Humour Socialisation

Why the Danes are Not as Funny as They Think They are

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Humour socialisation.
Why the Danes are not as funny as they think they are

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Abstract: The article presents the main idea from my recently published book on Danes' use of humour in professional relations with non-Danes. The key notion is *humour socialisation*. This notion contributes to describing the dynamic role played by language and society in moulding a person's humour. It also brings the aspect of personal humour to the level of "national humour", which again helps to explain why people from different countries who speak different languages do not always share the same kind of humour.

Keywords: Danes' humour, national humour, humour socialisation, language, society.

1. Introduction: studying humour

When I first began studying humour and its use in professional settings, I had no idea that humour studies had been going on for more than two thousand years. Nor did I know that they had produced a tremendous amount of literature, in fields as diverse as philosophy, psychology, literature and media studies, linguistics, and sociology. In our times, humour studies have exploded into a broad array of studies of the multiple forms, variations and situations in which humour is used – from stand-up comedians, political satire and social media, to therapeutic uses of clowns in hospitals and old people's homes, to mention but a few. This diversity is also seen in the heterogeneous programmes for the international humour conferences with humour studies related to religion, gender and sex, sports, translation, artificial intelligence, video games, internet memes, health benefits and law.

1.1. Studying a specific use of humour

I delimited my own object of investigation to a very specific use of humour:

> Spontaneous verbal humour in international professional interactions between people from different countries.

Which I further narrowed down to:

> Danes' use of humour in professional relations with non-Danes.

This led me to read an extensive range of literature within humour studies in general (Bergson 2007; Bateson 1952; Freud 1916; Morreall 1983, 2012), and within studies on humour in the workplace in particular (Martin 2007; Robert 2017). The aspect of *verbal* humour was developed by reading linguistic – mostly semantic – studies of humour, such as the seminal work of Raskin (1985), with its focus on "semantic scripts", whereas the comparative aspect of how humour is used in different countries was inspired by works such as Ziv (1988) and Gundelach (2000). I shall not go into detail regarding these studies here, since I have referred to them extensively elsewhere[1].

[1] Lundquist (2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020).

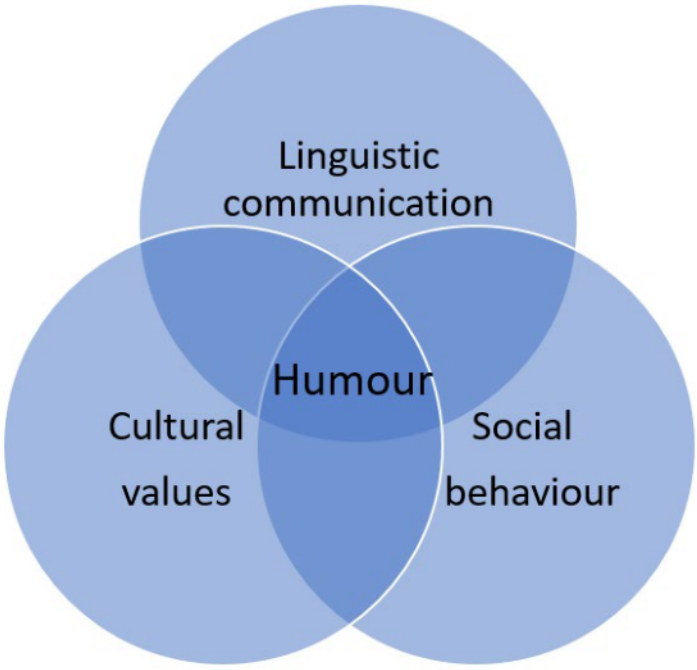
2. Aim

My aim here is both more specific and more general: specific in the sense that I will refer only to the literature that was most inspirational for my research on Danish humour from a comparative perspective; and general, because I will focus on outlining the main idea that emerged from my research: the notion of *humour socialisation*, which I consider to be an important contribution to humour studies, and which I have developed in Lundquist (2020)[2]. My intention here is to distil the essentials of that book into the present article.

I shall retrace the steppingstones used to elaborate the notion of humour socialisation: first, as I focus on *verbal* humour, I see humour as *linguistic communication*. Second, as I am interested in humour in professional interactions, I see humour as a specific *social behaviour*. And third, as my focus is on international relations, i.e. involving people from different countries, I add an *intercultural aspect*.

