not* concurrently mentioned on SAT to exclude intertextual ties methodologically) can be addressed directly with the help of a 2nd person pronoun *you* or he can be referred to with the help of a 3rd person pronoun *he*. Especially the demonstrative pronoun *that* is used to connect the viewers' talk to current or salient events on the screen. Also comparative reference is often used by the viewers for instance when comparing a current state of affairs to a prior one as in *that's better* meaning *that is better than what we witnessed earlier*. Also *conjunctions* (Halliday et al. 1976) or *discourse markers* (Schiffrin 1987) can be used to link the interactions to the pictures (e.g. *well, that should liven it up*). In the following we will see how humor is employed multimodally.

In this first example of multimodal humor, Maria, a middle aged Londoner who is watching with her lodger and an acquaintance, addresses a person on TV directly. The scene happens towards the end of the second half of Germany against

Saudi-Arabia, a game which the Saudis lost 8:0. Germany is already 7:0 in the lead at this moment in the match.

Transcript 5 GS2L51:17-51:24

1 Maria come on.=
2 STOP funning about,
3 {laughs}
4 o::h nasty man.
5 just because you've won.

It is not quite clear who exactly Maria is referring to, since nobody takes up her remark, the other viewers treating her utterance as a free unit. Evidently, though, Maria criticizes the behaviour of someone associated with the German team. She uses the fixed expression *come on* (line 1) and an imperative verb form, *STOP funning about* (line 2), and a term of address *nasty man* (line 4). The referent of her talk can only be located in the pictures on television, hence multimodally. In this first example, it is only one viewer who amuses herself by linking her talk to the media text.

In the following piece of data, one of the viewers refers directly to a scene in the match. Frank and Tom, two friends in their 30s to 40s who live in East London, are watching the second half of Japan versus Russia here. Both use the reception situation for jokes and joined amusement (cf. Klemm's function for talk in the reception situation 'creating an atmosphere of sociability and enjoyment', my translation, CG, *Schaffung einer geselligen und vergnüglichen Stimmung* 2000).

Transcript 6 JR2T 16:54-17:02

1 Frank it's just like schoolboy football.
2 Tom yeah, {laughingly}
3 both {laughter}
4 Frank it's-
5 I'll get that in, {in boyish voice}
6 both {laughter}

Frank's simile *it's just like schoolboy football* opens up a humorous frame (Norrick 1993, 2004). The referent of *it* (line 1) can only be found in the pictures: it is the current way of playing that can be witnessed live on the screen. Frank's 'constructed dialogue' (Tannen 2007) (line 5), the high-pitched voice with a pouting quality, the use of glottal stops for plosives indexing the prototypically less well educated football player, and the foolish grin on his face continue the humorous frame. The manner of execution of line 5 relates back to the assessment as *schoolboy football* (line 1). The media text is used a backdrop here to create conviviality and also, subsequently, by the fact that they laugh together, a feeling a belonging and sharing

(cf. Klemm's function for talk in the reception situation 'creating a feeling of belonging to the same group', my translation CG, *Vergemeinschaftung der Zuschauer* 2000). Also, the viewers position themselves within the setting with respect to their co-viewers and to the media text building identities such as being an entertaining fellow (Bamberg 1997, 2000, Davies et al. 1990)

The reception situation also allows for crude forms of *impoliteness* such as insults (Bousfield 2008), because of the *unidirectionality* (Klemm 2000) of the setting. The following example represents a form of face-threatening humor that would generally not be possible if the 3rd person was actually within hearing distance.

Transcript 7 JR1T 03:43-03:50

1	Frank	he's got that Putin look=
2	Tom	=yeah yeah,
3		[it's-
4		yeah,]
5	Frank	[{laughs}] {laughs}
6	Tom	a real hatchet [face,]
7	Frank	[{laughs}]
8		(0.9)
9	Tom	Slav, {jocular}

