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You had to be there: The Pragmatics of Improvisational Joking in Relation to a Sociolinguistic Theory of Conversation

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You had to be there: The Pragmatics of Improvisational Joking
In Relation to a Sociolinguistic Theory of Conversation

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Overview	5
1.2 Basic Issues	7
1.3 Theoretical Frameworks	25
1.4 Data	37
1.5 Terms	49
Chapter 2	54
2.0 Introduction	54
2.1 Review of the Literature	54
Chapter 3	121
3.0 Introduction	121
3.1 Key Ideas	122
3.2 Basic Argument	125
3.3 Rapport Theories	138
3.4 Joking in Political Discourse	141
Chapter 4	148
4.0 Introduction	148
4.1 Methodology	148
4.2 Terms	152
4.3 Prototypes of Joking Tones	156
4.4 Discourse Analysis	169
Chapter 5	187
5.0 Introduction	187
5.1 Summing-up	187
5.2 Cognitive Implications	189
5.3 Joking and Ideology	198
5.4 Social Implications	198
5.5 Directions	205

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

The topic of this dissertation is joking interaction as indirect communication. "Joking interaction" refers to the apparently spontaneous and improvisational eddies of verbal playfulness which constitute part of the flow of interaction in American society. Joking activity of this sort is distinct from narrative jokes, and from the more formalized types of speech play exemplified in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1976). Following Coser (1960) and Tannen (1984), I have looked at instances in which a remark is apparently non-serious and intended to amuse, and has been responded to as such.

Example 1:

Man on third unsuccessful attempt to pass through the metal-detector gate at the Seattle Airport, after having emptied his pockets of coins, removed his belt, etc., addressing the assortment of people present in the area: "I guess I just have a magnetic personality!" (laughter from people present)

Example 2:

President of the U.S. (Ronald Reagan) testing microphone before a radio address (August 1984):

"My fellow Americans. I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes."

Example 3:

Ed and Joyce are fellow faculty members who are meeting in the department lounge. Ed had previously paid for a couple of cups of coffee.

- 1 Ed: I'll pay for it.
- 2 Joyce: No, I already got it.
- 3 Ed: You shouldn't pay for my coffee.
- 4 Joyce: Oh, that's OK . . . you're worth every penny.
- 5 Ed: (laughs) I see your opinion of me has gone up.
- 6 Joyce: Not really. I'm coming back later to take fifteen cents out again.
- 7 Both: (laugh)

Example 4:

Ann, Kay and Sue are teachers who have just gotten together to work on a common project.

- 1 Ann: I've been busy doing twenty-five other things but now, finally, I'll turn my attention to these courses.
- 2 Kay: Do you ever feel fragmented.
- 3 Ann: Who me? Fragmented? (with simultaneous contortion of arms, face)
(laughter: Kay and Sue, joined by Ann)
- 4 Kay: What do I do next.
- 5 All: (laughter)

Example 5:

This example is from Hall (1974) and was transcribed from audiotape. The participants are student housemates who have just walked into the kitchen where one of their number is baking a cake.

- 1 Randy: What's the E.T.E. on your cake, Mary?
(laughter)
- 2 Mary: Estimated Time . . . ?
- 3 Randy & Others: of Eating. (laughter)
- 4 Mary: 35 minutes in the oven, 20 minutes to cool
- 5 Frank: and 10 minutes to get eaten. (laughter)
- 6 Sid: Is that one minute per person? (laughter)
- 7 Alice: So all return in . . . an hour and a half.
- 8 Sid: Or you can return in 35 minutes and steal it out of the oven
and ice it yourself.
- 9 Bruce: Quickly . . . quietly . . .
- 10 Donna: (laughter) uhuh . . .
- 11 Earl: Probably reduce the cooling time by throwing ice cubes in it.
- 12 Sid: What, in the batter? (laughter)
- 13 Frank: Yes, start out with ice cubes in the batter.
- 14 Bruce: But put asbestos around them so that they don't get melted
in the oven

(laughter; Alice speaks inaudibly)
- 15 Earl: Just pick out the asbestos . . . (laughter)

Example 6:

Situation: employees and supervisor were "chatting" in hallway outside the lunchroom prior to returning to work after dinner break

Characters: Bob (supervisor) Native American-English speaker, grew up in Louisiana, late 30's, described as "low key"; Larry (employee) Immigrant from the Philippines, 11 years in U.S., Catholic, long-term employee. 50ish, described as "emotional", hard worker; (Linda: Larry's coworker)

- 1 Bob: Larry, where's Linda?
- 2 Larry: I don't know . . .
- 3 Bob: Why don't you go see if she's in the ladies room?
- 4 Larry: (very excited) Oh, no, no, no! Boys don't go in girls' room!
Boys don't go in girls' room!
- 5 Bob: Well, OK, Larry; you just lost your chance.

Joking interaction as complex communication is of interest from at least two different perspectives. In the first place, it challenges current theories of language and discourse by forcing confrontation with certain basic issues: the nature of context; the different orders of meaning which can be conveyed by an utterance; the process of conventionalization in language; how aspects of a communication can be foregrounded; the nature of intersubjectivity; the existence of multiple perspectives; and the characterization of communicative competence. Secondly, joking serves as an important communicative resource among speakers of American English by which understanding is displayed, complex social meaning is conveyed, coherence is constructed in discourse, and individuality is expressed through language.

Given that the starting point for a theory of language must be situated communication, which is ultimately the phenomenon to be understood, the claim is made here that two levels of explanation may be useful. An adequate explanation may involve the pragmalinguistic as well as the interactional sociolinguistic.

"Pragmalinguistic" is here defined as referring to the resources of the communication system for conveying meaning of different sorts [at a relatively abstract level], and also in relation to general theories of [interpersonal] rapport; **"interactional sociolinguistic"** here refers to the situated analysis of joking as a communicative resource by which people construct coherence in conversation.

The contributions of this dissertation are:

- (1) a framework for conceptualizing joking activity;
- (2) a synthesis of findings and ideas on joking from different disciplines;
- (3) a social-functional pragmalinguistic analysis of joking interaction;
- (4) an attempt to link the pragmalinguistic and the interactional sociolinguistic;
- (5) identification of a range of joking "tones" and an explanation for the systematic misinterpretation of intent across tones;
- (6) an interactional sociolinguistic treatment of joking as a significant resource in the construction of coherence in conversation;
- (7) an attempt to link the phenomenon of joking interaction to American ideology, and to discuss the social implications within a pluralistic society.

1.1.0 Overview

CHAPTER ONE begins with an overview of the dissertation, describing each chapter in turn. This is followed by a discussion of the basic issues within linguistic theory motivating this study, a presentation of theoretical framework, an explanation of the data used, and a definition of terms within a proposed framework for conceptualizing affiliative joking activity.

CHAPTER TWO begins with a review of the literature, which brings together work on humor and joking from linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Essential notions and approaches are illustrated first through a discussion of

narrative jokes, and then in relation to improvisational joking activity. A general theoretical and methodological critique is followed by a synthesis of findings, with caveats, on joking activity.

CHAPTER THREE presents a social-functional analysis of the phenomenon of joking within the scope of pragmalinguistics. The point of departure is an attempt to account in a satisfying way for the classic ambiguity of joking as an indirect mode of communication. The analysis offers a unifying explanation of the occurrence of joking within different categories in [pragmatic] theories of rapport. The theoretical treatment begins with Bateson's analysis of play as a mode of interaction which is distinct from non-play and yet relationally-defined, and which is signalled by means of "metapragmatic" cues of a particular sort. It is argued that play, as an essential developmental activity, exerts social-functional pressure on the linguistic system, in the sense that provision must be made for signalling that it is going on. Prototypical cues to signal play are seen to have a phylogenetic and ontogenetic connection (Ohala 1984). Bateson's analysis of the nature of the cues, together with Silverstein's notions about the nature of language as a semiotic system, and Gumperz' theory of conversational inference which allows for the foregrounding of various aspects of conveyed meaning, allow us to understand how (1) joking activity comes to have a conveyed meaning as indexical of relationship which in turn entails assumptions about role relationships and shared knowledge and attitudes; and (2) the paradoxical nature of the communication, arising out of the analogic negation, can be used in the service of deniability. These two aspects of the joking communication are used to explain occurrences of joking within theories of rapport. The analysis is illustrated with some data from the realm of American public and political discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR shifts the focus from joking activity in general at the pragmalinguistic level, to the interactional sociolinguistic analysis of situated joking

activity which is oriented toward positive politeness. There is a discussion of methodology followed by further discussion of the framework proposed in Chapter 1 for conceptualizing joking activity. The perspective on joking is that of interactional resource for constructing complex coherence in discourse. Individual "senses of humor" are manifested and negotiated within broad "tones" and general "group styles" that represent sociocultural knowledge at the level of linguistic routine. The notion of "tone" from that framework is illustrated with a continuum having three general categories. The ideas set out in Chapter 3 concerning the foregrounding of different aspects of the joking communication are used to explain/predict systematic misunderstanding between habitual practitioners of two of the tones identified. Finally, a detailed discourse analysis is presented of an extended humorous episode which is an example of one of the tones identified.

CHAPTER FIVE sums up the argument, discusses the kinds of cognitive tasks involved in producing and interpreting joking activity (in relation to the framework laid out in Chapter (1), presents a hypothesis concerning the relation between joking and American ideology, discusses the social implications of the findings of this dissertation within a pluralistic society, and suggests directions for further for research.

1.2.0 Basic Issues

There are a series of issues which in my view should form the core of a communicative linguistics. They have to do with language as a complex symbol system which people use for various purposes in a context which language both reflects and forms part of. All of the issues can be subsumed under the category of context, within which patterns of coherence are perceived. Coherence is an interpretive notion, a "making sense" which must be for a subject who is also embedded in the context. Thus perceptions of coherence are potentially different interpretive

judgments from each point of view. Further, (as has been pointed out under different rubrics by Gumperz (involvement), Rommetveit (intersubjectivity), Brown & Yule (coherence), R. Lakoff (rationality), Cicourel (reciprocity of perspectives)), the notion of coherence is paradoxical, in that it must be assumed in order to be created. Finally, it is mutually constructed in interaction and is thus emergent--yet the construction is constrained by sociocultural patterns of production and interpretation. This process of constraint, mediated by language, is the core of the relation between micro-interactional processes and social organization.

My purpose in this section is to discuss the series of issues or that I see as basic, trying to show how I have perceived coherence in their treatment in the relevant disciplines, and establishing why joking interaction is particularly appropriate as a locus for their exploration.

1.2.1 Context

The nature of context is the core issue to which all others are related. One approach, initiated by Malinowski in his 1935 paper on "The context of situation", is an analyst's checklist of aspects of the context. This list has been elaborated and expanded by Hymes (1974). Brown and Yule (1983:44) supplement Hymes' list with one from Lewis (1972) which is more oriented toward the propositional version of context associated with formal pragmatics and discourse analysis and thus having more of a cognitive orientation. Halliday (Language as social semiotic), in attempting to delineate "a conceptual framework for representing the social context as the semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings", identifies the essential general concepts as (1) the text; (2) the situation; (3) the text variety or register; (4) the code (in Bernstein's (1964) sense); (5) the linguistic system (including the semantic system); (6) the social structure. Silverstein's (1985:224) definition of context emphasizes the centrality of language: "For analytic purposes, we may conceive of context as an organized, intersubjectively available and

socially maintained configuration of factors of potential indexical relevance to linguistic form and meaning." The key word here is "potential"; the etic grid of factors may represent all possibilities in the situation, but the actual relevance and relative importance to the participants is another question, and brings us to the emic (or members') dimension of context. We may be able to predict in very general terms what a set of participants are likely to be orienting to in a particular situation, but individuals take different perspectives at different times, and in fact are continuously assessing and negotiating what is going on. Thus Gumperz' (1982a) theory of conversational inference addresses itself to the problem of understanding how the potentially relevant factors are actually brought to bear in the process of interaction, through identifying the bases on which people make interpretive judgments.

In addition, and this brings us to the next point, context is partly signalled by linguistic choices. Language both reflects and shapes the situations in which it is used. Silverstein's description is apt: "Either the linguistic sign token presupposes some aspects of the context in which it is used or, by virtue of the use of the linguistic sign token, the context in such-and-such configuration is entailed as a consequence. . . . Language use in context is the everchanging dynamic of indexical presupposition and indexical entailment between specific linguistic signs and specific aspects of the context in the speech event."

Thus a key problem is the opposition between the conception of context as a given set of factors against which interaction takes place and which can be manipulated to affect interaction as a dependent variable (positivist view), and the view of context as interpreted and significantly defined by the participants [potentially in different ways] through interaction. Further, each participant brings to a situation a set of cultural expectations, learned through interaction, which represent "norms" of context, which guide behavior and against which the behavior of others

is interpreted. In this respect we may say that the context channels interpretive processes, acting as a kind of constraint. These "constraints" are not appropriately viewed as deterministic, however, since they are constantly being manipulated and violated for communicative effect. The construction of social interaction can be seen as participants' building on each other's behavior. "The constraints can thus be seen as 'production resources' rather than as limitations or as deterministic pressures" (Erickson 1983:75), as well as negotiated and potentially redefined by the use of language itself.

From a slightly different perspective, context can also be thought of in terms of the depth of awareness of the participants of the "norms" that they bring to the situation, and the strategies by which they violate them. Related to this is the balance of implicit/explicit context. We may tend to assume that even though each participant in interaction may have a different perspective on a situation, nevertheless each of the different perspectives will be unitary or internally congruent. However, Emerson notes (1970:76) that

a reality can hardly seem self-evident if a person is simultaneously aware of a counterreality. . . . the ordinary reality may contain not only a dominant definition, but in addition counterthemes opposing or qualifying the dominant definition. Thus, several contradictory definitions must be sustained at the same time. Because each element tends to challenge the other elements, such composite definitions of reality are inherently precarious even if the probability of disconfirming events is low.

Multiple contradictory realities are expressed on various levels of explicitness and implicitness. Sustaining a sense of solidness of reality depends on the right balance of explicit and implicit expressions of each theme through a series of points in time. The most effective gestures express a multitude of themes on different levels. The advantages of multiple themes in the same gesture are simultaneous qualification of one theme by another, hedging (the gesture lacks one definite meaning), and economy of gestures. (p. 92)"

Further, there is the potential aspect of context which Hymes called "key", This term was introduced by Hymes (1974: 57-58) as one of the components of speech situations

to provide for the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done. It corresponds roughly to modality among grammatical categories. Acts otherwise the same as regards setting, participants, message, form, and the like may differ in key, as e.g., between *mock: serious* or *perfunctory: painstaking*.

Key is often conventionally ascribed to an instance of some other component as its attribute; seriousness, for example, may be the expected concomitant of a scene, participant, act, code, or genre (say, a church, a judge, a vow, use of Latin, obsequies). Yet there is always the possibility that there is a conventionally understood way of substituting an alternative key. (This possibility corresponds to the general possibility of choosing one speech style or register as against another) . . .

Hymes' notion of key seems to be akin to Schutz' notion of consciousness "shifting the accent of reality" as it moves among "finite provinces of meaning," each of which has its own cognitive style. Schutz (1967) describes one such movement as "our quandary, if, in listening to a joke, we are for a short time ready to accept the fictitious world of the jest as a reality in relation to which the world of our daily life takes on the character of foolishness." The movement, according to Schutz, "is nothing else than a radical modification in the tension of our consciousness, founded in a different *attention a la vie*." Further, "to the cognitive style peculiar to each of these different provinces of meaning belongs, thus, a specific tension of consciousness and, consequently, also a specific *epoche*, a prevalent form of spontaneity, a specific form of self experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time perspective."

Goffman (1974, 1981), drawing on William James, Schutz, Hymes and Bateson, starts with the idea of "primary framework". In these terms, a culture is defined as a set of primary frameworks. Goffman's "key" is defined as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (1974:43-44). In the actual stream of interaction, strips of interaction which occur in the joking key are referred to as "footings".

Hymes realized the power of "key":

The significance of key is underlined by the fact that, when it is in conflict with the overt content of an act, it often overrides the latter (as in sarcasm). The signalling of key may be nonverbal, as with a wink, gesture, posture, style of dress, musical accompaniment, but it also commonly involves conventional units of speech too often disregarded in ordinary linguistic analysis, such as English aspiration and vowel length to signal emphasis.

Recognition of the notions just discussed carries with it certain necessary assumptions about the nature of the world: that it is composed of multiple perspectives, each with a necessarily limited degree of knowledge; that meaning and interpretation are relational and emergent. This leads to recognition of the idea that in dealing with human language and communication one is dealing with inherent ambiguity. Faced with this prospect one can define the situation either negatively or positively: either it is a problem, or, as Rommetveit puts it (1985:103), "vagueness, ambiguity and incompleteness...can be seen as versatility, flexibility and negotiability." According to Gumperz (1982a:208), "investigation showing how relational signs function to signal activities and discourse tasks, how interpretations are agreed upon and altered in the course of an interaction by differentially foregrounding, subordinating or concatenating various information carrying elements, is a major task of interactional sociolinguistics."

A related question of context which follows from Goffman's frame analysis is how to conceptualize and study the new sets of contexts [laminations] that contemporary American society and mass media have created, which involve mutual influence among the private and public spheres.

There is also the question of the link between the actions of individuals in conversation [the micro-context] and social structures and organization [the macro-context]. We may believe, with Sapir, that society is "creatively reanimated" in social interaction, but exactly how the process works is the question. Thus ethnomethodologists (e.g., Schegloff 1986) look for "obvious" evidence that

participants are orienting to aspects of social organization; Halliday creates a framework of language as semiotic moving in the direction of Saussure's vision of a science of signs in society; and Habermas insists on a social methodology which would integrate interpretive approaches with critique of ideology and also an historically-oriented analysis of social systems (McCarthy 1980:xii).

1.2.2 Orders of Meaning

An essential feature of linguistic communication, which has been obscured by a focus on propositional meaning in literal interpretation of written sentences, is the fact that any utterance potentially conveys an array of messages. Speech act theory has made a contribution in this area, by recognizing that speech is social action. Searle's work (1969, 1976) has elaborated the speaker-based notion of "illocutionary force". Dillon et al (1985) cite Levinson's definition of an illocutionary act as "a privileged level for describing 'doing things' with language--a level which is governed by convention and is in principle determinate (in contrast to the perlocutionary act, which is not)." Austin's (1962) concept of "perlocutionary effect" on the addressee has not been pursued to my knowledge within that tradition, unless we think of Grice's (1975) notion of conversational implicature as inducing an inference in the addressee. Levinson (1983:279) predicts that speech act theory will be slowly undermined by 'much more complex multifaceted pragmatic approaches to the functions that utterances perform,' which will arise from 'the empirical study of natural language use'. Within the Prague School linguistic tradition, Jakobson (1960) identified a set of factors [addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, and code] determining different functions of language in the communication situation [emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic, and metalingual]. Jakobson's analysis, which will be discussed further below, has been incorporated into the functional linguistic stratification of Silverstein (1985), who asserts that we need to reject the assumption that language is a "semiotically unfunctional

symbol system".

One essential difficulty, related to the etic/emic question with regard to the notion of context, is the question of "meaning" vs. "interpretation". Does one start from an analytical set of "factors" as Jakobson did, and then claim that any utterance has a set of meanings corresponding to those factors, based perhaps on the intent of the speaker, or on the conventional interpretation of the utterance in the context by a member of the speech community? This might constitute an analyst's perspective. Or does one assume that any utterance has a range of potential meaning, as conventionally defined according to expectation in a given context, but that one can only talk of a situated interpretation which emerges in a context of negotiated interaction? This would have to constitute a participant's perspective. A comprehensive analyst's perspective would attempt to incorporate participants' perspectives. There is also the difference between the perspectives of analysts, who can make choices at their leisure about what to study, and who have in principle unlimited access to replaying of the data; and the perspectives of participants as they go about their business using language in the world and interpreting in the stream of awareness.

The picture is further complicated by the fact of "markedness", i.e. that conventional expectations in a given context can be manipulated by a speaker to communicative effect. Thus, as Ervin-Tripp has pointed out, a form which has the conventional meaning potential of extreme politeness can be used to an opposite effect by means of manipulation of the markedness notion. Thus meaning and interpretation are both relational concepts: relational not only in the Saussurean sense within a sign system of a given "language", but also within the repertoire of a given speech community. Additionally, there are means by which either participant in a dialogue can selectively foreground different factors or aspects of the message.

Thus one approach to orders of meaning is etic, cataloguing all possible sets toward the message (Jakobson) or dimensions of the situation of communication (Hymes) or aspects of language as a "social semiotic" in relation to social structure (Halliday); another is an emic approach in relation to either (1) prototypical cultural scenes with prototypical participants, or (2) particular participants in particular situations. Another significant distinction is the one which Halliday makes between general pragmalinguistic functions embodied in the linguistic system, and "functions" as uses to which language is put by people for their own purposes. A further important distinction is between a static, structural approach and a dynamic, process-oriented approach which seeks to understand emergence.

There is some agreement among theorists that language performs either two or three broad functions at the pragmalinguistic level.

Bateson	report	command	
Hymes	referential	socio-expressive	(stylistic?)
Halliday	ideational (experiential & logical)	interpersonal	textual
Leech	ideational	interpersonal	(textual)
Popper	descriptive argumentative	expressive signalling	
Habermas	cognitive (expressive?)	interactive (expressive?)	
Gumperz			
Cook-Gumperz	referential	conveyed	situated
Heller	referential	social	discourse
Silverstein	reference/sense/metasemantics	pragmatics metapragmatics	

The first column represents language as a means of reporting information; the second column has to do with our recognition that language is a means of relationship to others. Halliday (1970, 1973) defines these two functions as follows:

(a) The ideational function: language functioning as a means of conveying and interpreting experience of the world. (This function is subdivided into two sub-functions, the Experiential and the Logical sub-functions.)

(b) The interpersonal function: language functioning as an expression of one's attitudes and an influence upon the attitudes and behaviour of the hearer.

Halliday's third "enabling" function, whose status as a function is disputed by Leech (1983:57) is:

(c) The textual function: language functioning as a means of constructing a text, ie a spoken or written instantiation of language."

A difference between the apparently static frameworks and a process-oriented one is illustrated by comparing the three dimensions as laid out by Cook-Gumperz, who conceives of them as progressively more contextually embedded, the situated meaning depending on the interpretation of the other aspects of meaning in relation to ongoing negotiation within the discourse. This approach also represents a clear attempt to relate the three types of function, rather than simply to identify them.

Silverstein's analysis brings us back to Bateson, who attempted to distinguish the levels of reference/sense/metasemantics. Silverstein seems to be interested in creating a framework for understanding language use in context, but his formulations are essentially pragmatolinguistic because he is concerned with the workings of language as a system.

A question which is posed within a static, taxonomic (etic) approach to the "functions" of language is which function is more "basic". Thus Leech argues with Halliday's claim that all three of his "functions" have equal status; Leech maintains not only that the ideational function is most basic, but also that Halliday's "textual" function is not a function at all. Bateson (and probably most psychologists) would claim that the relationship messages are most basic. Silverstein

(1985:225) remarks that "the indexical or pragmatic realm of function is, in a sense, the most elementary sign function in language. It bespeaks the simple fact of the situatedness of language use as a social action in some context." It is not clear, however, whether Silverstein intends "elementary" to mean "basic" or "important". Ervin-Tripp (1977:167) takes issue with treatments of "indirect" communication which assume that an interpreter starts with a "literal" interpretation (e. g., Gordon and Lakoff 1971), pointing out that there are a range of strategies that interpreters may use, calculation from literal meaning being only one among the rest. And Gibbs (1986:28) asserts that within the psycholinguistic literature "there is growing evidence that literal processing is *not* a default mode of understanding normal discourse. . . . Speakers and hearers know the meanings of many conventional, formulaic utterances and appear to comprehend their nonliteral meanings immediately, even if their literal interpretations do not make sense."

There is also the question of the potentially different nature of different orders of meaning. Hymes points out that socio-expressive meaning is "non-representational". This is consistent with Bateson's hypothesis (Watzlawick et al 1967:101) that an analogic message ("command") is not "assertive or denotative" as digital messages are, but rather constitutes an invocation of relationship: proposals concerning the future rules of the relationship.

When one octopus or one nation puts on a threatening gesture, the other might conclude 'he is strong' or 'he will fight,' but this was not in the original message. Indeed, the message itself is non-indicative and may be better regarded as analogous to a PROPOSAL or a QUESTION in the digital world.

Referring back to Jakobson's constitutive factors representing particular "sets toward" the communication event, all of which are simultaneously present, we can see that they come closer to representing the range of communication possibilities from the point of view of the participants. Fiske (1982:36), identifies Jakobson's

scheme as a "bridge" between semiotic and process theories of communication. The example Jakobson gives is from Eisenhower's presidential campaigns in the 1950's. The "function" is capitalized in each case.

The I LIKE IKE button

addresser

EMOTIVE : tells about political position and how strongly he feels about it
expressive

context

REFERENTIAL : to refer to an existing man and program
(what addressee knows about it)

message

POETIC : rhyme, rhythm

contact

PHATIC : to identify membership of group of Eisenhower supporters,
to maintain and strengthen solidarity among members

code

METALINGUAL : using code of political communication
"like" means "support politically"; "IKE" = political party

addressee

CONATIVE : to persuade addressee to agree, to support same political program

Yet we are still left with the question of how are these actually perceived in a given situation by the participants, and what resources the participants have for foregrounding or backgrounding any of these dimensions in ongoing interaction. We also need some way of understanding how cognitive (interpretive) processes are involved and the relation of language to social knowledge. To claim that all elements are present simultaneously presupposes different degrees of awareness on the part of the participants, and a balance of implicitness and explicitness. Further, how do we know that the array of factors is exhaustive? One element apparently missing is Hymes "key", discussed above.

The exclusion of key is representative of a general avoidance of non-literal uses of language. Austin (1962) himself excluded non-serious uses of language from

consideration in his foundational work in speech act theory.

1.2.3 Conventionalization

Meaning and interpretation are conventional, in the sense that they are arbitrary and represent a tacit agreement among members of a speech community (cf. Lewis 19). Communicative conventions can develop at various levels of linguistic organization, extending a basic design feature of language, the "duality of patterning" discussed originally by Hockett in relation to the grouping of phonemes at the morphemic level, at which they took on a different sort of meaning. Thus idioms and formulaic uses of language are examples of this phenomenon.

Ervin-Tripp (1977:167) has traced the process of conventionalization with regard to the interpretation of conveyed intent with "indirect" speech acts:

Situated conventional directives. If a situation repeatedly occurs, the usual directive becomes conventionalized and could lose its literal force in that context. There are many instances of this principle. We can use conventional question directives even when both parties know we share the information: e.g., Is Mr. Terrell in? when he is in full view, or Do you have the time? when the addressee is looking at his watch.

The 'literal meaning' is the communicative intention which maps, in any context, directly onto a surface realization: in this case, requesting information. The literal meaning of an imperative would be a directive. A good test of conventionalization is that the 'literal meaning' is ignored in the appropriate situation, and one can only arouse it by deliberate marking, or making a pun, so that one is misunderstood if one intends the literal meaning. Such cases occur in Is Sybil there?, Have you any vacancies?, and Is there any coffee left?

Situated conventional directives must be defined by context. For example: Is Sybil there? is optimally a directive when it occurs in a telephone call directly following the greetings. If it is a shout by a mother regarding her toddler, Sybil, who disappeared upstairs, it may be heard as an information request.

Another sort of conventionalization occurs when a predictable sequence of actions carried out with a particular style becomes associated with symbolic meanings. A predictable sequence of this sort is referred to in the literature as a "routine", apparently with some latitude among scholars as to the allowable improvisation within the sequence. In Watson (1975), joking conversation (as teasing, taunt-

ing, sexual joking) is analyzed along with narration from a sample of speech data recorded from Hawaiian children 5-7 years old, in a peer group setting. An underlying routine, transferable from one speech event to another, is identified in both narration and joking. This routine is iterative and allows both stories and joking to be produced jointly in a contrapuntal style. Watson defines a routine as "a sequence of utterances or behaviors which is regular and procedural, and which communicates as much by its form as by its content." Coulmas (1980) seems to have a more ritualized notion of routine, whereas Griffin and Mehan (1980) allow for more improvisation. Garvey (1977:43) defines routines as "predictable utterance sequences that serve a single or limited role, and are restricted to particular positions or specialized functions in respect to a conversation or interaction. A routine is highly conventionalized and is probably learned as a package."

Thus it appears that the term "routine" is applied to a kind of organized discourse, although there seems not to be consensus concerning the exact nature of the organization or patterning.

The tradition of the ethnography of speaking has identified patterning of language in typically ritualized speech events in other cultures. Goffman (1975) has extended the term "ritual" to refer to social routines which make up ordinary interaction. Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1984) demonstrate how participants in a group discussion of a particular sort (a Ph.D. orals examination) use the resources of conversation to transform the event into ritual, illustrating how, for example, certain prosodic contours can be conventionalized to signal off-record or on-record talk. Defined by Gumperz (1982a:Chap2) "contextualization cues" are learned as a result of an individual's interactive experience with particular networks of relationship.

Another sort of conventionalization occurs in cues which signal a shift into joking--in this case prototypically a change in voice quality together with a rise in

pitch associated with a smile face. Interestingly, as Ohala points out and we will discuss in Chapter 3, even when a conventional cue originally had a sound-symbolic meaning which made it non-arbitrary, that original meaning may no longer be recognized by speakers.

Thus conventionalization/ritualization can apply to any aspect of language, and in fact demonstrates how sociocultural forms are constantly extended and exploited within the communication system to create new aspects of shared knowledge. The existence of routines and rituals also means, of course, that we have frameworks within which we can improvise, and also that we have the potential to convey other kinds and levels of meaning by violating the pattern.

1.2.4 Foregrounding

What does it mean to say that certain aspects of the communication (as discussed above under in 1.2.2 "orders of meaning") are foregrounded? It is clear that speakers have a wide range of techniques for achieving selective foregrounding, involving not only prosodic, syntactic, and discourse-sequential resources, but also drawing very basically on the notion of markedness within cultural patterning. As Heller (198) demonstrates, "code-switching provides a clear example of the ways in which individuals draw on their linguistic resources to signal changes in the different aspects of context which they wish to foreground, or make salient, thereby opening opportunities for the redefinition of social reality, exploiting or creating ambiguity in the relationships between form and context to do so."

From the speaker's point of view, foregrounding something means drawing attention to it, establishing a joint focus of attention. Thus it is concerned with the direction and focus of attention rather than the quality of attention. However, a shift from one mode into another (i.e., from nonplay into play) can also accomplish foregrounding.

1.2.5 Intersubjectivity

The notion of intersubjectivity has been developed as an attempt to specify the nature of social reality. Leech provides an explanation of intersubjectivity when he adds a "world of social facts", between levels B and C, to Popper's epistemological theory which involves postulating a progression from lower to higher functions in the evolution of human language.

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|---|
| D | Argumentative function | (using lang. to present and evaluate arguments and explanations) |
| C | Descriptive function | (using lang. to describe things in the external world) |
| B | Signalling function | (using lang. to communicate info. about internal states to other individuals) |
| A | Expressive function | (using lang. expressing internal states of the individual) |

Leech (1983:51) describes the progression as follows:

"The expressive behavior of new-born babies (eg crying) produces a reinforcing reaction on the part of the mother. But it is not clear at what point the unintended behaviour patterns of the baby become rudimentary intentions, and thence fully-formed intentions, so advancing the baby's communicative role from the involuntary expressive stage to the deliberate signalling stage. . . . Once this step is taken, entry has been made to a world of social objects, states, and events. This is no longer a subjective world, but rather an INTERsubjective one, for, as the triangulation performed by more than one observer can establish the location of some observed object, so a number of individuals from the same social group can mutually confirm the meaning of some phenomenon which is external to all of them. On the basis of such confirmed communicative values there may arise social institutions such as ownership, marriage, rights, obligations: these 'institutional facts' could not exist outside a world in which the 'signalling' function of communication has established a reality beyond the individual. The intersubjective world of social fact, in turn, becomes the prerequisite of the descriptive function of language. Concepts of reference, truth, and falsity could not exist outside a social world in which individuals can share and compare their descriptions of reality.

The last world, the objective world of World 4, can in turn be explained as evolving out of the descriptive function of language. The hypostatization of descriptions of the world through the descriptive functioning of language can easily lead to a reinterpretation whereby the appropriateness of 'true' and 'false' is judged not by direct means (ie comparing a

description with the reality it is meant to describe), but by indirect means (ie judging truth value on the basis of reasoning and argument). Once this step has been taken, we are able to postulate the existence of facts which are independent of the observations by individuals, or even by groups of individuals."

A philosopher's definition of intersubjectivity is offered by Taylor (1979:48): Intersubjective meanings are not simply identifiable in individual subjects. They are "not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action". It follows that intersubjective meanings cannot be reduced, as empiricist social science would like, to individual psychological states, attitudes, beliefs or propositions. What is missing from the ontology of mainstream social science is the notion of meaning as communal. This meaning would be for a subject who could be a "we" as well as an "I". The exclusion of this possibility, according to Taylor, "comes once again from the baleful influence of the epistemological tradition for which all knowledge has to be reconstructed from the impressions imprinted on the individual subject" (1979:52).

The social-psychologist Rommetveit (1985:190) has attempted to identify interactional dimensions of intersubjectivity, which he believes must be made the foci of renewed theoretical analysis. He discusses "dialogue roles" having to do with what he calls "the directionality of intersubjectivity":

States of intersubjectivity are, in fact, contingent upon the fundamental dyadic constellation of speaker's privilege and listener's commitment: The speaker has the privilege to determine what is being referred to and/or meant, whereas the listener is committed to make sense of what is said by temporarily adopting the speaker's perspective.

His notion of "dyadic communication control" has to do with the degree to which the dialogue roles are interchangeable.

A basic critique of the conceptions of intersubjectivity presented thus far is that they either reify the notion, or treat it as a static phenomenon, or assume

homogeneity. Further, any version of intersubjectivity as propositionally-formulated mutual knowledge will be unable to deal with the orders of meaning discussed above.

Intersubjectivity is clearly manifested through practices whereby people enact the ethos of their group. Rapport is established and maintained through interactional styles which represent shared sociocultural knowledge. Our theories of rapport (Lakoff 1975, Brown and Levinson 1978, Leech 1983, Scollon and Scollon 1981), discussed in more detail in the next section and in Chapter 3, offer broad understanding of the principles underlying cultural patterns, and also detailed examples of the relation of individual acts to larger patterns. What is needed is further exploration of situated rapport. How is a joint focus of attention established and negotiated? How do people display understanding? How do they convey acknowledgement? How do they achieve empathy, solidarity, and intimacy? Such an exploration must take place within a framework of purposes and resources, and be able to handle interactional process.

1.2.6 Multiple perspectives

The discussion of basic issues has illustrated that there is enormous complexity involved in communication even when frameworks and conventions are shared. i.e., in a homogeneous situation. According to Rommetveit (1985:187), "the basic riddle within a pluralistic approach is ... how states of intersubjectivity and shared social reality can be attained in encounters between different 'private worlds'". Further, Emerson's work (1970) shows that multiple competing definitions within individual awareness must be orchestrated, and that situations differ in their precariousness or solidity.

The next order of difficulty is illustrated in the work of Gumperz, Erickson, Scollon and Scollon, demonstrating that in interethnic and crosscultural contexts there may be vast intersubjective differences among people speaking the same

"language", that these differences may occur at different levels of linguistic organization, and that these differences tend to go unrecognized as differences in communicative conventions, being interpreted instead in terms of personality or group stereotypes.

An appropriate theoretical framework must allow for multiple perspectives, ambiguity, and also for the existence of different systems altogether which may operate within the "same" language. These systems may interpret the "same" context differently, either as to salient characteristics, or as to appropriate behavior within it.

1.2.7 Communicative Competence

This term was originally proposed by Hymes (1966) as a response to Chomsky's notion of "competence", and as such it has been criticized as too much oriented to the cognitive content of the individual speaker. Hence Gumperz's revision (1981): "The knowledge of discourse processing conventions and related communicative norms that participants must control as a precondition to being able to enlist and sustain conversational cooperation.", moved the focus to the ability to achieve conversational involvement. Hymes has further revised his notion to "situated competence", as in his preface to Wolfson and Manes (1985)

For a half-century or so the dominant thrust in linguistics has been precision in terms of form and structure. Work which could not satisfy standards as to the facts of language, as to relevant features and the relations among them, was set aside. The challenge now is to make the dominant thrust in linguistics the connection between form and structure, feature and relation, on the one hand, and abilities and events, on the other. The structures of languages and the structures of societies are mediated by ways of speaking, ways in which verbal means are selected and grouped together in activities by definite people in definite settings, in short, by situated competence.

1.3.0 Theoretical Frameworks

The basic issues of concern lead necessarily to certain theoretical frameworks.

I will be using two different theoretical frameworks because I believe that the combination yields a more satisfying explanation of joking interaction. The essential relation between the two frameworks, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, seems to be that the pragmalinguistic analysis represents a form of speaker's competence which usually remains implicit, but which is drawn on as a resource in interaction. In the same way, the findings from the review of the literature concerning the relation of joking activity to social structure and organization represent implicit competence that speakers are aware of to different degrees. The two frameworks are the pragmalinguistic and the interactional sociolinguistic.

The pragmalinguistic level is concerned with the communication system as a whole, at a relatively abstract level. It attempts to identify the resources for conveying meaning of different sorts. A social-functional perspective on the communication system brings in universal theories of rapport and the effects on the system of certain communicative needs, represented as pressures on linguistic form.

It seems appropriate to combine the weakest form of functionalism identified by Bates and MacWhinney (1982), that of diachronic correlation, with Silverstein's (1985) "true semiotic functionalism".

The claim of diachronic correlation is that linguistic forms are historically associated with one or more communicative functions, in a manner that suggests a causal relationship. This is . . . a purely historical claim that certain forms evolved under pressure from one or more specific constraints. It is a kind of linguistic Darwinism, an argument that languages look the way they do for functional and adaptive reasons. These reasons include a variety of constraints from cognitive, social, perceptual, and production factors. Indeed, the interactions among these factors may be so complex that the relationship between form and function is often opaque."

Beginning with a Bates and MacWhinney level 1 functionalism, we will use Silverstein's vision of the semiotic system to explain how the conventionalized forms (cues) are exploited and extended within the system.