Many studies of humour across borders touch on "culture", but often leave the notion hazy. I wished to dig further into "culture" and did so by *combining* a linguistic and a sociological perspective in the concept of humour socialisation. In other words, I studied the use of humour in international professional relations at the intersection between *linguistic communication*, *social behaviour* and *cultural values*, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Humour at the intersection of linguistic communication, social behaviour and cultural values



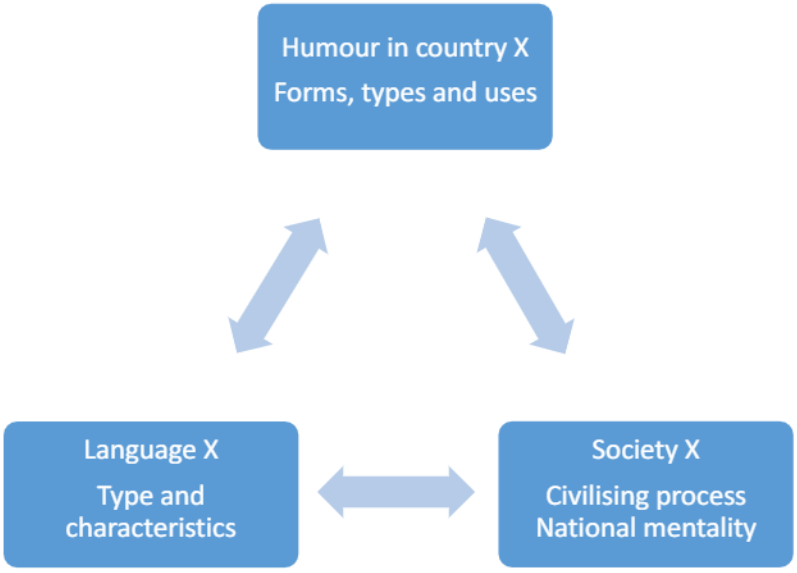
3. Humour socialisation

While searching in humour studies, linguistics and sociology, I perceived certain parallelisms and links between and across these three disciplines, which struck me as significant; parallelisms that led me to suggest the concept of humour socialisation. This concept is my attempt to grasp the interaction between the following three components and to discover relations and mutual influences between

[2] The book has almost the same title as the present paper but in Danish: "Humorsocialisering. Hvorfor er danskerne (ikke) så sjove (som de selv tror)".

them: the *dominant forms, types and uses of humour* found as a particular humour behaviour in a specific country, as one component; the *characteristics of the language* spoken in that country, as another; and the third component as a form of social organisation moulded by the specific *process of civilisation* that the country has undergone, resulting in a particular *national mentality*.

Figure 2: Humour socialisation



Studying humour with this model makes it possible, I contend, to be more exact in describing humour as a verbal, social and cultural phenomenon. Within humour studies (Section 6.1. below), we can zoom in on the forms and uses of humour specific to a country X, which for Danes means the two prevailing "national forms" of humour: irony and self-irony. When it comes to the sociological study of society X and its workplace culture and norms (Section 6.2), we can narrow down to historical and organisational sociology, which for Denmark, as we shall see, entails further particularities. Finally, within linguistics (Section 6.3.), our focus on conversational humour naturally leads to pragmatics and the Gricean *logic of conversation*. This seems to be flouted in spontaneous conversational humour. When considering specific languages, linguistics point to expressions that may contribute to signalling that the utterance is meant for fun. Such signals are frequent in Danish in the form of the characteristic "dialogical particles".

Before addressing these three dimensions and the literature that supports them, a few words follow on the methodology applied.

4. Method

The method presented in detail in Lundquist (2020) is summarised below. Here I will concentrate on two basic concepts and a few empirical findings that I find illustrative.

4.1. Basic concepts

My focus on spontaneous verbal humour considers humour as an *event*; hence the concept of "*humour event*".

4.1.1. Spontaneous humour as an event

Humour seen as an event emphasises the *dynamic* dimension, the moment when humour is used, the form it appears in, but also its impact on the communicating parties. In other words: the notion of a "humour event", or "humour process" (Latta 1998), includes both how the linguistic exchange intended as humour affects the receiver, and how it *changes* the relations between the sender and the receiver in the flow of communication.

Figure 3: The dynamic *humour event*

This is even more important when considering humour with a focus on "professional interactions", where humour must not be misunderstood, because this might have negative effects on further cooperation. On the other hand, the positive effects of humour on human relations can pave the way for fruitful cooperation between the communicating parties, who are working together towards a common goal[3].