This scene happens roughly at the beginning of the game when close-ups of the players are shown. Frank comments on the physical appearance of one of the Russian players *he's got that Putin look* (line 1). The 3rd person singular pronoun is used multimodally here to refer to the pictures on television. This remark is ratified by Tom (lines 2 – 4), while Frank's laughter (line 5) contextualizes his own words as a joke rather than a neutral comment about the likeness between the Russian president and the player. Tom then continues in this wake: *a real hatchet face* (line 6). These words are again tied to the pictures, i.e. multimodal, since they describe what the viewers see or, in other words, they verbalize the pictures. This derogatory remark also reaffirms the uncomplimentary nature of Frank's first utterance. In other words, for the two participants, it is not a good thing to look like the Russian president. Frank's laughter (line 7) at the end of Tom's remark ratifies Tom's comment and, again, underlines the humorous framing of the exchange. Finally, after a short pause (0.9 seconds), Tom smilingly says *Slav* (line 9) in a jocular tone to account for the likeness between the two Russians and their specific physiognomy, hence also for his and his friend's remarks. Although this moves the whole exchange from being specifically about two men to being a racial remark based on stereotypes and prejudice, Tom does sound very sympathetic for the player in question. So Tom's accounting here also justifies the player's look or apologizes for it, in the sense that he, the player, cannot help looking the ways

he looks (being a Slav). With this short multimodal humorous exchange, the two have confirmed and aligned their world-view or prejudice about male Slavic physiognomy generally not being particularly pleasing in the eyes of English men. So here the reception situation also allows the viewers to position themselves against larger Discourses (with a capital D) (Hepp 1998) negotiating their meaning in their talk.

As the last example of multimodal humor, we will move into the living room of an older English couple who watch Argentina versus England together with an old friend. The men share a background of refereeing, but they have by now retired from this pastime. This pairing is marked by the long history of rivalry between these two great football nations (cf. Maradona's 'hand of God') and, outside of the pitch, also by the Falkland war. So emotions can easily run high. This moment in the game is preceded by a number of Argentinean fouls.

Transcript 8 AE1C 32:45-32:57

- | | | |
|---|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Henry | from a technical point of view, |
| 2 | | the Argentineans are so HAIRy. |
| 3 | | [aren't they {laughingly}] |
| 4 | Darrell | [[{laughing}] [{continues laughing}]] |
| 5 | Henry | [long hair,] |
| 6 | | (0.7) |
| 7 | | like David Seaman,= |
| 8 | | ALL of them.= |
| 9 | Darrell | =yeah, |

In lines 1 – 2, Henry evaluates the playing of the Argentineans *from a technical point of view*, *the Argentineans are so HAIRy*. Based on the current state of the game, i.e. multimodally on the pictures, the term here seems to be used in the sense 'excited, angry, out of temper'. (OED) However, the expression used triggers the speakers and Darrell's mirth, so Henry continues in a joking manner based on the literal meaning of the term *long hair* (line 5). He then foregrounds his English perspective by comparing the Argentineans to David Seaman who also has long hair. (line 7) His turn finishes with *ALL of them*. (line 8) to refer back to *the Argentineans* (line 2) hence recasting his whole earlier utterance in the light of the second frame: *long hair*, ... *ALL of them*. Both readings of the term are based on the pictures, i.e. the media text is used multimodally as a resource for entertainment by the viewers.

To conclude, we were able to see that the viewers often base their humorous remarks directly on the pictures on television for multifarious functions such as the creation of an atmosphere of conviviality and pleasure and the building of a feeling of belonging and solidarity. Because of unidirectionality, politeness

with TV personae is not called for. This allows for a much more open airing of emotions or prejudice than other settings. This in turn helps align world-views and positioning against topics triggered by the television text so that the viewers can negotiate their more local, discursive identities (e.g. being entertaining) as well as their transportable identities (e.g. Englishman).

6. Intertextual humor in the reception situation

Besides the pictures, the talk on television, i.e. the football commentary or SAT, can also be used as a springboard for humorous activities by the viewers. Intertextual connections between the media text and the talk by the viewers abound in the ATTAC-corpus (Gerhardt 2008). Besides reference and the use of conjunctions (in the sense of Halliday et al. 1976), which can both also be used multimodally, intertextually the viewers have a number of linguistic means at their disposal. Since, intertextually, text is linked to text, *a priori*, any cohesive device can also be employed across texts (just as it can be employed within a text). For this reason, the viewers can also use substitution and ellipsis to connect their talk to SAT. Also, lexical repetition can serve to connect the two strands of talk in the ATTAC-corpus. All three means are not available for multimodal connections since they can only link language to language. Furthermore, the viewers use backchannelling, discourse markers and direct address to tie their conversations to the talk on television. Interactionally, they sometimes grant turn-rights to the television and co-construct talk by furnishing second pair parts to adjacency pairs started on television. As we will see, again the joint creation of humor plays an important part in this setting.