Universal theories of rapport attempt to identify essential characteristics of

human beings as interactants. Lakoff (1975, 1979) has identified broad rapport modalities or targets which can be thought of as metaschemas, and which are oriented toward relative focus on the ideational or the interpersonal functions of language. These ideal types of rapport are embodied in particular conventionalized behaviors and expectations which are part of the cultural repertoire of each person. Partly inspired by Lakoff, Brown and Levinson's framework is an attempt to construct a set of universal dimensions of interaction concerning "politeness". Locating the key interface of language and society in "strategic message construction" (1978:61), their general project is to explore how the management of rapport in interpersonal communication can exert pressure on the structure of languages. Starting with Goffman's notion of "face" in interaction, they posit both positive and negative face for each participant in an encounter. Negative face is defined as the desire not to have one's actions impeded, not to be interfered with (freedom of action and freedom from imposition); positive face is defined as the desire to be liked and included (conditions for maintaining a positive, consistent self-image). Thus there is a tension between these two desires, which represents an inherent dilemma of the human condition. Cultures (and subcultures, and individual personalities; all in relation to situational constraints) will differ in their preferred style and emphasis on one or the other. Brown and Levinson's framework includes the categories of "negative politeness" (arising out of negative face: avoidance-based), "positive politeness" (arising out of positive face: approach-based), and the other options of communicating baldly-on-record (with maximum efficiency) or off-record (with maximum indirection). Participants in interaction generally have a mutual orientation toward maintaining each other's face, in relation to the "line" which each is presenting (Goffman 1967:11). Participants have to calculate from moment to moment in interaction--doing redressive action in a complicated calculation of power, social distance and risk in relation to what they are trying to say

and do. (Scollon and Scollon (1981) and Tannen (1984) have tried to formulate more felicitous names for the rapport modes: for positive politeness, "solidarity" and "involvement", respectively; and for negative politeness, "deference" and "considerateness", respectively; but the original names will do for our purposes here.)

As I will discuss later in relation to both Lakoff and Brown and Levinson, joking represents an interesting combination of strategies within each of their frameworks.

A note on the term "function" at this level: we are dealing at the relatively abstract level of the general pragmalinguistic functions embodied in the linguistic system, i.e., the ideational, interpersonal and textual. And in relation to human interaction we are also at a very abstract level, i.e., in terms of general processes of approach and avoidance, in particular of on the one hand signalling play, and on the other of achieving conventional deniability for one's communication.

The second framework is the interactional sociolinguistic, which draws key ideas from the sociology of knowledge and symbolic interactionism as well as phenomenology. It is oriented to the situated analysis of joking as a communicative resource by which people construct coherence in conversation. This approach, based in the thought of George Herbert Mead and Alfred Schutz,¹ has the following characteristics. The first is that there is a core assumption that "reality" is socially constructed in interaction (Berger & Luckmann 1966), using language as a repository of socio-cultural knowledge. In this view the "meaning" in an interaction is always meaning *to* someone, i.e., interpretation. There are degrees of commonality of interpretation (for example, the contents of a dictionary represent an extreme form of decontextualized and codified "meanings" of words), which is in

¹ A similar formulation was proposed by Volosinov in 1929. His work influenced Western linguistics through Jakobson, but it is only recently with renewed interest in Vygotsky's work that Volosinov is being acknowledged (Rommetveit 1985).

effect another way of expressing the idea of shared culture. Intersubjectivity refers to shared tacit knowledge and interpretive processes as they are embodied in particular interactions. Secondly, the social construction of reality implies participants who are active, rather than passive beings whose behavior is "determined" by social structure or forces. Within social constraints (a primary one of which is language), which are situationally enforced, the individual seeks goals, enacts roles, pursues strategies, and defines situations using complex interpretive processes. The creative aspect of human behavior is recognized in this approach. Thirdly, consciousness is considered an important object of study, not only the conscious interpretations actors give to their actions, but also the ongoing interpretation of interaction. This latter effort involves analyzing intuitions as very subtle empirically-based inferences and generalizations. The concern with consciousness also involves a recognition (based on Schutz (1967)) that our everyday "reality" is a particular form of consciousness that we accept implicitly as part of our culture. A final characteristic of the social interactionist approach is a concern with process, and a rejection of the notion of society as a static structure. According to Sapir (1931), "it is only apparently a static sum of social institutions; actually it is being reanimated or creatively reaffirmed from day to day by particular acts of a communicative nature which obtain among individuals participating in it." Interpretation is always accomplished in a context which includes potentially differential power and authority to define the situation, i.e., to impose a particular interpretation of what things mean and what is going on.

"Culture" can be conceptualized as equivalent to a lexicon of background assumptions and interpretive processes which are organized and constrained by the syntactic or sequential aspects of "social structure" (Gumperz 1983). There are dialectics operating at the level of the individual reflexive self, the face-to-face interaction, and also between the face-to-face interaction and the level of "social

structure". This last dialectic, when it is consciously cultivated, is what C. Wright Mills (1959) refers to as the "sociological imagination," which grasps the relationships between personal troubles and public issues.

In sum, in contrast to what J. Douglas (1970:9) calls "the classical sociological perspective on society, which assumes that human actions are independent of the specific situations in which they occur, in the sense that they are determined by some factors outside of the situation and outside of the individual's committing the action," this approach asserts the primacy of face-to-face interaction in everyday life. This is not to deny the reality or influence of "larger" patterns in society (which some social interactionists have appeared to do), but rather to assert that all generalizations are based ultimately in everyday social interaction. Economic, political and social arrangements are manifested in our conversation (McDermott & Roth, 1978).

In this perspective, language is a complex multi-levelled semiotic system which must be interpreted (rather than simply "processed" as bits of inherently meaningful information) and which must be studied in its social context (largely because language itself partly creates or constitutes the social context), as it is used for the purpose of communication.

Language as a part of communication is seen to involve both the verbal and the non-verbal (Ekman & Friesen 1969), Scherer 1980). It is conceived to be a multi-levelled signalling process in which metacommunication is constant and ongoing. "Communicative competence" entails mastering not only phonology, prosody, lexicon, syntax, rhetorical patterns, proxemics, gaze conventions, back-channel cues and so on, but also knowing when and how to use all of this (largely tacit) knowledge. One must be able to interpret constellations of cues at different levels, and to produce and interpret style shifts at each of the discourse levels depending on the appropriate context. An important point to be kept in mind,

however, is that it is not possible to state this knowledge in terms of rules; it must be thought of from the analyst's point of view as a series of contingent judgments.

The notion of style shift brings us to another key idea of this approach: that within a speech community every individual speaker has not one but a repertoire of styles which are learned as appropriate to particular situations (more or less complexly determined by the characteristics of the participants and their relationships, and the topics involved) (Gregory & Carroll 1978). The association of a particular style with a particular context creates a set of expectations which speakers can then violate to convey social meaning (Blom & Gumperz 1972; Sankoff 1972; Ervin-Tripp 1973).

Moving to a slightly different perspective, beyond the structured heterogeneity of an *individual's* repertoire, neither is a "language" seen as a monolithic, homogeneous entity. Rather, taking the position of sociolinguistics (in contrast to Chomsky's (1965:3) vision of linguistic theory as "concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance."), a language is also viewed as structured heterogeneity, including a complex of conventional, prototypical forms (the ethnomethodologists' "normal forms"-- Cicourel 1974) which are established by group interaction within the same speech community or subgroup thereof. Different conventions for expression and interpretation can develop among sub-groups, and it can be difficult to recognize that the differences exist, particularly when people speak the same "language" (Ervin-Tripp 1973). A basic concept here is that of "reciprocity of perspectives" drawn from Schutz (quoted in Cicourel 1974:52-53) consisting of:

- (a) the member's idealization of the interchangeability of standpoints whereby the speaker and hearer both take for granted that each (A assumes it of B and

B assumes it of A, and vice versa) would probably have the same experiences of the immediate scene if they were to change places, and (b) that until further notice (the emergence of counter-evidence) the speaker and hearer both assume that each can disregard, for the purpose at hand, any differences originating in their personal ways of assigning meaning to, and deciding the relevance of, everyday life activities, such that each can interpret the environment of objects they are both attending in an essentially identical manner for the practical action in question.

Thus when miscommunication occurs under such circumstances, people are less likely to start from the position that there may be cultural differences operating--but rather jump to conclusions about another person's intent, logic, reasonableness, intelligence, etc., thereby perpetuating stereotypes (Campbell 1981). Since different groups within the same "language" will not only use the language slightly differently, but will also *interpret* the same linguistic usage differently, in accordance with their own frameworks, it becomes important to study the linguistic forms produced in context as well as interpretive conventions.

Another significant difference between Chomskyan linguistics and this approach is that the former deals with sentence- level clause structures through which information is encoded, whereas the latter deals with discourse-level structures through which interpretations are generated. The sociolinguistic approach is concerned with interpretation, involving structured heterogeneity at the level of discourse. Sociolinguistic judgments are pragmatic rather than referential. They are always based on multichannel choices, in effect paradigmatic choices within a particular frame. And they remain contingent judgments, because of the nature of human knowledge (Dreyfus 1979).

An additional characteristic of communication/interaction in this perspective (which is related to the multi-levelled nature of language and to the distinctions of consciousness mentioned above) is that it is constantly undergoing subtle shifts of framing or what Goffman (1981) calls "footing," [Hymes "key"] according to the stance that the interactants are taking to the interaction in that moment (to themselves to each other, to the topic under discussion). This can be viewed as a

particular form of code switching or style switching.

Yet another characteristic of the interactional sociolinguistic approach is that interpretive processes are conceived as a complex of hierarchically-ordered purposive activities, each of which serves as a frame within which interpretation is channelled according to expectations associated with that frame (Gumperz 1982a). There is a general trend, as noted by Levinson (1981), toward attempts to work out a speech-act model of discourse, on the assumption that there is a discoverable syntax of dialogue which can be identified in terms of sequences of speech acts (see, for example, Labov & Fanshel 1977). Levinson argues very persuasively that whereas such a model may be useful for analyzing such linguistic activities as ritual insults (Labov 1972a), it is inadequate for dealing with most conversation precisely because we do operate with a hierarchy of purposes. As competent interactants we respond to what we perceive the other person's intent to be.

Another term for frame is "schema" which was introduced by Bartlett (1932) in connection with research into the nature of memory as a dynamic structure of expectations which represents how we bring our past experience to bear on the present. This idea has been developed in a more static form by analysts of narrative and by workers in artificial intelligence as "scripts" (Schank and Abelson 1977). I prefer to return to Bartlett's conception of a schema or frame as a dynamic, abstract, implicit form of socio-cultural knowledge which is brought to bear as part of our inter-subjective competence in the form of relational judgments about our experience (cf. Tannen 1979).

Activities, as culturally-defined units (Levinson 1978), occur as part of the ongoing stream of behavior and represent a way in which we punctuate the flow of life using our interpretive procedures. Probably the first assessment we have to make of an interaction is that of activity type. The assessment of an activity carries with it certain expectations concerning what discourse tasks (Gumperz 1982a)

are likely to occur, what topics will be dealt with, and what the key of the interaction is likely to be. The initial assessment of an activity tends to channel our interpretations in particular ways, so that it then becomes progressively more difficult to change our assessment--partly because we tend to interpret everything in a way which makes it maximally consistent or congruent with our original assessment.

Within this framework, "functions" refer to the uses to which language is put by people for their own purposes. A single speech act may also have multiple functions, which may be hierarchically arranged. As Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977:190-191) point out,

If we view the question, Do you have a match? as functioning as the imperative Give me a light, we may ask, why the former and not the latter? The answer seems obvious. The question, in this context, is more polite than the command. A second function of the utterance then, the function that at least in part dictates the form, is the communication of civility or 'politeness.' At one level of analysis, the question and the imperative are functionally equivalent; at another level the two utterances contrast. Do you have a match? serves at least two functions; that of a directive and that of a polite utterance. From a broader perspective, however, when considered within the context of ongoing social interaction, the utterance may serve still other functions. If the scene were a cocktail party, for example, and if the speaker were a young man with matches in his pocket; and if the addressee were a young woman, and if after receiving his light the young man lingered making small talk, then we might reasonably assume that the utterance functioned as a means for the young man to strike up conversation with the young woman. Perhaps we could say that the request functioned as a socially acceptable conversation opener. Which function is to be considered the more basic function depends upon the frame of reference. If the concern is with the fundamental semantics of the utterance, then the basic or most pertinent function is the directive function, since the utterance must be recognized as a directive in order that a semantic interpretation may be assigned to it. If, on the other hand, our concern is with the form of the directive takes, then, for the purpose of our analysis, at least, we might consider the politeness function to be basic. Finally, if our concern is to determine the function of the speech act in ongoing social and verbal interaction, then the pertinent and basic function is that of a conversation opener. A single utterance, then, may serve multiple functions and, depending upon the analytic perspective, one of the functions may be considered more basic than the others.

Function in the sense used here has to do with the speaker's intent. To understand the function an utterance serves, we must understand why the speaker said what he said. Intent is not always obvious nor is it always easy to discover. In fact, it is not always discoverable. A

knowledge of intent, or an informed guess of intent, however, is usually, and perhaps always necessary to the complete understanding of any utterance. Interlocutors continually, and often unconsciously, know or make guesses about each other's intentions. In the above example, the hearer, being a member of the same speech community as the speaker and being familiar with the linguistic conventions of that speech community, would undoubtedly recognize that the speaker's intent was not to ask an information-seeking question but to request a light for his cigarette. She would further recognize his intention to avoid seeming rude and, dependent upon what followed the request, would also recognize the speaker's intention to begin a conversation with her. She might also suspect other intentions, honorable or otherwise, on the part of the speaker, but since those intentions (or that function) could probably not be served by the single utterance under consideration, they need not concern us here.

The symbolic organization of pluralistic society

An interactional sociolinguistic framework encompasses a vision of social organization which can account for the significance of linguistic usage in marking social identity and group boundaries. This vision is compatible with the ideas of Gans (1974) and Nieburg (1984) concerning the changing structure of American society as influenced by the mass media. These sociologists believe that the traditional categories, such as regionalism, urban/rural, religion, ethnic background, economic/social class are being supplemented or replaced by new categories which can be thought of as "taste publics": "the audience networks that respond to increasingly specialized media, the age cohorts that achieve self-identity by loyalty to certain communicators and styles, the factions that act out their internal unities by exclusion of each other's symbols". Nieburg (1984:54) identifies four general "taste publics":

1. Mainstream
2. Mainstream variations:
 - age grouping
 - ethnic
 - urban/suburban/rural
 - secular/religious
 - new/old
3. Status cultures
4. Special subcultures
 - professional groups
 - recreational specialties

A key characteristic of these taste groups is that they are scattered, yet nationally homogeneous. Nieburg proposes replacing the layer cake stratification model of society with a "chocolate chip cookie" mode, in which the batter is the mainstream culture.

An important feature of these groups is sense of humor and taste in jokes, which should predictably then become of great symbolic significance. We would also predict that group humor style would be exploited in the "lively and sensitive matching process between the mass media and the taste preferences of the publics" as industries in the marketplace compete to win and hold the attention of their target publics.

Interpersonal Relationships

The link between language and communication on the one hand, and interpersonal relationships on the other, is to be found first in the notion of intersubjectivity which is necessarily realized in face-to-face interaction. Part of intersubjective competence is the ability to initiate, sustain and terminate conversational involvement. Both Goffman (1981) and Gumperz (1982a) have been concerned with this process, and former with homogeneous groups of middle-class Americans and the latter with interethnic encounters and conversation in general. Gumperz has looked at breakdowns in order to discover what one needs to know and to be able to do in order to sustain conversational involvement, and what

differing conventions of language use and interpretation might be, among speakers of "the same language" within a pluralistic society. Especially given the identification of sense of humor as an important symbol of taste cultures (or whatever we want to call them), it seems appropriate to look at examples of highly successful, intense conversational involvement such as joint joking to discover the process by which the groups display, construct and negotiate their identities. As Coser (1960) points out, joking calls for particularly "close participation." Additionally, it seems important to look at the images of interaction that are being presented in the mass media as part of that lively and sensitive matching between taste preferences of significant groups of people and the industries that serve them. reflects and shapes.

1.4.0 Data

Within American culture there seems to be a continuum between professional comedians' performances, on the one hand, and improvisational joking in informal private situations among friends, on the other. Narrative jokes would fall somewhere in the middle. "Stock conversational witticisms," as identified by Norrick (1983), would be slightly closer to the "spontaneous" end of the continuum.

Norrick (1983) categorizes SCW's into (1) comparisons, (2) retorts: "in which the humor is built in response to another utterance", and (3) quips: "in which the humor lies in the relation to the situation, but not directly in relation to another utterance". Norrick gives a sketchy treatment of the pragmatics of SCW's, and calls for "additional work...on the functions and contexts of humor in conversation, not only narrative jokes and SCW's, both performed and re-used material, but on more spontaneous wit and repartee as well." After taping dinner conversations in a student cooperative for six months, Hall (1974) found that it was difficult to classify joking expressions in traditional folklore categories. He refers to them

as "performances in search of a genre," and advocates a focus on folklore as a communicative process. Example 5 is from his collection.

The generalization is that there is a range of humor forms within the culture, which affect each other in complex ways. Mass media humor undoubtedly affects improvisational joking, and expressions which become stock conversational witticisms are used by professional comedians and in the mass media as part of a repertoire of things which are culturally defined as "funny." What they have in common is the attempt to induce a bisociation experience in the hearer, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 6 there will be further discussion of the social implications of group joking styles in a pluralistic society.

Following Wolfson (1976) I have drawn my data from a variety of sources: tape-recordings of natural conversations; taperecordings of television and radio talk shows; notes jotted down immediately afterward on conversations that I took part in or overheard; reconstructions of interactions reported by consultants; transcripts of interactions reported in the work of other researchers.

Improvisational joking in its most basic form can be described as a humorous comment and a response, and involves a minimum of two participants. The initiating comment is apparently spontaneous, and is intended and interpreted as humorous, i.e. non-serious and designed to amuse. The addressee provides some response of acknowledgement of the intent. A cooperative response can range from a hearty laugh and approving or appreciative judgment through a "hollow laugh" to a groan and/or a look with an eye-rolling gesture. [These latter mock negative responses seem to be conventional for puns; an explanation will be offered in Chapter 2 in the discussion of puns.]

This most basic action and response, called a "humorous episode" by Coser (1960), is defined as an interaction "in which laughter was a response to an intended provocation." Coser points out that she excluded from her data from

psychiatric staff meetings a number of witticisms which may have been intended to provoke laughter but which were unsuccessful. Because of her methodology she was not able to get at the intentions of the actors in those situations, but she points out that an interesting social statistic would be who initiated to whom without response.

The humorous episode is this identified after the fact by the analyst both behaviorally and interactionally. By "behaviorally" I mean in terms of conventionally recognizable humor frame signals by the initiator. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Jefferson (1979) and O'Donnell-Trujillo and Adams (1983) have found laughter used as a signal. Emerson (1963) identified as standard cues to humor in American society: a break with the style that has preceded; a change in tone of voice to a "light tone": higher in pitch, more staccato, faster in tempo, less solemn and controlled; a teasing or devilish or flippant quality in the voice [!]; suppressed laughter in the voice, or modified laughter combined with the words. Emerson also mentions a change in facial expression: the face may "light up" or look more pleasant, perhaps with a smile, and the eyes may twinkle. Nasalization is occasionally mentioned as a cue (for irony or sarcasm). However, Ekman (1985: personal communication) is not aware of any work on non-verbal cueing of humor.

By saying that the humorous episode is identified after the fact "interactionally" by the analyst, I mean that a response of laughter provides evidence that the addressee interpreted the initiator's signal as humor-initiating (and chose to respond). In O'Donnell-Trujillo and Adams' terms, this would constitute and "acoustic display of hearership." Thus in Example 1,

Man on third unsuccessful attempt to pass through the metal-detector gate at the Seattle Airport, after having emptied his pockets of coins, removed his belt, etc., addressing the assortment of people present in the area: "I guess I just have a magnetic personality!" (laughter from people present)

the laughter from certain people who were present acknowledges the intent to amuse.²

An important shortcoming of the *simple* "humorous episode" from the analyst's point of view (not to mention from the initiator's point of view), is that there is no definitive evidence in the interaction of the addressee's actual understanding of the humor. In Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff's (1976) terms, there is no "co-implication in the mentality" of the joker. In fact, the addressee could simply be laughing because s/he had been able to identify the joking frame signal and wanted to be cordial (without really understanding the joking). Of course reading and responding to the humor frame signal represents a particular level of intersubjective competence, and I will discuss the gradations below.

In order to study displays of understanding as realizations of joking styles, ideal data are joking episodes which constitute an elaboration of Coser's behaviorally and interactionally defined "humorous episode." I am calling them simply "extended humorous episodes." These are the interactional phenomena which I refer to as "joint joking," stretches of interaction in which a joking "footing" is mutually maintained. The extended humorous episode can build to a climax followed by an explosion of laughter which ends the episode, which in turn is often followed by a lull and then a change of topic or an overt comment that joking has ended and the participants are going back to "seriousness," or it can just peter out.

As I have defined the extended humorous episode, it is a series of verbal responses building on what has gone before within the frame, with a minimum of one verbal response, and an upper limit to be determined. Handelman and Kapferer (1972) identify two kinds of what they call joking frames, category-routinized and setting-specific. The first is built on stereotypes related to

² In Norrick's terms, the remark is a quip.

institutionalized joking patterns and in its existence is more durable (less easily disrupted) than the setting-specific joking frame, which is built on circumstances in the moment which are not linked to joking stereotypes. What I am looking at is more likely to fall in the setting-specific joking frame category.

Like Example 1, Example 2 is definable as a quip,

President of the U.S. (Ronald Reagan) testing microphone before a radio address (August 1984):

"My fellow Americans. I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes."

and the response was [presumably] laughter from some of those present in the room. But in this case the quip is elaborated into two parts. Thus Reagan is providing a second part which could conceivably have been produced by a joint joker: "We begin bombing in five minutes."

If we compare Examples 1 and 2, we can also see a difference in degree of embeddedness. The utterance in Example 1 is interpretable as humorous only in relation to its context of airport metal detectors. It seems to fit Hockett's description of a "wisecrack" of the floating punchline sort as described below. One can begin to imagine Johnny Carson's monologue including something like: "I once knew a guy who had such a magnetic personality he could never travel by air." The utterance in Example 2 is also dependent on its contextualization, namely that the President of the United States is speaking these words in a conventionally off-record situation, but it also has elements on the "one-liner" which in its prototypical form structures the humor within the utterance. It is taken for granted as shared knowledge that a President cannot sign legislation outlawing a country.

A general concern of discourse analysts has been to discover units of interaction. Indeed, one of the basic assumptions of the speech act model of discourse (Levinson 1981) is that there exist minimal units in the form of speech acts which

can be identified from utterances and then linked together in patterns which explain the coherence of conversation. If we try to match a basic "humorous episode" against the speech act idea, we come up against one of the problems which are so elegantly discussed by Streeck (1980) in connection with the interactive constitution of meaning: "Illocutionary forces are created and can only be identified within the context of prior and subsequent speech acts." In other words, "the hearer's response establishes retrospectively the prior utterance's illocutionary force as an agreed-upon fact." In effect, a wisecrack or humorous remark does not count as such in the absence of an appropriate response. Streeck makes the further point that "the ambiguity that most utterances display regarding their illocutionary force may thus be seen as a constitutive rather than a defective feature of verbal interaction."

If we try to match the extended humorous episode against Gumperz' categories of discourse levels, we find the following. At the level of speech activity, we have the possibility of a comic monologue. However, the comic monologue has a special status as an entertainment form, rather than an expected activity of ordinary conversation. Within a folk taxonomy, it seems possible that "joking" could be used at the level of activity: that in answer to the question, "What were you doing?", someone could answer, "We were (just) sitting around joking with each other." And it is conceivable, I suppose, that the joking activity could be coterminous with one long extended humorous episode (but unlikely). So it seems that the extended humorous episode would be subsumed under an activity frame or type. At Gumperz' discourse task level, we would find "telling a joke." As Sacks (1974) has demonstrated, the telling of a joke can serve as a frame within which other interaction including joking can occur. As I have defined the extended humorous episodes they are necessarily more extensive than an individual "speech act" or "communicative act" requiring as they do a response as discussed above. And I

have further specified that laughter is not enough to display understanding. Thus the minimal unit is a remark intended as humorous and a verbal response within the joking frame. Laughter is a very frequent but still optional part of the sequence. As for the upper limit of the degree of extension of these humorous episodes, it is probably determined principally by the improvisational abilities of the participants.

In Example 3 the joking is initiated at line 4, with Joyce's "you're worth every penny," the interpretation of which rests partly on shared knowledge of the cost of coffee in this context. Each succeeding joking contribution displays understanding of what has gone before, as will be discussed further in relation to these examples in Chapter 4.

Example 4 is an instance in which it is less clear exactly when the humor is initiated. It seems to build gradually from Ann's utterance at line 1 which contains the minor hyperbole in "twenty-five other things" and the smile and laugh particles as cues. The contextual embeddedness in this example lies in Ann's nonverbal contortions juxtaposed to her utterance at line 3.

Example 5 illustrates how playfulness can be sustained by a group of people from a clear initiation at line 1 through a shift of the frame at line 11. This example also shows how local resources (the cake and its baking) can serve as initial topic of the joking frame, but that then the elaborated frame itself constitutes the essential context to be used in the joking.

Another characteristic of the extended humorous episode is that it may contain interaction which is not intended to be humorous. Thus in Example 5 Mary's responses at lines 2 and 4, and Alice's at line 7 are apparently serious, providing information about the cake preparation. Any "serious" responses can, however, be used for further joking, as occurs here at lines 3, 5 and 8. There is also a distinction to be made between "serious" responses which further the joking by providing

"straight lines", as in Mary's "Estimated Time...", and those which do not. A more extensive example is discussed in Davies (1980) "Struggling Toward Camaraderie" in which at least two extended humorous episodes are subsumed retroactively with much other non-humorous interaction under a larger interactional unit or episode the boundaries of which are established in a number of ways: general thematic coherence, pausing, topic shift, interactional function.

A further problem with boundaries, if we take thematic coherence as an important way in which we identify extended humorous episodes, is that there may be much longer discontinuities: of hours, days, years in certain kinds of relationships.

Thus it seems that the extended humorous episode generally falls somewhere between speech acts and discourse tasks within Gumperz' framework. Also, it seems that we recognize these episodes by a number of different things: the initial shift of frame by tone of voice and paralinguistic and nonverbal cues as well as by our interpretation of what is said in relation to the ongoing interaction; the extension probably mostly in terms of thematic development within the same cognitive frame; and the end by laughter, pausing and/or topic shift, and tone of voice or nonverbal cues.

When I assert that laughter as a response does not display the depth of understanding that active participation does, I am not trying to suggest that the person who does nothing more than laugh is not as involved or has not understood--and as I discuss later there may be a very real problem of relative skill in responding. But there are degrees of intersubjective competence, and some responses are ambiguous: on one level (that of reading the contextualization cues), one can understand that a comment is intended to be funny without understanding the comment. One can do this by reading the prosodic, paralinguistic and nonverbal cues, probably principally the laugh particles. Examples of the exercise of this level of intersub-

jective competence are as follows: (1) in trying to talk with someone in a situation in which the background noise level is too high to hear what the other person is saying, when one gives up and tries to simply scan for appropriate back-channel placement and for when the person wants a laugh response (as one is waiting for an opportunity to terminate the interaction); (2) in talking with someone from a different cultural or sub-cultural background where one can read certain cues that humor is intended, but not understand what the basis of the humor is, and one laughs in order to be cordial and cooperative.

Of course one can understand perfectly well what the humor is about, and choose to do nothing more than laugh as a response. But the point here is that a laugh response does not *display* understanding in the way that a verbal response does. In fact, it is possible that the responder is laughing at something other than what the initiator intended. An example of differing interpretations of humor comes from two women who work with children with learning disabilities and who have identified themselves as having different dominances with regard to cognitive style (verbal vs. nonverbal). They report that they were watching Sesame Street together and both started to laugh at the same moment. Both assumed that they were laughing at the same thing until for some reason they questioned each other about it and discovered that one was laughing at something verbal and the other at something non-verbal from within the same interaction, corresponding to their relative dominances.

When we move to the extended humorous episode, we move to a level of inter-subjective competence in which one can demonstrate understanding not only of the cognitive humor frame, but also of common sociocultural knowledge, drawing at one level on stereotypes and/or general cultural schemas to enhance solidarity; and at another level drawing on one's more particular and intimate knowledge of the other person, selecting schemas/symbols/sociocultural allusions to display

empathy.

A further characteristic of the simple laugh response is that it accepts the relatively passive role of audience for the responder, and grants the active role of entertainer to the initiator for that episode. A participatory verbal response, on the other hand, even though it may include laughter, creates a more reciprocal interaction, in that the entertainer role is shared and switched.

A point to be kept in mind, however, is that ability to respond is probably a learned skill, which people develop in different styles, with differing degrees of competence, and which they exercise or display in different contexts. For example, Coser observed in 1960 that the same women who were humorous in informal situations were virtually never initiators of joking in the staff meetings that she studied. Other data (unfortunately scanty) on mixed gender groups tend to support the generalization that the men joke and the women laugh. Referring back to Example 5, we notice that the women present are apparently not making joking contributions, as noted earlier in connection with the inclusion of non-joking responses within extended humorous episodes. American men and women may learn different joking styles in same-sex peer groups (Maltz and Borker 1982) and women may further learn to take on the audience role in mixed gender groups. Evidence for the idea that boys and girls tend to learn different styles comes from an American woman (white, middle-class) in her late twenties who reported that during her teenage years she became aware that boys were able to do a particular kind of joking that was very participatory, and that her girlfriends did not do it. My consultant said that she realized that she had to go to the boys to learn the joking style, and she set about learning it consciously. She succeeded in learning the style, but it took her several years.

Example 6 is discussed at length in Chapter 5 to illustrate problems which can arise when communicative conventions are not shared crossculturally, so that "jok-

ing" is perceived by only one participant.

Names for the Phenomenon

Apparently there is no term in English for the "extended humorous episode". The most general process terms which could subsume this phenomenon might be: "kidding around," "joking around," "bantering," [non-intellectual??lowbrow?] and "repartee"[intellectual?highbrow?] "Jocular talk" is a term I have seen in the literature, but I have never heard it in other than an academic context, i.e., it seems to me to be a technical term. "Wisecrack," "humorous remark," "humorous comment," "funny remark," "witty remark," "witticism," "jocular comment," and "jovial comment" are all used to refer to the initiating remark (although the last two seem to me to be either obsolescent or technical terms and "witty remark" and "witticism" have more intellectual connotations). Hockett has offered a definition and discussion of the "wisecrack" (1977:281-282).

A wisecrack is a clever verbal response quickly coined and used in a situation in which it is apropos; the situation serves as, or in lieu of, a build-up. But the wisecrack in this sense is hardly a joke, because it is not told: rather, it happens. More jokelike is the latent wisecrack: a lone punch held in reserve, as complete jokes often are, for circumstances to arise in which it will be relevant and witty. Many a latent wisecrack is born as we belatedly think of a clever comment on a situation to which, at the time, we reacted stupidly. We then sadly store away the 'I-should've-said,' hoping that opportune circumstances may again be encountered, and that we will recall it when they do.... An ingenious person with a latent wisecrack on his hands may not merely wait for proper circumstances to arise. Instead, he maneuvers others into an appropriate situation, or--more easily--imagines proper circumstances, verbalizes them as a formal build-up, and thus has a complete joke.

I do not believe that, strictly speaking, an incomplete joke in the form of a free-floating punch is possible. The nearest approach would be a latent wisecrack for which the appropriate circumstances are so prevalent in our culture that merely hearing the punch is enough to conjure up a picture of such circumstances in the imagination of the hearer. But in that case--if it exists--the person who presents a latent wisecrack is not quite telling a joke in our sense. Rather, he is saying to his audience, 'Here is a punch; build your own joke with it.'

There seems to be no word to refer to a jointly constructed joking episode.

Hall (1974:36) comments with reference to Example 5:

If interrupted during such a flight of fantasy by a newcomer who would ask what they were up to, only the broadest terms would be applied: "messing around," "just sitting around," "shooting the shit," "just talking." The most overt mention of the phenomenon I encountered before the paper was first written, was made by one member who, after hearing the taperecordings (and being told I was studying them for joking), said that she could see that there was a lot of joking going on, "like when we go... 'Or we could... Or we could...' , you know, that sort of thing."

In a paper which presents an example of this interactional process as a form of metaplay, Farrer (1981) formulates the term "collaborative contesting." I prefer to characterize the phenomenon as "joint joking: improvisational humorous episodes in conversation." The term "joint" stresses that more than one person must be involved (but there is no specification of the number, except that it must be at least two). The term "joking" is general and vague enough as to intent, but with a connotation of friendliness. By using the "-ing" form of the word I am trying to emphasize that the phenomenon is an active, intentional process. "Improvisational" emphasizes both the spontaneous and the creative nature of the contributions. The term "humorous" is included not only because I am building on Coser's unit of analysis, but also as a reminder that as I have defined joint joking it can include both wit and humor, as well as irony, and sarcasm directed at anything other than the addressee.

In a current dictionary, we find "wit" defined as "felicitous perception or expression of associations between ideas or words not usually connected, such as to produce an amusing surprise." Contrasting "wit" and "humor" we find that "*wit*" now usually suggests the power to evoke laughter by remarks showing swift perception, esp. of the incongruous, and verbal felicity; *humor*, an ability to perceive the ludicrous, the comical, and the absurd in human life or situations, usually without bitterness, and to express these so that others may see them." Zijdeveld (1983:2) uses *humour* as an "overarching concept: covering such phenomena as wit, mirth and the comic." Norrick (1983:195) defines a witticism as "a humorous utterance or turn of phrase, i.e. one which causes laughter. Thus I am using the

cover term "joking."

1.5.0 Terms

The previous section closed with an attempt to specify the term "joking". In this section I will propose a set of terms which constitute a framework for thinking and talking about joking activity. The starting point is Hymes' notion of *key*, described above as providing for the "tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done". The examples given by Hymes of differences in key are: "mock: serious" and "perfunctory: painstaking". It seems to me that the mock: serious or joking: non-joking distinction is more basic than such a one as perfunctory: painstaking. Following Goffman (1974) I prefer the term "mode" for the joking: non-joking dimension, recognizing that it is a continuum rather than a dichotomy. It seems to me that "manner" characterizes most accurately the perfunctory: painstaking distinction.

As for the cues which signal or bracket the transformation into the joking mode, Gumperz's "contextualization cues" seem apt.

In talking about joking, the term "tone" fits nicely in describing the attitude of the joker. In my work on friendly or affiliative joking, as presented in Chapter 4, I claim to have identified three distinct tones which constitute orientations to (1) displaying the strength of the friendship bond [= solidarity]; (2) building sociability; and (3) displaying empathy [= intimacy].

The notion of "tone" here is similar to "intentional focus" as described by Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977:207):

In our consideration of interpersonal functions, we have engaged in some speculation about the underlying motives of the interlocutors. We acknowledge that the attribution of motives is inherently problematical, but view such attribution as integral to the interpretive process that takes place in much social interaction. That this is the case seems dramatically exemplified in the status games played by the children. These status games put in bold relief the interpersonal functions that choice of

directive type may serve. Such games would, of course, be impossible in the absence of a set of normative constraints on directive choice. The use of an imperative as a status elevating device would be impossible in the absence of the conventional association of the use of this form to an addressee of rank lower than the speaker.

From the perspective of the addressee, there are interpretive problems involved in the use of the imperative by a peer. These problems arise from the status meaning which adheres to the imperative, and are accentuated by the importance of imperatives in status manipulation ploys. Unlike the ambiguity which may result from the use of a sentence modality type that permits a directive to be interpreted as in information question or a statement, the ambiguity inherent in the use of an imperative to an equal does not lie at the level of speech act functions. Rather, the interpretive problem becomes one of the intentional focus of the speaker. The question becomes, is the speaker's focus upon the action message of the directive, or is his focus upon himself as the cause of the addressee's action? To put it another way, ambiguity arises because there is a suspicion that the intentional focus of the speaker is to draw attention to himself as the cause or agent of the addressee's action, thereby conveying that he is a powerful person. Since this interpersonal goal is accomplished at the expense of the addressee, the latter has considerable interest in avoiding being used in this way. He does so by either refusing to comply or by forcing the speaker to amend his directive with a form that properly encodes the fact that he does, indeed, have a choice in the matter.

A further essential notion is "group style", as for example in the brands of irony among gay men identified by Tannen (1984) and corroborated by Saccomano (1986). A more ritualized example is the mock insult style analyzed by Labov (1972a). These group styles become important skills and badges of group identity.

A further distinction brings us to the "individual expression of sense of humor", characterizable in terms of

- (1) typical contextualization cues to show shift of MODE;
- (2) typical TONE;
- (3) elements of particular GROUP STYLES;
- (4) favorite techniques;
- (5) conventionalized routines (and also the relative proportion of stock conversational witticisms vs. improvisational material);

- (6) typical topics;
- (7) direction of joking: self, other, neutral?;
- (8) typical interactional uses: what situations, discourse tasks, etc.

Again following Goffman (1981), I prefer the term "footing" to refer to the actual strip or episode of joking activity within the stream of interaction. This term is evocative because it is related to the "stance" that one is taking toward what is going on. And one can also say that another person can follow one into a particular footing, and take that same footing.

Finally, we can refer to the "principles of the frame" within the footing, characterized in terms of humor techniques as well as in terms of the levels on which collaboration can occur:

Phonetic collaboration occurs in the form of repetition of particular sounds and sound configurations: rhyme and alliteration are examples of one type. Repetition of words is a common occurrence. People use caricatures of accents together in extended humorous episodes.

Prosodic collaboration can occur in the completion of a particular intonation contour, in the mirroring of intonation contours and intensity of stress, and in matching of paralinguistic features. A special case is joint joking in which each person has a different role which is signalled partly by different paralinguistic features.

Rhythmic or temporal collaboration is one of the things which has been explored by Erickson (1982) and others (von Raffler-Engel 1980) under the heading of "interactional synchrony." How precisely are participants able to "latch" their responses (including laughter) to each other's, with no gap and no overlap. Rhythm (including tempo) can be mirrored or extended by participants. Timing is one feature which is commonly considered essential for good joking.

Syntactic collaboration can occur in forms of parallelism, and in the building on previous contributions to create a syntactically coherent longer unit. This probably occurs more frequently in the form of loose compound structures as in typical monologue structure in English (Pawley & Syder 1978, Chafe 1980), but it can also be more complex and embedded syntactically. Additionally, ellipsis can occur across speakers.

Semantic (thematic) collaboration shows up prominently in various forms of lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan 1976), principally repetition. The lexical cohesion is embedded in thematic units in the form of sociocultural schemas, i.e., a set of expectations and associations drawn from common experience of the group. Instances from the examples are in: #4 the "human being forced into unnatural behavior by demands of work" schema; #5 the American "technology for better living" schema. Often the humor is developed out of what Koestler calls the "bisociation" of schemas: the bringing into collision of two habitually incompatible ways of thinking about the same thing. For example, in #5 the situation itself embodies the baking of a cake at home for the pleasure of the housemates--associations might be "mother," "nurturance," "nothin' says lovin' like somethin' from the oven," i.e., a stereotypically feminine activity. The schema which is applied playfully (in bisociation, because such thinking is applied to cake-baking in the baking industry, I'm sure) is the efficiency schema of American technology (a stereotypically masculine domain).

Rommetveit's (1979) "basic premises for intersubjectivity": "complementarity of intentions," "capacities for decentered categorization and attribution" and "a capacity to adopt the perspective of different others," all of which are interrelated, can be seen to represent collaboration at the *pragmatic* level. One of the most interesting linguistic manifestations of "a capacity to adopt the perspective of different others" is illustrated in example #4, when Kay in her last utterance actu-

ally appears to take on the "I" of Ann.