4.1.2. Humour as a social mediator

I have selected the term *mediator* to describe the active role that a humour event plays in a conversation, where it steers the relationship between the communicating partners in a positive or a negative direction. I borrowed the term *mediator* from the French sociologist Bruno Latour, who says that the result of a mediator is that "lots of *surprising aliens* may pop up" (Latour 2005: 58-59). The keywords here are '*surprising*', which, when applied to humour, refers to the *non-predictable effects* of spontaneous verbal humour, and '*aliens*', which describes the new, *emergent* relations, into which the participants are "reshuffled together".

Via the humour event, participants are "reshuffled" into a new rapport, which may be characterised by a feeling of amusement and wellbeing, in which case the event has been a *positive social mediator*. But, in other cases, where it creates an atmosphere of misunderstanding and frustration, the humour event acts as a *negative social mediator*. The notion of the humour event as being a social mediator, negative or positive, makes it possible, I think, to both circumvent and subsume the two traditional humour (and laughter) theories: the *superiority* and the *relief* theories (see Section 6.1. below).

4.2. Empirical findings

The study was based on interviews and questionnaires with 28 Danes and 45 non-Danes working with each other in Denmark or abroad (Lundquist 2014). The interviews were semi-structured and qualitatively analysed (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). The interviewees were employees in Danish firms or embassies, and members of the European Parliament, with the addition of international business students (for more details, see Lundquist 2020: 183-190). When asked about their experience with Danish humour, each group showed a remarkable consensus *between themselves*. The Danes saw their own humour as predominantly open, warm ('lun') and cosy ('hyggelig'), but non-Danes had

[3] These aspects are supported in sociological humour research, e.g. in the so-called *encryption* and *AAA model*, where the *A*s stand for assortment, affiliation and altruism (Flamson & Barrett 2008, 2013; Curry & Dunbar 2013a, 2013b). See Lundquist (2020: 149-155).

often experienced their first meeting with Danish humour as "blunt", "in your face", aggressive and frustrating (Lundquist 2020: 33).

4.2.1. Some interview examples of reactions to blunt Danish humour

On her way to begin studying at Copenhagen Business School, a young Serbian woman encountered a Danish passport control officer in Copenhagen airport who made the following remark: "You have something on your lip", he said, referring to her piercing. She was shocked, frustrated, and felt he was intruding into her private life. Coming from another country, she was actually afraid that the Danish officer, an authority figure, was hinting at something that may potentially bar her entry to the new country.

Another young student, this time from China, opened a conversation with his Danish friend with this positive observation: "I have heard that Denmark is the happiest country in the world", to which the Dane replied: "That's because of excessive use of alcohol and sex!". The Chinese student described his own reaction in these terms: "I was very surprised. I would have preferred a more discrete and restrained form of humour. (…) Maybe because I am from a country with a tradition for censorship and reserve".

Analysing the difference between how the two groups perceived Danes' use of humour with the concept of social mediator, we can say that the Danes see their own humour mainly as a *positive social mediator*; as expressed here by a Danish MEP[4] who considers self-irony to "be the absolutely most important quality if you want to get your message across". However, other Danish MEPs are aware that Danes' frequent use of irony may cause problems, because it makes other people see us as "shamelessly rude", so that "we often have a lot of patching up to do afterwards".

As non-Danes in the interviews often perceived Danes' humour as "in your face" and "aggressive", it acted as a *negative social mediator*. It turned out that Danish humour was not only at the time in the actual conversation perceived as negative, but that it often had long-term consequences; as in the case of the French scientist who said that he generally felt insecure in the company of his Danish colleagues: "Half of the time, I do not know if they are joking or being serious. I feel I'm becoming paranoid".

5. Danish irony and "self-irony"

The two abovementioned examples of blunt comments from Danes can be perceived, from a Danish perspective, as examples of the "typical Danish humour", which all Danes in my interviews, and many Danes in general, qualify as *irony* and "*self-irony*" (Lundquist 2020: 57-63). This is exemplified in these quotes from two other interviewed Danish MEPs: "We have a humour based very firmly on irony (…) and we have another form of humour, a form where you sort of laugh a little at yourself", i.e. self-irony: "Danes use a lot of self-irony … it is just a form of social custom"[5]. Irony and self-irony are forms of humour that are not used to the same degree at workplaces in other countries, where people tend to avoid this kind of what they see as hostile and self-deprecating humour, respectively (Lundquist 2020: 143).