Sometimes the connection between the viewers' talk and SAT consists of simple repetition. Repetition has been described as a source of intertextuality and identity construction (cf. Tannen 2007, Tovares 2006, Gordon 2004, for a more general account cf. Johnstone 1994). This is again the opening match between Germany and Saudi-Arabia which Germany won 8:0. At this point in the game, Klose, a German player, has already scored two goals.

Transcript 9 GS1L 24:42-24:46

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | TV | maybe it's a little early, {jocular} |
| 2 | | to start thinking about- |
| 3 | | golden boot. |
| 4 | Maria | golden boot. {laughingly} |
| 5 | all viewers | {general mirth} |

The sports reporter jokes about Klose already being the top scorer of the tournament: *to start thinking about golden boot* (lines 2 – 3). The joke is based on the discrepancy

between the time elapsed at that point and the 63 other matches still to come. Maria repeats the joke verbatim and laughs *golden boot* (line 4). Verbatim reiteration is frequent in the corpus when participants mark parts of the commentary as entertaining. It allows them to draw attention to the humorous parts inviting in a reaction by their co-viewers. Concurrently, they construct themselves as humorous persons and the situation as leisurely and entertaining.

The following transcript is again a part featuring the two friends in East-London who are watching Japan versus Russia.

Transcript 10 JR2T 02:11-02:42

1	TV	Izmailov, [zmaɪlɒv]
2		corner.
3		(2.6)
4	Frank	is his name REAlly Smirnoff.
5	Tom	{laughter} [{continued laughter}]
6	Frank	[{laughter}] =
7	Tom	=well he's not supposed to-
8		what if he was,
9		be called Smirnoff.
10		who would do that.=
11	Frank	={short laugh}
12		(0.9)
13		{laughs}
14		that's like there was people in Italy called Bacardi,
15		{laughter} [{continued laughter}]
16	Tom	[I mean there ARE are there,]
17		[Martini,]
18	Frank	[{continued laughter}]
19	both	{laughter}
20	Frank	RON Bacardi.
21	Tom	and yeah- {laughter} Ron Bacardi {laughingly},

In the first two lines, the sports announcer does *play-by-play announcing* (Ferguson 1982), i.e. he describes the ongoing action on the pitch. A Russian player, Izmailov, is conceded a corner. The way the commentator pronounces the name [zmaɪlɒv] (line 1) reminds the viewers of the Russian vodka brand Smirnoff pronounced [zmɜːnɒf] by Frank (line 4). The connection between the viewers' talk and SAT is established with the help of anaphora *his name* (line 4). Clearly, the referent of *his* must be located in the prior talk on television (and not in the pictures or the prior talk at home.) First, in the World Cup the players wear jerseys with numbers only and no names. Primarily though, there is only a phonetic resemblance in unstressed fast English speech. Hence, the televised text here is used by the viewer

as a resource for joke-telling reinforcing their friendship by shared laughter. They manage to execute this practice by Frank (line 4) intertextually referring to a player just mentioned on television with the help of the 3rd person pronoun *his*.

The following example is similar: again it is Gerard, the father, who is watching England versus Brazil together with his son. It is the end of the second half; Brazil are leading 2:1 which means England will most probably be out of the World Cup.

Transcript 11 EB2R 45:32-45:44

1	TV	but there's a bonus here for England,
2		FOUR minutes of stoppage time.
3		(0.7TV)
4		a lot of that's down,=
5		=to the time it took,=
6		=to send off Ronaldinho.
7		(5.4)
8	Gerard	{laughs}
9		(2.9)
10		nice of him,

With *nice of him* (line 10), Gerard connects his talk to the media text (lines 1 – 6). The 3rd person referred to with *him* can only be located with the help of SAT. It is nice of Ronaldinho that he caused extra stoppage time in which England might be able to score and, as a consequence, might still be able to win the game. Ronaldinho had earlier been the source of some critical remarks both by the sportscasters and the viewers at home. The referee's decision now seems to punish Ronaldinho's earlier behaviour. Gerard in hitching up to the media text can display an ironic stance towards Ronaldinho's doings. Furthermore, since his remark evaluates earlier doings by one of the protagonists, Gerard weaves a meaningful narrative out of the, in principle, unconnected events on the pitch (cf. Martinez 1999, Morris et al. 1985 for the same function for SAT).