Another dimension of pragmatic collaboration is in the choice of schemas: how one chooses them to emphasize sociocultural knowledge at the level of stereotypes (for invoking a kind of impersonal solidarity) or to emphasize sensitivity to the particular psychological state of the other person at a particular moment (to invoke a closeness based on empathy).

As Farrer (1981) has pointed out, we must also allow for metaplay: the shifting of the principles of the frame as the interaction proceeds. Handelman and Kapferer's (1972) types of joking frames are relevant to this notion.

Chapter 2

2.0 Introduction

CHAPTER TWO begins with a review of the literature, which brings together work on humor and joking from linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Because the same basic cognitive principles apply, essential notions and approaches are illustrated first through a discussion of narrative jokes, and then in relation to improvisational joking activity. The reader is led gradually from analyses of narrative jokes to work on improvisational activity. A general theoretical and methodological critique is followed by a synthesis of findings (with caveats) on joking activity, and the claim is made that the generalizations about joking activity constitute implicit sociocultural knowledge to which speakers have differential access.

2.1.0 Review of the Literature

My purpose in this section is to introduce some basic notions, illustrate a range of approaches, and present some findings from the literature on humor and joking from linguistics, anthropology, sociology and psychology. In addition to my own analyses, I will draw on recent assessments of the literature on humor (1) in anthropology by Apte (1985); (2) in sociology by Zijderfeld (1983) and Christie Davies (1984); (3) in psychology by Pepicello and Weisberg (1983).¹

I have been selective in that my interest is in joking activity between people in interaction (rather than funniness ratings of cartoons or jokes, or analyses of humor in literature, for example). The use of the term "joking" is intended to emphasize the action and process aspects of the phenomenon, thus reducing the

¹ For a treatment of the history of theories of humor, the reader is referred to Keith-Spiegel (1972).

possibility of the kind of reification which has occurred with the terms "irony", "humor" and "wit". One of the main points which should emerge from this study is that "joking activity" is socially defined.

Analysis by technique

The classic intrapsychic analysis of jokes (wit) is Freud (1905). His basic idea is that the pleasure of the joke form or technique (in effect a form of play with words and ideas which also serves to disguise the content according to cognitive principles which will be discussed below) tricks the internal censor into allowing some of the unconscious material, which is otherwise repressed by the demands of civilization, to come forth. Freud's theory is sometimes referred to as a "relief" theory of humor. This coming forth from the unconscious is typically a form of aggression: against social conventions of any sort. Thus "aggression" must be understood broadly, as in the following categories of tendentious jokes: (1) exposing or obscene jokes, (2) aggressive (hostile) jokes, (3) cynical (critical, blasphemous) jokes, and (4) sceptical jokes (attacking the certainty of our knowledge itself). The term "tendentious" comes from German "Tendenz" meaning "purpose". Thus tendentious jokes are defined by Freud as having "an implicit purposive disposition to promote a point of view." Freud also recognized a category of what he called "innocent" jokes, i.e., all those which are not tendentious.

Freud also attempted to analyze the techniques of verbal [focusing on the linguistic system] and conceptual [presented by means of language, but without the linguistic system as a focus] jokes or wit.

- I. Condensation:
 - (a) with formation of composite word,
 - (b) with modification.
- II. Multiple use of the same material:
 - (c) as a whole and in parts,
 - (d) in a different order,
 - (e) with slight modification,
 - (f) of the same words full and empty.
- III. Double meaning:
 - (g) meaning as a name and as a thing,
 - (h) metaphorical and literal meanings,
 - (i) double meaning proper (play upon words),
 - (j) double entendre,
 - (k) double meaning with an allusion.

his most famous example [condensation: composite word] is drawn from Heine's *Reisebilder*:

Heine introduces the delightful figure of the lottery-agent and extractor of corns, Hirsch-Hyacinth of Hamburg, who boasts to the poet of his relations with the wealthy Baron Rothschild, and finally says: "And, as true as God shall grant me all good things, Doctor, I sat beside Salomon Rothschild and he treated me quite as his equal--quite famillionairely."

Thus Freud was the first to attempt to analyze linguistic humor, prototypically of the pun sort. With regard to the techniques of verbal jokes he ends up subsuming "multiple use of the same material" and "double meaning" under the larger rubric of "condensation"(1905/60:42); Leech in *A Linguistic Introduction to English Poetry* defines a pun as "a foregrounded lexical ambiguity, which may have its origin either in homonymy or polysemy." There seems to be a bit of confusion in the literature between written and spoken language here. For spoken language I believe that the essential notions are polysemy (multiple meanings of the same word) and homophony (two different words which sound alike, or which can be made to sound alike).

Hockett (1977), without referring to Freud, makes the same distinction between verbal and conceptual jokes. His terms are "poetic" and "prosaic". Again, although he does not refer to Jakobson, it seems that Hockett is using "poetic" in the same way that Jakobson does in his delineation of the factors in the communi-

cation situation: poetic as set toward the linguistic form of the message. Poetic jokes are non-translatable, hinging on "accidental resemblances between words in sound and in meaning" within the language being used. Hockett points out that

in any human community, there are some pairs of things or situations that have nothing to do with each other but that may be brought into juxtaposition indirectly, in the awareness of members of the community, by the language--merely because words that mean the things are similar or identical in sound. Poetic jokes rest on this. . . . (p. 286) The respondent work required by a poetic joke is that of recognizing the absurdity--at best, a culturally or situationally relevant absurdity of juxtaposing things merely via the sounds that mean them. (p. 287)

An awareness of this characteristic at some level is probably what lies behind the cultural belief that "puns are the lowest form of humor".

Poetic jokes can be made up of puns and non-puns. The basic punning joke that he cites is:

"Tough luck," said the egg in the monastery,
"out of the frying pan into the friar."

Hockett classifies puns into "perfect" and "imperfect", and analyzes the egg example as having a perfect pun in the identity in sound of *fryer* and *friar*, and as having an imperfect pun in the similarity in sound of *fire* and *fryer*. He also mentions the importance of the presence of the idiom in English: *out of the frying pan into the fire*, thus also expanding the relevant levels of linguistic organization which may be involved.

An example Hockett gives of a non-punning poetic joke is as follows:

Just as he finished putting a question to his class, a professor noticed that one student was nearly asleep, so he quickly added, "Jones, what do you think?" Jones jerked his eyes open and responded, "I'm not sure, Professor; what do *you* think?" The professor drew himself erect and said, "*I don't think; I know.*" Jones replied, "Well, I don't think I know either."

Jokes which are not poetic are "prosaic", defined as translatable. This category would correspond to Freud's conceptual jokes. Hockett suggests that the best way to classify these is topically. The sample narrative joke given earlier is an

example of a prosaic joke.

Pepicello and Weisberg (1983) in their article on "linguistics and humor" in the first volume of the Handbook of Humor Research, have the intention of resolving what they see as the problem concerning definitions of major types of linguistic humor among psycholinguistic researchers. They attempt to provide "a reasonably coherent, although somewhat limited, framework for classification that is amenable to the interdisciplinary approach we advocate" [linguists and psychologists]. Although they are primarily concerned with "riddles", they cite Hockett's article on jokes, and claim a common analysis with Hockett for the twelve strategies identified below, although in Hockett's work the strategies appear in nonriddle humorous sequences simply termed 'jokes'. They present a classification of "linguistic strategies in verbal humor" which is based essentially in grammatical analysis: describing how phonological, morphological, and syntactic categories can be manipulated to produce ambiguities that are then employed humorously. (p. 60)

Their classification subsumes the basic polysemy and homophony principles, and extends into techniques which can be seen to illustrate another theme of the recent literature on humor (cf. Zijderveld and Christie Davies' response) that it is essentially a form of play with institutionalized meanings (cultural conventions including the structure of the linguistic system).² Implicit recognition of this basic characteristic is in Pepicello and Weisberg's extension in the category "Other" to presupposition, and parody, which constitutes playing with the conventions of the riddle genre itself:

Why do elephants paint their toenails red?
So they can hide in cherry trees.

² There is further discussion in Chapter 3 of Garvey's findings on children's play with conventions of conversation.

Oring has pointed out that playing with riddle genre conventions is the characteristic of the elephant joke cycle humor structure. Oring cites as the ultimate example in which "the only rule consistently operative is that of rule-breaking":

Q: What's blue, hangs on the wall, and whistles Dixie?
 [I don't know.]
 A: A herring.
 [But a herring isn't blue.]
 You can paint it blue.
 [But a herring doesn't hang on the wall.]
 You can hang it on the wall.
 [But a herring can't whistle Dixie.]
 So I lied a little.

An illustration of how joking can be understood as the breaking of communicative conventions can be seen in Hancher's analysis of American cartoons in terms of the type of violation of the speech act framework as set out by Austin. Austin (1962) had explicitly excluded joking from consideration, along with writing poetry and acting a part, as "parasitic uses," various "not serious" and "not full normal" uses. Thus within the framework of speech act theory, such things as "jokes, kidding around, punning, mimicking" are not illocutionary acts. They are deviant practices which Bach and Harnish (1979) put in a category called "collateral acts" which "can be performed in conjunction with or in lieu of illocutionary acts."

Hancher (1980) demonstrated that in the cartoons he looked at humor may be seen to arise out of Austin's "misunderstandings", "mistakes", and under the rubric of "infelicities" primarily under "misapplications" and "insincerities" (irony). He found that humor based on the other categories of "non-plays", "flaws", "hitches" and "breaches" was not common. Thus even as Austin thought he was excluding joking from consideration he was setting up a conceptual framework which can explain how humor is generated. It remains to be seen, however, how much the humor of cartoons resembles the humor generated in joking interaction.

An example of humor generated under Austin's "misapplications," according

to Hancher (corresponding to Searle's first preparatory rule on assertions, and Grice's second maxim of Quality (Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence), is a George Price cartoon (*New Yorker*, 8 August 1977) in which the wife says to her hen-pecked husband: 'You say you're sorry. You act sorry. And you *look* sorry. But you're not sorry.' One can't make assertions felicitously about the content of other persons' consciousness.

After discussing how we choose what and what not to say in conversation generally to create a shared focus, Dolitsky (1983) makes the claim that humor is based universally on manipulation of such rules, playing against an audience's unstated expectations. She draws on Freud's ideas of the comic and "the naive" and discusses examples of different humor techniques (mostly in cartoons). In her conclusion she asserts that "going against the pragmatic conventions of a linguistic community, i.e., stating the normally unsaid, or omitting the normally said, is the strategy most commonly used in humor."

Claiming to subsume Freud's analysis of verbal joke techniques is Raskin (1985), who presents a script-based semantic analysis of jokes, or rather of "joke-carrying texts", in which a joke is revealed to be constructed of a (partial) overlap of two opposed semantic scripts. There is a "semantic script-switch trigger" which usually belongs to one of two types: ambiguity or contradiction. In the case of the sample joke the trigger is the instruction of the captain to "be subtle". "use indirection", etc. The switch is activated around the point when the ensign says "whose mother is still living..."

According to Raskin (p. 104-111) the essential thing in partial script overlap is oppositeness. The basic kind of oppositeness is REAL vs. UNREAL, and this can be subdivided into actual vs. non-actual, non-existing; normal, expected state of affairs vs. abnormal, unexpected; and possible, plausible vs. impossible or nonplausible.

Freud analyzes the techniques of "conceptual" jokes [Hockett's prosaic jokes] as condensation, displacement (diversion of the train of thought), and indirect representation. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* also contains a summary of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* which shows that the most striking technical methods of jokes (condensation, displacement and indirect representation) are very much like processes of "dream-work", which Freud took to be characteristic of and unique to the unconscious. Freud noted that certain logical relations are absent in dreams (negation, in particular), and that the logical relation that seems to be preferred is the relation "just as".

Benveniste (1956) and Todorov (1982) have since pointed out that the cognitive processes identified by Freud are actually subsumable under the classical tropes [of which the (basic) one is metaphor], and as such are simply basic cognitive processes of analogy not unique to the joke/dream mode but rather "simply those of any linguistic symbolism." (p. 248T) Hockett also made clear in his article on jokes that the basic cognitive process involved, in his view, is analogy.³

Cognitive humor theory

The cognitive principle of analogy, and the idea of two frames of reference which are somehow incongruous, can be found in some of the classic theorizing on humor originating with Immanuel Kant. Ragnar Johnson (1976) gives a "critical exposition" of the theories of Bergson, Freud, Koestler, the Bateson school of logical paradox. Milner and Douglas, pointing out that all have in common the recognition that the joke form is the product of some kind of bisociation between two frames of reference or realms of meaning. The joke constitutes a third realm which cannot be understood without reference to the two bisociated realms. The

³ D. Gentner's work in cognitive science concerning "mechanisms of analogy" has found that developmentally there is a change from perception of analogy from surface characteristics to a preference, in adults, for analogies in terms of relations. I'm sure there is a connection here to production and appreciation of humor.

main points he seems to be making are: (1) a joke cannot be studied out of its entire social context; and (2) the meaning of any given joke probably arises from *many* layers of bisociation.

Analysis by an American structuralist

Moving now to structural analysis, we return to Hockett (1977) who set up a classification in which a complete joke may be simple, compound or complex. A simple joke has a bipartite structure: build-up and punch.

Hockett finds puns occurring in three locations in jokes: (a) end puns: in the egg and professor examples given earlier: (b) build-up puns in "garden path jokes" in which the context is constructed to force one reading, and the pun serves as a "pivot" (described below in terms of structure):

The missionaries moved westwards through the North American wilderness, converting the Indians, mainly to dust.

In this example, the pivot pun is the word "convert".

(c) implied puns in which the pun is evoked by implicature. This case is the prototype for Dolitsky's (1983) recognition that humor may lie in the "unsaid".

Hockett gives a true structuralist procedure for discovering the parts of the joke:

Given a particular wording for a simple joke, there is an easy procedure for locating the boundary between build-up and punch. Starting at the end, one finds the shortest terminal sequence, the replacement of which by suitably chosen other words will transform the joke into a nonjoke.

Compound and complex jokes are formed by repeating, "with certain inclusion relations", the build-up-plus-punch pattern of the simple joke. The example Hockett gives of a complex joke is as follows:

Arriving mid-morning at the penitentiary, a new convict was hastily processed and taken out to the rockpile. Regulations permitted no conversation; but as things grew grim one inmate called out "Thirty-two!" and all the others burst into laughter. The guards stirred and things quieted down. Later, another inmate broke the monotony with "Forty-seven!"

and got the same response.

Puzzled, the new inmate asked his cellmate that evening what it was all about. "We pass around the best jokes we know. through the grapevine," said his cellmate, "and we give each one a number. Then out on the rockpile where we can't talk, when things get too tough we just call out the number of the joke we have in mind."

The next afternoon the new convict decided he would get in on the act. After several others had told their jokes, and after an appropriate lull, he called out "Seventy-three!" --and was met with dead silence.

That evening, puzzled, he tried to find out from his cellmate what had gone wrong. "Don't you have a number seventy-three?" "Oh, sure we do." "Well, is it a poor joke?" "No, it's one of the funniest." "Well, then, what *was* wrong?" The cellmate, a little embarrassed, said "Leave us face it, bud; there's guys that can put a joke over and guys that can't."

Continuing with a cognitively-oriented structural/rhetorical analysis, we note that narrative jokes may be more or less overtly signalled in interaction. In the case of the example from Vick Tayback presented below, the joke is announced as such:

"This joke is a real classic
so..you may have heard it
but..don't you stop me because it's my favorite
and I want to hear it myself."

A middle position would be signalling by formulaic language: "That reminds me of the story about...."; "There was a priest, a rabbi, and a minister on a desert island...". At the other extreme is the style of joketelling in which part of the game is to keep the audience believing for as long as possible into the joke that what is being told is an experience of the teller⁴:

⁴ This joke, and the one to follow by Vick Tayback, were transcribed from an audio recording of a television show, "The Funniest Joke I Ever Heard," which was a collection of videotapes of people telling their favorite jokes.

Transcription conventions: I have decided not to try to be consistent in using transcription conventions, because of the different sources of my data and the different purposes to which I put the data. Thus the following narrative jokes are set out as a list of tone groups for ease in referring to various parts of the joke as I discuss its structure, but the tone groups are not marked for prosodic and paralinguistic features except for loudness in the Tayback joke. In Chapter 4, on the other hand, some of the data is transcribed using the range of conventions below when I need to indicate contrastive stress. This transcription system for prosodic and paralinguistic cues has evolved from an original base in John Trim's work (1976). In this system, speech sequences are first divided into tone groups or intonational phrases. A phrase can be marked by a minor, non-final boundary "/" or a major or final boundary "//". Within a tone group may be indicated: (1) location of the nuclei: (i.e., the syllable or syllables marked by change in pitch) "˘" low fall, "˙" high fall, "˘˙" low rise, "˙˘" high rise; (2) other accented syllables in the tone group, "˙" high, "˘" low; (3) paralinguistic features such as (a) shift to high pitch register "r" or shift to low pitch register "L" (both applying to the entire tone group), (b) pausing ".." indicating a break in timing and "... " indicating a measurable pause, (c) speech rate: "accel." indicating accelerating tempo and "rit." indicating slowing down, (d) loudness over an entire tone group is indicated by "p" (soft) or "f" (loud) or by CAPS. Doubling of a symbol indicates extra emphasis.

Tommy Lasorda

1. I was playing in the Howard Cosell Golf Tournament
2. I was playing with Sandy Koufax
3. n[on] [] each hole
4. there was this old man
5. with two heavy boxes
6. he kept following me around
7. and I said I wonder what that guy's got in those heavy boxes
8. he'd walk around from one hole to the next
9. finally on the sixth hole
10. as I was just getting ready to chip up
11. ...some guy come over
12. and tapped this old guy on the shoulder
13. he said excuse me sir do you have the correct time
14. and he put these two heavy boxes down
15. and he looked
16. and he said yeah
17. it's twelve o'clock here in Palm Springs
18. three o'clock in New York
19. six o'clock in the morning in London
20. he said the Dow Jones is up eight point six five
21. he said gold is up [] dollars an ounce
22. silver's down eleven dollars an ounce
23. he said the high today here in Palm Springs is eighty
24. the low is forty-nine
25. he said there's a hurricane blowing off the coast of Puerto Rico
26. n the guy says man
27. he said that's the greatest wrist watch I've ever seen
28. n the guy said yeah
29. but carrying these batteries around is really killing me
(enunciated more distinctly: slower and louder than the
rest of the joke)

The joke lead-in is particularly ambiguous here because for a celebrity to have someone following him around is expected. At line 4 the formulaic "there was this..." occurs, but the story seems believable until the second occurrence of a formulaic expression associated with joking, "some guy..." at line 11. Thus there is a subtle cumulative cueing that the story is actually a joke. Otherwise it is not apparent that this is a joke until line 18 when inappropriate information begins to be offered.

Once the joke is recognized as such, the conventional expectation (Sacks' 1974 analyzed example among adolescent boys notwithstanding) is that the joketeller's turn-at-talk will extend through to the punchline of the joke. The joketeller is

given the floor, with the expectation that some entertainment will be provided in exchange.

We will now consider a joke in terms of narrative structure:

Vick Tayback

1 This joke is a real classic
2 so you may have heard it,
3 but don't you stop me , because it's my favorite
4 and I want to hear it myself
5 there was this brand-new ensign on a battleship
6 and it was his turn on the bridge
7 he was in charge of the whole ship
8 well here comes Sparky the radioman
9 n he has a radiogram sayin that
10 Seaman Smith's mother has just died
11 and he's to be informed
12 so the ensign gets on the horn
13 his voice rings out all over the ship
14 NOW HEAR THIS
15 NOW HEAR THIS SEAMAN SMITH
16 SEAMAN SMITH YOUR MOTHER JUST DIED
17 THAT IS ALL
18 well Seaman Smith he goes into hysterics
19 and he has to be wrapped in wet sheets and lashed to his bunk
20 well meanwhile
21 the captain comes running to the bridge
22 and he really chews the ensign out
23 you nitwit
24 you dummy
25 you don't break bad news that way
26 you have to be subtle
27 use indirection
28 tell him in a roundabout way
29 well two days later
30 the ensign has the bridge again
31 and sure enough
32 in comes Sparky with another radiogram
33 but this time it's Seaman Abernathy of Battery B whose mother has died
34 so the ensign gets on the horn
35 and he says
36 NOW HEAR THIS
37 NOW HEAR THIS
38 BATTERY B
39 FALL IN ON THE FANTAIL
40 ON THE DOUBLE
41 so all the sailors from Battery B
42 they come running to the fantail
43 and they assemble at attention
44 and then they hear the ensign's voice again
45 ALL RIGHT MEN
46 EVERY SAILOR WHOSE MOTHER IS STILL LIVING
47 TAKE THREE STEPS FORWARD
48 ANH ANH ANH ANH ANH ANH
49 NOT SO FAST ABERNATHY

The joke begins at line 5 with the formulaic opening

There was this (generic character)...

as part of the "orientation". [The terms "orientation" and "complicating action" from Labov 1972 taken partly from Propp 1929.] Certain linguistic devices are found in jokes which are found in conversational narratives generally: the demonstrative adjective "this" used for immediacy; the shift into the historical present (also conveying immediacy) begins at line 8 at the beginning of the "complicating action." It may be the case, however, that the substitution of "this" for the indefinite article is a distinguishing feature of jokes; if we compare jokes with fairytales, we find "there was *an* old man".

As a narrative structure, one way of describing this joke is that it consists essentially of two episodes, as follows:

	orientation: lines 5-7		
	EPISODE 1: lines 8-28		
well...	complicating action:	arrival of telegram:	lines 8-11
so...	result:	action of ensign:	lines 12-17
well...	effects:	Seaman Smith:	lines 18-19
well meanwhile...		captain to ensign:	lines 20-28
	EPISODE 2: lines 29-49		
well...	repeat of complicating action:	telegram:	lines 29-33
so...so...	result:	action of ensign:	lines 34-49
	(punchline: lines 48-49)		
	effects-----		

Thus the structure is similar to the example of the "complex" joke presented by Hockett and cited above. In this joke there is an interesting occurrence of the

three-fold repetition principle--in the pivot: "be subtle, use indirection, tell him in a roundabout way."

As indicated at the left margin, the teller also makes discourse distinctions by use of the particles "well" and "so", the former apparently marking background to the latter.

But in contrast to a fully-developed narrative in conversation, in which there is a complicating action building to a climax followed by the equivalent of a denouement and then a "coda" bringing the audience back from the narrative world to the world of the conversation (shifting footing back), in the joke form the purpose is to build up to a sudden cognitive switch in the punchline.⁵

Elaborating Bateson's ideas on humor, Fry (1963) analyses humor as a communication which is contained in a play frame and which has a punchline. The play frame can be established at the beginning (as in the "canned jokes" discussed so far), or signalled at the end of the episode, retroactively (as in a "situation joke" or a practical joke--to the victim, anyway). The play frame constitutes an *external* paradox, which is multiplied as the play frame is repeatedly signalled. According to Fry, the punchline precipitates a further circular paradox which concerns only the *internal* content of the joke rather than the total situation. It accomplishes this paradox by suddenly reversing the figure-ground relationship of explicit and implicit content: "it is the art of the punchline of the joke to snatch some of this implicit material from the world of Shades and project it into . . . reality." Thus to Fry all humor has not only implicit content, but also implicit unconscious aspects which are a vital part of the humor structure. This is what Fry considers his agreement with the Freudian position. Jokes are multi-level phenomena; the explicit and implicit are on different levels of abstraction and the implicit is by

⁵ Sacks (1974), however, has expanded the analytical frame for a joke to include "preface, telling and response" in keeping with his purposes in analyzing the joke as an "understanding test" as discussed below.

definition a commentary on the explicit.

A successful joke is then followed conventionally by laughter from the audience. If there is a denouement by the joketeller before the laughter response, that probably means that either the teller was unskilled in the telling or that the audience is being uncooperative.

The recognition that a joke has been embarked upon also involves a particular shift in orientation to the interaction on the part of the listener: [as discussed in chapter 1 as a shift in mode]. Cooperative behavior involves following along with appropriately suspended disbelief (Schutz's "radical modification in the tension of our consciousness, founded in a different *attention a la vie*."), with the expectation that the joketeller is supplying exactly the right amount and sequence of information. Hockett (1977:281) remarks that the design of good joke resembles a classical detective story.

If we look at the first sample joke, in the orientation section we are provided only with generic terms for the protagonist (ensign) and the setting (battleship). What apparently is important is the fact that the ensign is "brand-new," that he has access to the bridge, and that he is in charge of the whole ship. These facts emphasize his inexperience and his position of power. For the purposes of the joke the identity of the ensign and the battleship are not essential; indeed, such information could even distract the audience from the essentials of the joke and overload short-term memory. Consider if the joke were to begin:

There was this brand-new ensign second-class Frank Jones
on a battleship named the USS Minnesota

In this case of this joke, the characters are progressively more personalized (with the exception of the captain): from "the ensign" to "Sparky the radioman" (still generic but at least an actual name) to Seaman Smith and Seaman

Abernathy. "Smith" is also more generic and less comical than "Abernathy". This is important because the structure of the joke requires that the ensign address the two seamen by name. Also the impact of the content (the mother's death) is stronger if the audience is thinking in terms of a named individual rather than a generic sailor.

The whole focus of the joketeller's "evaluation" in Labov's terms (how the teller indicates how things are to be interpreted and makes clear what the point is) is to guide the interpretive processes of the audience along within one delimited frame. This is the rhetorical challenge for the joketeller: to guide the willing thinking of the hearer along a carefully constrained track so that a bisociation occurs at the punchline, suddenly bringing a parallel implicit interpretation into awareness.

To illustrate from the sample joke: Given the gravity of the news, the audience is assumed to be shocked at the behavior of the ensign. The shock reaction is reinforced within the joke by describing the seaman's hysteria and the captain's chewing out of the ensign. The audience is then expected to assume that the ensign will interpret the captain's instructions as any reasonably normal and sensitive member of the culture would, even though a parallel implicit expectation is also potentially there--namely that the sort of person who would announce someone's mother's death over the loudspeaker in the first place cannot be expected to understand such inexplicit instructions as "be subtle" (even when paraphrased in several different ways) and could be expected to attempt to follow them in a variation of his initial behavior. But the audience can in fact continue to believe that the ensign will act tactfully up to line 44, I believe, because the ensign could have assembled them all and then come down and taken Seaman Abernathy aside. So even though the ensign's behavior toward Abernathy is predictable from his initial behavior, and in fact represents obedience to the captain's

order/instructions, the audience is not prepared/expecting to encounter it because cultural expectations about tact are so powerful. Thus *logically* speaking (or literally) the ensign's behavior makes sense as a possible interpretation of the captain's instructions. just as informing Abernathy in private in a tactful way would have made sense as a possible interpretation of the captain's instructions. But the audience isn't likely to think in terms of the unacceptable behavior because the social expectations of tact (especially in such an emotionally-charged situation) are strong enough to adequately constrain our thinking. [the right way, the wrong way, the navy way?]

So far we've been talking about jokes as decontextualized cultural forms, using one particular joke as an example. A way of thinking about the discussion of the semantic form of the joke given above is that it represents one possible interpretation of the joke. I, as the television viewer, heard this joke told in the context of a program entitled "The Funniest Joke I Ever Heard", and I interpreted(analyzed) the humor as I set out above. This is one level of "communication" at which we can talk about jokes. We can do this because the joke is a conventionalized cultural form which has a conventionalized purpose (entertainment) and a conventionalized expected response (laughter). Thus Raskin (1985:101) can delimit his data by defining jokes as a form of non-bona-fide communication, the purpose of which on the part of the teller "is not to convey any information contained in the text he is uttering but rather to create a special effect with the help of the text, namely to make the hearer laugh." Raskin's purpose is to model humor competence ("native-speaker's intuitions as to the funniness of texts") by formulating a set of conditions which are necessary and sufficient to predict that a given text will be funny.

The situated meaning of a joke is another matter entirely. If we consider even the "simplest" situation, in which the joke is being told as entertainment, the

"point" of the joke in the mind of the teller may or may not match with the "point" in the mind of the audience. For example, two navymen who had been sailors (rather than officers) in the roles of teller and audience might interpret the point in the same way: as a negative comment on the military bureaucracy and officers in particular. A woman in the role of audience who was feeling cynical about men at the time of the telling might interpret the point of the joke as that men can be astonishingly insensitive to each other. Two students of pragmatics might interpret the joke as an illustration of the consequences of strict adherence to the Gricean maxims. Someone whose mother had just died might find the joke too highly charged emotionally to be experienced as funny; another person might experience it as funny in the context of a wake. Evidence exists of gender differences in humor appreciation (ref.), extending to people laughing at the same joke for different reasons, and of course there is the phenomenon [embarrassing to most social explanations] of the in-group telling of jokes which are supposedly "against" the group.

Moving toward an understanding of jokes as embedded in discourse and used to communicative effect, Robbie Davis Johnson (1973:214-215) gives an example of the use of jokes as weapons in an escalated struggle of the type described by Goffman (1967:24-26) as the aggressive use of face-work: "The purpose of the game is to preserve everyone's line from inexcusable contradiction, while scoring as many points as possible against one's adversaries and making as many gains as possible for oneself." The analysis is of the strategic and tactical use of folklore in the social interaction of a Texas madam in her role as social controller and her strong presentation of herself as a woman. Hilda is the madam and Buddy is a customer who presented the face that Hilda most disapproved of in men-- that of boaster.

". . .since their lines conflict so drastically, they have no protective orientation toward saving each other's face. Thus, their conversation is a

series of challenges, a situation that is very clear in their jokes. Several times when Buddy tells one in which the female is the butt, Hilda caps it with one of the same type in which the *male* is the butt. For example, Buddy tells a Dagwood-Blondie joke in which Blondie tries to trick Dagwood into thinking she is a virgin when she marries him and fails, making a fool of herself in the process. Hilda replies with another joke on the same subject of simulating virginity, in which the male is the fool and the woman's trick is entirely successful:

"Well, you heard about this ole country couple that got married? She'd fucked everything that had a prick hung on 'em, so she decides that she's gonna bullshit him that she's a virgin, too, so hell all she done was just stuff herself with meat to where, hell, there was no way he could possibly have gotten it in. So she finally told him, 'Well go in there and git some vaseline and maybe that will help.' And while he's gone gittin' his vaseline she removes all this damn stuff and he comes back and practically falls into that son-of-a-bitch. So the next day he's out chopping cotton, jest as happy swingin' that hoe handle as he can be, but these little piss ants keep pesterin' him, so he says to 'em. 'Goddamn you little sonofabitches, if I had me some vaseline I'd shove this hoe handle right up your ass!'"

Buddy immediately says, "She'd removed a little bit too much!" but Hilda refuses to let him make the woman the butt of the joke. She replies, "Yeah, but he was still happy about the situation. He couldn't get it in at all at first-- he thought the vaseline made all the difference!" Thus, she refuses to let Buddy change the joke from one of female manipulation, as she told it, to one of female subordination, as he wanted it.

What Johnson describes as "a function of the differential identities of the interactants and . . . a mechanism for conflict" is a negotiation of how the "point" of a joke is to be interpreted.

Basso (1979) gives an example of how a joker uses a joking performance to communicate the strength of the relationship with the person that he can joke in this way. First, Basso discusses Indian models of "the Whiteman" as cultural

symbols. Apparently in all Indian cultures "the Whiteman" serves as a symbol for what the Indian is not, the manner in which this opposition is interpreted being mutable and culturally specific. The image of the Whiteman that the joker presents is an image of "ineffectively guided behavior, or social action gone haywire, of an individual stunningly ignorant of how to comport himself appropriately in public situations." The joker puts on a performance in which it is the code switching (to a particular stereotyped variety of English) that accomplishes the metacommunicative signals. He uses a process of contrast and distortion which Basso calls "epitomization," creating a unique image each time. In this sense each portrayal is a symbolic invention.

The trading post at Cibecue, Arizona--a small, one-room establishment with wide wooden counters, floor-to-ceiling shelves, and a large overhead fan that turns to the rhythm of an earlier and less-hurried time -- gets very busy on paydays. And so, on this one a number of years ago, it was understandable that the customers who crowded inside, all of them Western Apaches except myself, paid little attention when another Apache, a man in his early forties, walked in the door and moved to a spot near the rear where one of his cousins, an angular man in his late thirties, was seated on a pile of saddle blankets nursing the remains of a bad cold. Neither did anyone take notice when the two men began to converse in Western Apache, an Athabascan language that has flourished in Cibecue for centuries and that, despite protracted efforts by representatives of the U.S. Government to eradicate it during the present one, survives there today, modified but vigorous, as the standard vehicle for all forms of verbal communication.

Thus, it came as a surprise when the older member of the pair stepped back from his companion, fixed him with a quizzical stare, and broke into a variety of English, proclaiming in a sharp, high-pitched voice, "I don't like it, my friend, you don't look good to me. Maybe you sick, need to eat aspirins!" The effects of this excursion into an alien language (for that, to all but a few Apaches from Cibecue, is just what English is) were instantaneous. Conversation ceased abruptly in other parts of the trading post and everyone turned to see what was happening. "You come to the clinic every day, my friend. Sure I help you over there. Sure got lots of aspirins. Maybe you drink too much, that why you sick." As the speaker continued -- "You got to sleep, my friend, get lots of sleep" -- several bystanders began to smile. And as the monologue reached its climax -- "I know all what make you sick, *everything*! So just you don't *forget* it!" -- they began to laugh. Moments later, the whole place was in an uproar.

But why? What had been so funny? Smiling weakly, as ethnographers are apt to do when they find themselves confused by something that confuses no one else, I put this question to an Apache standing next to me. "That man," he replied in English, "was just joke his cousin, that's all. He not mad, just saying it, that's all. He was just imitate a Whiteman. Pretty funny, these people think so."

Sacks (1974) analyzes a struggle which takes place within the arena of the joke itself. His example is at the opposite extreme from the "ideal" joke-telling situation described initially, in that the adolescent male joke-teller has to work actively throughout the telling to achieve the completion of the joke among his peers. Sacks analyzes the joke as being built in the form of a story, but he expands the idea of "story" to include interaction preceding and following: preface, telling, and response. Within the telling there is a puzzle sequence, organized in such away as to direct the hearer's attention appropriately for the proper effect of the joke. and the solution sequence ending with the punchline from which the answer to the puzzle must be inferred. [Thus we see the same pattern as set out by Hockett.] Sacks discusses the use of dirty jokes, especially for adolescent boys, as 'understanding tests,' such that being able to display understanding of the appropriate inference from the punchline is the way to pass the test. He also points out that the withholding of a laughter response can be used to grade a joke negatively, and he speculates that "a mirthless laugh perhaps constitutes a way to produce a sequentially appropriate object, where that object is laughter, while stripping it of much of the rest of what laughter otherwise carries, emotionally and interactionally." (p. 351)

Laughter as an interactional phenomenon

The joke-teller's ideal purpose is to guide the audience along in such a way that when the bisociation comes in the punchline it is (1) unexpected enough and (2) appropriately pleasurable enough for the audience that an involuntary laugh will be produced which Koestler apparently believed to be a physiological reflex of the cognitive experience of bisociation. The involuntary nature of the laughter relates to certain features of the "entertainment" situation: people become *passive* (even though an audience for a comic may appear to be quite active). The passivity is captured in the expression: "He made me laugh" = caused me to laugh.

The audience put themselves in a receptive state, hoping that the comic can lead them along cognitively to the point at which the involuntary laugh response will happen. Once it has, of course, it may create a particular mood in which one is even more receptive to potential bisociations, and everything becomes funny. Garvey (1977:21-22) describes the phenomenon of "group glee" among children, and Goffman has referred to the state of mirth which can be generated among grown-ups. I suppose this is what the comedian strives for.

The laugh as an involuntary convulsive response seems to have been extended pragmatically in various ways. Ethnomethodologists have produced a series of studies on the organization of laughter in conversation.

Schenkein (1972) begins his analysis of laughter with an example in which a member of the multi-party interaction other than the particular addressee provides a laugh response. [In this case, however, the hearer who provides the laugh is potentially included in the "we" of the speaker, since both are members of a therapy group into which Jim is just now being introduced:] (p. 346)

Roger: Bring yer mother in we'll work on her hehh

Al: hehh hehh

Jim: [Okay hh

(I've modified Schenkein's notation to show where Al and Jim overlap with a bracket.)

Schenkein is interested in laughter as a way of "proffering or displaying affiliations" in the course of conversation. Schenkein concludes that laughter can be used to show support, and that, by extension, the withholding of laughter where it is expected can signal disaffiliation. He also points out that the inappropriate insertion of laughter can convey a judgment of the "foolishness" of some first speaker, thus conveying an extreme of disaffiliation.

Jefferson (1979) analyzes laughter as a signal which a speaker may use to invite the hearer to laugh, an invitation which may be accepted or declined. It appears that a speaker's laughter (in the form either of "a post-utterance completion laugh particle" or "within-speech laughter") sets up a strong "preference" for laughter in response, such that hearer must, in Jefferson's terms, "actively decline to laugh". A typical way of accomplishing this is to pursue the topic at hand. In my terms this would mean not accepting the attempted shift into the joking footing which the speaker is attempting. An example from Jefferson (1979:86) which shows both an example of a post-utterance completion laugh particle and an active declination to laugh:

Vic: ...of a ho::sss. + he h

Mike: [Yeh but...

On the other hand, Jefferson's most recent paper on laughter (1984), in conversations in which people talk about their troubles, finds that in response to "post-utterance completion laugh particles" the troubles-recipient does not laugh, but rather produces a serious response. Her analysis identifies different appropriate behavior for the teller and recipient: that it is appropriate for the troubles-teller to laugh because that shows that she is "troubles-resistive", and for the recipient to refrain from laughing in order to exhibit that she is taking the trouble seriously.

O'Donnell-Trujillo and Adams (1983) contrast their work with that of Schenkein and Jefferson as exploring accomplishments of laughter in more detail. In particular they are interested in what they call the "coordinating" actions of laughter. Their data are transcripts from conversations between college students who were meeting for the first time, a situation in which the researchers assumed that coordination would be the most difficult. The article examines "*what* coordi-

nating activities occur in conversation and *how* laughter functions to actualize these accomplishments." Their findings are that laughter functions as:

- (1) a turn-taking cue;
- (2) an acoustic instruction by the speaker as to how to hear the utterance, in particular "that vocal emphasis and within-speech laughter taken together can provide instructions to hear nonliteralness and nonseriousness." (p. 190);
- (3) an acoustic display of hearership;
- (4) an acoustic invitation to elaborate;
- (5) an acoustic resource in affiliation, (although they point out that they looked only at coordinating, affiliating uses). They assert "the combined use of laughter and latching to display mutual and immediate apprehension of the content of the utterances and their laughable candidacy." (p. 191)

O'Donnell-Trujillo and Adams seem to be unaware of Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1976) (forthcoming as "Laughter in the Pursuit of Intimacy" in Button). This paper exhibits two different facets of the ethnomethodological approach. Part I of the paper considers "laughing together" as an object in itself, which tends to occur as a single round of one of two types: unison (same onset and end), and relay (each stream ends as next starts). The coordinated activity which seems to be involved is investigated: re devices for signalling boundaries, renewing laughter.