This difference between Danes and non-Danes in their judgement of Danes' use of humour leads to a question and a generalisation. First, the question: what explains this difference? The explanation is found in "cultural differences", which in turn can be explicated via the language people speak and the form of society where they live. This is exactly what humour socialisation is about. It also makes it possible to *generalise* from Danish humour to any case of clashes between (national) humour used across borders and cultures. My theory is that a person's humour tends to be seen as a positive social mediator among this person's countrymen, but often as a negative social mediator

[4] MEP stands for Member of the European Parliament.
[5] For more on Danish humour, see Levisen (2018).

among people from other countries. Why? Because people are socialised to different uses and forms of humour in the countries where they grow up and through the language they learn as their mother tongue. It is true, of course, that people belonging to the same country may also differ in their attitudes to and use of humour, since they are socialised into more specific and idiosyncratic uses of humour via traditions and norms in their families and close surroundings. Still, I contend that, as a general rule, people within a community have more features in common between them than with people from other communities.

6. Literature findings

As mentioned above, the concept of humour socialisation was not a ready-made, pre-existing tool, but the end result of exploring a great deal of literature within three fields: humour studies, linguistics and sociology. Ploughing my way through this mass of literature from diverse fields, I was to some extent unconsciously attracted to some writers, who acted as beacons in my quest for a notion of humour socialisation. These writers and theorists shared what I found to be an appealingly *dynamic*, *evolutionary* aspect in their thinking; an aspect that is, of course, also the very essence of the idea of socialisation in terms of a specific form of humour. Naturally, the dynamic aspect had already been planted, as this work focuses on the *humour event* and its power as a *social mediator* between the communicating parties.

6.1. Humour studies

Humour studies or, more precisely originally studies of *laughter*, are well known and can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato via Hobbes, Descartes, with their insistence on the feeling of *superiority* which is inherent in laughter, via Kant and Schopenhauer, who introduced the logical concept of *incongruity* as being the essence of humour, to Shaftesbury, who was the first philosopher to focus on humour as such. He saw humour as a *relief* from inner (physical) tensions. This idea was continued by Freud, an important guiding light in my research, not least because he was the first to explore the link between the linguistic aspects of humour that he called the "techniques" of humour on the one hand, and the psychological effect of humour as a "subconscious" strategy to elude internalised social constraints on the other (Freud 1916).

However, what I find most important is the *Danish contribution to humour research* with its specific insistence on the *existential* question of the role of humour in the life of human beings. Kierkegaard stands out in emphasising the role played by humour and irony as two *transition phases* in between the three *stages of life*. Thus, *irony* intervenes between the first stage: the *aesthetic stage* and the second: the *ethical stage*, whereas humour constitutes the transition from this stage to the last, the *religious stage* (Koch 2010: 11-12).

Figure 4: Irony and humour as transitions between Kierkegaard's three "stages of life"

6.1.1. The Big Humour

The person who opened my eyes to the role played by social life in the formation of our humorous "habitus", our *sense of humour*, was, however, the Danish psychologist Harald Høffding. In his exceptionally interesting book, *Den Store Humor* (1916), "The Big (or Great) Humour", Høffding describes and explains how a person's "humour habitus" is gradually built up via experiences with

glimpses of "teeny-weeny humour" ("den lille-bitte humor"), which stir certain emotions of mirth and well-being. Later, in the various social groups the individual grows up in, such as education, apprenticeship, workplaces, sport, charity, etc., people acquaint themselves with "the little humour" ("den lille humor"), which takes the form of "singular moods" ("enkeltstående stemninger"). Together, these experiences develop into a "total state of the personality" ("totaltilstand"), i.e. a specific "view of life" or "attitude to life" ("livsanskuelse"). This is "the big humour", the specificity of which is, according to Høffding, "seeing life as big and small at the same time" ("Den store Humor ser livet som stort og som småt" (Høffding 1916: 73)). It takes skill to maintain a distance between one's self and the pressures of the world. The big humour contains a superiority of the mind to contradictions and conflicts with which it must struggle ("sindets overlegenhed over de modsigelser og modsætninger, det har at kæmpe med" (Høffding 1916: 70)). And in doing so, the big humour expresses consideration for and an understanding of what life brings us ("stiller sig hensynsfuld og forstående over for hvad livet medfører" (Høffding 1916: 82)). It is an open attitude, which makes it possible for new values to *emerge* ("det er måske begyndelsen til en ny værdirække" (Høffding 1916: 86)), an idea close to the concept inspired by Latour that the humour event is a social mediator, inviting *surprising aliens* aboard.