Often demonstratives are also used for this purpose. Their nature as verbal 'pointers' make them useful instruments in this setting. The following example is again taken from the beginning of the game Japan versus Russia being watched by the two friends Tom and Frank. Again, the viewers use SAT for humorous purposes to their shared amusement.

Transcript 12 JR1T 02:59-03:17

1	TV	includes a lawyer,
2		also from Germany,
3		(0.5)
4		a scientist,
5		(0.6)

6		from,
7		the Czech republic,=
8		=from Prague,
9		and yet another dentist,
10		from Paraguay.
11		(1.4)
12		[(?)...]
13	Frank	what?
14		{laughs}
15		is that the [Russians.]
16	Tom	[on the team?]=
17	Frank	[{laughs}]
18	Tom	=[I was gonna say,
19		is that-]
20	Frank	{laughs}
21		[a dentist,
22		from Paraguay.] {laughingly}
23	Tom	[a new relaxed Russian immigration][policy.]
24	Frank	[{laughs}]

In lines 1 – 10, the telecaster is presenting the match officials: the referee and his linesmen. After a pause of 1.4 seconds, Frank signals his confusion with the help of the wh-pronoun *what?* (line 13). Seemingly, the two had not been paying attention so they do not understand the significance of this list of non-Russian (and clearly non-Japanese) names. As their talk generally has a humorous keying, Frank starts laughing about his or their bewilderment (line 14). He then uses the demonstrative *that* to refer to the commentators talk *is that the Russians* (line 15). In overlap, Frank (line 16) states the same non-sense suggestions *on the team?* While Frank laughs again, Tom aligns himself with Frank’s failure to contextualize the information in SAT correctly. First he signals that his words will represent another version of Frank’s aberrant suggestion. The *marker of standpoint continuity* in line 18, *I was gonna say* (cf. *I’m just saying* Craig et al. 2000), indicates that the speaker could renounce from voicing his intended utterance because the prior speaker has already stated the same. Still, in line 19, Tom continues *is that-*. Again *that* refers intertextually back to SAT. The break-off and pause may be a result of his endeavour to find a more entertaining formulation for the thought already expressed by Frank. While Frank repeats the dubious denomination more or less verbatim, *a dentist from Paraguay*, Tom comes up with a more entertaining reformulation *a new relaxed Russian immigration policy* (line 23). The laughter which accompanies this exchange underlines the humorous keying i.e. they both know that the people mentioned on television are not part of the Russian team. Instead, SAT is exploited for comic purposes here. This again emphasizes that the viewing

is seen as a past-time in which the viewers want to ‘enjoy themselves’ (cf. *sich vergnügen*, my translation CG, Klemm 2000). The demonstrative pronouns link the viewers’ talk and the commentary.

This final example is taken from the game England versus Denmark which is watched by the father Gerard and his son Benjamin again. Here, Jodie, the mother, has joined them for the viewing. As we will see, this interchange raises a number of methodological questions in this specific setting.

Transcript 13 ED1R 31:12-31:31

1	TV	it was Töfting,
2		who uh-
3		(0.6)
4		bounced the ball in frustration,
5		and got a yellow card.
6		(1.4tv)
7	Gerard	he looks like a BOUncer.
8	Jodie	yeah,=
9	Pundit	=wouldn't meet-
10		like to meet him in a dark alley.=
11		=would you.
12		(?)= (1.1tv)
13	Jodie+Gerard	={loud laughter}
14		[{continued laughter}]
15	TV	[no.] (0.8tv)
16	Jodie+Gerard	{continued laughter}
17	TV	see his tattoos.=
18		[=anyway.]
19	Jodie+Gerard	[renewed laughter]
20		{rest incomprehensible}