The second facet considers laughing together as "accessory to negotiation vis a vis some locally engendered problem," i.e., how it occurs systematically as a mid-component of an Expanded Offense-Remedial Sequence. Thus their focus is on offenses as bids for intimacy, asserting that "since things like rudeness, profanity, crudeness, obscenity, etc. are in the first place indices of intimacy...", their occurrence may not be intentionally offensive but rather an invitation to intimacy, redefining the talk up to that point as having been formal. This usage fits in nicely

between types 1 and 2 in my framework for joking "tones" presented in Chapter 4. Their point is that laughter by recipient proposes "No offense taken" but it does not display understanding or affiliation with the initiator of the bid for intimacy. Their way of describing it is that laughter by itself doesn't "co-implicate in the mentality which generated the offense". In my terms "co-implication" means displaying understanding by producing an utterance within the joking frame that has been put forward by the initiator. An example they give (p. B11):

Hannah: I'm looking forward to just uh hh having a little, (0.6) ti:me tuh myself,

((ignorance))

Hannah: Yihknow like Gahbo, 'hh

((laughter))

Emma: "AH WANT TUH BE A LO:: NE."

in which case, in their terms, "the co-implicative utterance meets evocation of Garbo with the Garbo signature." My interest lies in specifying how the "co-implication in another's mentality" is achieved (as in the analysis of joking styles) as well as in the interactional application of joking as part of strategic language use. Thus my object of study (the extended humorous episode) could subsume some of these "expanded offense-remedial sequences".

Some further considerations concerning the pragmatic extension of laughter: the "primary" occurrence of laughter in an involuntary pleasurable response to the cognitive experience of bisociation provides a basis for manipulation. At the core of this is the differential ability (which Ekman (1985) is exploring in relation to the ability to lie) to suppress and fabricate supposedly "involuntary" reactions. Suppression yields a dead-pan style; fabrication can produce appropriate social laughter (as described in the articles just discussed). Significant in this latter case

is that we have terms for inexpertly fabricated laughter, calling it "nervous" or "forced" or "phony".

By extension we have forms of laughter which are parodies of laughter, intended to be interpreted as fabrications (as in the "hollow" laughter that Sacks discusses in relation to the dirty joke) and which convey further nuances of evaluation of the previous joke or joking, such as "yuk yuk" and "hardy har har" (R. Lakoff, personal communication). These parody forms may actually represent the influence of written language, most probably in cartoons, back on spoken language.

Thus two of the four studies of laughter from an ethnomethodological perspective have recognized (1) the signalling function of laughter in a speaker's utterance; and (2) the use of laughter in a response to signal affiliation--which can be displayed verbally as well. The studies also make clear that the occurrence of laughter may have certain prototypical features, but that ultimately an instance must be interpreted according to the activity in which it occurs. [revise] A further point which these studies make about laughter is that it is the one exception to the "one speaker at a time" rule of turn-taking specified in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). In fact, "laughing together" is a desirable event, as analyzed in Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1976). Thus laughing together manifests in its occurrence the affiliative meaning that the researchers have found for it.

With reference to the conventional laughter response to a joke, sometimes people laugh in spite of themselves, responding involuntarily to the humor structure with laughter even when they object to the point of a joke as being cruel or sexist or racist. For other people a conscious decision is made concerning whether or not to laugh; they are able to suppress their potential laughter as a political statement of disapproval concerning the point of a joke.

Relation of joke content to social structure/organization

Given that narrative jokes exist and can be identified and counted, attempts have been made to explain the occurrence of certain joke content in relation to social structure. One such analysis is that of Christie Davies (1982), who links the content of jokes (stupid/crafty) aimed at minority groups to the predictable preoccupations and fears of members of Western industrial societies with democratic ideologies. (Assuming that the jokes originate in the dominant middle class.)

"..ethnic jokes...reflect the competing moral values, uncertain social boundaries and impersonal power structures of these societies." If the ideology is that success comes from being smart enough to take advantage of one's opportunities and from also working hard (leading to a "blaming the victim" framework), but not having to work so hard that one can't have some leisure to enjoy the good life, then minority groups which are typically at a lower economic status can be labelled as "stupid" (supposedly projecting the joke-tellers' fears of stupidity and failure vis a vis large, impersonal and perplexing institutions). The resentments at the work ethic are aimed at those identifiable minority groups that have succeeded and risen above the middle-class ranks of the joke-tellers. "Crafty" implies having succeeded by trickery (i.e., not playing by the rules, having more than their fair share). Thus "crafty" actually represents "too smart"-- using one's intelligence to accomplish things that are unethical in order to get ahead.

The constant repetition of joking of a predictable sort may serve to perpetuate existing attitudes. I suspect that what Radcliffe-Brown observed in his "joking relationships" was of this type (which Handelman and Kapferer (1972) have called "category-routinized" joking), in which the participants, settings and situations, content, etc. are closely constrained. A striking example of a related phenomenon was provided by the "joking contest" at the 1984 WHIM Conference: it was apparent that a lot of the jokes told were built upon anti-woman/subordinate

group themes. Thus the cultural form "joke" with its standard themes may in fact perpetuate certain sexist/racist/oppressive attitudes in that form of discourse, even when the joke-tellers themselves may not identify with those attitudes.

A very general analysis of the relation of joke content to social structure, which can be traced to Freud's underlying idea of aggression against the constraints of civilisation, and which has been put forth by Bateson (1969) and Nevo and Nevo (1983), is that joke content goes against the prevailing cultural conventions. Nevo and Nevo (1983) is an attempt to explore joke techniques in simulated situations of everyday encounters in order to discover the rules people follow when they answer humorously. The authors point out that the standard humor research paradigm is too limited; typically subjects are presented with humorous materials and asked to rate them. In this study 250 12th grade male students in Israel were given a modified version of Rosenzweig's Picture Frustration Study and were asked to answer this questionnaire twice: (a) ordinarily (as if they were present in the situation) and (b) humorously (as amusingly as possible).⁶ They found that the subjects indeed used Freud's techniques "as if they had read him" and also used many more sexual associations in their humorous answers. The authors believe that humor operates through social rules and conventions but that the *rules* are universal. Here is their inferred rule process: I have to answer humorously---> I will say something incongruent/ unexpected/inappropriate---> the possibilities are: 1) aggressive answers (direct and indirect); 2) sexual answers; 3) absurd fantasy answers; 4) reversals of situation or intention; 5) use of double meaning of words; 5) use of idioms or famous phrases. Thus hostility, Schadenfreude, and the topics of sex, excrement and death will predictably occur in humor simply because most societies define these attitudes and topics as inappropriate [and thus

⁶ Apparently the research was carried out in Hebrew and Arabic, but there is never any discussion of translation.

incongruous] in most situations. This analysis is opposed to the notion that there is something inherently "funny" about these things.

Patterning in 'joking' speech events

Moving now from narrative jokes to joking activity, we have evidence from the ethnography of speaking of "joking" activity which is highly patterned, as well as in-depth analyses of its role within social organization. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) is the classic essay in which "joking relationships" in traditional societies are described as "as relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence."⁷ These relationships involve specific roles for participants, a highly regularized set of opening cues, and content stereotypes, e.g., "strange" dietary habits, "immoral" sexual behavior, or "peculiar" marriage customs. Symmetrical and asymmetrical varieties are distinguished. A problem with the term "joking," at least for anthropologists, is that Radcliffe-Brown used it in referring to relationships which are characterized by *teasing* (Howell 1973). Radcliffe-Brown himself mentioned that "joking relationship" was possibly not the best term for the phenomenon (1952:105).

A similar phenomenon is "verbal dueling" Dundes. Leach and Ozkok (1972) analyzing this phenomenon among young men in Turkey, look at how forms are used in interaction and the cultural meanings involved. The patterning here involves: message form (end rhyme), semantic content (topics of the joking), the contrast between overt content and the communicative goal or function, how "unification" works here as a semantic strategy. There is a discourse analysis in terms of sequencing rules built on the basic pattern of challenge--reply. There is a social analysis of participation and a consideration of the integration of linguistic

⁷ See Apte (1985) for a comprehensive discussion of joking relationships.

skills and cultural knowledge in that verbal dueling serves as an important language socialization device. An explanation of the practice is given in terms of psychological motivation: "symbolic sexual dominance is a predominant theme in terms of the enculturation experience in the male life cycle." Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1976:)

Gossen (1976) is an ethnography of speaking analysis of a verbal activity among young males in Chamula which attempts to demonstrate the value of an "holistic social and linguistic framework." Gossen locates the activity within a folk taxonomy of all verbal behavior, describes typical performance contexts, considers phonological and semantic rules in the performance and their relative importance, discusses the pragmatic rules in terms of the relationships of the participants and social themes, considers verbal dueling as it appears developmentally, discusses how it functions as a socialization technique by cataloguing deviance and developing the male role and social identity, and describes how it serves not only to rank boys within the solidary group but also as entertainment and as a form of informal social control. Gossen's claim is that this kind of activity is more complex than the analysis in Dundes et al would show; the larger significance only becomes clear within a holistic social and linguistic framework.

Bricker (1976) addresses the question of strategy in joking, and demonstrates elegantly how lack of congruence in two Zinacantan semantic systems (address and reference terms within the kinship system) are exploited in joking among men as they play off one cognitive structure against the other. Extensive data are presented. We learn not only what the rules are, but how they are actualized in face-to-face interaction. From the volume introduction: This article examines "how social relationships are continually being defined in particular social situations, and how the structure of the relationship of the participants affects the content and organization of the exchange."

Brukman (1975) is an ethnography of speaking approach influenced by ideas from ethnomethodology and speech act theory of a type of sexual joking between men and women. Brukman's avowed purposes are: "to show what constitutes the activity the Koya identify as joking" and "to lay out the beginnings of an analytic framework for characterizing the manner in which ongoing verbal as well as nonverbal interaction are understood by participants in social encounters." There is a detailed discussion of his methodology. The analysis covers seven minutes of a forty-minute tape, and most of the paper is an account of the background information necessary to understand what is going on in the joking. Brukman emphasizes that "what is construed as orderly and appropriate in the context of the ritual of joking is contingent on the particular historical and personal biographical circumstances within which the joking takes place." He says that conventional ethnographic description is deficient in two ways: "it fails to take into account that communication is necessarily a chain of statement--response/ statement--response/statement--etc., in which an initial opening establishes a contingent relationship with an alter; and it fails to reckon with the past history (the biographies) of the individuals engaged in some interchange." This article represents an attempt to deal with emergence within the constraints of a particular speech activity.

Labov's (1972) analysis of ritual insults begins with a problem statement:
Given that Stanley is of higher status than Rel.

Rel: Shut up please!

Stanley: 'ey, you tellin' *me*?

Rel: Yes. Your mother's a duck.

why does Stanley retire when Rel says to him "Your mother's a duck"? Labov finds that the answer lies in "the concept of a ritual event as one which is formulated without regard to the persons named." (p. 352) Thus the statement "Your mother's a duck" is indexical of that use of language and signals that Rel is not

issuing a personal challenge. The paper is a sociolinguistic analysis of the speech event of "sounding" among black adolescent boys in an American urban setting. Symbolic distance and highly patterned form (rhyming couplets, rules governing the content of each component of the couplet and the relationship between components) help insulate the exchange from further consequences. Labov writes a formal description for the dozens.

In Watson (1975), joking conversation (as teasing, taunting, sexual joking) is analyzed along with narration from a sample of speech data recorded from Hawaiian children 5-7 years old, in a peer group setting. An underlying routine, transferable from one speech event to another, is identified in both narration and joking. This routine is iterative and allows both stories and joking to be produced jointly in a contrapuntal style. By "routine" is meant a sequence of utterances or behaviors which is regular and procedural, and which communicates as much by its form as by its content." "A routine exists when conventional or symbolic meanings have become attached to speech or behavior carried out in a particular sequence and with a particular style."

Handelman and Kapferer (1972) present extended joking interaction from two cultural settings (Israel and Zambia) to illustrate two kinds of "joking frames" (sets of rules--which may alter in the course of the joking activity): *setting-specific* and *category-routinized*. They try to focus on emergence, and give extensive contextualization and commentary on the joking interactions. Setting-specific frames are more fragile, less predictable in their course than category-routinized frames, which are "anchored in more general social conventions" and are better able to integrate subversive elements. In searching for rules, they discuss 1) the issuance of a license to joke [Goffman's term]; 2) how participation is controlled (containment vs. uncontainment); 3) how targeting is controlled (open/closed: open = characteristics selected for comment are not peculiar to a particular person who is

the target of the joking activity; they can apply equally to others in the audience). For example, the joking initiation "Chai is fat" is a closed reference but it is uncontained because of the third-person form. Compare with the contained "Chai, you are fat."

There is a good discussion of the sociolinguistic dimensions of category-routinized joking (which is the kind of thing that Radcliffe-Brown was most probably referring to in talking about "joking relationships") as frames containing specific roles for participants, a highly regularized set of opening cues, and content stereotypes, e.g., "strange" dietary habits, "immoral" sexual behavior, or "peculiar" marriage customs.

Handelman and Kapferer (1972:513) claim to have developed a conceptual scheme which allows them to examine the pattern and form of joking behavior without regard to content, i.e., function or purpose: "The single most important contribution we hope to have made is to demonstrate that any form of expressive social activity, whether it be joking or not, must be understood in terms of the emergent, self-generative form of the activity itself."

Within American culture there seems to be a continuum between professional comedians' performances, on the one hand, and improvisational joking in informal private situations among friends, on the other. Narrative jokes would fall somewhere in the middle. Two main parameters which can be used in distinguishing these practices are the degree of spontaneity and the degree of collaboration involved. Narrative jokes in their prototypical form are both non-spontaneous and monologic, whereas improvisational joint joking is both spontaneous and collaborative. Hall (1974) identified all of the types of joking that occurred during dinner conversations in a student cooperative over a six-month period. The data was taperecorded and represents casual conversation among peers. Hall's purpose was "to illustrate the relevance of conversational joking behavior to the folkloristic

study of jokes, with particular regard to the formative influence exerted on joking tradition by the interweaving of creativity and tradition in spontaneous, conversational joking." Hall found that it was difficult to classify joking expressions (which he considers "a dimension of artistic verbal performance in everyday life") in traditional folklore categories. He refers to them as "performances in search of a genre," and advocates a focus on folklore as a communicative process. Hall hypothesizes that "a joking expression's chances for survival...are determined primarily by the range of contexts which can support it, the frequency of their occurrence, and the expression's esthetic value."

The idea of the survival chances of a joking expression depending on the range of contexts that can support it has also been taken up by Hockett with regard to the "wisecrack" (pp. 281-282).

A wisecrack is a clever verbal response quickly coined and used in a situation in which it is apropos; the situation serves as, or in lieu of, a build-up. But the wisecrack in this sense is hardly a joke, because it is not told; rather, it happens. More jokelike is the latent wisecrack: a lone punch held in reserve, as complete jokes often are, for circumstances to arise in which it will be relevant and witty. Many a latent wisecrack is born as we belatedly think of a clever comment on a situation to which, at the time, we reacted stupidly. We then sadly store away the 'I-should've-said,' hoping that opportune circumstances may again be encountered, and that we will recall it when they do.... An ingenious person with a latent wisecrack on his hands may not merely wait for proper circumstances to arise. Instead, he maneuvers others into an appropriate situation, or--more easily--imagines proper circumstances, verbalizes them as a formal build-up, and thus has a complete joke.

I do not believe that, strictly speaking, an incomplete joke in the form of a free-floating punch is possible. The nearest approach would be a latent wisecrack for which the appropriate circumstances are so prevalent in our culture that merely hearing the punch is enough to conjure up a picture of such circumstances in the imagination of the hearer. But in that case--if it exists--the person who presents a latent wisecrack is not quite telling a joke in our sense. Rather, he is saying to his audience, 'Here is a punch; build your own joke with it.'

Norrick (1983) categorizes, analyzes and discusses "stock conversational witticisms." His categories are as follows:

- (1) Comparisons, such as "As clear as mud". In these SCW's, the humor, [such as it is,] resides in the comparison itself.

- (2) Retorts: in which the humor is built in response to another utterance. Norrick finds three types of retorts:
- (a) punning retorts: "What does your watch say? ---Ticktock, ticktock"
 - (b) non-punning retorts: "How old are you? --Old enough to know better."
Norrick mentions that non-punning retorts are also common in response to insults: "You fool! --Coming from you that's a compliment." [This is what Freud referred to as "unification," turning a (mock or real) insult unexpectedly back on the speaker.]
 - (c) evaluative comments: "Famous last words."
- (3) Quips: in which the humor lies in the relation to the situation, but not directly in relation to another utterance.
- (a) embarrassing body functions: for belches, "Bring that up and we'll vote on it";
 - (b) someone blocking the light/the view: "Your father was no glazier."⁸
 - (c) Entering/exiting the building: "Age before beauty"⁹

Norrick favors a bisociation theory of humor, recast in terms of schema conflicts, and proposes a hypothesis "that the funniness of a schema conflict is directly proportional to the goodness of fit the new schema achieves with the old one on some other level." (p. 205) This may be true, but it is highly unilluminating. It is at the same level of abstraction as the claim that Grice's maxims can be consolidated into the supermaxim of Relevance (Wilson and Sperber 1981). Norrick gives a sketchy treatment of the pragmatics of SCW's, and calls for "additional work...on the functions and contexts of humor in conversation, not only narrative jokes and SCW's, both performed and re-used material, but on more spontaneous wit and repartee as well."

What we have seen here is that there are patternings of behavior associated with "joking" which range from highly constrained and ritualized to flexible and fragile. We have also seen that these speech events have been identified and analyzed in other cultures and also within American culture. There is a range of humor forms which affect each other in complex ways. Mass media humor

⁸ I found this one included in Jonathan Swift's "Polite Conversation" which would suggest that it was in use three centuries ago.

⁹ Norrick apparently is not familiar with Dorothy Parker's famous response to this: "Pearls before swine," which would be classified as a retort to a quip, I guess.

undoubtedly affects improvisational joking, and expressions which become stock conversational witticisms are used by professional comedians and in the mass media as part of a repertoire of things which are culturally defined as "funny." In Chapter 5 there will be further discussion of the occurrence of these patterns within American culture and the social implications thereof.

Relation of joking activity to social structure/organization

Just as Freud was convinced that joking was related to psychological structure, social scientists have also been convinced that joking activity is somehow linked to social structure. We have just seen how Gossen and Bricker have analyzed the link. Again we come back to Radcliffe-Brown (1952), the classic structural-functionalist essay in which "joking relationships" in traditional societies are described as "as relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence." Symmetrical and asymmetrical varieties are distinguished. The explanation that is offered is that the "peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism" of the joking relationship is a mode of organizing a definite and stable system of social behavior in which both conjunctive and disjunctive components are present.

Within American society, Coser (1960) is a classic sociological analysis of humor during a particular speech event and in a social setting involving a well-defined status hierarchy (staff meetings in a mental hospital). Those in higher status positions took the initiative more frequently to use humor; the target of a witticism was never in a higher status position than the initiator. Coser seems to agree with Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalist position that "humor occurs to reconcile tendencies of association and disassociation within a group," but adds that "in a *hierarchically* ordered social structure, it tends to be directed downward." Most of the time, the target is an object of consensual agreement. "Humor

helps to convert hostility and to control it, while at the same time permitting it expression."

Other important features of this article are as follows:

- (1) emphasis on humor as communicative behavior that calls for especially "close" participation;
- (2) definition of "humorous episode" in terms of reciprocity: episodes "in which laughter was a response to an intended provocation" [note: definition by means of laughter];
- (3) interesting footnote re including an investigation of humorous remarks that were *not* responded to;
- (4) important distinction between an "aggressive *act*" and the "underlying psychological attitude of hostility"--so that humor can be "aggressive" in that it takes control temporarily out of the hands of those higher in the hierarchy;
- (5) identification of humor as an informal socialization technique that combines criticism with support;
- (6) improvement on the methodology of Goodrich et al (see below) in that the observer kept track of the status of the humorist, target, content, and theme;
- (7) same technique as Goodrich et al of recording "verbatim";
- (8) important finding re women: that they didn't joke in this context;
- (9) junior member can initiate joking by using self as target;
- (10) high staff position predisposes person to the informal role of moralist with humor; low staff position correlates with humor that is more self-protective.

The disguised moralist taught others what was right or wrong by confronting them with the infringement of what was right. [to footnote 31: When a junior member reported that he had used the therapeutic technique of accepting a patient's delusions of having killed, the senior member presiding asked him: "When was it that you reassured her that she was a murderess?" By presenting the junior member with the incongruity between reassurance and accusation, thus highlighting, through humor, the role confusion that the young psychiatrist was thought to have brought about, his senior taught him that he had not lived up to his role as psychiatrist. The senior was *safeguarding* for the present, and transmitting to the next generation, a traditional role definition of the psychiatrist. The general laughter that greeted this question was a means of normative social control.

The acquisition of values and orientations found in statuses and groups in which one is not yet engaged, but which one is likely to enter, takes place, to a large extent, implicitly, unwittingly, and informally. Much of such informal socialization takes place through humor, [how is footnote 33 included in this?] which is especially suited for this task because it combines criticism with support, rejection with acceptance. If negative sanctions are provided in a humorous way, a bond is established between the culprit and possible culprits--a bond that exonerates both, while simultaneous assurance is given that negative sanctions do not take place without social support. When the junior member quoted previously informed the meeting of his new method of "participant" therapy, the chairman told him: "Let me mention that there were precedents of your

method. There once was a patient who went around barking like a dog [laughter starts here] and the therapist barked back . . . [The rest of the sentence is drowned in laughter.]

Here the young psychiatrist is shown the danger of assuming the role of participant in a patient's asocial behavior: he may behave just like the patient, thus destroying the boundary that separates the 'incompetent' patient from the 'competent' physician. But at the same time the junior psychiatrist is reassured that others have made similar blunders. Humor negates its own content. By ridiculing the victim it also informs him that it is not serious, that they can all laugh about it together. Humor permits one simultaneously to attack and lend support.

On the other hand, in a case in which the jokers were all situationally peers, as patients on a hospital ward, Coser (1959) found that "humor is an expression of the collective experience of the participants, and receives response only from those who share common concerns." There is some linguistic and pragmatic analysis in her discussion of the "jocular gripe": the difference between "I cannot sleep" and "a hospital is no place to rest." An interesting connection with Freud's ideas about humor: "by generalizing it and making it the property of all, the individual sufferer is 'dispossessed' of his own suffering."

Kennedy (1970) challenged Radcliffe-Brown's formulation, asserting that "joking relationships can best be understood as a type of game of 'play' which tends to take the form it does because of the nature of small-scale, non-literate societies." He emphasized "the positive rewards of sociability," rather than "the negative effects of social control and avoidance of imminent conflict." The approach is still structural-functional, however, with joking now serving the ends of social cohesion and harmony.

K. Alford (1981) set out with two purposes: (1) to test Kennedy's (1970) reanalysis of joking relationships as play oriented to positive social goals occurring in relationships characterized by intimacy and equality; and (2) to discover what typical styles of relating are (re joking) in selected kin relationships in American society. She used a modified version of Murdock's (1949) continuum of relationship styles (from greatest social distance to least) for cross-sex joking relationships

(within the kinship system). She used a questionnaire administered to 52 (half male and half female) college students. Her findings are that Kennedy's hypothesis is confirmed: joking relationships are associated with high intimacy and equality (even if the equality is situationally defined). She found interesting differences cross-culturally: unlike other cultures, Americans joke most with parents, siblings, and spouses--and the rest of the joking activity is more diffused through the kinship system. Americans are considerably more informal than the cross-cultural norm in all three categories. The author suggests that parents create "fictive equality" with children, and that American marriages are more equal than those found elsewhere. "The structure of joking activity, then, reflects the absence of formal authority relations within a society."

Drew (1986) analyzed 'po-faced' (non-cooperative) responses to teases. He found that teases attribute deviant identities to the teasee, and that they tend to be cued by lexical selection or formulaic expression-- signals that they are "not intended sincerely". Sequentially, teases are: (1) not topically initial; (2) second, next, or response to prior or adjacent turn; (3) always in response to utterance of person being teased; (4) exploiting something in the turn prior. Teases only occur in following contexts: when person who ends up getting teased has been engaging in (1) outraged complainings, or (2) bragging, (3) extreme self-deprecation. Drew's conclusion is that teases serve as a form of social control by conveying scepticism, and treating the previous turn as out of proportion in some way. All teases attribute a deviant identity to teasee. He sees teases as a mild form of social control which in the cases he was analyzing the teasees resist. Drew makes the point that people typically see this kind of thing as a combination of friendliness and hostility, but that that explanation does not account for how teases are done, and what identities are relevant.

Burns (1953) discusses irony and banter as devices used to avoid embarrass-

ment in social situations in which one is presented with claims to two different statuses. Irony constitutes an indirect rejection of the secondary status membership. "To use irony is to play at being friendly--at maintaining a member relationship--while intimating enmity, rejection. In this case, the element of reassurance in the joking relationship refers to the status occupied in the group more socially significant to the occasion--the joke is shared with them at the expense of the other." Banter constitutes maintenance of two status positions but the relationship with the non-dominant group bears the episode of banter. "To use banter is to play at being hostile, distant, unfriendly, while intimating friendliness."

Emerson (1963) essentially confirms a structural-functionalist position on humor, even though it is symbolic interactionist in approach. An ethnographic analysis of the use of humor in a hospital setting reveals that humor is "one significant way of managing delicate situations." The study attempts "to demonstrate that the official unacceptability of an important kind of humorous message derives from unresolvable structural conflict which that same social structure makes it imperative to communicate." Emerson's points about the use of humor in orchestrating definitions of the situation were presented in Chapter 1.

Woolard (1985) analyzed monologues of a stand-up comedian in Barcelona and found code-switching between Catalan and Castilian when there was an absence of switching in the larger community. The humor consisted in manipulation of a very limited set of features along a continuum: phonology, prosody, lexis, etc. Her interpretation is that code-switching in this instance serves as a boundary-levelling strategy and releases interethnic tension.

Studies have also been done of groups and of work situations in Western societies in hierarchically organized settings, which together with the studies already cited, yield some generalizations about joking norms and functions.

Bales (1951:179) includes joking in the categories in his Interaction Process Analysis, used by observers who coded small group interaction in real time based on their judgments as members of mainstream American culture. His twelve categories range from Social-Emotional: positive (1-3) through Task Area: neutral (4-9) through Social-Emotional: negative (10-12). "Joking" is coded in category 2. However,

if the element of aggression is present, as it often is, it must be lower than the element of friendliness in the opinion of the observer in order to be marked in this category. If the element of aggression is stronger than the element of friendliness, the act should be scored in Category 12. Similarly, the attempt must indicate some sensitivity to the readiness of others to laugh, otherwise the observer concludes that the actor is excessively ego-involved and places the abortive attempt in Category 11, as an indication of anxiety, or in Category 12, as an indication of status seeking, according to his judgment.

Miller (1967) emphasizes "the importance of the behavioral context, the empirical social situation in which humor and laughter occur." The general question posed is: "What kinds of humor are used in various types of social situations, and what does it contribute to the process of interaction?" Miller examined meetings of the tribal council on a Chippewa Indian reservation in Minnesota. He tries to define the two types of joking used: "ribbing" and "wisecracking." He also identifies four ways in which humor contributes to the life of the group: by promoting group solidarity; by validating a friendly relationship with outsiders; as a way of commenting indirectly on an action; by relieving tension. Miller points out that a particular instance may fall under more than one category, but that usually there is one primary function. Miller claims that in the tribal council humor was seldom used as a means of controlling the behavior of the members--that its main function was communication.

Ransohoff (1975) is a psychiatric analysis of how humor functions in groups of young adolescent girls who have been referred by a guidance counselor because of problems in school. The girls are between 12 and 14 years of age, are from lower-class to lower-middle class backgrounds, and are students in the New York City

public schools. The 6-person groups (2 of them) continued over a seven-month period. The data come from tape recordings, and lots of examples are cited. The findings are:

- (1) Humor was more successful "when it resonated with the young adolescents' developmental tasks" (current physical changes, beginning relationships with boys, pride in developing femininity).
- (2) "In humor that failed and caused the eruption of anxiety, (a) there was a failure to reduce the frightening content to 'size' through 'small' words and foolish disguise and (b) issues too remote from current developmental ones created anxiety and guilt."

The author emphasizes that group giggling and laughter provide reassurance.

Saccomano (1986) found that joking among gay men in a casual dinner party environment was "an outlet for the gay men's concern with the social class structure (i.e. often being forced to be members of a *sub-class*)."

Goodrich et al (1954), a joint project by a psychiatrist, an anthropologist, and an "observer," was apparently the first attempt to study laughter as a group response phenomenon. What was observed (by note-taking, which is called "verbatim") by the observer in the middle of the group, as a participant, was *general crowd laughter* ("average" and "hearty") and the social context surrounding it. Laughs were seen to be determined by form and/or content. Their categories for "form" are basically: (1) incongruity (of four types) and (2) disparagement (of three types). By "content" they mean subject matter (7 categories, of which *patients* and *physicians* were most frequent and of equal occurrence). Some laughs they could only score for form or content: 60% were scored for both. Sometimes a laugh clearly served a definite group integrative function: tension release is the only category they give. The authors show awareness of levels of context:

of American cultural values: comments on how this group conforms and differs;

of any continuing group's need to maintain a certain level of harmony: a mechanism for promoting solidarity and providing a safety valve for divisive tensions. "In support of this interpretation of laughter is the fact that the most frequently observed laughter-provoking situation was a disparaging remark made by one physician about another." (p. 182) Also mentioned was

the resolution of spirited arguments, especially after disagreement concerning psychoanalytic ideas;

of each individual participant's need for a particular group response to reinforce status or reduce anxiety: [the status-reinforcing effect is not exemplified];

of overt purposes of the group (i.e., to promote improvement in patients and learning of staff members: suggests disparagement humor is contradictory to overt purposes.

The authors suggest that such research can be valuable in exploring the relationship of individual behavior to group behavior.

There are problems with the data-gathering techniques, since it was done without the aid of audio or videotape. Most importantly, there is no record of the source of the jokes, i.e., the status of the jokers in relation to the jokes (except for the tantalizing comment quoted above about physicians toward each other). Coser (1960) elaborated on this basic idea, refining the object of investigation (the humorous episode) and keeping track of the jokers in relation to the jokes and to each other, which revealed important social-structural dimensions, as discussed above.

Bradney (1957) is an attempt to relate the idea of "joking relationship" to Western industrial society. The author worked in a large London department store and reports that she took no notes during working hours. She extends "joking" to include non-teasing humor. She gives examples and also lists general topics of humor. Relating the joking activity to the formal structure of the store, she found that symmetrical joking is the most frequent type, and occurs not only between status equals but also across levels "where the relation is one of constant instruction and training or continuous giving and taking of orders." Asymmetrical joking is usually aimed by superiors at subordinates. People in different statuses use joking for different purposes. Her findings are similar to Coser (1960). She interestingly combined Radcliffe-Brown's perspective (that joking eases tensions arising out of difficulties inherent in the formal structure of the institution) and Kennedy's (that joking creates positive enjoyment for the workers). She notes that

such joking patterns do not necessarily arise in such an organizational structure, having observed other department stores where it was not going on. Bradney found that there was a tendency for lower ranks to adopt a jovial or teasing manner in their contacts and for higher ranks to tell funny stories. (p. 184) The following exemplifies a typical symmetrical relationship for lower ranks. (p. 184)

The assistant says to the liftman (who is of assistant status), "How's my best boy-friend today?" "I shall be all right now I've seen you!" he replies.

Lundberg (1969) was interested in looking at joking that focuses on a person in a stable human organization such as a business firm. In particular, he was interested in the consequences of joking for work groups and other small social systems rather than in psychological analyses of the individual. He favors a structural-functionalist position. His scheme for analysis, as a participant observer in an all-male work setting, includes:

- (1) initiator;
- (2) target (addressee);
- (3) focus (the butt--in this scheme always a person);
- (4) publics (group members beyond initiator and target persons who can see and/or hear the joking).

Lundberg points out that sometimes the target and focus are the same person. He also takes into account: the rank of the participants, the relative status of groups, whether the focus is present or not, the positive or negative feelings generated in the situation, and group or individual reactions. He comes up with a formal notation for handling the four items listed above. He gives examples to illustrate a cross-section of types of joking observed: joking without a public, the initiator as focus, a focus other than initiator or target, the target as focus, and a group as target. His concluding generalization is that "in the context of stable human organizations, person-focused joking incidents seem to fulfill a social function; namely, that joking defines and redefines the differentiated social grouping, reinforces the ranking of group members both within and between groups, and clarifies the status

of one group to another."

Lundberg's more specific tentative findings are that

- (1) intra-group joking is accepted and even contributed to by the focus;
- (2) intergroup joking is tolerated if the initiator's group is present but not the group of the focus;
- (3) if, however, the focus' group is the public(s) but not the initiators and/or if the initiator is of lower rank than the focus--then 'it ain't funny';
- (4) peers or relatively closely-ranked members of the same group have the most fun;
- (5) low-ranking focuses do not seem to 'joke-back' to high-ranking initiators even if more than their own group constitutes the public."

To illustrate Lundberg's notation and his data: (p. 24)

Incident 1. On the first day of my presence as a field observer in this particular shop, I was sitting on some steps at the head of the aisle where the more routine reconditioning work occurs. John, the foreman of that work, looks up, puts his hands on his hips, says in a loud voice so that most of the people in the shop (including the researcher) can hear, "Hey, that new efficiency guy, he's beautiful." The researcher's response is a shy smile and a lowering of eyes to his papers.

Applying the notational conventions to this incident: John the foreman is *a* (initiator). His work group A, along with the other work groups C and D, are the publics. The researcher, an outsider, is designated *x* in his role as addressee, and (*x*) in his role as focus. Here the foreman John, *a*, spoke about the researcher (*x*), in the presence of his own work group A, the other physically close work groups in the shop C and D, and the researcher *x*. Incident 1 would then be noted as follows:

$$a \rightarrow x(x) [A,C,D]$$

Incident 2. Ten days after the first incident the researcher, John the foreman, and six other men who work with him, as well as two from another group, were standing around John's bench at the morning coffee break. Lee, one of the workmen, reads from his newspaper about baseball in a penitentiary. John responds. "Boy, imagine hitting one over those walls." Jack, another workman, chimes in. "Or running bases with a ball and chain." As the laughter subsides, the researcher briefly increases it by adding, "Yeh, and being a trusty means you can go outside to shag flies."

We see that John again, in response to one of his workers *a*', started the joking in front of most of the rest of his work group as well as a few others from work group

C. The difference is that no person is the focus of the second incident. Also, the researcher has included himself as a member of either the A or C groups according to the following notation of Incident 2:

$$a \rightarrow a' [A,C]$$

Sykes (1966) presents findings similar to Lundberg's. Sykes looked at male/female joking in an industrial workplace and found that "joking functioned to identify potential sexual partners to one another." Gross obscenity and horseplay were found only between men and women who were *not* potential sexual partners.

Ullian's (1976) participant-observation study of "bantering that employs a person as the target" in a factory setting (among men?) attempts to be more precise in gathering data about joking:

- (1) joker;
- (2) person joked with;
- (3) the target;
- (4) the audience;
- (5) time;
- (6) rate of activity (heavy, light or break);
- (7) location of the workers within the factory;
- (8) context whereby a determination was made as to whether the structure permitted others to enter into the bantering (he cites Handelman and Kapferer's "open/closed" and "contained/uncontained" dimensions);
- (9) the referent, a determination as to whether the target of the joke need be the specific person selected or any person chosen at random;
- (10) an account of the content of the joke.

He found patterns of joking similar to those in other studies. An interesting finding is that employees that worked closely together tended to have a symmetrical relationship.¹⁰ He also found that messages concerning non-routine events or situations triggered joking with the person who introduced the message becoming the target and the person to whom the information was most relevant becoming

¹⁰ He doesn't mention status in this connection.

the joker. This use of joking for handling "new" information seems to fit right in with Bradney's findings (which, interestingly, he doesn't mention in all its relevant aspects). He doesn't mention Lundberg.

After complaining that Bradney (1957), Coser (1959), Sykes (1966), Emerson (1969) and Handelman and Kapferer (1972) fail to specify their data adequately. Ullian offers exactly one example from his corpus: (concerning joking which occurred upon the introduction of new information)

Ed: Hey, there's a lot of deliveries today.

Don: Well then I'll let you and Jos do it!

Ed: He's really generous!

Ullian describes this situation as Ed having introduced information that was relevant to Don whose job it was to make the deliveries, Don reacted by joking with Ed.

Caveats

In generalizing from the studies of joking activity, the principal cautions are: (1) that the findings come from different societies (industrial vs. non-industrial), different contexts within those societies, and different populations; (2) that different techniques have been applied in gathering and analyzing the data; (3) and that there is a general lack of specification of the data on which the findings are based. Thus even when the phenomenon under study is joking activity, the reader often finds that what is reported about is the researcher's category of "joking" with neither data to inspect nor further specification of what "joking" means. When the reader is shown examples of the researcher's category, typically what is shown are inevitably decontextualized reconstructions from field notes. Even transcriptions from audiotapes are necessarily presented in written form (by non-linguists) without information concerning prosodic, paralinguistic and rhythmic

features and non-verbal dimensions of the interaction. Thus language data is "taken for granted."

There has been a terminological confusion as well in that what since Radcliffe-Brown have been referred to as "joking relationships" are probably more accurately described as "teasing" relationships. This problem has probably arisen out of the strong bias that joking is basically the expression of hostility which has been rendered socially acceptable. This view has been derived from on the one hand the work of Freud (in particular, *Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, not his later article on *Humor*), and on the other hand the structural-functionalist work in anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown. In the former the hostility arises intrapsychically; in the latter it arises at points of disjunction in the social system. Within a static model in which functions are oriented toward maintaining the status quo, joking is necessarily interpreted as conservative: tension is released so that the arrangement can be maintained. This point of view (unidentified as to its theoretical bias) is expressed in as recent a work as Wilson (1979). With regard to the idea that joking reflects conflict situations, to paraphrase Christie Davies (1984):¹¹ sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't.

There is also the problem of generalizability from the subject populations which often are male and/or college student.¹²

A further problem in the studies in which there is an attempt to specify categories of "joking" is conceptual confusion. Thus categories having to do with intent or the emotional state of the joker (hostility) are placed alongside those having to do with the content or technique of the joking (incongruity). The difficulty here is that a joke based on incongruity can have a very hostile intent, thus the categories are not mutually exclusive even though they are treated as such. I

¹¹ Probably no relation

¹² The cross-cultural findings on gender differences in joking are discussed very thoroughly in Apte (1985).

believe that such conceptual confusions, in linguistic terms a mixing of pragmatic and semantic levels, can be traced to two sources. The first is the typical (and understandable) tendency toward reductionism in the face of a complex and elusive phenomenon. The second is the traditional distinction between wit and humor which can predictably be (mistakenly) reduced to hostility versus incongruity. A possible way out of the terminological morass is to return to the data in context and try to characterize joking in terms of what people do and how they interpret what they are doing.