Let us return to the Danes' use of humour in focus here. If, as a general rule, Danes consider irony and self-irony as their preferred forms of humour, it is because they have been frequently exposed to these forms during their childhood, adolescence and adulthood; and the reason that they can use irony and self-irony with other Danes and be understood, is that, having grown up in the same society and the same type of social groupings, they stand on *common ground*. And having common ground is crucial for decoding irony and self-irony, which exists in a playful act of *pretence*: sender and receiver pretend to be more naïve than they are, and both are aware of this double-dealing (Lundquist 2020: 89). This need for sender and receiver to be on common ground in order to join in irony and self-irony is spelled out in Clark & Gerrig (1984):

> The pretense theory makes clear how *common ground* will be needed (since) the *perception of irony* often hangs on subtle judgments of what is *common ground* to whom [...], so a listener or reader not supplied with the right information *may not make these judgments accurately*" (Clark & Gerrig 1984: 124. My emphasis).

The notion of common ground thus explains why using irony and self-irony when interacting with people from other countries, who have been socialised to humour under different cultural circumstances, may lead to misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and eventually to withdrawal and a sour atmosphere which jeopardises further cooperation.

I see a link between the idea that people who have been exposed to the same type of humour experiences during childhood end up with a common "big humour", and the concept of a "national humour disposition". This finds support in historical sociology, which brings individual experiences and socialisation to the level of countries and nations, and which I shall mention briefly below.