On television, the commentators assign a yellow card to a specific player, a common act on SAT, since the pictures do not always make it clear which player exactly was penalized *it was Töfting who uh- (0.6) bounced the ball in frustration, and got a yellow card* (lines 1 – 5). Gerard then seems to utter a rather clever pun *he looks like a BOUncer* (line 7). On the one hand, this is based on Töfting bouncing the ball earlier, hence, on his acticity: he seems to be the kind of person who would do what was just mentioned on SAT (intertextual connection between *BOUncer* and *bounced* and between *he* and *Töfting*). On the other hand, it is based on Töfting’s physical appearance which apparently is similar to that of a chucker-out (multimodal connection between *he* and the person visible on the screen). Hence, the more immediate meaning of the verb *to bounce* is replaced by its extended meaning in the derivative noun *bouncer*. However,

in taking the intonation pattern into account it becomes apparent that *BOU*ncer is the new information in this utterance marked by the tonic pitch movement (Halliday 1967) and not *looks*. In other words, if Gerard had based his remark on the earlier mention of the lexical stem *bounce*, he would have had to say: *he LOOKs like a bouncer*, since *bouncer* would be the given information and *looking like* one the new information. Hence, the information structure signaled through the intonation pattern clearly rules out this intertextual connection in an interactional sense, albeit semiotically in describing these texts as texts, this connection exists. For our current endeavour, namely a description of the humorous practices of television viewers or an analysis of the verbal appropriation of the media text by the viewers with respect to humorous uses, this instance does not represent an intertextual humorous connection (cf. a similar point in Norrick 2003 about jokes as performance in contrast to jokes as texts). The ensuing utterances raise a similar point. After Jodie's ratification, the pundit's states a similar opinion which, in terms of timing, latches on to Jodie's short acquiescence (line 8) *wouldn't meet- like to meet him in a dark alley. would you. (?)* (line 9 – 12). Since the pundit cannot hear the viewers, the 3rd person pronoun *him* must either point back textually to the commentator mentioning *Töfting* on television (line 1) or multimodally to the pictures on television.⁵ It cannot, for a start, be said to point intertextually to Gerard's earlier utterance in his living room (line 7). However, taken the next turn into account, i.e. the sequential place where we find the participant's treatment of the prior turn, we can discern that the couple evidently orients to this intertextual connection. Their loud laughter is only explicable on the basis that the pundit's remark is *heard* as a response to the husband's remark. So part of the loud merriment of the couple is grounded in the coincidence that the pundit voices similar ideas as the husband with sequentially appropriate timing. Hence, to come to a conclusion as far as the nature of this connection is concerned: in line with the *next-turn-proof-procedure* of CA (Sacks et al. 1974) I will assume an intertextual relation here since the participants themselves orient to this moment of intertextuality.

As we could see, the viewers use the talk on television for humorous purposes and for their shared amusement. The television viewers use the language on television as a resource for humor. In repeating verbatim what has been said on television they can draw attention to humorous bits. Furthermore, they can pick out individual words or utterances to subvert them for their own comic purposes, irrespective of their

⁵ The television commentators have monitors in the stadium which allow them to follow the televised pictures in order to synchronize their commentary with them.

meaning or function in SAT. Also, talking back to the television is done for the pleasure and entertainment of the the speaker him/herself and the co-viewers.

7. Conclusion

The reception situation offers fruitful ground for humor. Since television viewing is a form of entertainment for the families and groups of friends, an atmosphere of sociability and enjoyment is built by the viewers. The media text serves as a backdrop for jokes, humor and clever ironic commentary. Both the language on television and the transmitted pictures can be built on. These humorous practices often result in common laughter signaling and fuelling the joined mirth. The joined laughter about the media text reinforces a feeling of sharing and belonging to the same group. Furthermore, common laughter helps negotiate mutual stance on world-views and, hence, serves as a contextualization cue in the interpretation of the media text. In this light, the prototypical image of the *couch potato* seems questionable, at least, when groups of viewers watch together.

Finally, the data also point to this basic differentiation that has to be made between jokes as texts and humor in interaction. Depending on the perspective of the researcher, one and the same piece of data will lead to different analyses. However, it must be recognized that spoken language is the cradle of humor and jokes. Especially the reception situation, the setting under discussion, calls for a treatment of humor as an element of spoken talk-in-interaction.

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