Generalizations in relation to social organization

Where there is a clear hierarchy the use of humor reflects the hierarchical structure in that it is directed downward (even though the most frequent target of humor is an object of consensual agreement). Higher status people tend to initiate more joking, are less often targets, and often take the role of "disguised moralist" which is appropriate to their social control/informal socialization activities in interaction. Higher status people also tend to tell more funny stories, whereas lower status people are more likely to adopt a jovial or teasing manner.

Lower status people initiate less joking, and when they do it is either self-directed (rather than targeted at a higher status person) or generally more self-protective. The person being joked about tends to contribute in intra-group situations, but very low-ranking targets¹³ do not seem to 'joke-back' to high-ranking initiators. Asymmetrical joking is usually aimed by superiors at subordinates. Thus it "ain't funny" if initiator is of lower rank than the target.

Peers "have the most fun". It also seems to be the case that symmetrical joking occurs not only between peers but also across status levels "where the relation is one of constant instruction and training or continuous giving and taking of

¹³ I find Lundberg's terminology confusing; I prefer to use "target" for the person being joked about.

orders", i.e., people working closely together. And in American society joking relationships within the nuclear family apparently represent a "fictive equality".

In a non-hierarchical situation (among patients in a hospital ward) humor tended to be an expression of collective experience, and depersonalized (like Freud's humor).

With regard to group-internal processes, we have seen that joking activity can be either positive or negative on the socio-expressive dimension (Bales). It can also to create solidarity, release tension, communicate indirectly about an action, reinforce status and reduce anxiety (Goodrich, Miller). Joking activity can also represent a parallel subtext of issues of concern (Ransohoff, Saccomano).

In relation to inter-group joking, the finding from Lundberg is that it is tolerated if the initiator's group is present but the group of the butt is not. If the group to which the butt belongs is part of the audience but not the source of the initiation, then "it ain't funny".

Thus some clear patterns emerge from these studies, concerning the relation of joking activity to social status within a hierarchically organized work structure. However, there are some inconsistent findings as well: in particular the finding of both Sykes and Ullian that symmetrical joking occurs across status levels in close working relationships, and the finding of K. Alford that joking relationships in American society are found in the family (in situations of "fictive equality"). These two observations form the basis for a critique of a structural-functionalist view. If it were the case that people always acted according to the general patterns identified above, then we might be able to adopt a relatively deterministic view of the relation between social organization and behavior. But it is clear that there are inconsistencies. One way of conceptualizing the situation is that people have internalized, by virtue of living and interacting in the society, the joking patterns laid out above. These patterns can be thought of as a set of norms. It is not being

suggested that this knowledge is explicit; it may partly consist in systematic non-learning of certain skills, as in the famous inability of women to tell jokes (Apte 1985:69 gives a very systematic survey of gender differences cross-culturally in joking, and concludes that "women's humor reflects the existing inequality between the sexes not so much in its substance as in the constraints imposed on its occurrence, on the techniques used, on the social settings in which it occurs, and on the kind of audience that appreciates it.") In this social interactionist view, people use awareness of norms, and skills in the joking activities which they have been able to learn by virtue of their participation in networks of relationships, in order to convey social information and to negotiate definitions of the situation. Thus the "fictive equality", in K. Alford's terms, is created partly by the enactment of the joking relationship. The symmetrical joking symbolizes closeness and equality. In the close working relationships the relationship has been similarly transformed. K. Alford interprets joking relationships in the family as reflecting the "absence of formal authority relations" in the society; another view is that the occurrence of joking relationships represents an ideological denial of actual authority relations and status differences.

The joking patterning is similar to the T/V pronoun usage analyzed by Brown and Gilman (1960), and by Brown and Ford (1960) in an American context through address terms, and it has the same built-in ambiguities: the higher-ranking person initiates a closer relationship by using the less formal term/initiating potentially symmetrical joking; however, the lower-ranking person has to respond in kind in order to establish the reciprocity. If the lower-ranking person lacks either the definitional option of recasting the situation as one of "fictive equality", or the necessary skills in joking response, then the joking overtures will not be met with reciprocal efforts, and the pattern will reflect the norm of status difference. Ullian found that very low-ranking group members never

joked back to higher statuses.

People can also convey their definition of the situation and their role in it by the quantity and nature of their joking. Initiating more joking seems to be associated with higher status. Taking the role of the disguised moralist (by telling jokes or stories to make a point indirectly) is associated with higher status. The telling of stories is related to higher status in another way: the higher status person can claim the attention of others for longer periods of time. This is contrasted with simply "adopting a jovial or teasing manner" on the part of lower-ranking people.

Lundberg's finding that there is a specific social configuration in which "it ain't funny", namely that the group of the focus is not the initiator of the joking but is part of the audience, is some clear evidence of the fact that humor is socially defined rather than inherent in certain topics or techniques. Sherzer (1978:345) has already pointed out with regard to puns: ". . . it is not only the speaker who can make a pun, but the receiver or interpreter as well. And what makes a pun a pun depends not only on properties purely internal to puns, or even to the relationship between puns and the discourse in which they occur. Equally important is the topic dealt with in the discourse, and such cross-culturally variable issues as whether the topic is tabu and whether the topic is one which should be dealt with in direct speech or indirect, allusive speech."

. . . While incorporating the findings on patterning of joking activity in relation to social organization as a set of norms which speakers use as a resource, a social interactionist perspective rejects the structural- functionalist one in three basic ways. In the first place, while assuming that the disguised expression of hostility as part of conflict management is likely to be one of the social purposes which joking serves, it rejects a single, deterministic explanation for all joking behavior. Rather, it seeks to discover the various interactional uses to which joking is put, finding such things as self-disclosure, denial of responsibility, face-saving, unmask-

ing, ingratiation, and friendship-building. Secondly, it rejects the idea of humor as an object that can be defined either out of context or one-dimensionally (by this is meant that humor cannot be defined strictly in terms of behavior, or in terms of content, or in terms of cognitive processes involved). It attempts to study joking as an emergent process. Thirdly, it rejects the idea that humor is inevitably conservative, emphasizing instead that humor is potentially revolutionary in that it is constantly putting before us new possibilities. The bisociative process detaches the thinker from any one point of view, and operates in a dialectical manner. Zijderveld refers to humor as a "de-ideologizing force". The potential for the promotion of cognitive flexibility is also what makes humor valuable in the psychotherapeutic process.

The ideas of Mary Douglas (1968) on joking can be seen as transitional between structural-functionalist and symbolic interactionist. Attempting to link cognition and social structure, Douglas (1968) argues that "the joke¹⁴ form rarely lies in the utterance alone, but that it can be identified in the total social situation." Her hypothesis is that a joke is perceived and permitted when it offers a symbolic expression of a social pattern which is occurring simultaneously. Further, if the social pattern occurs it is imperative that it be expressed by means of a joke. This is where the joker comes in, providing radical satire and thereby release from restraint, and enjoying a privileged position of immunity from attack as s/he expresses a subversive consensus. In other words, the situation channels perception and interpretation in particular ways. Douglas draws on what she sees as the common element in both Bergson and Freud, that a joke represents an attack on control. Douglas sees the subversive and creative possibilities ("new, unforeseeable kinds of interpretation") in humor. Her transitional position arises out of seeing

¹⁴ For our purposes, this conceptualization applies to both narrative jokes and to joking activity. The difference would lie in the elaboration that collaborative joking activity might provide.

the joking as called forth by the structure of the situation, yet also seeing the joking as bringing out subversive and creative possibilities: that it can be used by the joker to redefine or attempt to redefine the situation.

Goffman (1967) has also discussed joking in relation to the context in which it occurs. Goffman, taking the perspective that a conversation is a miniature social system, points out that

one of its heroes is the wit who can introduce references to wider, important matters in a way that is ineffably suited to the current moment of talk. Since the witticism will never again be as telling, a sacrifice has been offered up to the conversation, and respect paid to its unique reality by an act which shows how thoroughly the actor is alive to the interaction.

"Irony"

If we return now to the last example of "joking" that was cited:

Ed: Hey, there's a lot of deliveries today.

Don: Well then I'll let you and Jos do it!

Ed: He's really generous!

it is clear that we have come a long way from a neat and tidy narrative joke form that can be easily identified and analyzed as to a particular linguistic or conceptual humor technique. This interaction is identified as "joking", the kind of thing on which the studies we have been generalizing from are based. We aren't given any information as to laughter, voice quality (except for the exclamation point), facial expression, but we are told that Don is joking. There are clearly cues in Don's utterance that he does not mean what he is saying. A transformation has taken place at the point at which the joking is recognized. The notion of contextualization cue is useful here, probably a combination of prosodic and paralinguistic features, together with nonverbal, and the ambiguous use of the word "let". Don has moved into the joking mode, and Ed follows him on the same "footing". Ed's

comment is an example of a prototypical ironic/sarcastic remark [this would be the "tone" in my terms]: he gives an exaggerated positive evaluation in a situation in which it is clear that he means the opposite.

This brings us to the problem of understanding "irony" within the conceptual apparatus of formal linguistic theory. R. Lakoff (1973): (*Politeness, Pragmatics and Performatives*) used the problem of irony as an indirect speech act (saying something other than what one means) as part of a challenge to the Chomskyan paradigm. She attacked from three angles. First, she pointed out that the prototypical "reversal of meaning" definition of the trope of irony (which would have allowed an elegant handling of the problem through some sort of "irony rule negation") would be inadequate in that an ironical statement is always an exaggerated positive statement that is used to convey a negative judgment or attitude, never the reverse. Secondly, she introduced the idea that speech act theory may be necessary to deal with the problem, in that irony sometimes doesn't consist of the opposite of a statement but rather consists of a cancellation of the felicity conditions for a declarative utterance. Thus Austin classifies irony as the overt violation of sincerity condition on speech acts. And Grice defines irony in terms of a flouting of the maxim of Quality: "say what you believe to be true". Lakoff's third point introduced into the discourse the traditional rhetorical notion of dramatic irony. Thus she attempted to move the debate toward a more social definition of irony involving inclusion and exclusion of audiences.

To review the traditional literary and rhetorical notions of irony: this trope, or figurative use of language, is considered a specialized mechanism of meaning inversion. An ironic statement is supposed to communicate the opposite of what it says, but as Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber (1984) point out, what is meant by "the opposite" not clear: it seems to be used for both the contrary and the contradictory. There is also the variation referred to as "the irony of fate," in which events

take a turn which somehow opposes or contradicts what had been intended or expected. The notion of "dramatic irony" is described by Leech (1969:171) as follows:

H.W. Fowler in *Modern English Usage* describes irony as a mode of expression which postulates a double audience, one of which is 'in the know' and aware of the speaker's intention, whilst the other is naive enough to take the utterance at its face value. This seems to be a fitting account of what we understand by 'dramatic irony', i.e. a situation in which a double meaning is meant to be appreciated by the audience, but not by someone on the stage. But linguistic irony does not so much presuppose a double audience as a double response from the same audience.

The basis of irony as applied to language is the human disposition to adopt a pose, or to put on a mask. The notion of a disguise is particularly pertinent, as it brings out (a) the element of concealment in irony, and (b) the fact that what is concealed is meant to be found out. If you dress up as a rabbit at a fancy-dress ball, you do not intend to be mistaken for a rabbit. In the same way, the mask of irony is not normally meant to deceive anyone--if it does, then it has had the wrong effect. When someone takes an ironical remark at face value, we are justified in saying that he has 'failed to appreciate the irony' of it. ***[Thus we see Grice defining irony in terms of a "flouting" of the maxim of Quality.]

It is also of the essence of irony that it should criticize or disparage under the guise of praise or neutrality. Hence its importance as a tool of satire.

The typical example of written satire which is cited is Swift's "A Modest Proposal". The "ironic tone of voice" is mentioned as a particular problem for interpretation in written language. (p. 173: "...the ironist adopts a tone which is at variance with his true point of view, and which subtly sharpens the edge of the irony.")

Lakoff also mentions the problem of distinguishing between irony and sarcasm. Her tentative conclusion is that sarcasm is exclusive of the speaker; it mocks someone else. Irony, on the other hand, usually includes the speaker as one of its targets; therefore, unlike sarcasm, it is not painful for the target. Leech, in a formulation that seems to fit with Lakoff's, defines sarcasm as "the type of everyday irony . . . which consists in saying the opposite of what is intended: saying something nice with the intention that your hearer should understand something nasty. If I had a black eye, and friend met me in the street with the remark 'Don't you

look gorgeous!', I should have to be extremely undiscerning not to realize that the reference was to my temporary disfigurement, not to my physical beauty."

A further complication with the general notion of irony is that there is a recognition of the phenomenon known as "complex irony" (Vlastos 1985), in which one both means and does not mean what one says.

Within formal pragmatics, however, as late as Levinson 1983:109 we find irony treated as "the opposite or negation" of what one has stated, invoking Grice: (i.e., implicature by overtly and blatantly *not* following some maxim, in order to exploit it for communicative purposes.)

A: What if the USSR blockades the Gulf and the oil?

B: Oh come now, Britain rules the seas!

Any reasonably informed participant will know that B's utterance is blatantly false. That being so, B cannot be trying to deceive A. The only way in which the assumption that B is cooperating can be maintained is if we take B to mean something rather different from what he has actually said. Searching around for a related but co-operative proposition that B might be intending to convey, we arrive at the opposite or negation, of what B has stated -- namely that Britain doesn't rule the seas, and thus by way of Relevance to the prior utterance, the suggestion that there is nothing that Britain could do. Hence, Grice claims, ironies arise and are successfully decoded. If there was no underlying assumption of cooperation, recipients of ironies ought simply to be nonplussed: no inferences could be drawn.

Levinson then refers the reader to Sperber & Wilson (1981), characterizing their approach as claiming "that ironies consist of sentences *mentioned* rather than *used*--much as if they were in implicit quotation marks -- from which recipients calculate implicatures by reference to Relevance rather than Quality." The "use vs. mention" theory of irony draws its essential notions from philosophy, rather than than rhetoric, and challenged the basic assumption of the traditional approach.

They denied that to speak ironically is to express a figurative meaning that is the opposite of a literal meaning; they denied that to comprehend any irony consists in retrieving such a figurative meaning. They argued instead that the meaning expressed in any ironical utterance is the literal one and no other. However, this literal meaning is not *used* by speakers

to convey their own thoughts. Rather it is *mentioned* as an object of contempt, ridicule, or disapproval. Conversely, the task of the hearer is to reconstruct both the literal meaning of the utterance and the attitude of the speaker toward that meaning. (Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber, 1984)

The basic idea is that when one speaks ironically one doesn't use language in the same way as usual, but in fact quotes someone else ("mentioning" something that person or group of people have said or would be likely to say) for the purpose of conveying a negative judgment.

A generalization from the work on irony seems to be that the concept involves the conveying of some sort of negative attitude or judgment.

Clark and Gerrig (1984) have taken on Sperber and Wilson in an ongoing debate in the psycholinguistic literature. Clark and Gerrig also use the notion of dramatic irony (but without drawing on Lakoff 1973) in their "pretense" theory of irony. An essential critique that they offer of Sperber and Wilson is that the use/mention theory is often forced into "implicit mention". Going to a different interpretation of Grice, and to the original meaning of irony as "dissimulation", they claim that their theory provides natural explanations of the problems noted above of (1) asymmetry of affect: (because the ironist is taking the role of an ignorant person who would be likely to cling tightly to Pollyanna norms; (2) victims: (the person the ironist is pretending to be, and also the uncomprehending audience); (3) the ironic tone of voice: (in make-believe, people take on new voices with new roles).

Thus if we apply this to the Don and Ed example, within the pretense theory frame, Don has moved into a make-believe world in which he pretends to be the person who utters those words, assuming at the same time that Ed will recognize the pretense and take delight in sharing in the intimacy of recognizing it. The "ironic tone of voice" consists in the new voice (with whatever characteristics) that Don takes on, which serves as part of the contextualization cue. And I suppose

that it could be argued that Don is taking the role of a foolishly optimistic person who believes himself to have power and authority which he does not in fact have: thus we have here an extension of the asymmetry of affect: exaggerated positive to convey negative attitude. In my analysis, Don is directing the negative judgment or attitude/disapproval at Ed, by taking on a mock role of higher status in which he would be in a position to delegate his work to others--and/or he would be in a position to do them a favor by allowing them to do more work (the ambiguity of "let" here). Ed enters into the frame by reciprocally expressing mock disapproval by means of prototypical irony (here sarcasm because directed at Don) in which he picks up on the role that Don is playing--the second version I just gave, the magnanimous guy who out of generosity gives them his extra work to do. By his joking response Ed: (1) displays his understanding of the principles of the joking footing which Don has initiated: (2) creates the reciprocal response which maintains the symmetrical nature of the relationship.

With regard to the reciprocal joking that Ed responds with, Clark and Gerrig have an excellent description: "staging the next step in the make-believe world". In my terms this would be: grasping principles of the frame within the footing and displaying it.

Coming back to Freud's (1905, 1928) discussion of "humor", we find that the only example he gives is prototypical irony. Freud discusses jokes (wit) as a subset of "the Comic", under which he also placed "humor". (The translator's preface contains an excellent discussion concerning the problems with the words "Witz", "witzig", "Scherz", and "Humor"--which leads to the confusion between "jokes" and "wit" in English.) Freud (1928) starts with the basic economic principle that he had set out in 1905, that humorous pleasure comes from a saving in expenditure of affect, i.e., the ego is not obliged to suffer certain feelings. The humorous attitude can be taken toward the self or toward another person. The only example

that Freud gives, and which he calls "very crude," is that of a criminal being led to the gallows on a Monday who observes: "Well, this is a good beginning to the week." Within Freud's psychological theory, humor is a defense mechanism (a denial of reality and assertion of the pleasure principle) in which the focus shifts to the superego which "speaks kindly words of comfort to the intimidated ego", taking the attitude of parent toward child to protect the ego in relation to life events. Unlike all other defense mechanisms, humor is considered by Freud to be healthy, liberating, and as having something "fine and elevating" about it--in contrast to wit, the aim of which is "either simply to afford gratification, or, in so doing, to provide an outlet for aggressive tendencies." Contributions to the comic are: humor from the superego, and wit from the unconscious. He comments that in humor (in contrast to wit), what is essential is not the *jest* but rather the demonstration of intention. Thus within Freud's framework wit and humor have different purposes, arise out of different intrapsychic processes and differ in the foregrounding that is called for: in humor what is important is the recognition of the communicative intent and not the jest; in wit what is important is the jest itself which allows the unacceptable communicative intent to be backgrounded.

An interesting juxtaposition are Nevo and Nevo (1983) and Ransohoff (1975) discussed above. It seems that the boys in the experimental situation responded with "wit" in Freud's sense, whereas in the next study the girls are producing "humor" in Freud's sense.

Within pragmatic theories (e.g. Leech 1983 and Brown and Levinson 1978) irony is prominently featured. Dillon et al (1985:455) critique Leech's "Irony Principle" as follows:

The IP, as Leech rather narrowly defines it, comes into play when the PP is insufficient to account for the particular utterance-- where the utterance is excessively polite, and hence can be interpreted as poisonous. Clearly, the IP should be broadened to apply to any excessive execution of a move (ironic euphemism, ironic exaggeration, ironic understatement, etc.) So regarded, irony is not a principle governing interaction, but a

way of exploiting any gesture so as to reverse its force. From this viewpoint, it is part of the general process of superimposing a frame over a particular interaction so as to caricature it: such caricature can of course be good-natured and playful, and is one of the modes of joking. Some jokes are nasty, but not all. Here is one area where Leech's postulating of maxims 'works', but fails to grasp the nature of the phenomenon.

In Brown and Levinson's framework, irony is considered "off-record" unless it is clearly marked as irony, in which case it is considered "on-record". The treatment of irony in these theories will be taken up again in Chapter 3 in connection with the pragmalinguistic analysis of joking.

Generalizations from the literature

A number of generalizations, in addition to those already discussed above, can be drawn from research on joking in the social sciences. These generalizations are at a high level of abstraction.

- (1) Joking is quintessentially social. Thus Johnny Carson asks George Carlin (11/29/84): "If you tell a joke and there's nobody around to hear it, is it funny?" Sherzer (1978:345): "It thus becomes necessary to rethink the very nature of the pun. Up to now I have dealt with puns in categorical terms, as if items were either puns or not puns. But in fact it is not only the speaker who can make a pun, but the receiver or interpreter as well. And what makes a pun a pun depends not only on properties purely internal to puns, or even to the relationship between puns and the discourse in which they occur. Equally important is the topic dealt with in the discourse, and such cross-culturally variable issues as whether the topic is tabu and whether the topic is one which should be dealt with in direct speech or indirect, allusive speech." Zijdeveld (1983): "The effect of the joke depends on the situation in which it is told and on the definition of that situation by the audience. Its effect depends much less on the intention of the person who tells the joke or on the content of the joke itself." Christie Davies (1984:152) "...jokes change drastically in meaning

and function depending on the social context in which they are told."

- (2) Joking is constructed in interaction out of shared sociocultural knowledge, most of which remains implicit. This depth of the implicit is a strong theme in the literature. Joking footings are signalled through contextualization cues.
- (3) A major theme is that joking represents an attempt to resolve ambivalence in social situations, by redefining or negotiating the definition of the situation. There is a clear link between humour and ambiguity that needs to be explored further and particularly by examining the role of humour as a device for coping with anomie, such as that resulting from competing and apparently contradictory values.

Where there is conflict, humour may well act as a way for people to express covert malice and suppressed anger. Whether it acts primarily as a safety-valve or as a cynical delegitimizing force in societies wracked by political conflict is a difficult question that can probably only be answered by empirical investigation. Davies does agree with Zijderveld that humour works as a 'de-ideologizing and disillusioning force' (TR, p. 58) He points out that "playful incongruity can itself have this effect even if malice is absent. A refusal to take the official version of the world seriously ultimately undermines it and induces a general human cynicism." He then warns that people may simply laugh at the unreal alternatives instead of striving for them.

Zijderveld claims that laughter reassures us that 'reality and its established meanings', 'daily life and common sense' are unharmed and triumphant: laughter is a glory in sanity. Christie Davies counters that "in an everyday world that is at times absurd, sanity resides in jokes, and laughter that glories in sanity is a recognition of this."

- (4) Humor can be thought of as "playing with meaning", a perspective that has escaped humour theorists obsessed with 'glory' and conflict. However, a great

deal of play is also aggressive--it is playing to win.

- (5) The cognitive process of analogy underlies joking. A critique of 'clash of frames of meaning' approach is that what is important is *not* that the actors in a joke have different frames of meaning but rather 'what are the social sources of these meanings?' and 'why are some clashes of meaning salient and amusing for a particular audience when others are not?'" The key question though is 'what social forces determine why a particular audience adopts the definition that it does?' (Christie Davies 1984:148).
- (6) Because of its "family resemblance" to play, it is an inherently ambiguous mode of communication, hence deniable under certain circumstances. How this ambiguity works will be explained in chapter 3.
- (7) There is a relationship between social status/role and joking activity as described earlier in this chapter, such that joking is socially distributed and the interpretation of and response to the joking activity is constrained by the definition of roles in a situation. For example, whether joking activity is symmetrical or asymmetrical may be related to whether the movement is horizontal or vertical in social space as defined in the situation. Also, joking styles may be associated with social roles.
- (8) There are different joking styles which can be characterized in terms of certain co-occurring features at many different levels of linguistic organization, but also in terms of alternation (as marked or unmarked in relation to context).
- (9) Joking "frames" can be thought of as located on a continuum between ritual and spontaneity (Handelman and Kapferer's "category-routinized" and "setting-specific", respectively.)
- (10) The strategic use of joking is closely bound up with the maintenance of appropriate "rapport", involving the relationship between social identity and

group boundaries. It's essential link to friendship needs to be further explored.

- (11) There is a generally recognized need for multidisciplinary work involving close linguistic and interactional analysis of the production and interpretation of humor/joking as communication in a social context.

Communication

Work which has been done on joking as communication, from a range of perspectives, is discussed in the following section. Sacks (1973) is an ethnomethodological analysis of puns as a device for displaying understanding (especially of a narrative which another speaker has just completed.) In Davis and Farina (1970) "it was hypothesized that one of the functions of humor is its role in providing a means of communication between individuals. Sixty male undergraduate students were given cartoons to rate by an attractive female experimenter. It was hypothesized that where possible, male subjects would use appreciation of sexual humor as a means of communicating sexual interest in the female experimenter." Confirmed. This article is interesting because even though it uses an experimental format including use of cartoons and ratings, it attempts to get at humor as communication--considering the response to humor as bound up with a communicator's goals in an interaction. From an ethnomethodological perspective, Painter (1980) describes use of humor among lesbians (using data from participant observation in a lesbian bar) to normalize breaches of their social reality and thereby reinforce the existence of a lesbian speech community.

Roper (1981) is a very detailed ethnographic account of the use of humor for rapid and precise communication in a "high context" communications matrix (attempted resuscitation of a human being in an American hospital emergency room). One of his main points is that we must not make the mistake of assuming that humor has a few standard functions and leave it at that (such as tension release and introduction of tabu topics without responsibility), but rather that we

need to investigate in great detail the use of humor in social contexts. He points out that much humor research in medical settings considers only the spoken word, and he says that we need to consider the entire "communications matrix" or framework: behaviors, gestures, spatial relations among people and objects in their environment, visibility, screening, and the sequencing, tempo and rhythm of these elements. His approach differs from Coser (1959) in that he is *not* focussing on specific types of humor in a general hospital setting--but rather exploring looking at the total communications matrix of a particular event which recurs. He discusses a wide range of functions which he considers under the two arbitrary categories of "cognitive" and "social".

cognitive: --transposes definition of situation to one which is harmless
 --promotes cognitive flexibility
 --metacommunicates questions concerning readiness
 --cues cooperative orientation to task

social: --reaffirms others as co-equals
 (sets tone for social interaction)
 --diffuses responsibility to others present
 --binds in team--reaffirms exclusion of others
 --"teacher/school" frame reflects situation: opportunity to
 perfect skills
 --group self-concept as "special"
 --physical barriers (group boundaries)--also reflect
 narrowness of focus in health care system

Individual style

Tannen (1984) is pioneering work on "brand of humor". Using as data a recorded Thanksgiving Dinner conversation, Tannen identifies two different interactional styles associated with ethnic background and geographical origin. She shows how systematic misunderstanding is predictable. She discusses how humor and irony are used as part of the conversational styles, discussing several extended humorous episodes. She uses the terms "humorous" and "ironic" for statements that seemed not to be meant literally and seemed to be intended to amuse. She speculates that "'brand of humor' is one of the most highly individual-

istic aspects of a person's style." Her analyses give general characterizations of the types of irony used by the different speakers: (1) a mocking style which dramatizes speech patterns; (2) a mock serious style; (3) a content irony, aimed outward; (4) a collaborative style which builds on others' humor. Her quantitative analysis revealed that the use of humor played a significant role in the impact that each participant had on the group. Her identification of a distinctive irony style among gay men is supported by Saccomano (1986), who emphasizes the expression through irony of the general concerns of the group as socially deviant.

Chapter 3

3.0 Introduction

CHAPTER THREE: In Chapter 3, a social-functional analysis of the phenomenon of joking within the scope of pragmalinguistics is presented. Pragmalinguistics is defined here as the study of language as a communicative system and in relation to a universal theory of rapport (both at a very abstract level).

The point of departure is an attempt to account in a satisfying way at the pragmalinguistic level for the typical observation that joking (especially in the extreme form of teasing) is an ambiguous combination of contradictory/disparate elements (as in the classic formulation of Radcliffe-Brown that "joking relationships" combine friendliness and antagonism). Within theories of rapport (Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978), Leech (1983)) the activity of joking constitutes part of the repertoire of "positive politeness". Yet on the one hand how it plays that role is not adequately specified (beyond the usual statement that joking draws on shared knowledge), and on the other hand it is also clear that joking is the classically "deniable" communication (as "off-record" irony) (within which usage it can serve the opposite purpose of attack). The analysis attempts to offer a unifying explanation of the occurrence of joking within different categories in pragmatic theories of rapport.

The theoretical treatment begins with Bateson's analysis of play as a mode of interaction which is distinct from non-play and yet relationally-defined, and which is signalled by means of "metapragmatic" cues of a particular sort. It is argued that play, as an essential developmental activity, exerts social-functional pressure on the linguistic system, in the sense that provision must be made for signalling that it is going on. Prototypical cues to signal play are seen to have a phylogenetic

and ontogenetic connection (Ohala 1984). Bateson's analysis of the nature of the cues, together with Silverstein's notions about the nature of language as a semiotic system, and Gumperz' theory of conversational inference which allows for the foregrounding of various aspects of conveyed meaning, allow us to understand how (1) joking activity comes to have a conveyed meaning as indexical of relationship which in turn entails assumptions about role relationships and shared knowledge and attitudes; and (2) the paradoxical nature of the communication, arising out of the analogic negation, can be used in the service of deniability. These two aspects of the joking communication are used to explain occurrences of joking within theories of rapport. The analysis is illustrated with some data from the realm of American public and political discourse.

3.1 Key Ideas

There are certain key ideas to be brought forward from Chapter 2 for use in the pragmalinguistic analysis presented in this chapter. These ideas concern (1) the nature of joking (observations on characteristics of joking--from the literature and from examples in American society); and (3) the nature of functionalism as an approach. The treatment here is relatively abstract, working within a broadly functional theoretical framework.

As we have seen, joking is classically described in terms of ambiguity, both within the structural-functionalist framework (Radcliffe-Brown's "joking relationships"), and within the psychoanalytic framework (Freud's "wit"). This combination of positive and negative on the interpersonal level is nicely illustrated by Bales' (1951:179) categories, which represent systematization of interactional interpretations among mainstream American English speakers. The reader will recall from the discussion in Chapter 2 that his twelve categories range from

Social-Emotional: positive (1-3) through Task Area: neutral (4-9) through Social-Emotional: negative (10-12). "Joking" is coded in category 2. However,

if the element of aggression is present, as it often is, it must be lower than the element of friendliness in the opinion of the observer in order to be marked in this category. If the element of aggression is stronger than the element of friendliness, the act should be scored in Category 12. Similarly, the attempt must indicate some sensitivity to the readiness of others to laugh, otherwise the observer concludes that the actor is excessively ego-involved and places the abortive attempt in Category 11, as an indication of anxiety, or in Category 12, as an indication of status seeking, according to his judgment.

I take Bales' categories as important socio-cultural information concerning interpretive labels in interaction (even though on a gross level), a systematization of layman's knowledge. This layman's knowledge offers evidence that what is superficially the same behavior (apparently all of it would be subsumed under the same activity label, "joking"), is inherently ambiguous. It must be interpreted in the moment according to the degree of friendliness or the "element of aggression" perceived. The interpretation can yield a ranking at the positive and negative extremes on the social-emotional dimension.

There are several current examples from within American public discourse which illustrate both the ambiguity of joking, and also the varying emphasis depending on what is foregrounded. The first is the typical sign at the metal detector in airports: "Please, no joking. Any remarks made in jest will be interpreted as serious." Apparently this indicates that the mode of communication referred to as "joking" is ambiguous enough that it is necessary, in such *deadly* serious situations as airports where highjacking is a real possibility, to make an explicit statement concerning interpretive procedures. Another example is the development of etiquette concerning joking on computer message and news nets. The problem of misinterpretation of joking intent in computer communication has been recognized as serious enough that protocols warn users about joking and provide a conventional symbol to mark any joking statement:

Be Careful with Humor and Sarcasm: Without the voice inflections and body language of personal communications, it is easy for a remark meant to be funny to be misinterpreted. Subtle humor tends to get lost, so take steps to make sure that people realize you are trying to be funny. The net has developed a symbol called the smiley face. It looks like ":-)" and points out sections of articles with humorous intent. No matter how broad the humor or satire, it is safer to remind people that you are being funny. (Von Rospach 1985)

The computernet instruction shows that joking interaction has been extended into this new medium pervasively enough, and that the mode is inherently ambiguous enough, that a contextualization cue has actually been created in order to try to signal clearly what mode is intended. A third example comes from the recent Sanctuary trial in Tucson, Arizona (as reported in the Daily Cal. Oct. 30, 1985). What emerges here is that conventional interpretations of joking communication can emphasize either the "serious message" (with joking as a cover) or the "sociability" dimension (with the discounting of any message). I think here, in contrast to the Reagan example discussed at the end of this chapter, personality is not invoked, but rather simply the playing of an appropriate role as presiding judge (inserting light remarks where humor was needed). Defense attorneys charged that the judge had a bias against the defendants and argued for a dismissal motion on two arguments. The first was that as a shareholder in Phelps Dodge Corporation, which has a subsidiary in El Salvador, the judge had an economic interest in ruling that the defendants were guilty of harboring illegal aliens. The second was that "the judge's constant 'quips, comments, and innuendo' reveal his deeply held bias against the defendants." The prosecutor, on the other hand, praised the judge for his "hard work" in addressing defense motions, and while acknowledging that the judge had made informal remarks, the prosecutor said that "the comments were light, when some humor was sorely needed." This example shows that the two interpretations of joking are institutionalized enough that it was considered appropriate in a court of law for the defense attorneys to challenge the judge on this basis, and for the prosecutor to respond to the challenge with the other

conventional interpretation of joking remarks.

Joking activity is seen as a form of play, and as such is associated with certain social situations, notably symmetrical activity among peers. There is also the use of joking for denying responsibility for communication, which Labov and Fanshel (1977) mention as an important requirement of a communication system. These two social functions, signalling play (playing), and avoiding responsibility (deniability), are claimed to be social functions which exert pressure on the communication system.

Combining the diachronic level 1 functionalism, defined in Chapter 1, with Silverstein's "true semiotic functionalism", allows us to understand extended pragmatic uses within the communication system. Certain functional aspects of human behavior show up in conventionalized forms (which may themselves have older functions that show up in the sound-symbolism) which then get extended and exploited for other purposes (to convey complex meaning), which serve other functions of communication e.g., a need for conventional deniability.

3.2.0 Basic Argument

The starting point is the idea that the need for a provision for signalling play within the communication system serves as a social-functional pressure on that system.

Play is a phenomenon which occurs with increasing frequency, complexity, and organization as one moves up the phylogenetic scale. The more advanced the species, the longer the period during which the young engage in frequent play. In all species it is the young who play most, but adults play as well, though often only under special circumstances. Some form of play continues to be an important behavior for human beings at all stages of the life span (McGhee 1979:93).

Although there appears to be no single function for play in the life of a child or an immature animal, it is generally agreed that it is developmentally important, serving the general purpose of exploring possibilities in behavior, rehearsing options, and polishing skills which will be needed in adult life.

Garvey (1977:4-5) lists five characteristics which are generally accepted as descriptive of play:

- (1) Play is pleasurable, enjoyable.
- (2) Play has no extrinsic goals.
- (3) Play is spontaneous and voluntary.
- (4) Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player.
- (5) Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play.

The key idea in this last characteristic is that play is a relational phenomenon. Both Garvey and Bateson make the point that "the very idea of play depends on contrast with another, foundation behavior" (Garvey 1977) against which play is understood as not being what it appears to be. Thus it is simulative, a form of pretense.

Garvey's analysis indicates that children need "a basic model of nonliteral treatment of resources"¹, and that such an orientation to experiences is probably communicated to an infant within the first few months. She describes play as the natural product of the processes of physical and cognitive growth together with a nonliteral model.

The next essential point is that the literature on play finds the association of play with particular social situations, involving role relationships and mood, etc. Play is typically thought of as relaxed, fun, enjoyable-- something that is done with peers. McGhee points out that "play occurs only in relaxed circumstances:

¹ The notion of "nonliteral" will be discussed later in connection with verbal humor.

that is, in the absence of physiological pressures (such as hunger or sex drives) and threats from the environment." Aldis (1975:129), whose work has centered on play fighting, found that "in the more relaxed forms of play, which make up the majority of play, dominance relations often seem to disappear completely." He claims that one of the most conspicuous characteristics of play is the lack of dominance relations, which is obviously related to role reversal. He challenges the frequent claim that one of the functions of play (particularly play fighting) is the establishment of rank orders, believing that rank orders are probably almost always established in serious situations. He asserts further that "play, in fact, is antithetical to the establishment of rank orders. If rank orders were to prevail in play, continuous activity with frequent reversals in roles could not continue."

Given a foundation behavior and a play version, we still need some sort of signal of the shift into the play "mode". This is what Bateson analyzed, from observing the otters in the San Francisco zoo, in his classic paper. "The Message 'This is Play'" (1972).

- (1) There is the idea of a foundation behavior (fighting, etc.--reality, primary process, mood statement, life or death); (2) There is the idea of a metaphoric behavior (play-- fantasy, secondary process, representation, just for fun); (3) There is also the idea of metacommunication (discriminating signals, cues, etc.--'This is different from that for which it stands,' 'This is play,' 'This is not real').

With the recognition of the presence of such metacommunication, a message about the message, which is part of the message itself, paradox enters the picture because of the nature of the cues. First of all, the metacommunicative cues, as relational messages, are not abstractable from the context. And even though conventional signals of the play behavior may evolve, they still cannot be counted on to

correspond in a one-to-one manner. In addition, because these ambiguous cues are analogic, they are incapable of communicating negation in a way that it can be communicated through digital communication. Watzlawick et al (1967:102) point out that while it is simple to convey the analogic message 'I shall attack you,' it is extremely difficult to signal 'I will NOT attack you' ". This is consistent with Freud's point that primary process does not have a way to express negation. Thus, and crucially for the precipitation of paradox, the cues create a negative logical problem of the Epamenides type ["This statement is untrue"], but analogically expressed.

Bateson found that the ~~typical~~ analogic solution arrived at by animals is to somehow demonstrate or begin or propose the action to be denied, and then transform the behavior in various ways so as not to perform it in the usual manner. Aldis, in his work on play fighting among animals, abstracted the following criteria for defining behavior as "play" (1975:127):

- play signals
- +modification (transformation) from serious behavior:
 - reduce risk of injury
 - *intensity lower
 - *muscle tone more relaxed
 - *biting inhibited or limited
 - *claws retracted
 - *vulnerable areas(especially around face & eyes)avoided
 - omit some components
 - *sniffing as part of predatory(?)
 - *vigilance behavior
 - *freezing behavior
 - *maintenance of critical distance
 - *fleeing modified
 - serious signalling behaviors absent
(threat or warning calls)
- +mixed order:
 - role reversal most conspicuous example of a mixed order
in play
 - shift from one kind of play to another in apparently
chaotic fashion
- +lack of dominance relations

To illustrate the shifting among types listed under the category of "mixed order," Aldis cites Lorenz's example that "a kitten in play may treat his litter mate first as

a mouse (by stalking him), then as a tomcat (by wrestling him), and finally as a dog (by fleeing from him) all within a brief period of time."

Thus it appears that Aldis is not suggesting that the criteria listed above in addition to the play signals are used by the animals themselves as cues. Within his category of "play signals" in play fighting among animals, Aldis found that vocalization was the most common form of play signal, and that play vocalizations in most species are usually *segmented* and *repetitive* (ha-ha-ha). The next most common form of play signal is the "open-mouthed play face". Ritualized body movements are also used, such as special walks.