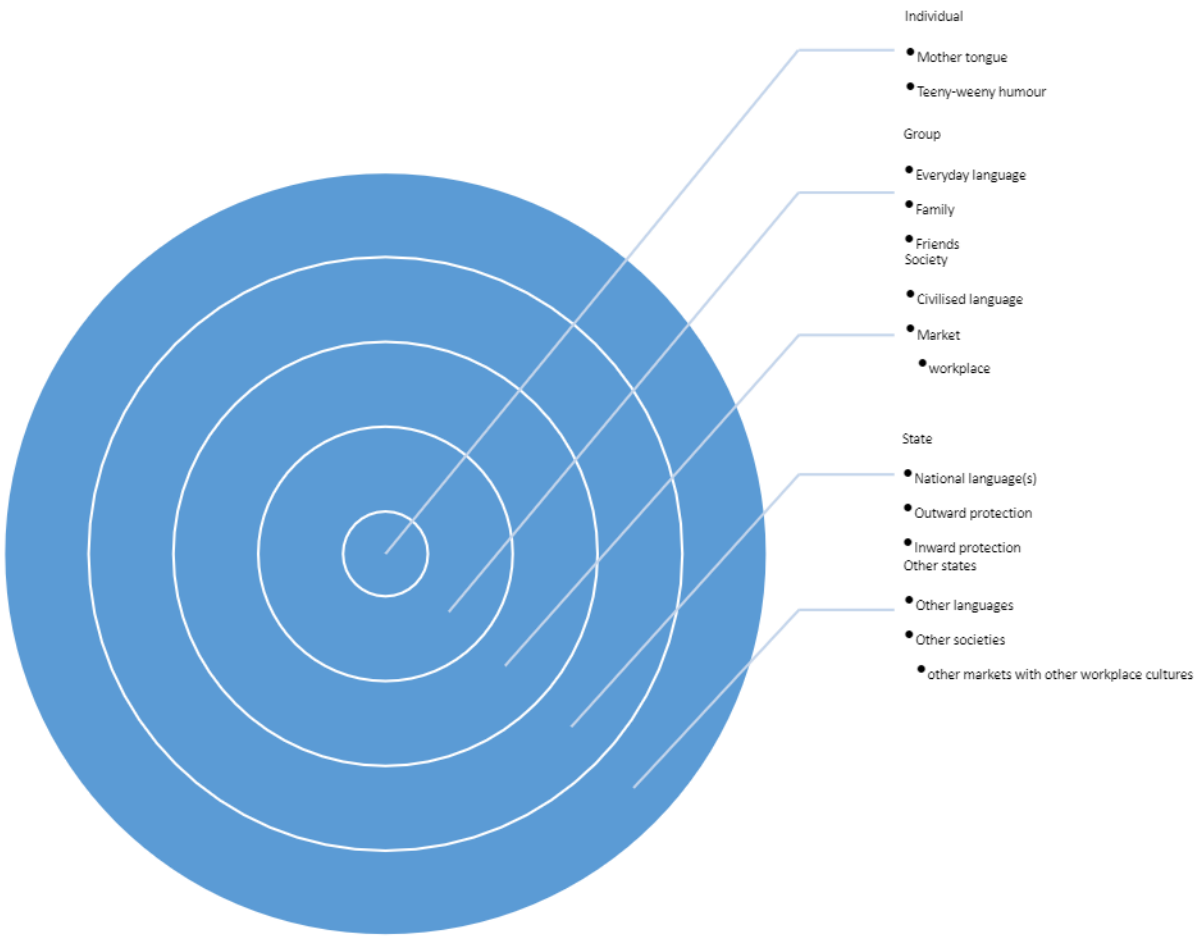
6.2. Historical sociology

The seminal work of the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990) has been my main inspiration for digging deeper into the general explanation of people's different attitudes to humour as being a result of different *cultures*. Elias' theories have been applied to the Danish situation in several publications by the Danish historian and sociologist Lars Bo Kaspersen. Kaspersen explores both the geopolitical and historical circumstances that steered the *civilising process* (Elias 1994) of Denmark towards the present Danish society with its characteristic *consensus mentality* and '*we feeling*' (Kaspersen 2020: 184, 185). Kaspersen also develops Elias' "relational and dynamic group perspective" (Kaspersen 2008: 14), which is not only the basis of my notion of *humour event* with its

focus on the interacting parties, but also crucial for the very conceptualisation of *humour socialisation*.

Kaspersen presents a detailed description and explanation of the different types of groupings and, more importantly, of the *interdependence* between these groupings (Lundquist 2020: 131), which makes it possible to flesh out the societal process of humour socialisation. But, also, to elucidate the role of language in this process (see Figure 5 below)[6]. Indeed, when children are nurtured and protected in their intimate relations with their parents, they are exposed, in Høffding's terms, to a dose of "teeny-weeny" humour events presented in their *mother tongue*; this exposure continues in the broader family with relatives and friends, still in the *everyday language* of the mother tongue, where humour experiences gather into forms of "the little humour". Later, the individual participates actively in groups at the level of Society. "Society" includes the Market with its groupings in the workplace, and the Civil Society, with groups such as clubs, charities and other associations, with specific social and cultural norms, which include *civilised language* and "the big humour" representative of a given country. Encompassing all of it, we have the State, which protects its citizen inwards and outwards. This is achieved with rules and regulations formulated in the *national language(s)*.

Figure 5: Humour socialisation of the individual via experiences in different social groupings



[6] For a more detailed description, see Lundquist (2020: 128-131, 138-141).

I have added yet another level to this web of interdependent social groupings, which are held together by the common language and use the potentialities of that language for performing communicative tasks specific to that society. Given my perspective of "Danes' humour as compared to non-Danes'", I have had to augment the model with a *supra-national level* "Other States". This means a repetition of all levels and a recursion of the interdependence between individuals from one country and individuals from other countries, each population having grown up with their mother tongue and their personal experiences of "teeny-weeny humour" and "little humour", totalised in their "big humour". The "big humour" varies from country to country, because each population participates in groups with different norms and cultures at all levels: family, market, civil society and state figuration. In short, at the supra-national level, as witnessed by the interviewees from the European Parliament (Lundquist 2020: 147-155), people interact with people who are socialised to other forms of humour[7].

In the context of Danish humour, the Danish way of living together is characterised by a general *we feeling*, into which the Danes have been civilised as the result of a historical geo-political necessity to survive as a national entity in the face of political pressures from outside (cf. "unit of survival" (Kaspersen 2008: 244))[8]. This *we feeling* has been characterised first as a *tribe feeling* (Mellon 1992), then more precisely, in my view, as a *campfire mentality* (Jespersen 2004). The *we feeling* of the campfire mentality is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The Danish campfire mentality

It is evident that Danes' national mentality, as illustrated above, constitutes a "natural habitat" for the use of irony – we actually sit on and refer to common ground – and particularly for the use of self-irony which thrives around the fire. When everybody sits on the same level, they all have to stick to the cultural norms of equality and homogeneity and to respect the "hygge" (cosiness), which dictates that you should not distinguish and heighten yourself, but rather "lower yourself" and melt in with the others – on the common ground.