Aldis also found, with regard to sequencing of play signals, that there is a differentiation between the use of visual and vocal ones: that at the onset of play visual(face) signals are more common, whereas during the course of play, vocal signals predominate. His explanation of this distribution is that visual ones can be used when the playmates have a good view of each other, as at the beginning stages, but that once play is embarked upon the visual cannot be counted on because view may be obstructed, etc. Thus vocal are more reliable.

An ingenious linking of the visual and vocal has been proposed by Ohala (1984) within a broader investigation of the origins and functions of speech prosody. Ohala proposes a genetic predisposition across species to the development of a "frequency code," associating "high acoustic frequency with the primary meaning of 'small vocalizer' and thus such secondary meanings as 'subordinate, submissive, non threatening, desirous of the receiver's goodwill, etc.'" Small vocal tracts produce both high frequencies and high resonances². To include the phenomenon of the smile (and its opposite, the O-face), he extends the sound-symbolic meaning of "small vocalizer" from the fundamental frequency of vocalizations to their resonances as well. Ohala proposes that the smile mouth shape (which originally

² p. 7: Resonances are "those spectral details of the vocalization contributed by the air space between the sound generator and the point where the sound radiates to the atmosphere"

served an acoustic purpose) became reinterpreted through ritualization "as an independent visual display having the same meaning or function of the original vocalization."

In an interesting convergence of interpretations with Bateson and Aldis, Ohala likens acoustic characteristics to kinesic signals:

The Fo of voice is used, as it were, as a *gesture* which *accompanies* or is *superimposed* on the linguistic message in order to enhance, elaborate, or even, in some cases, to contradict its meaning.(1984:5)

Thus it appears that human beings have some prototypical visual and vocal cues, which link us with other species, for signalling the play mode [higher pitch, smile, laugh particles], which can occur to signal the transition into, during, and also after the fact for a retroactive signalling. Garvey points out, however, that whereas for children smiling and laughter are common signals of a playful orientation, they are not essential. And furthermore, (p.23) "...a smile is by no means a reliable index of a playful orientation. It is characteristic of human behavior that there are few, if any, simple and constant relations between a gesture and its meaning or significance in a communicative situation." In addition, as with animal play, there are cues accomplished via obvious transformations of a base behavior, which Garvey (1977:82) describes with regard to "pretending":

Pretending will be defined here as a voluntary transformation of the Here and Now, the You and Me, and the This or That, along with any potential for action that these components of a situation may have. For such a definition to be workable, one must be able to see when a transformation has taken place, and that is generally achieved by contrasting the transformed with the pre- or post-transformed state. For example, how do we know that a child has adopted the role of wicked witch or working woman? She is most likely to announce her new identity to the playmate, but further she is likely to signal the transformation by speaking in a modified voice, by performing some identifying action, or by moving or gesturing in a manner that contrasts with her normal behavior. Pretending tends to be redundantly marked, and the signals are especially clear at points of transition to and from the pretend state."

Garvey has found that play/nonplay, along with social/nonsocial, are "two very critical distinctions that appear to influence almost everything a child does".

Because these are so important, clear signalling is essential, and the play mode is signalled as distinct from other orientations. On the other hand, the adult researcher notes that [p. 83:] "we know very little about the criteria children use to distinguish between pretend and what they call 'real' or 'for real' features of a situation, but there is strong evidence that they believe this to be an important distinction and attempt to apply it appropriately." It seems to be the case, then, that human children have means of clearly signalling what for them is an essential distinction between play and nonplay. These means seem to show a connection between ontogenesis and phylogenesis.

So far we have been talking about play without specific reference to play with language. A distinction needs to be made between play as a general mode of behavior (which among human beings usually involves language as part of the general phenomenon, and play in which the focus is the structure of the communication system itself. This latter sort of speech play has been a source of information about linguistic and cultural systems [cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1976)]. In Garvey's treatment of play she discusses how children play with sounds, with different levels of linguistic organization, and also with the pragmatic or functional aspects of conversation.

McGhee (1979:42-43) defines humor as "a form of intellectual play" which he sees as "the logical result of an extension of playful forms of behavior to the more abstract intellectual sphere of ideas." In particular, he sees incongruity-based humor developing at a level of intelligence which made possible the easy manipulation of symbols. McGhee traces the general development of humor, in relation to cognition, in four phases.

McGhee's first stage, which begins in the second year, is characterized by incongruous actions toward objects. It seems that this stage has a commonality with the behavior of the kitten noted above, who acted incongruously toward a

littermate. It appears also to describe the action of Koko the gorilla who acted as if she were going to use her hairbrush as a toothbrush (in the presence of her trainer).

Stage 2 begins toward the end of the second year and is characterized by McGhee in terms of the incongruous labeling of objects and events. The stage 2 child laughs when a cat is referred to as a dog. This appears to be the stage at which linguistic symbols are first used--interestingly, in a form of metaphor. Of course, one could argue that metaphor is the principle underlying the behavior in stage one as well.

McGhee's third stage begins at about age three, when the child realizes that words refer to classes of objects or events that have key defining characteristics. The label given to this stage is "Conceptual Incongruity", and the technique involves violating one or more aspects of a concept: "the Stage 3 child laughs upon imagining or seeing a drawing of a cat that has two heads, but no ears, and that makes a 'moo' sound." The use of rhyming and nonsense words also begins at stage 3. This stage is clearly related to language, both to words as conceptual categories, and also to the phonological and morphological systems.

Stage 4, which begins at about age 7, is the point at which linguistic ambiguity in the classic sense of the pun first comes into play. McGhee gives the following example pivoting on the word "take": "Hey, did you take a bath?" "No! Why, is one missing?" The stage 3 child understands both usages of the word "take" in this joke, but cannot keep both in mind at the same time. It would seem that the stage 4 child has acquired a second stage of polysemy, which involves simultaneously entertaining two schemas with regard to one word. In Piagetian terms, this stage comes about through the acquisition of "concrete operational thinking", which allows among other things the "reversibility" which enables a child to go back and forth between several different meanings of key words. McGhee points out that "in order to appreciate the humor in puns, a child must be simultaneously

aware of the two meanings and realize that the obvious one provides for a normal set of circumstances, whereas the less probable one creates some sort of incongruous situation." Characteristics of stage 4 humor remain to some extent into adulthood. During late childhood and early adolescence preferences for particular types of humor begin to be firmly established.

McGhee's categories include sound play, and play with different levels of linguistic organization, but do not include a type of play that Garvey found: play with pragmatic and functional aspects of conversation. For example, children play with what we would refer to as Grice's maxim of Quality (say what you believe to be true); with the convention that argument must include support (assertion and contradiction and counterassertion); and with the convention that (in Labov's terms) a statement about a B event is taken as a request for elaboration: "Respond to a question or assertion concerning your own state or experience as an invitation to contribute to the conversation"; and with some kind of conditions on the speech act re requests for information: that the speaker does not already know the answer, that he wishes to know the answer. etc.

It is important to keep in mind the kind of play which uses pragmatic conventions of conversation when we are tempted to create a binary distinction between "literal" and "nonliteral" and to equate literal with nonplay mode and nonliteral with play mode. In fact, as Ervin-Tripp (1977) describes with reference to situated conventional directives, in some cases in order to play or to joke one has to respond literally.

If a situation repeatedly occurs, the usual directive becomes conventionalized and could lose its literal force in that context. There are many instances of this principle. We can use conventional question directives even when both parties know we share the information: e.g., Is Mr. Terrell in? when he is in full view. or Do you have the time? when the addressee is looking at his watch.

The 'literal meaning' is the communicative intention which maps, in any context, directly onto a surface realization: in this case, requesting information. The literal meaning of an imperative would be a directive. A

good test of conventionalization is that the 'literal meaning' is ignored in the appropriate situation, and one can only arouse it by deliberate marking, or making a pun, so that one is misunderstood if one intends the literal meaning. Such cases occur in *Is Sybil there?*, *Have you any vacancies?*, and *Is there any coffee left?*

Situated conventional directives must be defined by context. For example: *Is Sybil there?* is optimally a directive when it occurs in a telephone call directly following the greetings. If it is a shout by a mother regarding her toddler, Sybil, who disappeared upstairs, it may be heard as an information request.

It is this playful, rather than the serious, interpretation of fantasy incongruities that constitutes the essence of the young child's humor." McGhee believes incongruities are the basic building blocks of most occurrence of humor--but "the real meat or substance of the event that makes us laugh is the emotional investment we have in the situation" (1979:69).

A recognition of the importance of context also serves to qualify the laying out of stages of humor development in relation to cognition above. Both McGhee and Davison emphasize the importance of (1) the expectations of the child based on previous experience with the adult, and (2) the strength and clarity of conventional cues or lexicalization of intent by the adult. Garvey (1977:41) describes Davison's (1974:179-187) findings on such play in a family setting.

Sophie (3:2) found blatant misnaming of pictures and objects quite funny--if the interlocutor was her mother. With a stranger, however, she was less sure that this rule violation was intended as humorous and did not know how to respond to the mislabeling of a picture. Jean (2:0), her brother, also succeeded in playing with the convention with his mother, but was easily recalled to seriousness in cases when she did not go along with the joke. A still younger child (1:10) who was present did not recognize what Davison calls 'nonserious' speech events.

It seems that there is a disjunction between the child's play/nonplay modes (which are not clearly understood by adults, as pointed out by Garvey above), and the adult's world of play-humor/serious. Wolfenstein (1954:196) in her work on children's humor found that children learn only gradually to distinguish between what she calls the serious and the joking realms of adult discourse. This can be thought of as their learning of the adult modes of reality as recognized by Schutz.

Wolfenstein makes the same observation that Garvey makes about children having their own play mode which is apparently different from the adult one: "While they can easily break away from the demands of reason on their own initiative and enjoy fantasy or nonsense, it is not always clear to them when others, especially their elders, make this shift."

Returning now to Bateson's ideas about analogic communication (Watzlawick et al 1967:101-106), key features of the joking mode are: (1) analogic message material is highly ambiguous; (2) analogic communication invokes relationship, constituting a proposal regarding the future rules of the relationship; (3) the lack of "not" in analogic communication, and its expression through nonoccurrence or through ritual. Bateson believed that "ritual may be the intermediary process between analogic and digital communication, simulating the message material but in a repetitive and stylized manner that hangs between analogue and symbol."

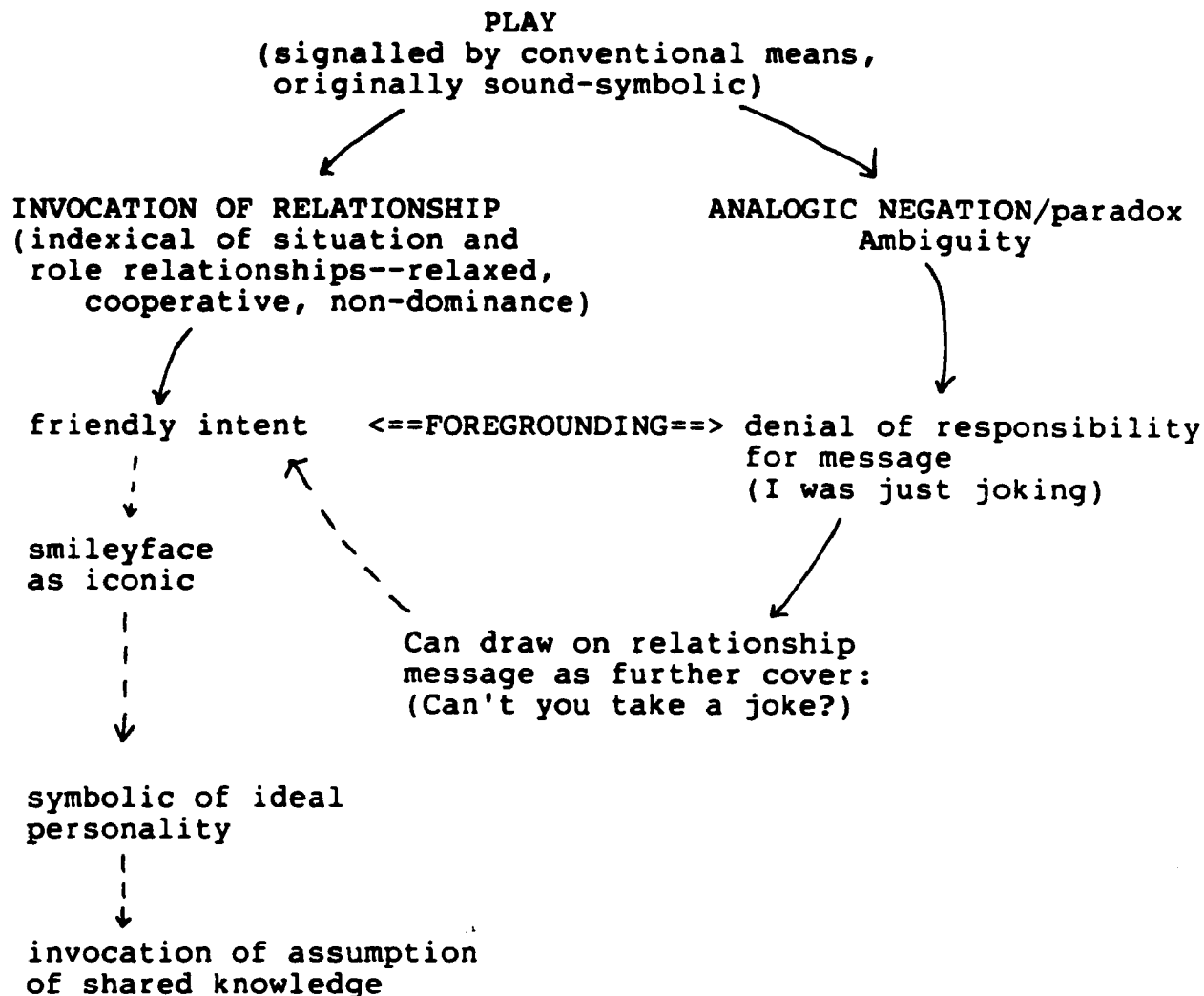
For adults, play is often more restricted and conventionalized, in the form of games. A continuity with pretending among children, however, can be seen in Clark and Gerrig's pretense theory of irony discussed in Chapter 2. McGhee (1979:279) describes verbal humor and comedy among adults as "a special form of play unique to our species." We would predict that there would be conventionalized signals within the communication system for indicating that a state of play is being shifted into. We also might expect that there would be some signals (or cues) that are fairly standard (smile with accompanying rise in pitch along with "light voice" plus laugh particles) and which would be associated with the non-verbal dimension. These contextualization cues would prototypically involve paralinguistic, prosodic and non-verbal (facial) cues. Thus a member of the culture would know that there are ways of conveying fairly obviously that one is moving into play---"joking around".

R. Alford (1981) starts from Goffman and Bateson, and proceeds on the

assumption that humor framing techniques must be conventional. The "meaning" of the humor frame is said to be that what is contained is not to be taken seriously or literally, leading to the idea of "buffered communication." It is pointed out that one effect of the humor frame can be scale reduction, which creates distance from the communication. The author cites the similarities of play framing in primates and children. The major point of the article is that framing requirements vary with a number of features of social context; in some situations it is expected and therefore easy, and in others it is unexpected and therefore difficult or impossible. In American society much humor framing is found in relationships of intimacy and equality, and it is not found where intimacy is lacking and where a significant status inequality exists. [This claim is directly contradicted by, for example, Coser 1960.] The *clarity* of framing is also relevant and can be part of the humor itself. Humor framing cues can be nonverbal, paralinguistic, stylistic . . . the full range is not known.

Further, we would predict certain conventional disclaimers of responsibility drawing on joking as a cover: "I was just kidding", "I was only joking", "I didn't really mean it", "We were only fooling around", "it's only make-believe". Ohala's analysis of the smile gives us a clue to the meaning of the minimizing particles in these disclaimers: "just, only, etc.". They are interpretable as conveying smallness and therefore non-threat. This is also consistent with R. Alford's comments on scale reduction as a feature of joking interaction. even though he interprets scale reduction as creating distance from the interaction.

The essential claim of this chapter is represented in the following chart, which will be discussed in the remainder of this section and in the following section on rapport theories.



RAPPORT THEORIES

Lakoff

camaraderie

distance/deference

Brown and Levinson

positive politeness

off-record

["re-ranking attempt"]

ritual inversion
of prototypical irony

Thus play exerts a social-functional pressure on the communication system, in the sense that provision must be made for signalling that it is going on. The nonverbal signals combine invocation of relationship with analogic negation. The former carries the conveyed meaning of the prototypical play situation: a relaxed, cooperative, peer context; the latter is highly ambiguous and can be exploited in the service of another basic social need, i.e., for conventional deniability. These two dimensions of the play signal can be differentially foregrounded in interaction.

An added twist is that the foregrounding of the deniability dimension can be reinforced by invocation of the play relationship as in "Can't you take a joke?". Among peers this ploy is hard to deal with because it invokes a conventional ideal personality: everyone wants to be perceived as having a sense of humor, being able to laugh at oneself, and not take oneself too seriously. Not playing along, or worse, calling someone on the covert message of the joking forces the target of the joke to violate strong social conventions. Further, calling someone on a covert message generally means having to explicitly express the insult to oneself. Such a prospect is painful, especially if the joker will then use the deniability cover and potentially make it look as if the target is simply projecting insulting judgments onto others.

A fairly equal balance of the two dimensions can be used as a mode of informal socialization (as pointed out by Coser 1960), drawing on the indirect message as corrective and the relationship message as simultaneously inclusive and supportive.

The computer smileyface :-) is iconic of the friendly intent of the invocation of the play relationship, traced back further by Ohala as we have seen to acoustic representation of small size as non-threatening. Within a democratic society with an egalitarian ideology, joking as invocation of an informal egalitarian relationship is symbolic of an ideal personality. The invocation of the play relationship also implies shared knowledge, which brings us to a discussion of joking within theories

of rapport.

Rapport Theories

The general outlines of Lakoff (1973) and Brown and Levinson (1978) were given in Chapter 1. Here I will focus on the placement of joking activity within the theories. I will mention Leech (1983) only briefly.

Within Lakoff's framework, joking is explicitly mentioned as a characteristic of the "camaraderie" modality, which embodies "maximum awareness of the addressee's presence as explicitly manifested by the speaker" (1979). This modality is characteristic of informal behavior among Americans. This placement is consistent with the foregrounding of the invocation of the play relationship. Although it is not explicitly discussed, it is clear that foregrounded deniability could be a manifestation of "distance" or "deference". In terms of Lakoff's framework, joking seems to fit within all of the modalities except "clarity," depending on the foregrounded intent: it is a camaraderie strategy in that it is an invitation to play together and an appeal to shared assumptions; it represents a deference strategy to the extent that it leaves the interpretation up to the addressee and thereby allows the joker to evade responsibility; it is a distance strategy in two ways: (1) in that it avoids imposing a direct message on the addressee, and (2) in that the joker has to "step back" from the situation in order to joke about it.

Brown and Levinson (1978) in attempting to identify universals of politeness grounded in the face-to-face process of communication also list "joking" as one of the interactional strategies associated with their equivalent of "camaraderie," "positive politeness". As they define it, positive politeness is "redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable.

Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants." (1978: 106). The group of positive politeness strategies which includes joking are directed to claiming common ground, i.e., common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, or empathy. Brown and Levinson assert that "since jokes are based on mutual shared background knowledge and values, jokes may be used to stress that shared background or those shared values." (1978: 129) In Brown and Levinson's terms, joking is a positive politeness strategy because it claims common ground, but it can also be exploited in mock insult joking in an attempt to rerank their social Distance variable. Irony is classified as an off-record strategy unless it is conventionally marked, in which case it becomes "on-record".

It seems to me that the invocation of the play relationship is a better explanation of the examples Brown and Levinson give as "joking" than is their explanation given above in terms of shared background knowledge and values:

English: God you're farty tonight!

OK if I tackle those cookies now?

How about lending me this old heap of junk? (H's new Cadillac)

Similarly, I believe that Brown and Levinson's explanation of the exploitation of mock insult joking as a way to rerank Distance is less satisfying than the invocation of play relationship together with the use of ritual of a certain type. They claim that in trying to rerank Distance, a speaker may take advantage of the relationship between on-record strategies and intimacy, which is that in intimate relations there may be presumed to be minimal danger of face threats. This gives rise to the use of bald-on-record insults or jokes as a way of asserting such intimacy. Hence we get conventionalized (ritualized) insults as a mechanism for stressing solidarity. Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1976) have a similar version of intimacy: that a way to move toward it is to commit social offenses and try to get the other

person to practice "co-implication in the mentality that generated the offense." My impression is that these scholars are mistaking a ritualized inversion or violation of rapport rules for an actual indication of the nature of intimacy. Alternatively, they are generalizing a version of intimacy which may not be universal. It may also be the case that there is a confusion of intimacy and solidarity. Conventional mock insult joking rather displays the strength of the friendship bond, and the trust that exists between the jokers (cf. Chapter 4).

Leech's Banter Principle is intended to account for insulting jokes: 'In order to show solidarity with h, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to h' (144). This formulation captures both the insights of Labov (1972a) regarding the content of the ritual insults, and the idea that there is a ritualized politeness violation. The problem with it, as was pointed out by Dillon et al (1985), is that Leech seems to assume that most conversation will be joking conversation and that the default joking type will be banter. I demonstrate a range of other "tones" in Chapter 4.

Brown and Levinson do not allocate any kind of joking or irony to "negative politeness". To the degree that the avoidance-based mode is more formal than the approach-based one, this seems appropriate.

As was noted in Chapter 2, "irony" is treated as "off-record" unless it is clearly marked, in which case it is considered "on-record".

off record: A communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act. Thus if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. (pp.216,217)

This definition clearly fits as foregrounding of the analogic negation aspect of the communication. Brown and Levinson make the further point that there are

degrees of off-recordness.

The *degree* of off-recordness varies in relation to the viability of another interpretation (literal meaning OR conveyed meaning) of the utterance, as meeting the Maxims in the context equally well. Given the vulnerability of mutual knowledge (the difficulty of 'knowing' what is inside anyone else's head), and the non-recoverability of intonational and kinesic clues, even fairly blatant indirectnesses may be defensible as innocent -- a speaker could protest that he didn't mean an irony in a sarcastic way, for example. S and H could both go away from the interaction 'knowing' in their hearts that it really was sarcastic, but because face (as the word implies) is largely a matter of surface appearances, S may well get away with his FTA.

Brown and Levinson seem to run into some problems in dealing with what I would call prototypical irony of the ritual inversion type, in that they are forced to call it "on-record":

In short, authors agree that irony has (to put it in our terms) an essential FTA content: it must express, broadly construed, a criticism. But they have failed to ask *why* this is the case. Our answer of course is that irony is an output of an off-record strategy that attends to face threat. Alternatively, in cases where the irony is disambiguated in form, it may be the output of an on-record strategy, but in all cases irony is organized around the potential face threat posed by the critical content (including evasion of unambiguous responsibility for it).

In effect, it seems that they are simply talking about degrees of off-recordness again, and are attempting to deal with a highly conventionalized form of indirect communication. They make the further interesting point that "those cases where irony is disambiguated provide examples where what is essentially a pattern of usage begins to pick up structural correlates," and the example they give for English is marking with heavy nasalization.

3.4.0 Joking in political discourse

President of the U.S. (Ronald Reagan) testing microphone before a radio address (August 1984):

"My fellow Americans. I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes."

In this section I will apply the analysis just presented to an example of joking in context for which we have different interpretations in order to show how the differential foregrounding can work in political discourse. My particular interest is in demonstrating how joking can be used as a way of "thinking the unthinkable".

The basic facts, as in the case of the Sanctuary trial judge, are that the Reagan supporters foregrounded the the relationship aspect (and by extension the personality aspect) which carries with it the conventional presupposition that he does not mean what he says. The Reagan critics foregrounded the covert message for which deniability would be be conventionally claimed; they also rejected the relationship invocation and attacked *ad hominem*:

They say a man's level of humor corresponds to the level of this thinking. If so, then are not the one and the other too low for the president of a great country? (Genrikh Borovik, quoted in Tass)

A puzzling aspect of the administration of Ronald Reagan has been the apparent ability of Reagan to disassociate himself from a whole series of events (from the environmental antics of James Watt to the questionable business practices/ethics of Edwin Meese to the foreign policy decisions which led to the death of 200 Marines in Lebanon) which might have been expected to reflect very badly not only on his administration but also on him personally. Wits in Congress have taken to talking about the situation in terms of the Sleaze Factor and the Teflon Factor.

The basic question is: what is it about Reagan's communicative style which creates that Teflon coating? In this essay I will discuss Reagan's sense of humor with particular reference to the "joke" or "quip" cited above.

Discussions of Reagan's sense of humor thus far have tended to emphasize the ability to joke and to produce "one-liners" as something Americans take as symptomatic or symbolic of a likeable personality. Reagan comes across as a likeable guy, and likeable guys will be forgiven--because people insist on believing that they "mean well". Typical discussions of political humor tend to mention Lincoln, FDR, JFK and Reagan. They emphasize the personal appeal generated by their wit as well as their use of humor to deflect questions, etc.

Reagan may in fact represent an ideal personality style within an American ideological context. The gender role literature indicates that sense of humor is a highly valued trait among American men which symbolizes playfulness, friendliness, flexibility, and spontaneity. In the case of Ronald Reagan we have a further layer of phenomenological complication in that Reagan has had long experience as an actor. Reagan was always a nice, likeable guy in the movies that I've seen, with the exception of *King's Road*. Actors learn to play roles. They can cry on cue, and they can read funny lines effectively, with appropriate pausing.

There is, however, an interesting feature of joking which may allow us to use it as an indicator of the attitudes and beliefs of the man behind the role. That feature is the kind of timing that is involved. Occasionally we hear of someone carefully keeping a clever remark in mind for years so that it could be used at just the right moment. And some people are able sometimes to see a situation developing and plan a quip in advance. But for most of us the typical experience is that the moment passes and then later we think of what we should have said. To go ahead and open one's mouth in the perfect moment means to trust a great deal to automatic pilot, as Freud has demonstrated.

If we assume that something is being revealed about Reagan's attitudes: what is it? The use of the passive voice brings us to the first point about joking as communication. It is highly indirect in that we can't say for certain what Reagan was

communicating by making that joke. If we ask Reagan what he was communicating by making that joke, he could legitimately (in the sense that it is socially acceptable to do so) claim that he wasn't communicating anything, that he was just joking around. He could further appeal to other dimensions of communication, claiming that he was just feeling good and playful on that day, was just trying to put people at their ease, confessing that he just loves to entertain people and goes for a laugh with whatever's handy. He could even put us on the defensive by suggesting that we're making a big deal out of nothing.³ and that it's ridiculous to psychoanalyze him on the basis of a little kidding around.

Thus at the level of the invocation of the play relationship=friendly intent=symbolic of ideal personality what he actually said can be conventionally denied out of hand: "Oh, come on! I was just kidding around."

Approaching again the intended conveyed meaning, there is a basis for confusion in a two-fold possibility of interpretation of the joking according to two different joking styles. In one style, the joker characterizes himself in a way which he knows is false and which he assumes the audience knows is false.⁴ In this case the interpretation of the joking would be that Reagan was so far from actually starting to bomb the Russians that he could feel comfortable joking about it. Interpreted as an instance of another style, the joker is in fact expressing something with his joking about his attitudes and what he would like to do, as well as about what he assumes the attitudes and desires of his audience are. Hyperbole/exaggeration in the joking remark fits with both styles and purposes, serving as a cue which removes it from reality and into the realm of the non-literal and non-serious. Both are forms of irony, but they work in opposite directions.

³ A version of "Can't you take a joke?"

⁴ This fits with Clark and Gerrig's pretense theory of irony discussed in Chapter 2.

Thus on the basis of the first style, Reagan could even claim that he was trying to be reassuring to those who think of him as a warmonger. Assuming that this latter possibility is rather remote as a response Reagan might make, let us consider how the Teflon factor might work in this case.

As I mentioned earlier, the repellent field of the Teflon might have at its furthest limits the serious/non-serious dimension, at which the criticism is deflected without any consideration of content. White House response might be a refusal to comment. At the edge of the Teflon proper we see how joking allows Reagan to have it both ways: for those who do not want to have a war with Russia and who are afraid that Reagan might start one, he can either (1) claim that he was trying to reassure them by showing that he could joke about such things;⁵ (2) claim that it was all in fun and then throw it back on them as having no sense of humor. For those who really wish that we could bomb Russia, Reagan has revealed himself as one of them...who of course must deny his real intentions and desires (and in fact this is consistent with Reagan's political image over time-- Grenada, evil empire, the bombing of Libya.) Thus politically he appeals to all those who either overtly or in their hearts would like to bomb Russia, to all those who are not seriously worried about him as a warmonger and who can therefore focus on the appeal of his charmingly playful joking; and he effectively deflects the outrage and criticism of those who fear that he is expressing what he would really like to do--and thereby bringing it closer to actuality. Thus the creative aspect of humor pointed out by Douglas (1968) which allows us to present new possibilities is here used in the service of thinking the unthinkable. The literal hostility and aggression of the joke make it a classic Freudian event.

⁵ In fact I heard of one reaction by an older woman supporter of Reagan that she believed that it was just some harmless letting off of steam about an issue that he has to think about all the time as President.

The joking has accomplished a double irony (if we define irony socially, in the sense of appealing to shared implicit knowledge, attitudes, etc., rather than semantically). For one group within the audience he is claiming the shared knowledge that he really doesn't mean what he is saying; for another group he is claiming the shared knowledge that he really does mean what he is saying, in the sense that it reflects his *true* feelings.

Considering the joke as a semantic structure in a social context: the basis of the humor (such as it is) is to be found in the incongruity between the action performed and its object. One cannot sign legislation to outlaw a country in the same way that one can outlaw marijuana use or cigarette smoking in public places. It would have been a better joke if he had said: "we begin bombing on Monday at 9:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time" because then he would have set up a further incongruity between the well-in-advance announcement over the radio of the start of bombing and the shared knowledge with his audience of the realities of bombing (such as that it takes 7 minutes for a missile to travel between the two countries). The fact that it was not a very good joke makes it more believable as spontaneously authentic.

The social inappropriateness of the joke lies in Reagan's joking in the presence of subordinates in a way which brings his own greater and threatening power into awareness without minimizing it. An additional dimension of the social context is the backstage, off-record definition of the setting. This further reinforces the Teflon effect: it was off-record, and it was also only a joke. On the other hand, in modern society the framing of the event is much more complicated than that.

Reagan is "joking around" in an back-stage manner in a situation which is back-stage only relative to other situations. Here it is back-stage only in relation to the on-stage situation of the mike being turned on. In Brown and Levinson's terms (and in journalistic terms) it is defined as "off-record". Thus it is back-stage

in that sense, but it is "on-stage" in that the President of the United States is with a group of reporters. Part of the pretense that Reagan uses is that he is being back-stage with all that goes with it.

Reagan uses the joking around behavior which prototypically co-occurs with back-stage: "relaxed, spontaneous, informal". One's guard is allowed to be down, because one is among friends who are going to make the most "generous" interpretation of one's remarks. They can be assumed to take a "favorable interpretation" of one's actions and utterances vis-a-vis one's own positive self image. Reagan's invoking of the play situation creates an interpretive frame in which his words and actions get interpreted as authentic, genuine, ingenuous, *sincere* because of the sociocultural interpretive contract of informality/intimacy/spontaneity--that the interpreters are ethically bound to see him as meaning well and being a good person.

Further laminations are that (2) the relative "backstage" behavior got redefined as "onstage" because it happened that the microphone was on, and because it was chosen to be picked up and publicized; (3) it became a "news item" which was commented on and also played back (on audio) which put the utterance in a completely new frame; (4) it was commented on and interpreted by official commentators of various political biases, as discussed above, as well as by the Russians; (5) it became part of an album in the popular music culture.

I hope to have demonstrated that the abstract pragmalinguistic analysis is valuable as a starting point for understanding situated communication, but that other layers of complexity are involved in understanding situated communication. The implications of the laminations and distortions of political discourse by the mass media remain to be investigated.

Chapter 4

4.0 Introduction

CHAPTER FOUR shifts the focus from joking activity in general at the pragmalinguistic level, to the interactional sociolinguistic analysis of situated joking activity which is oriented toward positive politeness. There is a discussion of methodology followed by further discussion of the framework proposed in Chapter 1 for conceptualizing joking activity. The perspective on joking is that of interactional resource for constructing complex coherence in discourse. Individual "senses of humor" are manifested and negotiated within broad "tones" and general "group styles" that represent sociocultural knowledge at the level of linguistic routine. The notion of "tone" from that framework is illustrated with a continuum having three general categories. The ideas set out in Chapter 3 concerning the foregrounding of different aspects of the joking communication are used to explain/predict systematic misunderstanding between habitual practitioners of two of the tones identified. Finally, a detailed discourse analysis is presented of an extended humorous episode which is an example of one of the tones identified.

4.1 Methodology

There are a number of ways in which spontaneous joking is elusive. One is that it is usually not "reportable," being so closely linked to the situation that many attempts to describe what was so amusing end in frustration with the familiar refrain, "you had to be there!" As one consultant explained the difficulty: "You have to describe the whole situation, even to how people were sitting, sometimes." Spontaneous joking is elusive not only because of its situated nature, but also because of the high level of sociocultural knowledge which may be required in

order to "get" it. Any outsider may be at a loss to understand why people are laughing. This situation has often been described to me by fairly fluent non-native speakers of English as a source of embarrassment for them: to be standing with a group of native American English speakers who suddenly start laughing at something which the non-native speaker does not understand. A related problem bearing on the elusiveness of the phenomenon is that people often have difficulty in explaining exactly what was funny about the joking, and in fact may take the position that (1) if you don't get it there's no use in trying to explain it to you; and (2) explaining humor just ruins it anyway.

From the point of view of the student of interaction, another reason why spontaneous joking has been elusive is that even though the development of audio and video recording capabilities has finally made it possible for us to capture aspects of the stream of interaction flowing through time, this capability puts the participants in such a captures moment in a new and strange relation to their own experience. This can involve an unfamiliar objectification of oneself, and a potentially distorted reinterpretation of the interaction because it may be more difficult to retain during analysis the balance of relative salience of factors which the participant used in the interpretation of the moment in real time.

On the other hand, the analyst can now contemplate tapes (ideally videotapes) and transcripts of spontaneous joking and see what people are actually doing, in minute detail. Interpretations of the interaction, subject to the problems and limitations mentioned above, can also be elicited from the participants and from others of the same speech background.

Because of the complexity and ambiguity of joking as a mode of communication, especially given the well-recognized use of joking to convey hostility, and because of differing interpretive conventions within the same society (Gumperz 1982a), I have chosen at the level of situated analysis to investigate joking behavior

which is associated with a particular rapport goal, that of "positive politeness" as discussed above. This rapport goal can include both solidarity and intimacy. The assumption is that people operate as social actors within social constraints which they are aware of to a greater or lesser degree, but that within these constraints people make choices¹ and use linguistic forms in the pursuit of goals, both short- and long-range. Thus "functions" at this level constitute interpersonal *uses* of linguistic behavior, in the pursuit of particular *purposes*. As cogently discussed above in the quotation from Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan, any one utterance may serve multiple functions.

My strategy in attempting to identify communicative intent has been to use a combination of subjective report, interpretation, and conventional expectation associated with context. Thus whenever possible I have asked the jokers (or others from a similar speech background) what they were intending to accomplish with their joking behavior. I have also chosen to observe relaxed, informal, casual conversations among friends, on the assumption that joking oriented to positive politeness is likely to occur there. Simmel's (1950:45-49) description of the encounters of "pure sociability" was an important guide to choice of settings for finding friendly joking:

1

On the other hand, it is also clear that people are not "choosing," i.e., consciously or deliberately or with full awareness of selecting from among alternative, particular linguistic forms in many cases. And further, especially in the case of "spontaneous" joking, it would be paradoxical to claim that it was planned.

I have documented, however, the "setting up" of apparently spontaneous humor in the moment to defuse a tense interpersonal situation (white, middle-class male, 30's) (Davies, 1980). I also have testimony from a consultant (white, middle-class male, 50's) who has had a lot of contact with people in the role of restaurant owner and host, that he intentionally uses joking to establish a friendly rapport and that he strives for *participation*, i.e., intentionally sets things up so that the addressee can respond if s/he has the inclination and/or ability. In effect, my consultant is doing all he can to initiate an extended humorous episode. Of course he does have a repertoire of opening gambits for different situations. This consultant agreed with my interpretation that participation is effective in developing the friendly rapport that the initiator wants because it gives the person who responds an opportunity to demonstrate that s/he can play the game too.

The fact is whatever the participants in the gathering may possess in terms of objective attributes--attributes that are centered outside the particular gathering in question--must not enter it. Wealth, social position, erudition, fame, exceptional capabilities and merits, may not play any part in sociability. At most they may perform the role of mere nuances of that immaterial character with which reality alone, in general, is allowed to enter the social work of art called sociability. Sociability is the game in which one "does as if" all were equal, and at the same time, as if one honored each of them in particular. to be in frame of mind or mood to engage in it and to interpret other's behavior accordingly.

Horton and Wohl's (1956:35-37) analysis of the characteristics of certain talk shows was also valuable. They identified the values stressed in what they called "personality shows" as sociability, easy affability, friendship and close contact--"briefly, all the values associated with free access to and easy participation in pleasant social interaction in primary groups." The "persona", i.e. the personality of the show such as Johnny Carson, tries to create an illusion of intimacy: "Most characteristic is the attempt of the persona to duplicate the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering".²

Thus I have tried to make use of the power of the context to constrain joking toward at least the conventional representation of positive politeness intent, assuming that it would occur in television discourse which represents a non-scripted attempt to simulate friendly informal private discourse (the talk show rather than the scripted soap opera or the situation comedy series).

Most generally characterized, my methodology is a participant-based, qualitative, close analysis which attempts to give a thick description of joking activity in interactional context, using a variety of analytic concepts. The techniques include many associated with ethnography (Saville-Troike 198): introspection, participant-observation, observation, interviewing. I attempt to achieve a "triangulation" of approaches to validate analyses. At the heart of my methodology is

² If we link this formulation with the taste culture, public analysis discussed earlier, we can see that personality shows, which are usually talk shows, can be an important source of information about (and influence on) the groups which constitute their audiences.

a close linguistic analysis which attempts to discover patterning within and coherence among as many levels of linguistic organization as possible. My assumption is that there will be a connection between the micro-patterning discoverable by the participant-observer analyst and the jokers' descriptions of their activity or general comments as to its feeling or effect.

The detailed linguistic analysis is also background to elicitation of interpretive judgments by jokers:

A speaker oriented approach to conversation . . . focuses directly on the strategies that govern the actor's use of lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic and other knowledge in the production and interpretation of messages in context. Linguistic rules and social norms, when seen from this perspective, can be regarded as constraints on message form and content which, when not observed or violated, may lead to interspeaker differences in interpretation or otherwise interfere with the quality of interaction. The analyst's task is to make an in-depth study of selected instances of verbal interaction, observe whether or not actors understand each other, elicit participants' interpretations of what goes on, and then (a) deduce the social assumptions that speakers must have made in order to act as they do, and (b) determine empirically how linguistic signs communicate in the interpretation process. (Gumperz 1982a: 35-6)

I have identified broad joking "tones" which I believe are characteristic of improvisational joking styles within mainstream American culture. I have identified the tones by abstracting from empirical data of jointly constructed joking episodes to prototypes which represent principles of coherence. These prototypes represent sociocultural schemas within which improvisation is done.

4.2 Terms

In Chapter 1, a set of terms was proposed as a framework for conceptualizing joking activity. "Mode" and "tone" were presented as further differentiations of Hymes' notion of "key", "mode" representing the joking/non-joking distinction, and "tone" the attitude of the speaker within the joking mode. The shift into joking mode is signalled by "contextualization cues", in Gumperz's terms. A further

basic notion is "group style", as for example in the brands of irony among gay men identified by Tannen (1984) and corroborated by Saccomano (1986). A more ritualized example is the mock insult style analyzed by Labov (1972a). These group styles become important skills and badges of group identity. The "individual expression of sense of humor", is thus characterizable in terms of

- (1) typical contextualization cues to show shift of MODE;
- (2) typical TONE;
- (3) elements of particular GROUP STYLES;
- (4) favorite techniques;
- (5) conventionalized routines (and also the relative proportion of stock conversational witticisms vs. improvisational material);
- (6) typical topics;
- (7) target of joking: self, other, impersonal;
- (8) typical interactional uses: what situations, discourse tasks, etc.

Related to (7) above is a framework for talking about the participants in a joking interaction, which I have modified from Lundberg's as discussed in Chapter 2. The basic elements are the "initiator" who can be identified as shifting into the joking mode, the "addressee" a potential responder or reciprocator who may or may not be the "target" of the joking. Finally, there is the "audience" who may also be potential responders or reciprocators.

Goffman's (1981) term "footing" is used to refer to the actual strip or episode of joking activity within the stream of interaction. This term is evocative because it is related to the "stance" that one is taking toward what is going on. And one can also say that another person can follow one into a particular footing, and take that same footing. The "extended humorous episode" described in Chapter 1 and referred to also as "joint joking" is a footing which is jointly elaborated.

Finally, we can refer to the "principles of the frame" within the footing, characterized in terms of humor techniques as well as in terms of the levels on which collaboration can occur:

Phonetic collaboration occurs in the form of repetition of particular sounds and sound configurations; rhyme and alliteration are examples of one type.

Prosodic collaboration can occur in the completion of a particular intonation contour, in the mirroring of intonation contours and intensity of stress, and in matching of paralinguistic features. A special case is joint joking in which each person has a different role which is signalled partly by different paralinguistic features.

Rhythmic or temporal collaboration is one of the things which has been explored by Erickson (1982) and others (von Raffler-Engel 1980) under the heading of "interactional synchrony." How precisely are participants able to "latch" their responses (including laughter) to each other's, with no gap and no overlap. Rhythm (including tempo) can be mirrored or extended by participants. Timing is one feature which is commonly considered essential for good joking.

Syntactic collaboration can occur in forms of parallelism, and in the building on previous contributions to create a syntactically coherent longer unit. This probably occurs more frequently in the form of loose compound structures as in typical monologue structure in English (Pawley & Syder 1978, Chafe 1980), but it can also be more complex and embedded syntactically. Additionally, ellipsis can occur across speakers.

Semantic (thematic) collaboration shows up prominently in various forms of lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan 1976), principally repetition. The lexical cohesion is embedded in thematic units in the form of sociocultural schemas, i.e., a set of expectations and associations drawn from common experience of the group.

Rommetveit's (1979) "basic premises for intersubjectivity": "complementarity of intentions," "capacities for decentered categorization and attribution" and "a capacity to adopt the perspective of different others," all of which are interrelated, can be seen to represent collaboration at the *pragmatic* level. Thus participants

may actually take each other's point of view linguistically. Another dimension of pragmatic collaboration is in the choice of schemas: how one chooses them to emphasize sociocultural knowledge at the level of stereotypes (for invoking a kind of impersonal solidarity) or to emphasize sensitivity to the particular psychological state of the other person at a particular moment (to invoke a closeness based on empathy). Handelman and Kapferer's (1972) notions of "open/closed" and "contained/uncontained" frames as discussed in Chapter 2 are further dimensions of pragmatic collaboration.

As Farrer (1981) has pointed out, we must also allow for metaplay: the shifting of the principles of the frame as the interaction proceeds. of types of joking frames are relevant to this notion.

Further important notions are laminations of context, as introduced in Chapter 3 with the Reagan joking example, and resource. "Laminations of context" is an extension of Goffman (1974) toward attempting to understand the effects of the mass media in re-presenting events and information. It represents an essential supplement to Silverstein's (1985) model of functional stratification. "Resource" refers to more than one level as well. First there is the idea of production resource (Erickson 1983:45) that jokers can draw on: (1) immediately local; (2) local resources once removed; and (3) nonlocal resources. The second category refers to previous conversations, and subsumes the creation by joking of a context over time, in a sense, in that every joking interaction becomes part of the history of the relationship, to be drawn on for meaningful allusions, and to be elaborated playfully. Secondly, there is the idea that joking itself constitutes a resource for the construction of coherence in conversation.

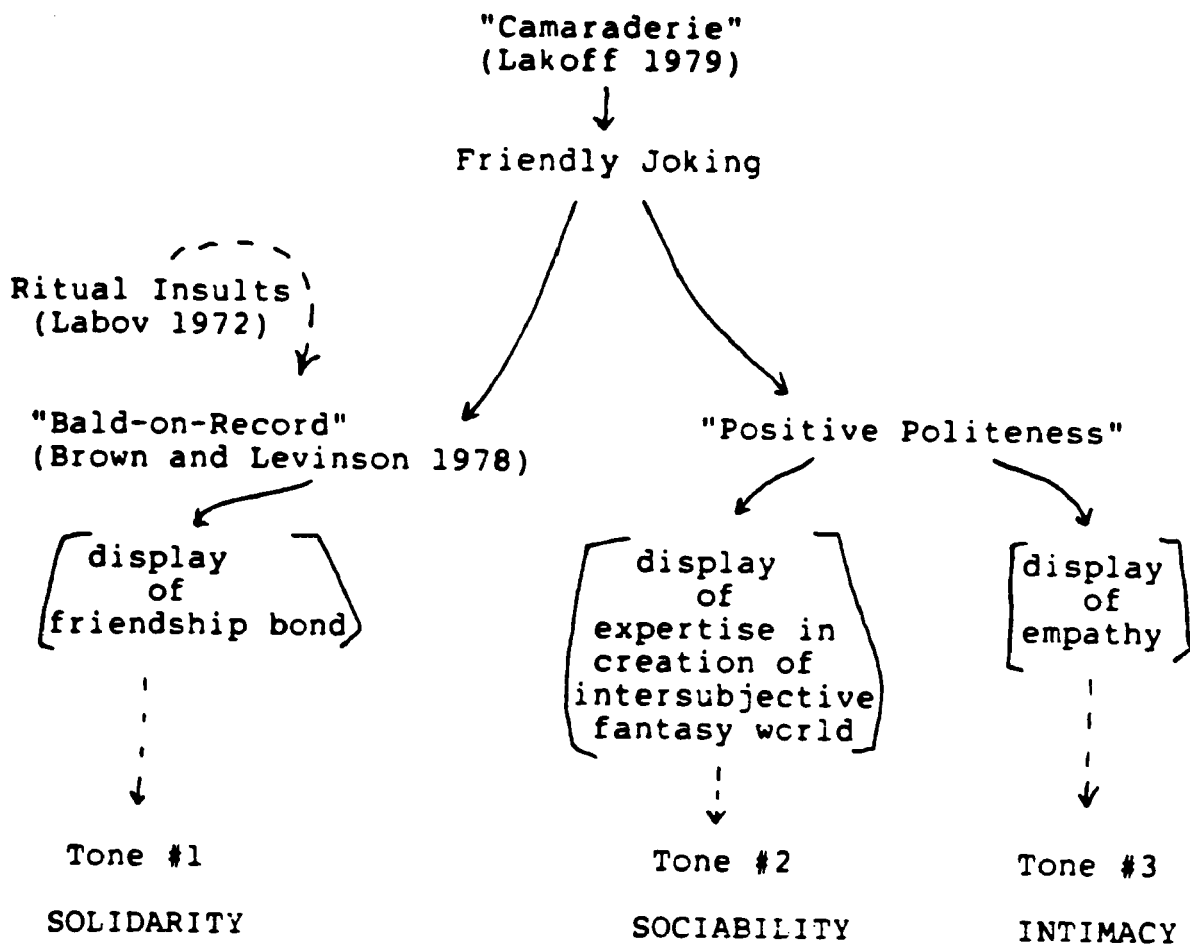
4.3 Prototypes of joking tones

In this section, I will illustrate three joking tones by presenting in-depth analyses of particular joking footings which represent prototypical examples. These tones constitute orientations to (1) displaying the strength of the friendship bond [= solidarity]; (2) building sociability; and (3) displaying empathy [= intimacy]. The analysis considers multiple levels of linguistic organization and the interplay of different aspects of context in order to demonstrate coherence and to reveal basic principles and improvisational dimensions. The tones will then be related back to the theoretical work on rapport, differentiating them in terms of conveyed meaning in order to discuss how misinterpretation is predictable between two of the tones; and considering the analyses in relation to current theories of humor.

The tones were identified from a corpus of several hundred examples of joking footings gathered according to the techniques discussed under methodology. The claim is made here that any friendly joking can be classified under one of these three tones, and that tone #2 will subsume proportionally more instances of joking, since it is the least "personal" of the three.

Referring now to the chart

Joking "Tones"



I would like to suggest that the different friendly joking tones that I have identified can be organized theoretically along a continuum in terms of conveyed meaning. Tone #1, oriented toward solidarity, is a reflection in everyday conversation of the well-studied phenomenon of ritual insults (see, for example, Labov 1972a). Within Brown and Levinson's framework this tone represents an exploitation of the relation between on-record strategies and intimacy. In other words, I can say things to you that I wouldn't dare to say if we weren't close; an exchange of insults becomes a display of the strength of our friendship bond (often in front of an audience). In addition, we display a common expertise at this particular linguistic game. But whereas with, for example, "the dozens," the insults about certain approved topics must be obviously untrue and preferably as fantastic as possible, in tone #1 one should attack only at strengths. Thus the basic principles involve a ritual inversion, and a ritualized violation of politeness rules.

Tone #2, which I have considered calling "cognitive frame" but now have decided to call "sociability joking", is less personal than either of the other types. Joking in this tone emphasizes group identification and displays sociocultural knowledge along with expertise in the creation of an intersubjective fantasy world. This tone evokes for me the image of a Steinberg cartoon in which the speech of a group of people would be intertwining in the air to create a fantastic edifice in the middle of the group.

Tone #3 is the most intimate version of positive politeness, one which to my knowledge has not been studied. Oriented to intimacy, it is used to display understanding of another person's internal state, i.e., empathy, so that the person knows that she is not alone in what she is experiencing. It can also serve to shift perspective for the other person so that distress may be rendered manageable.³ As might be predicted, this joking tone is often initiated, as in the example, as a response to

³ An interpersonal version of Freud's intrapsychic analysis of humor.

a personal statement which constitutes a request for support.

Example #1

- 1 Ed: I'll pay for it.
 2 Joyce: No, I already got it.
 3 Ed: You shouldn't pay for my coffee.
 4 Joyce: Oh, that's OK . . . you're worth every penny.
 5 Ed: (laughs) I see your opinion of me has gone up.
 6 Joyce: Not really. I'm coming back later to take fifteen cents out again.
 7 Both: (laugh)

This joking incident involves two faculty members who are meeting in the department lounge. Ed had previously paid for a couple of cups of coffee. They disagree about who should pay for the coffee, and then the shift into the joking footing is initiated by Joyce in line 4, where after a pause she says, "you're worth every penny." Ed laughs and responds. Joyce responds to Ed, and both laugh, ending the joking footing as they get back to their discussion.⁴

With this joking tone the pragmatic guidelines dictate that one may attack only at mutually recognized strengths, thereby conveying that whatever constitutes the insult is believed by the speaker *not* to be the case. Thus in the example Joyce has a good opinion of Ed, and she believes that Ed knows that she has a good opinion of him.

In this joking tone a smile is possible, but so is a straight face. The deadpan is the extreme form of removal of facial cues, and it may be used as well. However, this joking tone requires careful monitoring of reactions and if the joker is in doubt, non-verbal channels are intensified for a very clear signal of intention to

⁴ This piece of data was reconstructed afterward by one of the participants and then checked with the other for general accuracy.

joke. Typical paralinguistic and prosodic characteristics are: a nasal tone, exaggerated stress, and a slower tempo relative to previous utterances outside of the joking footing. Laugh particles, as explored by Jefferson (1979), may or may not be used.

Frequently in this tone a basic thematic principle is contradiction. At the most obvious level it occurs in overtly marked form between utterances, as from 5 to 6. There is also contradiction within utterances, arising in 4 out of the use of the conventionally complimentary set phrase, "you're worth every penny," in an inappropriate context. In line 5, "I see your opinion of me has gone up," Ed matches Joyce's utterance: his utterance is also overtly positive in terms of evaluation, but given the established situation, that what is at stake is twenty cents together with the presupposition that Joyce's opinion was previously even lower, the covert meaning is negative. The principle of contradiction is displayed in the contrast between overt and conveyed meaning. Contradiction as a thematic principle is consistent with the competitive feeling of this joking tone, and is reflected in the interactional moves (which actually begin at 2). Thus Joyce insults Ed at 4; Ed simultaneously acknowledges the insult and rejects it by redefining Joyce's move at 4 as complimentary; to continue the game Joyce has to reject the redefinition at 6 and escalate (in a downward direction, so to speak). Further, the situation itself represents a contradiction of traditional gender role expectations concerning who buys the coffee and who initiates joking. Finally, an ideological contradiction is expressed in the theme of materialistic evaluation of persons.

Turning to a consideration of syntax, what is typical in this tone is a series of relatively short statements. These utterances tend to be self-contained, in that the syntactic units are not developed across turn boundaries. The only instance of ellipsis in this example is at the beginning of line 6. Although it is not exemplified here, questions are a common form for insults, used to exploit presuppositional

possibilities. Overt negation is frequent, as is parallelism across turns.

The participants in this example were able to create a joint improvisation within the joking footing, grasping and following the principles of the frame: the pragmatic principle that one should attack only at mutually recognized strengths; the kinesic, paralinguistic and prosodic principles concerning clear signalling of the intention to joke; the thematic principle that one should express contradiction in any and all possible ways; and the syntactic principle that one should maintain syntactic closure within turns. These principles seem to constitute the basic pattern of the joking tone, against which the jokers improvise such things as the nature of the insult and the devices for expressing contradiction. guided by situational resources, cultural schemas, and knowledge of each other.

Example #2

- 1 Randy: What's the E.T.E. on your cake, Mary?
 (laughter)
- 2 Mary: Estimated Time . . . ?
- 3 Randy &
 Others: of Eating. (laughter)
- 4 Mary: 35 minutes in the oven, 20 minutes to cool
- 5 Frank: and 10 minutes to get eaten. (laughter)
- 6 Sid: Is that one minute per person? (laughter)
- 7 Alice: So all return in . . . an hour and a half.
- 8 Sid: Or you can return in 35 minutes and steal it out of the
 oven an ice it yourself.
- 9 Bruce: Quickly . . . quietly . . .
- 10 Donna: (laughter) uhuh . . .
- 11 Earl: Probably reduce the cooling time by throwing ice cubes in it.
- 12 Sid: What, in the batter? (laughter)
- 13 Frank: Yes, start out with ice cubes in the batter.
- 14 Bruce: But put asbestos around them so that they don't get melted
 in the oven

 (laughter; Alice speaks inaudibly)
- 15 Earl: Just pick out the asbestos . . . (laughter)

This example is from Hall (1974) and was transcribed from audiotape. The participants are student housemates who have just walked into the kitchen where one of their number is baking a cake. The joking footing begins probably at "E.T.E." in the first question, and continues through to the end of the transcription here, shifting frame halfway through, at 11. Randy initiates the joking, but then others take over. There are a few apparently "non-joking" utterances within the footing (at 4 and 7) but they are added on to in a joking way in each case,

incorporating them into the joking footing. The joking turns are taken collaboratively by six different people. Laughter occurs frequently.

For this joking tone the pragmatic principles seem to be: build on what others have done; demonstrate ability and willingness to participate in the joint effort; keep it impersonal.

The danger potentially involved in misinterpretation is not as great as with tone #1, so the distinctive paralinguistic, prosodic and kinesic cues are not as evident. In this tone there is typically more use of laugh particles than in tone #1. There may be more latching between utterances as participants build on each other's contributions.

A basic thematic principle is elaboration. Lines 2 through 9 are an elaboration of the basic question in 1: first, just in the full forms of the words "Estimated, Time, Eating;" then, in that 4 through 15 can be seen as an elaboration of the answer to the initial question, which is apparently given in 7. At the level of cultural schema what is elaborated is the introduction of a mock technological efficiency into the domestic world of cake-baking at home: E.T.E. evoking E.T.A. (Estimated Time of Arrival) of the world of air travel; the jargon of the efficiency expert; the absurd calculation of eating time of the cake by the number of eaters; the ridiculous suggestion of cooling the cake faster by starting before it has been baked, thereby creating much more trouble than it would be worth given that cakes cool quickly. There is the further dimension that a substance known to be hazardous to human health is being proposed for use in the interest of efficiency. The mock efficiency is elaborated and escalated in its self-defeating absurdity. A further schematic overlay is that 13 through 15 is presented in the format of a recipe, again referring to the domestic context. A reflection in the situation is that a woman is baking the cake, and the joking is all constructed by the men: the participants enact gender stereotypes as they play on them.

In this tone, in contrast to tone #1, there is a great deal of lexical repetition and other forms of semantic linking between utterances: from 4 to 5: "minutes," to 6: "minute," to 7: "an hour and a half," to 8: "minutes"; from 7 to 8: "return"; from 8 to 11: "ice" to "ice cubes," to 13: "ice cubes," to 14: "they," and "them"; from 12 to 13: "batter" (with retroactive definition of "it" in 11 as "batter"); from 14 to 15: "asbestos".

This tone is characterized by phonetic play: alliteration, rhyme, puns. In this example there is an instance of a play on two meanings of a word which serves as the pivot on which the frame shifts within the joking footing. In 8 the word "ice" is a verb meaning "to coat with frosting" within a cake-baking schema. Sid shifts the meaning to the less specialized "frozen water," which interestingly enough does have relevance here within a cake-baking schema in that cakes do need to cool. But Earl initiates an absurd application of the alternate meaning which is picked up on by Sid, who redefines "it" which up to line 8 had stood for "cake."

Syntactically, elaboration and collaboration occur in: the completion of a phrase at lines 2 and 3; the addition of a third parallel clause to a previous utterance at lines 4 and 5; the use of conjunctions to begin utterances at lines 5 (and), 7 (so), 8 (or), and 14 (but). The adverbs in line 9 are added presumably to the end of utterance 8. There is an interesting use of questions in this joking tone which is exemplified at lines 1, 6 and 12: the exploitation of adjacency pair force toward a response, so to speak, to keep the elaboration going.

My impression is that this tone is less constrained in terms of basic principles than is tone #1. Because it is more likely to be a group activity, drawing on the resources of more than two people, it is also probably better able to tolerate shifts in the frame within the joking footing. In fact, one of the basic principles of this joking tone may be that jokers must continue to shift the frame within the joking footing (Farrer 1981).

Example #3

- 1 Ann: I've been busy doing twenty-five other things but now, finally, I'll turn my attention to these courses.
- 2 Kay: Do you ever feel fragmented.
- 3 Ann: Who me? Fragmented? (with simultaneous contortion of arms, face)
(laughter: Kay and Sue, joined by Ann)
- 4 Kay: What do I do next.
- 5 All: (laughter)

This joking footing was written down shortly after the interaction by the participant who laughed but did not joke. The jokers here are fellow teachers who have just gotten together to work on a common project. The shift into the joking footing is initiated by Kay at 2. The intonation here is falling rather than rising. Ann responds, both verbally and non-verbally. Everyone laughs. Kay makes another contribution, there is more laughter, and the shift occurs out of the joking footing.

The pragmatic principles for this tone seem to be: display understanding of what the other person is feeling or thinking, using allusions to shared symbols; give the other person a chance to express further; use incongruity; if possible, shift perspectives in such a way that the other person will be released from a rigid psychological position.

A small smile (as opposed to a broad smile) is used more frequently in this joking tone. Laugh particles are used frequently.

The thematic principle is paraphrase. In line 2 "Do you ever feel fragmented?" paraphrases what was expressed in the first part of utterance 1 and offers a supportive response to the semi-apology that that utterance represents, in effect conveying that Kay understands what Ann has been feeling and going through. A

direct lexical repetition in 3 might seem to be inconsistent with my claim that the thematic principle is paraphrase, but only superficially, because in 3 Ann is literally embodying an additional paraphrase. Her questioning of the label as she contorts her body represents the idea of fragmentation: if one were fragmented one would display it while remaining unaware of it. In 4, Kay offers a paraphrase of a different sort: the internalized speech of a fragmented person.

An interesting feature of this particular joking footing is the use of the word "fragmented." It has been pointed out to me that this is a fashionable word right now; such a paraphrase has favorable connotations, suggesting that one is in tune with Twentieth Century Intellectual Developments. Consider the contrast with a choice of word like "scatterbrained," or an expression like "going to pieces." But the word "fragmented" also has a mechanical connotation to it which creates an incongruous juxtaposition of the mechanical and the human--which Ann then acts out through the distortion of her body.

The theme of fragmentation is also reflected in the use of rhetorical questions in 2, 3 and 4, all of which have, in effect, the function (that of statement) split off from the form (that of question). In another sense the rhetorical question is appropriate to this tone in that it is tentative: suggesting a definition without imposing it (as a statement might) or questioning directly.

One of the most striking characteristics of this joking tone is that the joking initiator may actually assume, linguistically, the point of view of the person empathized with. In this case, I am referring to Kay's use of the pronoun "I" in utterance 4: that "I" represents Ann.

In terms of the situation, each of the teachers is very busy and they have a difficult time getting together to work. Each feels to some degree that she treats herself like a machine, expecting superhuman accomplishments. In the last analysis, existentially speaking, we are all "fragmented," in the sense that we are

not aware of everything about ourselves, and in that what we do know consciously we cannot hold in awareness simultaneously.

Summarizing thus far: detailed analyses have been presented of three joking footings which represent prototypical examples of three joking tones. In each case, improvisational dimensions have been discussed and basic principles of the tone have been identified. The manifestations of these basic principles serve as contextualization cues (Gumperz 1983) which shift in their constellation according to such things as the setting, the mood or degree of intoxication of the participants, and the topic.

The three tones represent sociolinguistic skills, and my impression is that competence is differentially distributed in a complex interrelationship of regional, gender, social class, and ethnic differences. It seems to be the case, for example, that men are more likely to have expertise in solidarity joking, and women are more likely to practice intimacy joking. Status differences in a particular situation may also be related to the choice of tone. An individual's repertoire may or may not include from the full range of these tones, and an individual will have different degrees of proficiency. The tones may be learned and displayed at different stages in a person's life cycle. The tones may also be used at different stages in a relationship.

To understand how misinterpretation of communicative intent is predictable between people who are primarily or habitually tone 1 or tone 3 jokers, we need to think in terms of levels of interpretation, bringing forward the pragmalinguistic analysis from Chapter 3. Usually the shift into the joking footing is interpreted as part of a coherent style at various levels of linguistic organization. For a habitual tone 3 joker, non-verbal cues signalling a shift into a joking footing together with manifestations of the other principles of tone 1 joking are not interpretable as a display of a friendship bond. The tone 1 joker intends the joking frame to mean:

"Let's play!": the tone 3 joker interprets it as: "I hereby deny responsibility for what I'm saying." The tone 1 joker intends the insult to mean: "Here's something we both know is a strength of yours:" the tone 3 joker interprets it as : "Here's some criticism I can tease you with and deny responsibility for at the same time." On the other hand, the habitual tone 1 joker may experience tone 3 friendly joking as getting too close, as a communication that feels like exposure in the guise of friendliness.

The strong affective dimension involved in joking can make it difficult to accept cross-stylistic joking as it is intended; even when we have an intellectual understanding of what is happening the gut level emotional experience related to the habitual perception of criticism or exposure may get in the way. There is also the reality to consider that in practice people often do exploit the potential ambiguity between tone 1 joking and veiled criticism.

The notion of "tone" here is similar to "intentional focus" as described by Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977:207):

From the perspective of the addressee, there are interpretive problems involved in the use of the imperative by a peer. These problems arise from the status meaning which adheres to the imperative, and are accentuated by the importance of imperatives in status manipulation ploys. Unlike the ambiguity which may result from the use of a sentence modality type that permits a directive to be interpreted as in information question or a statement, the ambiguity inherent in the use of an imperative to an equal does not lie at the level of speech act functions. Rather, the interpretive problem becomes one of the intentional focus of the speaker. The question becomes, is the speaker's focus upon the action message of the directive, or is his focus upon himself as the cause of the addressee's action? To put it another way, ambiguity arises because there is a suspicion that the intentional focus of the speaker is to draw attention to himself as the cause or agent of the addressee's action, thereby conveying that he is a powerful person. Since this interpersonal goal is accomplished at the expense of the addressee, the latter has considerable interest in avoiding being used in this way. He does so by either refusing to comply or by forcing the speaker to amend his directive with a form that properly encodes the fact that he does, indeed, have a choice in the matter.

Finally, looking at the joking discussed above in terms of some current

theoretical work on humor (Johnson 1976) which asserts that the dominant theories of humor have in common the recognition that the joke form is the product of some kind of bisociation between two frames of reference or realms of meaning, it is clear that in each of the examples bisociation occurs: in example #1 it is set off by the use of a set phrase, "you're worth every penny," in an anomalous context; in example #2 the basic bisociation is of two cultural schemas, the domestic and the high tech; in example #3 it is set off by the introduction of the term "fragmented," which introduces several other realms of meaning. Johnson suggests that a joke may involve not one but many layers of bisociation; I have demonstrated how the bisociation reverberates within the complex interplay of levels of linguistic organization and other aspects of context.

4.4 Discourse Analysis

This section will present a discourse analysis of another example of tone #1. My purposes are (1) to illustrate the subtle transitions into and out of joking within discourse; (2) to show the situated complexity of the use of joking in relation to the participants' purposes; (3) to demonstrate how joking draws on shared unstated background knowledge, which the participants use to orchestrate definitions of the situation.

Phil: ah..three daughters/.....ah..you were/..he spotted
you in the orchestra//...that's the most romantic
story I've ever heard in my life//

Arlene:

mmmm

Alan:

well I didn't

Phil:

Arlene:

Alan: have that/.my eyesight wasn't that good/ it was

Phil:

oh I'm sorry//that's right//hahaha a-h

Arlene:

ha ha ha ha ha hahahaha ha

Alan:

a quartet//

hahahaha

Phil:

it is fair--/yes//

Arlene:

Alan: I mean that's fairly romantic//

haha

Phil:

ah-m

Arlene:

Actually it was a quintet//

Alan:

hahahaha

oh was it a

Phil:

yes//

Arlene:

yes a quintet//ha hahahaha his memory isn't

Alan:

quintet//

Phil:

we also know that he

Arlene:

good either//hahahaha HAHAHAHAAAA HA HA HA

Alan:

Phil:

didn't only have eyes for you/ at that time//

Arlene:

HAHA HA HA HA HA

hahahaha

Alan:

hahahaha

Phil:

ah you were..a professional clarinetist.....

Arlene:

Alan:

The data are taken from the opening few minutes of a popular television interview/talk show, "The Phil Donahue Show." This hour-long show originated at the time this data was collected in the Midwest and was broadcast nationwide during the morning hours, at 9:00, 10:00, or 11:00, depending on one's location. The format consists of an initial interview with a guest who is either well-known or involved in a currently controversial issue, followed by discussion facilitated by Phil Donahue involving the largely female studio audience.

The guests for the show from which the data are taken are Alan and Arlene Alda. Alan Alda is an actor who is probably best-known for his ten-year participation in the television series "M*A*S*H", in which he played a character who is an inveterate joker. Alan Alda is also portrayed in women's magazines from *Ms.* to *McCalls* as generally a good guy and a "feminist." Arlene Alda, his wife, is unknown to the public. Both members of the couple are about 45 years old, Alan (and perhaps also Arlene) is of Italian-American background, and both are apparently originally from the New York City area.

The speech activity "television interview on a talk show" sets up certain expectations which channel our interpretations in certain ways. We assume that the interviewer has talked with the guest beforehand, and has done some homework in order to know what to ask, what interesting stories he can draw on, and also, presumably, what topics are sensitive for the interviewee. We expect that the interviewer will ask questions and the interviewee will answer, that the interviewee will do the bulk of the talking, and that the interviewer will orient himself to the interviewee, i.e., not tell matching stories from his own experience.

The task of the interviewer is to get the interviewee to display verbally in a way which the audience will find interesting, and in the case of a celebrity to show what the person is "really" like. In the latter case the appearance of spontaneity is particularly important. On the assumption that an interesting and spontaneous

display is more likely to occur if the guest feels comfortable, most interviewers work toward at least the illusion of a friendly, informal conversation. The basic mode is "serious," but joking is appropriate as part of a camaraderie or positive politeness strategy. Of course different interviewers have different personas: Dick Cavett, for example, can be expected to try to be witty. Phil Donahue, on the other hand, does joke, but joking is not a particularly salient part of his self-presentation. There is more generally a seriousness of concern about people and issues.

The task of the interviewee is to talk cooperatively, interestingly, and at length.

The television audience for "The Phil Donahue Show" is people who are in a situation where they can watch television during normal morning working hours: presumably principally women who are housewives and perhaps also retired people. We can probably assume that such women would have an emotional investment in long-term successful marriages, and also probably in the romantic mystique which is a part of traditional patterns.

In his introduction, Donahue stresses two things about Alan Alda: his achievements in his field, and his unusually long marriage. Then, after the applause dies down, he shifts his attention to Arlene Alda with a question about the exact length of the marriage, which she responds to minimally. Donahue's next abbreviated statement, "three daughters," seems to be aimed at the audience, as an informational communication, rather than at Arlene, and in fact she does not respond verbally. He then continues to address Arlene, saying "you were...he spotted you in the orchestra".

This contribution is quite complex and requires a lot of interpretation. It begins with a false start: "you were.." If we look only at the segment "you were..he spotted you in the orchestra", we are led to assume that Donahue had started out

with a passive form in mind (something like "you were spotted by Alan in the orchestra"), and had then changed his mind and made it active. And in fact, in the moment of processing, that is all that the participants and the audience have to go on. From our analyst's perspective after the fact, however, if we look at the end of the joking interlude when Donahue takes up his interviewer mode once more, we find that he says "you were..a professional clarinettist". If we assume that what Donahue had started to say was "you were a professional clarinettist and Alan spotted you in the orchestra." then we find that for the audience the phrase "in the orchestra" is disambiguated, as I discuss below. What we seem to have here is an interview technique which provides rather cryptic abstracts (in the sense of Labov 1972) and attempts to get the interviewees to flesh out the stories. Perhaps we can assume that Donahue continues with "you were..a professional clarinettist" because the interviewees did not cooperate in providing the information themselves.

But in any case, no matter which interpretation we choose, it seems that Donahue intentionally violates the surface structure empathy hierarchy and the speech act participant empathy hierarchy as set out by Kuno (1976). He does this by switching the second person pronoun from grammatical subject position, referring to the person he is addressing, to grammatical object position; and elevating a third person singular masculine pronoun to grammatical subject position. We know, of course, that the pronoun refers to Alan; I will discuss below how we know that fact. I suggest that these violations can be understood in terms of a creative adaptation to the demands of the interviewer role.

One contributory factor might be that Donahue needs to maintain some continuity of subject and discourse topic. Up to this point Alan has held these statuses. Donahue wants to bring Arlene into the spotlight, so to speak, and a smooth way of doing it is to put her in object position to Alan's subject.

Another possibility is that in his role as interviewer Donahue wants to maintain as much involvement with the interviewees as he can. One way of doing that, in this case, is to put Alan, who is not being addressed directly, in subject position, also maintaining him as topic. This draws Alan in grammatically, so to speak, while Arlene is drawn in with direct address to supplement her lower position grammatically on the empathy hierarchy. I suggest as evidence to support this hypothesis the fact that Alan actually responds (with "well I didn't have that/..my eyesight wsn't that good/ it was a quartet//") even though he is not being addressed directly.

Presumably the utterance "he spotted you in the orchestra" is not ambiguous for Alan and Arlene [except in that, as we see shortly, it is inaccurate]. It is, however, ambiguous for us, the audience, concerning what "in the orchestra" means, in that at this point we do not know that Arlene was a musician, whereas we do know that Alan is an actor. So a logical interpretation for us is that Alan was on the stage as an actor and spotted Arlene in the orchestra during a curtain call. Perhaps we could say that within an "actor schema", "the orchestra" means the seating on the ground floor. Use of the indefinite article would have directed interpretation toward "group of musicians" with the strong implication that Arlene was a musician.

We could say that this utterance violates all of the Gricean maxims: quality, in that it is untrue; quantity, in that not enough information is given; relation, in that one could argue that it is not immediately obvious what relevance it has to the directly preceding discourse; and manner, in that it violates the empathy hierarchies and it is obscure in the ways mentioned above.

What is implicated as a result? By the quality violation, nothing, because at this point in the interaction we do not know that what he has said is untrue, speaking from the point of view of the audience. For the Aldas, for whom it is a

quality violation, the utterance becomes the basis for the humor which they generate. By the quantity violation, what is implicated for the audience is that Donahue has talked with the Aldas and shares some knowledge concerning their lives from which we are excluded, for the moment. For the Aldas, there may not be a quantity violation, since they are able to fill in what is being referred to. By the relevance violation, what is implicated probably for both the audience and the Aldas is that Donahue as interviewer is skipping around among the facts he knows about the Aldas, trying to find a starting point to engage them to start the interview. All of the implicatures are channelled by the expectations of roles and goals inherent in our conception of the speech activity, television interview.

How else do cultural schemas channel our interpretations in appropriate ways concerning this utterance? First of all we use the "interviewing a married couple" schema which has as its first question, "How did you two meet?", and which calls for a "romantic" answer. This allows us to understand who "he" is: "he" and "she" can be pronominalized in reference to the spouses within the schema. The schema also allows us to locate the past tense appropriately in time. We know that it must refer to some time slightly over twenty-five years ago, since they've been married for almost twenty-five years. Use of the verb "spotted" is related to the courting part of the marriage schema in an interesting way: if "to spot" means "to pick out", "to recognize", then the use here suggests that Arlene was an instance of a recognizable category, as in "girl of my dreams" or some such. It seems to me that this usage is different from "he first saw you" or "he noticed you", neither of which suggests that Arlene was somehow recognizable. Also the idea that Alan spotted Arlene and picked her out conforms to the version of the marriage schema in which the man is the active one, and the woman the passive one, which, one could argue, may have been appropriate for these people in the 1950's in the United States. The ambiguity of "in the orchestra" I have discussed above; if

Donahue had begun with "you were...a professional clarinettist" then the definite article would have referred anaphorically to the orchestra which a professional clarinettist would necessarily have to play in. The meaning of "in the orchestra" isn't disambiguated for the audience until Alan indicates a contrastive "quartet".

Since the expectation within the interview activity frame is that the interviewer asks questions and the interviewees answer, why doesn't Donahue simply say: "How did you two meet?" I suggest that one reason is that it would lead to a less "natural" interview, in a case such as this where the interviewees know that the interviewer knows the answer. What Donahue does in effect is answer his own question, and we understand his utterance as a response to the unarticulated question. The response constitutes a kind of abstract of a story. In this case it can count as starting them off on the story.

But the Aldas do not respond as if it were a request for elaboration; they respond, it seems to me, as if it were a request for confirmation. They both qualify the statement, in a joking manner, but without elaboration. An explanation for this might be that they are still operating according to usual interpretive rules, since they are probably not used to the special requirements of television interviews. If we look at the discourse sequencing rules set out in Labov and Fanshel (1977), we see that Donahue has invoked the "rule of confirmation" by making a statement about a B-event (an event from the Aldas' biography). And they respond with what seems to me to be a qualified confirmation. Within a television interview format, however, for the interviewer A to make a statement about a B-event is to request elaboration. It seems to me that part of what's going on here is that the Aldas are making the transition from interpretive rules of normal conversation to those of interview (and in fact very shortly into the interview they begin to respond with elaborations to the same sorts of abstracts).

Donahue's next utterance, "that's the most romantic story I've ever heard in

my life", accomplishes a number of things. It identifies the immediately preceding utterance part as a "story": it establishes definitely that Donahue has heard the complete version; it defines the story as "romantic", confirming the schema-based expectation that how couples meet is romantic and simultaneously confirming that the story he's referring to is how they met. Why does he use hyperbole? The story is probably not the most romantic story he has ever heard in his life. I suppose this would constitute a violation of the maxim of quality, and the implicature is that he wants to be friendly toward the Aldas. He is adopting a camaraderie style, practicing positive politeness:

Perhaps the only feature that distinguishes positive-politeness redress from normal everyday intimate language behavior is an element of exaggeration: this serves as a marker of the face-redress aspect of positive-politeness expression by indicating that even if S can't with total sincerity say 'I want your wants', he can at least sincerely indicate *want* your. Thus the element of insincerity in exaggerated expressions of approval or interest ('How absolutely marvellous! I simply can't imagine how you manage to keep your roses so exquisite. Mrs. B!') is compensated for by the implication that the speaker really sincerely wants Mrs B's positive face to be enhanced. (Brown and Levinson 1978, p. 107)

At this point in the interaction we have the Aldas built up into a kind of paragon: Alan's achievements, the length of their marriage in the context of Hollywood expectations-- in fact in the context of any expectations about marriage, their tremendously romantic meeting.

Donahue's utterance is addressed to Arlene, and she responds with a closed-mouth laugh. It is not clear she might have said in response, if anything, without further prompting from Donahue. At this point Alan responds with "well I didn't have that...my eyesight wasn't that good. It was a quartet," and everybody laughs. Donahue may have been setting Alan up with his hyperbole. Evidence of spontaneity, at least on Alan's part, is the false start, "well I didn't have that/..". As a professional humorist he could be expected to have any prearranged lines down cold.

Alan's "well" signals disagreement or qualification of some sort to follow. The false start sounds as if he were going to say something like "I didn't have that good eyesight" which he changes to "my eyesight wasn't that good" which seems to me to be much more effective in terms of information processing and therefore humorous impact. "My eyesight" in first position is maximally distanced from "good" in last position (whereas in the other option the attributive modification would have brought them maximally together) so the hearer has more time to link up "eyesight" with "spotted" before the comparative judgment is made.

The shift in footing to the humor frame is accomplished as Donahue and Arlene and the audience respond, mostly with laughter, to Alan's utterance. It is not clear to me whether he used any paralinguistic or prosodic cues to signal that he was initiating a humorous remark.