6.2.1. Organisational sociology and Danish irony and self-irony

In line with the general Danish attitude to life and humour, seeing life as small and big in the terms expressed by the Danish philosophers Kierkegaard and Høffding, we find Danish literature on

[7] See also Lundquist & Gravier (2019).

[8] Especially after the loss of the duchies in 1864, but also caused by other crises such as WWI and WWII (Kaspersen 2020).

management and organisation in which humour, irony and self-irony have been praised as *management strategies* in their own right (Lundquist 2020: 155-160). Thus, the Danish professor of philosophy of leadership, Ole Fogh Kirkeby, recommends the use of *irony* in leadership as a "corrective" to seriousness, as "a mild shadow" that follows seriousness in order to create *trust*; next, *humour* is to be used as a "soothing" corrective to irony that may be too sharp in creating an "unarticulated *communitas*" (Kirkeby 2003: 27-29).

I see a link between the notion of "unarticulated *communitas*" and the notion of "common ground", suggested by the pretence theory (see above). Both notions implicitly refer to a distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders", between those who have access to the *communitas* because they are on common ground, and those who are excluded from the *communitas* because they are not on common ground. Both notions help describe why non-Danes so often misunderstand Danish irony.

In a seminar on humour for international students at Copenhagen Business School, Kirkeby vividly summarised how "the true leader" should use humour and irony: "Humour and irony constitute the way of the true leader, as the wax melted away when the statue of the organisation has been finally cast".

However, such a "flat" organisation, where the boss seems – or pretends? – to melt away, can often cause confusion and misunderstanding, perplexity and uncertainty among non-Danes working with Danes. A young Bulgarian woman among the interviewees was confused when her boss joked with her, because she did not know if she could return the joke or should just smile. In general, she said, she does not know "if people are joking or not, because they do it with everything". Her Danish boss's humour confuses her. As she does not know whether he is being serious or joking, she ends up being generally uneasy in her professional relationships with her Danish colleagues (Lundquist 2020: 161).

Self-irony, too, is recommended as a special leadership tool, because it is supposed to be the antidote to self-pompousness, which is the worst thing imaginable to a Dane, be it at home or at the workplace. Another Danish professor of organisation and leadership, Jan Molin, is very sharp on this point. He argues that self-irony is crucial for cooperation in the workplace, because the "exposure of one's self" creates an *affinity* based on the recognition of being (more or less) equal and mutually engaged, responsible and connected (Molin 2006: 32). Again, the underlying metaphor of the Danish campfire mentality also applies, it seems, to professional leadership and management contexts.

6.3. Linguistics

We saw above that the concept of common ground is fundamental for the existence of a "national mentality", and consequently for a "national humour". Common ground is also crucial for the correct decoding of the typical Danish humour forms, irony and self-irony. In addition, common ground plays an important theoretical role in *linguistics*, where it is considered a central aspect of interpreting utterances in conversations. The need for common ground is even more acute when explaining interpretation of humour as a spontaneous event in linguistic interaction. This is evident both when it comes to the general aspect of conversational humour independent of language, which leads to linguistic pragmatics, and in terms of the characteristics of a particular language. Since I am focusing on Danish humour, I looked for explanations in Danish grammar.

6.3.1. Pragmatics: conversation, logic and humour

While focusing on the dynamic aspect of interpreting humour events in conversation, I have been especially attracted by *pragmatics*, not least by Grice's general "principle of cooperation". As general as this may initially seem, being derived from a universal "logic of conversation", in the final analysis, however, when applied to humour used in international contexts, it founders on the problem of *common ground*; on the presence or absence of common ground between the communicating parties.

The general "logic of conversation" is described in Grice's seminal paper "Logic and

Conversation" as follows:

> Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks and would not be *rational* if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, *cooperative efforts*; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a *common purpose* or set of purposes, or at least a *mutually accepted direction* (Grice 1989: 26. My emphasis).

The cooperative principle is derived from this conversational rationality and the common purpose:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the *Cooperative Principle* (Grice 1989: 26).