What does the humor consist of? First of all he is playing with the subschema "romantic stories about how couples meet". We have been all set up for a romantic story. One characteristic of romantic stories is that they specifically do not include all the annoying realities of life. In fact to be within a "romantic" schema means to filter out all mundane realities. The romantic hero is clear and keen of eye, pursuing his lady love in the face of enormous obstacles. And in fact Donahue has cooperated in this fantasy by increasing the quintet to an orchestra.

Alan picks up on the word which carries connotations of romantically keen eyesight ("spotted") and deflates the image by mentioning his visual limitations and also by demoting the orchestra to the size of a quartet. Alan is refusing to accept the persona of romantic hero that Donahue is offering him. The humor is based partly in the abrupt violation of expectations.

A cooperative response to Donahue's utterance would have confirmed the general idea (that he saw her for the first time when she was performing music on a stage) and that it was romantic. He could have said: "Yes, you know, I almost

stayed home that night but a friend talked me into going out to hear some Mozart. And there she was. Actually it was a quartet...but I took one look at her up there on the stage and I knew that I had to meet her. So after the performance...." And he could have made his correction of Donahue's facts tactfully as I just indicated.

Alan is violating the cooperative principle here in that he is not responding to the general thrust of the conversation. He is violating the maxim of quantity by responding to only *part of the previous contribution*. In fact he is responding literally to what Donahue said. In a sense he is violating both submaxims under quantity: the first in that he is not responding to the general intent of the previous utterance; and the second in that he gives detail that is too specific--and thus in a sense more informative than is required.

We could argue that Alan adheres too closely to the quality maxim, "Try to make your contribution one that is true." He is being too truthful in a context in which romantic poetic license is really called for. He may also be violating the maxim of relation in that the acuity of his eyesight and the size of the musical group are not relevant to the general purpose of the interview, which is to represent how they met in a relatively romantic way to satisfy the expectations of the female audience.

What is he implicating? One interpretation is that the story is *not* terribly romantic, or at least not as romantic as Donahue is making it out to be by inflating the quartet to an orchestra. He catches us by surprise in suddenly introducing an element from the underside of the romantic schema, so to speak, when we have been set up to follow along with the official version. Another important ingredient in the humor is the emotional investment that we tend to have in the schemas involved, and the potential conflict in attitudes.

In order to understand the humor we have to be able to connect "eyesight" back to "spotted", then know that "not that good" represented a comparative with

"spotted", then recognize that the comparative was related proportionally to "quartet":

"SPOTTED": "EYESIGHT WASN'T THAT GOOD" =
 "ORCHESTRA": "QUARTET"

There is also a nice parallelism between the two statements.

Something is being communicated here about Alan and Arlene Alda as a couple in relation to other couples. They have been presented as a paragon, so the deflating humor makes them not so special, and more like regular people in the audience whose real lives are not as romantic as they might like them to be.

I believe it is significant that Arlene laughs at Alan's comment. She seems to be in tune with Alan in deflating the image which Donahue has set up.

Interactionally, Alan's statement can be interpreted as a challenge, defined by Labov and Fanshel (1977) as "a speech act that asserts or implies a state of affairs that, if true, would weaken a person's claim to be competent in filling the role associated with a valued status." More specifically, Alan's statement can be interpreted under the rule for challenging propositions: "If I asserts a proposition that is supported by A's status, and B questions the proposition, then B is heard as challenging the competence of A in that status." What is being challenged is Donahue's (A's) competence as an interviewer, who hasn't gotten the circumstances right of the Alda's first meeting.

Evidence that Donahue interprets Alan's utterance as a challenge (a mock one) is found in his mock apology for not getting the facts straight. His apology acknowledges that he should have known; and his utterance of "that's right" indicates that he even remembers now that he had heard the facts and had forgotten them.

Alan's comment is a challenge not only to Donahue's competence as an interviewer, but also to the frame that Donahue is building up (the romantic image).

The comment is also self-directed, in that he is using reference to his own limitations to deflate the romantic image. The direction toward Alan and his limitations is taken up again by Arlene in "his memory isn't good either", maintaining the humor frame that Alan established here.

Another sort of challenge that may be simultaneously achieved here is toward Arlene. It may be that for her husband to deflate the romantic image of them as a couple may cause her to lose face in the judgment of the female audience. If she in fact was feeling this way, then a possible interpretation of her joking is that she is getting him back. My impression is that even if some of these challenges were strongly felt, the predominant mood of the interaction is playful, with enjoyment of the joking game. It seems competitive to me, but good-humoredly so. I infer this partly from the quality and placement of the laughter.

Donahue responds to Alan with a mock apology, the mock quality of which is conveyed in the shift to higher pitch register and also the high falling nucleus on "sorry". As I indicated above, the mock apology seems to me to be evidence in the emergent interaction of Donahue's perception of Alan's response as a mock challenge to his competence as the interviewer. An apology is also due in that it is insulting to make an inaccurate statement about another person's biography. For confirmation a statement should be put in the form of a question. If an interviewer wants to make an intentionally inaccurate claim about another person's biography in order to provoke a response, a question form is safest.

At this point the situation is that Alan has taken charge by shifting the frame with humorous consequence. Donahue has responded to the interactional challenge, and has laughed in response to the unexpected deflation of the romantic image.

I suggest that we could not understand Donahue's "I'm sorry" accurately unless we were attending to the interactional dynamic here. We might even wonder if Donahue's response was condolence over Alan's less than perfect eyesight. On the other hand, maybe part of the humor is precisely that there is that interpretation too: that Donahue responds literally to Alan, in the same way that Alan has responded literally to him, and offers his sympathy on his eyesight limitations. However, it seems to me that "that's right" refers to Donahue's role as interviewer, tending to confirm for me that "oh I'm sorry" was primarily a mock apology to a mock challenge.

At this point Donahue appears to be getting ready to begin another utterance ("a-h") when Alan continues within the same humor frame, which has deflation as a general principle. He applies the same principle to the evaluative comment that Donahue made: from "the most romantic story I've ever heard in my life" to a hedged "I mean that's fairly romantic". This qualification of the word "romantic" is funny because it is incongruous. The word "romantic" needs to have qualification in the same spirit: with an intensifier, superlative (as above) or generally extravagant word, such as "terribly," "wonderfully," "frightfully." But not "*barely romantic", "*minimally romantic," "*slightly romantic". So Alan is further exploiting the rule of the new frame (deflate by reducing the scale) which he has introduced with humorous effect, and he gets another laugh from the audience.

The artful thing, to me, about this comment is that it not only follows the pattern Alan has established for the humor, but also serves interactionally as a qualified agreement with a statement of Donahue's: "that's the most romantic story I've ever heard in my life". The comment is like the glass which is either half full or half empty, depending on your point of view. It is as if Alan is now trying to make amends by agreeing in a qualified way, for having challenged Donahue

with his first contribution. He seems to be saying: ok, I'm trying to cooperate with you now.

Again Donahue agrees in a mock way. He seems to be following Alan's lead, responding to him rather than taking aggressive action as interviewer. But he is following him in a minimal way within the humor frame, using mock agreement, rather than adding a new construct. What is humorous, to me, is his emphatic agreement (in a mock serious way) with Alan's silly mock serious judgment, "I mean that's fairly romantic". It is the incongruity between the ridiculousness or non-seriousness of the content of what is being said and the serious manner in which it is said, which is humorous.

Then when Donahue is apparently preparing to resume his interviewer role ("ah-m"), Arlene comes in. She is smiling as she says "Actually it was a quintet", and her smile may be either a carryover from laughing at the most recent comment of Alan's or anticipation of the humorous response to her remark, or both. It is not clear to me that people would have laughed at Arlene's remark if Alan hadn't responded. The audience laughter begins less than a second after his low rising stress on "was".

Arlene's comment builds within the humor frame that Alan initiated, developing further the broad principle of change of scale. But Arlene goes Alan one better in the minuteness of her adjustment: from quartet to quintet.

Interactionally Arlene's comment stands as a challenge both to Alan and to Donahue. It challenges Alan's competence in his status as member of a couple who share a biography. He had made a definitive statement about the musical group, speaking for both of them. Arlene, however, was the musician, and therefore the authority in the situation. Her statement is a challenge to Donahue in the same way that Alan's was earlier, namely that as the interviewer he should have gotten his facts straight.

Then Alan switches to straight person role. He also addresses Arlene as husband to wife, expressing surprise concerning some new information about their common biography. The humor here is partly the shift from the "world" of the interview, where the couple maintain a united front, to the "world" of the couple. There is a violation of the expectation that both spouses would remember facts of their common biography.

The utterance which I find most enigmatic is Donahue's "yes", which occurs simultaneously with Arlene's "yes a quintet". With "that's right" Donahue apparently acknowledged that he remembered hearing that Arlene was playing in a quartet when Alan first saw her. If we accept that interpretation, then how can Donahue be agreeing with Arlene? It seems almost to be an automatic response--perhaps it represents a verbalized prediction of what he knew Arlene's response would be. He seems to be taking Arlene's point of view.

Arlene repeats the word "quintet," giving the word its third repetition in quick succession. I suspect that the repetition contributes to the humor as well, perhaps by ensuring that the hearer has caught the unusual word "quintet" and its meaning in relation to what has gone before.

Arlene's laughter builds a bit and then she says, "his memory isn't good either", which links back to Alan's "my eyesight wasn't that good". The comments are syntactically parallel, essentially, and offer evidence that Arlene was able to retain for about ten seconds whatever was necessary for her to construct a parallel, contrastive segment. I have a feeling that there are time limits on this kind of "capping" on another person's utterance, that the parallel and contrastive form would cease to be relatable to the original utterance past a certain point. On the other hand, I have witnessed very effective humor which relates back to something salient from several hours before during a group gathering.

Arlene's utterance follows the principles of the humor frame that Alan introduced. First, it has the same direction: at Alan. Second, there is the reduction in scale, here in terms of mental competence. Not only is his eyesight not that good, but his memory isn't good either. Third, it deals with male stereotypes within marriage schemas; but whereas Alan's was deflating the romantic lover stereotype, Arlene's is invoking the stereotype of the married man who cannot remember accurately things which relate to romantic details of the common biography.

Another element of the humor is the revelation that Alan, the good guy and feminist, can act just like a stereotypical husband.

And a final aspect of the humor is that of course it is ridiculous to accuse Alan of not having a good memory because he can't remember that she was playing in a quintet on the night he first saw her. That is the sort of thing that a musician would remember, but not a non-musician. In that sense it is obviously not a serious attack on his competence because it is so unreasonable.

I take as evidence that this exchange was good-natured the kind of open, hearty laugh from Arlene that followed it.

Donahue finally comes in with an active contribution within the joking frame. His contribution is thematically quite an achievement, because it combines the music theme, in playing on the name of a popular song (the one about "only having eyes for you"); the eyesight theme that Alan introduced; the male stereotype theme, in this case the man with the roving eye; and the deflating the romantic image theme. It directly contradicts his earlier statement ("That's the most romantic story I've ever heard in my life") by suggesting that Alan was also looking at other women.

Alan and Arlene respond with laughter to Donahue's contribution, and so does the audience. But it is a much milder response, especially from the audience, than after earlier contributions. I suggest that this may be because Donahue has

introduced a more threatening stereotype, that of the unfaithful man, than the ones Alan and Arlene have introduced.⁵ It could also be argued that the joking episode ends because everyone has had a chance to participate, and Donahue's contribution ties a lot of the themes together in a way that creates a sense of completion.

At this point Donahue continues his initiative, in a sense, leading them from the eddy of joking back into the interview with a comment addressed to Arlene: "ah you were..a professional clarinettist." He apparently has decided to abandon the idea of getting the Aldas to provide such information. It is interesting to consider that the only straight information or fact that came out of the discourse during this extended humorous episode is that it was a quintet that Alan spotted Arlene in.

What patterns have emerged from discussion of the data? Which ones are probably characteristic of spontaneous joking interactions in general, and which ones may be useful in characterizing this particular style?

From the time of initiation of joking to the end of the episode there are a number of contributions, not all of which are alike. Alan's contribution at 2 is the initiation, and accomplishes the shift in footing or frame. The joking frame is constituted of certain themes and principles, as described above. The task of anyone who wants to build or play within the frame is to perceive what the themes and principles are. A question to be explored is how much and by whom an established humor frame can be transformed.

The contributions within this episode, with the exception of Donahue's at the end, tend to be simple and short, with a lot of use made of contrastive and emphatic stress. With challenges and contradiction as the basic principle, we

⁵ It could also be one of those cases in which it is not okay for an outsider to joke on this topic.

would expect emphatic and contrastive stress. Actually maybe the complexity of his contribution made it more difficult to process, hence the relative lack of response. Lexical cohesion is relatively dense. Thematic collaboration is a basic feature of this kind of interaction.

What I see as characteristic of this tone in particular is that interactionally the humor is constituted of challenges, as described above, and the basic orientation is toward competition and attempted oneupmanship. It is clear that the earlier example of tone #1 and this example are of the same type.

Finally let us consider how the joking functions within the discourse, and what the audience may have learned from it about the participants. It probably served to release some tension for everyone at the beginning of the interview. Whether that was intended or not, I believe it had the effect of deflating the intimidating paragon image of the Aldas and revealing them as regular people who even fall into the stereotypes from time to time.

Chapter 5

5.0 Introduction

CHAPTER FIVE sums up the argument, discusses the kinds of cognitive tasks involved in producing and interpreting joking activity (in relation to the framework laid out in Chapter 1), presents a hypothesis concerning the relation between joking and American ideology, discusses the social implications of the findings of this dissertation within a pluralistic society, and suggests directions for further for research.

5.1.0 Summing-up

Joking interaction as complex communication is of interest from at least two different perspectives. In the first place, it challenges current theories of language and discourse by forcing confrontation with certain basic issues: the nature of context; the different orders of meaning which can be conveyed by an utterance; the process of conventionalization in language; how aspects of a communication can be foregrounded; the nature of intersubjectivity; the existence of multiple perspectives; and the characterization of communicative competence. Secondly, joking serves as an important communicative resource among speakers of American English by which understanding is displayed, complex social meaning is conveyed, coherence is constructed in discourse, and individuality is expressed through language.

Linguistic theory has dealt with such data in several ways: (1) by excluding it from consideration either (a) as a part of performance (TG theory); or (b) as parasitic on more basic elements (speech act theory); (2) by oversimplifying it (a) with the reification "irony" (formal pragmatics); or (b) in squeezing it into a slot in

a overall theoretical scheme (applied pragmatics); (3) by focussing in on one essential behavior--laughter--and analyzing its pragmatic extensions (ethnomethodology). The most useful formulation has been Clark and Gerrig's recent formulation of the pretense theory of irony, which is quite compatible with the analysis presented in this dissertation.

Given that the starting point for a theory of language must be situated communication, which is ultimately the phenomenon to be understood, the claim is made here that two levels of explanation may be useful. An adequate explanation may involve the pragmalinguistic as well as the interactional sociolinguistic. "Pragmalinguistic" is here defined as referring to the resources of the communication system for conveying meaning of different sorts [at a relatively abstract level], and also in relation to general theories of [interpersonal] rapport: "interactional sociolinguistic" here refers to the situated analysis of joking as a communicative resource by which people construct coherence in conversation.

The dissertation carries forward the tradition of Sapir, Firth, Sacks, Goffman, Tolmach Lakoff, and Gumperz in its concern with the situated interpretation of language use in sociocultural context, taking the dialogic unit as basic, and exploring the mutual display of understanding.

The contributions of this dissertation are:

- (1) a framework for conceptualizing joking activity;
- (2) a synthesis of findings and ideas on joking from different disciplines;
- (3) a social-functional pragmalinguistic analysis of joking interaction;
- (4) an attempt to link the pragmalinguistic and the interactional sociolinguistic;
- (5) identification of a range of joking "tones" and an explanation for the systematic misinterpretation of intent across tones;
- (6) an interactional sociolinguistic treatment of joking as a significant resource in

the construction of coherence in conversation, through which multiple definitions of the situation are orchestrated;

- (7) an attempt to link the phenomenon of joking interaction to American ideology, and to discuss the social implications within a pluralistic society.

5.2.0 Cognitive Implications

In this section there will be a discussion of the cognitive tasks involved in participating in joking interaction. These cognitive tasks are systematically related to the issues discussed in Chapter 1, as well as to the framework presented for conceptualizing joking activity. The switch into joking MODE involves assessment of contextualization cues. Assessment of TONE involves drawing on sociocultural knowledge of the sort discussed in Chapter 2 in the review of the literature, and concomitantly achieving foregrounding and backgrounding at the discourse level in determining the social meaning of the switch into joking. GROUP STYLE and INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION OF SENSE OF HUMOR are manifested principally through the principle of the joking frame within the footing, manifested in phonetic, prosodic, rhythmic or temporal, syntactic, thematic and pragmatic collaboration. The social meaning of possible responses is again related to sociocultural knowledge concerning linguistic routines and definitions of situations. Further, the role of affect, while not systematically investigated here, is clearly very important, especially in blocking other interpretations of the joking interaction. The ability to respond is also clearly related to one's retrospective feeling assessment of the joking interaction. Finally, there is some discussion of the characterization of the joker as oriented more to the textual function of language than to the ideational or interpersonal.

The Cognitive Complexity Involved in Joking: Interpretation

The importance of nonverbal and paralinguistic cues in assessment of the switch into joking

Nonverbal and paralinguistic cues are particularly important in signalling the frame shift, but as R. Alford (1981) points out, the strength of the nonverbal cue required for framing humor varies with the situation, i.e., if joking is an expected feature of the talk in the situation, then only a minimal nonverbal cue is required to signal the shift. The nonverbal and paralinguistic cues can also be part of the humor itself. This underlies the experience of finding something funny not so much because of what was said, but rather because of *how* it was said. In the example of tone #3 discussed in Chapter 4, the nonverbal was an integral part of the humor; without the incongruence between the verbal and the nonverbal, the remark probably would not have been perceived as humorous. A classic joking style is the deadpan, in which an attempt is made to give no nonverbal cues for humor, so that the hearer is left with nothing but the verbal content by which to assess the joking intent. Considering all of these variations, we can see that the assessment of the shift from non-joking to joking mode, as well as the understanding of the joking itself, involves the interpretation of a complex co-occurrence of both the verbal and the nonverbal.

Thus one level of interpretive task in participation in joking in conversation is assessment of a constellation of verbal and non verbal cues, the sum of which is perceived as a contextualization cue. Part of the message is a message about how the message is to be perceived.

The Assessment of the Social Meaning of the Switch into Joking

Another level of interpretive task is the assessment of the social meaning of the switch into joking. I believe that this switch can be thought of as a form of metaphorical code switching (Blom & Gumperz 1972). The joking frame is

assessed together with the content of the joking to arrive at the communicative intent of the utterance. Following the pragmalinguistic analysis presented in Chapter 3, the possible conventional interpretations of the joking frame that I have identified are as follows (and it also seems possible that the main ones may be perceived simultaneously): The first is the interpretation "this isn't real" or "this is not to be taken seriously" with the pragmatic sub-meaning "I will not be held responsible for what I say in this frame," and a further possible sub-meaning: "I am stepping back and detaching myself from this interaction" and/or "you need to lighten up." This conventional interpretation (with its possible submeanings) can be thought of as a form of speech act qualification (Lakoff 1980) modifying in various ways what taken on the basis of propositional content would have been thought of as the illocutionary force of the utterance, and especially rendering it deniable (in a socially acceptable way). A second possible conventional interpretation of the joking shift fits within the "positive politeness" framework laid out by Brown and Levinson (1978): "I'm assuming that we are enough alike that you will share/understand my humor," conveying the expectation of likemindedness. A third conventional interpretation of the joking shift is: "I feel friendly enough to want to play with you." Perhaps this fits into Lakoff's "camaraderie" mode best, emphasizing the American cultural values of informality and spontaneity.

I suggest that people from different subcultural groups may foreground and background different frame interpretations in connection with the same joking content. For example, with content which on the surface appears to be personal criticism, one group may foreground the content together with the "denial of responsibility" meaning of the frame, and perceive the joking as indirect criticism which is conventionally deniable. The joker can always claim that s/he was "just kidding" and can even go on the offensive by suggesting that the target doesn't have a sense of humor or can't take a joke. On the other hand, apparently similar

content together with the foregrounded meaning of the frame "I feel friendly enough to want to play with you" can be perceived by the target (and by an audience) as a display of strong friendship (Basso 1979).

These conventional foregroundings and backgroundings constitutive interpretive conventions, a form of sociocultural knowledge which is generally not available to people as a conscious formulation, but is rather experienced with an accompanying emotional force which makes it difficult for people to step back from the interaction and entertain alternative possibilities of communicative intent.

Identification of the Principles of the Frame

Another level of interpretive task is the identification of the principle(s) of the frame. This understanding is displayed in the response. The principle of the frame refers to the humor technique by which the joking discourse departs from non-joking discourse expectations within the situation. But of course the switch to the joking frame establishes a new set of expectations concerning how joking discourse should be constructed. Freud's (1905) three basic joke techniques can serve as a starting point here: unification or condensation; displacement of the normal process of thought; and indirect representation. All three of these techniques often seem to be operating simultaneously within a single joking episode, as in the two examples of tone #1 in the data analyzed in Chapter 4. Another common technique in my data is the shifting of scale, either reduction or exaggeration (again, as in the examples of tone #1). The use of cultural schemas or scripts has been illustrated in the analyses presented in Chapter 4. Shifting to a slightly different perspective, the "principle of the joking frame" can be thought of as also including the relation of what is said to the commonly accepted characteristics of the hearer, as in the "rules for ritual insults" identified by Labov (1972a) according to which the insults retain their ritual meaning (of solidarity) only so long as they do not appear to reflect any actual truth about the persons referred to (in which

case they are perceived as "coming too close" and interpreted as personal insults). Handelman and Kapferer's closed/open and contained/uncontained features of the frame, as discussed in Chapter 2, must also be included. A final point with regard to the principle of the joking frame is that, as Farrer (1981) points out, at a metalevel part of the principle of the frame can be the periodic shifting of the principle of the frame.

Assessment of the Social Meaning of Possible Responses

Another level of task (which in a sense is interpretive, but which more importantly involves the degree of skill attained in joking) which I will here call interactive, is the assessment of the social meaning of possible responses, and the decision concerning how to respond. How one responds has important implications for how the joking interaction as a whole will be interpreted retroactively. One consultant reports that the difference between simply laughing or responding in kind to the playful insult style of humor was to him the difference between walking away from the interaction feeling one-down or feeling on an equal footing with the joking-initiator (that he had held his own). Another consultant points out that in a friendly kidding style one may in effect be offered a slot to fill, so that virtually any response, no matter how inept, will be treated as an appropriate come-back.

The Cognitive Complexity Involved in Joking: Production

Understatement and Economy of Expression

Shifting now to a consideration of joking techniques more specifically from the *production* point of view, another whole area which is part of the art of humor is that of understatement and economy of expression. Not only does the joker draw on shared implicit knowledge, s/he must also say just enough but not too much, carefully calculating the humor to be work-out-able.

Freud proposed that the reason behind the pleasure of joking was psychic economy (both from the production and comprehension points of view), especially in the case of the operation of condensation or unification, which draws on the symbolic nature of language. It seems to me that the notion of economy is also related to understatement and to economy of expression, both of which are apparently an important part of joke technique. By economy of expression and understatement I am referring to the well-known fact that in most cases saying too much can ruin an attempt at joking. One could argue that the problem is one of *timing*, but it seems to me that that begs the question, unless what we are getting at is being able to articulate one's remark so that the humorous point takes the hearer by surprise, and brevity is somehow related to this technique. Explaining a joke is notoriously unfunny.

I would suggest that one of the important features of understatement, which is significantly related to the "positive politeness" effect of joking, is that understatement and economy of expression have the effect of including the hearer more effectively. The joker is making it obvious that s/he assumes that the hearer knows all that is necessary (including the sharing of attitudes toward the joking content) to fill in everything required to understand the humor. In effect the abbreviated production of the speaker calls for more participation on the part of the addressee (which in the case of the extended humorous episode is actually reflected in verbal production, not just cognitive understanding), and tends to be perceived by the addressee as a compliment to his/her intelligence. A tricky point here is that such a demand on the part of the speaker *could* be perceived by the addressee as self-involved and uncooperative, under adverse circumstances, as when a speaker keeps making cryptic allusions to obscure mythological references

during a conversation with someone who doesn't know (or care) that much about mythology. I think part of the dynamic here (or trade-off, if we think of this in terms of relative demands put on the addressee) is that the addressee gets to be entertained for his/her trouble. The joker provides amusement. I do not believe, however, that the willingness of the addressee to perform the work is as significant as is the *speaker's* ability to size up the addressee.

Assessment of the Addressee

This sort of assessment of the addressee has been discussed by Freud, Sacks and Grice. Freud (1905) pointed out that in joking one has to make a calculation of like-mindedness of the other person-- the extent to which the other person not only shares sociocultural knowledge, but also shares attitudes toward particular topics and also shares a particular psychological landscape (in terms of such things as defenses). Sacks (1972) points out that in conversation one must be able to "membership the listener appropriately." This "membershopping" can of course be done in a more or less gross (drawing on broad stereotypes) or fine-tuned way.

Green (1981) illustrates the interesting occurrence of joking and kidding among British coal miners in an ethnically-mixed group based on patently absurd but unflattering stereotypes of the various ethnic groups, e.g. all X's are stupid. Green points out that the stereotyped slander is suitable for joking because the participants are able to distance themselves personally from it. This fits the contrast between the solidarity style (the fact that if you say it, it means that you don't believe it) and the empathy style (if you say it you must mean it on some level and so I perceive it as a softened criticism or a sneaky way of trying to get at me which I can't call you on in an effective way).

Grice (1975) points out that an implicature must be capable of being worked out by the hearer--which means that the speaker has to do extensive assessment of the hearer's knowledge, attitudes, state of mind, etc., when framing an implicature, as well as of the probable pragmatic meaning that the hearer is likely to assign to (1) the fact of the speaker's having framed an implicature, and (2) the sort of implicature that the speaker has chosen to make.

To the degree that joking is highly contextualized, it has characteristics of Bernstein's "restricted code" (1964). And in fact I have testimony from consultants that they use joking as a test, to "check a person out" in the initial stages of a relationship. Interestingly, in such a case the joking can be intended and interpreted as a metaphorical shift signalling potential closeness and friendliness at the same time that it has a cognitive purpose for the joker: to see from the response whether the hearer is likeminded in the situation.

The Affective Complexity Involved in Joking

Finally there is the question of *affective* complexity, which I believe is quite significant in relation to humor and joking. My main concern is with the potential interrelation of the cognitive and the affective in such a way that it becomes difficult to entertain alternative interpretations in a given situation to which one is reacting. Drawing on my own experience, because of my cognitive understanding of the intent of certain kinds of joking, it seems that a gut-level (negative) feeling reaction to a particular joking style can significantly impede my accepting the style as it is intended (even though I may have a clear *cognitive* understanding of how the style works and how it is intended by people who use it). It is also the case for some people that how one feels about a joking interaction afterward may be

significantly related to how one was able to participate, as discussed before.

Orientation to the Textual Function

Within Lakoff's theory of rapport there is a continuum which represents relative orientation of the speaker to the ideational function or the interpersonal function. It seems to me that some jokers and joking styles can be characterized in terms of their relative focus on the "textual" function, in Halliday's terms, or the "poetic" function, in Jakobson's terms. These are the people who are constantly exploiting potential humor resources within the stream of interaction. There are certain potential social consequences of interaction among people who hold different orientations in the moment. For people who are relatively more oriented to the ideational or the interpersonal, the joker can be distracting, unless the joker has in effect been allotted that role in a group, for example, performing that function for everyone. Another interesting consequence is illustrated in an example from Tannen (1984), in which the relative foci lead to misunderstanding of the conveyed meaning of some joking. Steve, the host, expressed exaggerated mock annoyance at the presence of the taperecorder on the table, thus making a joke of whatever small annoyance he may have felt. He simply wanted to be able to make a joke out of the present resources, exploiting whatever was to hand for comic effect. Deborah interpreted Steve's joking as he intended, apparently partly because there was no further attempt to make her remove the taperecorder, and responded within the frame by exaggerating her defense of the taperecorder. David, on the other hand, was apparently not able to interpret Steve's behavior as primarily oriented to the textual or the poetic, and believed that he was truly angry at Deborah for having the taperecorder on the table.

5.3 Joking and ideology

R. Williams (1977) finds three main uses of the term "ideology": (1) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; (2) a system of illusory beliefs--false ideas or false consciousness-- which may be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge; (3) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas. I am using the term here in a combination of the first two senses. The basic points I want to make are that American democratic ideology tends to suppress overt markers of rank and authority, thus promoting a "fictive equality". Joking as indexical of a play context invokes relaxed, egalitarian informality, and thus has been analyzed in Chapter 3 as symptomatic of an ideal American (male) personality.¹ Further, the kinds of social patterning of joking in relation to status that we saw in Chapter 2, set up potential confusion in vertical joking on a status hierarchy. There is additional potential cross-cultural confusion, as will be illustrated later in this chapter, in the unconscious use of joking by an American of higher-status to establish the preferred "fictive equality" if that fiction is not an option within the situation for the person joked at.

5.4 Social implications

First of all, the general implicit knowledge of the relation of joking activity to social organization, as laid out in the review of the literature, constitutes sociocultural schematic knowledge. People seem to have

¹ We can predict the inclusion of joking in R. Lakoff's *Camaraderie* as the preferred American rapport style on the basis of ideology.

different degrees of awareness of this relation, and joking can clearly serve as a basis for strategic interaction. This can be at the level of simple status manipulation ploys, or it can be used at the global political level to "think the unthinkable", as in the analysis of Reagan's joke presented in Chapter 3.

Secondly, drawing on the taste public framework presented in Chapter 1, there will be mainstream tones and group styles recognized by most people [with safe general topics, etc.]; and there will be distinctive group styles [Tannen's identification of styles linked to ethnicity and sexual orientation] more or less recognizable to outsiders. These group styles will be highly significant in the marking of group identity. "Wisecracks" as defined by Hockett will be important as part of the display of in-group shared knowledge.

Derivative uses of joking as a part of relationship development are: as a test in the initial stages of meeting someone, to find out what kinds of attitudes and assumptions the person holds and to find out if the person has a compatible sense of humor; as a metaphorical switch (Blom & Gumperz 1972) in the early stages of a relationship to attempt to accelerate closeness.

Non-participation in extended joking could be the result of (1) lack of sociocultural knowledge; (2) lack of skill in playing within the frame; (3) misinterpretation of communicative intent; or (4) lack of interest in developing a relationship. Non-participation can lead to blocking of relationship development (partly through reinforcement of negative stereotypes about others (Campbell 1981) and thus to lack of access to social networks where the joking skills and sociocultural knowledge are acquired, and also in some instances to the perpetuation of social inequality.

Pluralistic possibilities for misunderstanding:

The in-group function of joking may lead to problems from the use of irony. As an in-group phenomenon the contextualization cues are bound to become more and more subtle and specialized to the group. This would mean that irony, either of the classic inversion type or generally of the pretense type for the purpose of ridicule, would have a strong potential for misunderstanding by any outsider. This would especially be the case if irony is used among different groups in a pluralistic society in the presence of other groups. Since the ironist is taking on a role, s/he is appearing to behave/speak in a way which is in fact being ridiculed. But the irony cues may be too subtle for an out-group member to pick up on. So other groups would be confronted with confusing information about what members of another group actually believe, etc. A related problem arises with in-group use of ethnic slurs (e.g. "nigger") overheard by an outsider and assumed to be acceptable usage.

Another possibility for misunderstanding is that groups may have the same kind of joking activity, but each group may accomplish it slightly differently. The literature offers a couple of examples of this phenomenon.

The purpose of Philips (1975) was "to examine [teasing, punning, and putting people on] as instances of non-serious communication to see what can be learned from them about serious or literal communication, and to explore the relationship between literal and non-literal usage." The data are from field work on Indian reservations in the Plateau and Plains regions of the northwestern U.S. (because she found herself involved in such activity without understanding what was going on). There is defining and exemplification of puns, shading into put-ons with interactional analysis given.

Philips points out that "the doing of a deliberate misunderstanding involves the ability to ignore or strip away that disambiguating structure and to focus on the potential sources of ambiguity, constructing around them another contextualization that is then implied in the response." Re put-ons: the following positions occur

- (1) instigator
- (2) the deluded
- (3) the included (who can be either colluders or revealers)

She discusses the differences between punning and teasing done by Indians and by white middle class persons. "Teasing and punning are terms used by Indians in much the same way they are used by white middle class persons. But Indian punning usually involves the two-party form of a deliberate misunderstanding. And Indian teasing much more often involves or makes use of both deliberate misunderstandings and deliberate misconstructions than is the case among persons of white middle class background." (p.

9) An example:

Three children and an adult are standing by a car, and the adult says, "We'd better hit the road." Two of the children turn toward the car, but the third says, "O.K", and using the jacket she is holding, she begins to strike the ground with the jacket, giggling as she does so. She then breaks her own action and turns to the car.

Asking how put-ons are recognized as non-literal and non-serious, she lists

- (1) plausibility.
- (2) whether the doing of something such as a pun is obviously being accomplished simultaneously, and
- (3) laughter or smiling on the part of the perpetrator.

In considering how this general activity is accomplished, Philips distinguishes between general competence in the communicative process, including assessing the access of others to information in the situation and how they will construe it [cf. Freud]; and culturally learned awarenesses which include understanding not only the social contexts and role relationships where putting people on is appropriate, but also the cultural differences in interpretive frameworks used in establishing plausibility.

A study such as Ayoub and Barnett (1965) would suggest that both black and white male adolescents engage in "the dozens". But both Labov and Leventhal have found that there are differences. In his analysis of ritual insults among black peer groups, Labov (1972a) also cites ritual insults among white peer groups. He found differences in that the "white forms" are basically a limited set of routines, essentially "snappy answers" which reflect knowledge of the speaker rather than creative competence.

A: Eat shit.

B: What should I do with the bones?

A: Build a cage for your mother.

B: At least I got one.

A: She is the least.

Each response creates a further "unification" in Freud's terms.

Leventhal (1981) is based on observation in elementary school classrooms in middle class integrated American schools. The primary concern of research was to explore how black communication style was interpreted by students of other ethnic groups within the classroom. The data was apparently handwritten during observation, and some was taped. Data is cited extensively. There is no indication of whether students or teachers were interviewed. The findings are: (1) White students (boys only?) adapted "the dozens" as something they called "cutting up" but

they interpreted the function in relation to the literal content of the exchange, so that "cutting up" served as a vehicle to express their anger rather than a game of verbal wit. As a consequence, its use among black and white students in the class is not equivalent: the white students used it as "a formal mechanism for the expression of personal hostility". (2) "The second use of speech play indicates that negotiation of different evaluative systems occurs. The use of typical Afro-American joking strategies can set up an interpretative frame consistent with Afro-American speech norms." (p. 264). (3) The use of humor to circumvent directives may differ among black and white teachers in the classroom and may therefore be subject to misunderstanding.

There is also the potential for misunderstanding that I pointed out in Chapter 4 between habitual users of different joking "tones", which is related to the degree of aggressiveness or hostility that people feel comfortable with within their schemas for "friendly interaction" and "friendship" in general, and at different stages of relationship. Apte (1985) also concludes that much more work needs to be done on the connection between non-kin joking relationships in industrial societies and friendship.

On the other hand, in multicultural environments there is some indication that groups of different ethnic backgrounds may develop a common repertoire for inter-group use. This repertoire relies heavily on local resources, i.e., things previously introduced into the conversation, things which are obviously visible to all participants, etc. The local resources are supplemented by "commonsense" and common themes (such as sex). Thus no esoteric assumptions are made about shared knowledge. Green (1981) has found among coal miners, and I have documented among paramedics some interesting developments in the use of "ethnic slurs" as ritual insults: in a pluralistic context, they can apparently be used to display strength of friendship bond. Acceptance is conveyed by razzing about

one's ethnic identity:²

Upon hearing the announcement that the three were going to be working partners on the unit for that shift:

White

Black

Hispanic "I ain't gonna work with no white guy"

In one sense this usage constitutes drawing on local resources as well. The recipient of the razzing in this situation interpreted it as acceptance, and the phenomenon in general as conveying the message that "we're not alike and that's fine". In this usage there is thus simultaneous acknowledgement of differences based on obvious ethnic (etc.) differences, and affirmation of solidarity. This contrasts with a liberal "color-blind" philosophy which seeks to deny differences in achieving equality.

Finally, we have an example of a crosscultural problem with joking arising out of different definitions of the situation, i.e., what constitutes expected and appropriate behavior within it.³

Situation: employees and supervisor were "chatting" in hallway outside the lunchroom prior to returning to work after dinner break

Characters: Bob (supervisor) Native American-English speaker, grew up in Louisiana, late 30's, described as "low key"
 Larry (employee) Immigrant from the Philippines, 11 years in U.S., Catholic, long-term employee, 50ish, described as "emotional", hard worker
 (Linda: Larry's coworker)

1 Bob: Larry, where's Linda?

2 Larry: I don't know . . .

3 Bob: Why don't you go see if she's in the ladies room?

4 Larry: (very excited) Oh, no, no, no! Boys don't go in girls' room!
 Boys don't go in girls' room!

5 Bob: Well, OK, Larry; you just lost your chance

² It may be the case that such joking must be initiated by the minority group member.

³ The essentials are provided here; the extended analysis is in Davies (forthcoming).

The aftermath of this 'joking' interaction was that Larry believed that he had been set up to disobey his supervisor, and that when he was later denied a promotion he attributed it to this interaction, when he had been told that he had "just lost [his] chance".

This interaction was analyzed by a group of Westerners (American and European) and Easterners (Asian). What emerged was that whereas Bob was using joking in the "fictive equality" sense to establish rapport, using a standard sexual topic and stock joking contributions ("you just lost your chance"), Larry was unable to interpret the joking as intended because vertical joking between supervisor and supervisee was not part of the definition of the work situation for him. Thus he was only able to interpret Bob's utterances literally.

5.5 Directions

This dissertation is preliminary to a further specification of group styles and individual expressions of sense of humor as used in social contexts. The individual sense of humor must be examined in terms of a repertoire across kinds of situations, using ethnographic methods.⁴

Images and patterns of joking in the mass media, and their influence on everyday conversational patterns (i.e., the sensitive reflecting and matching process described by Nieburg), need to be investigated. In effect this is continuing the agenda set out by Horton and Wohl in 1956: "In essence, therefore, we would like to expand and capitalize on the truism that the persona and the 'personality' programs are part of the lives of millions of people, by asking how both are assimilated, and by trying to discover what effects these responses have on the attitudes

⁴ Related to this is an investigation of how people apply the categories "wit", "humor", "irony" in everyday life.

and actions of the audiences who are so devoted to and absorbed in this side of American culture."

After the model of Reagan, it will be important to continue monitoring the political use of humor to "think the unthinkable".

Finally, the study of joking will benefit greatly from collaborative studies with researchers from different disciplines.

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