I assume that the parties in a professional interaction act in accordance with this principle. Not least because they are steering towards a *common purpose*, such as sealing a business contract or reaching a political agreement, so that they expect the other party to contribute to the negotiation in a way that is *rational* and *relevant* with respect to this common purpose. So, what happens when an utterance in a professional context is intended as a humour event by A, but not expected as such, and hence not immediately perceived as such by B? B becomes confused because the "mutually accepted direction" seems to change, and the *conversational implicatures* he or she would normally work out on the basis of the cooperative principle (Grice 1989: 24; Lundquist 2020: 82-86) do not seem to make sense in that particular situation. What can A possibly mean by his or her seemingly irrational remark? I imagine that this happens more often when A and B come from different countries and speak different languages, i.e., when A and B are socialised in and to different forms of humour. Or, in pragmatic terms, when A and B are not geared for making the same conversational implicatures because they are not acting on common ground. I have (Lundquist 2020: 90-92) proposed three types of conversational implicatures specific for humour events: a general "conversational implicature *cum* humour" and, with a special view to the two typical forms of Danish humour, two specific implicatures: a "conversational implicature *cum* irony", and a "conversational implicature *cum* self-irony". Such implicatures, which swiftly guide you in the direction that "this is not serious but meant to be fun" are readily at hand for Danes, but not easily arrived at by non-Danes, as apparent from the examples mentioned above.

The need for *common ground* becomes especially acute when interpreting irony, as stated in the linguistic *pretence* theory (see above), with what can be seen as its "double audience": "(Irony) may be defined as the use of words *intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part* of the audience and *another to the initiated*, the delight of it lying in the *secret intimacy* set up between the latter and the speaker" (Fowler 1965: 305-306. My emphasis). The division between the "initiated" and "the uninitiated" finds a better explanation in the notion of humour socialisation: every person is socialised into their country's "big humour", with a common ground shared with their countrymen, which makes countrymen more initiated than the uninitiated non-countrymen.

6.3.2. The Danish language

It is tempting to consider conversational humour events as *acts of humour*, maybe even as a certain type of *speech act*. Or more moderately as an *illocutionary act*, i.e. a linguistic layer added to the locutionary act, signalling that the utterance has to be interpreted as an act of humour, irony, self-irony, etc. (Lundquist 2020: 90-92).

This seems obvious for humour used as we find it in Danish. Danish is a language that has

particular linguistic devices for expressing common ground, which are essential and necessary for assuring a successful humour event. Such devices are frequently used by Danes in conversation and dialogue, for which reason they have been called "dialogical particles" (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 1046-1108). They consist of short, often monosyllabic and unaccented adverbs such as *jo, vel, nok, vist, bare* (Lundquist 2010a, 2010b, 2014, 2020: 100-104), and their function is to guide, maintain and regulate the interaction between the communicating partners, and more specifically, to refer to an implicit common background of knowledge, assumptions, feelings and attitudes. They create a relationship of understanding and "secret intimacy", as mentioned by Fowler above; thus, these short Danish particles have a "bonding function", in that they create a fertile ground for using humour, irony and self-irony among Danes. Since, in addition, the ground is already present in the Danish campfire mentality (Figure 6), these dialogical devices naturally invite conversational implicatures of the kind "*cum* humour", "*cum* irony", and "*cum* self-irony" as suggested above. Danes are already initiated into the "big Danish humour" and its preferred forms, and the linguistic devices at hand are constantly used for social purposes, thus reinforcing the interdependence between language, social behaviour and common cultural values.

As an example, let us imagine that the remark perceived by the Chinese student as blunt and 'in your face', could and would have been soothed by his Danish buddy, if he had said it in Danish. The Dane would probably have inserted one or more dialogical particles:

"That's {*jo, nok*, *vel*, *vist*, *vist nok*, *vel nok*} because of excessive use of alcohol and sex!"

The English equivalents of these Danish adverbs are roughly: 'you know', 'I suppose', 'as far as I know', 'probably'; i.e. longer words and paraphrases, more articulate and not as subtly slipped in everywhere as Danish particles are in everyday dialogue.

For non-Danes, these particles, monosyllabic and unaccentuated as they are, are practically imperceptible, even for those who master Danish. Add to this that each of these particles in itself has a fine web of meanings, which in combination with their recursivity in natural dialogue, end up creating an intricate net of understanding and intimacy that is mostly inaccessible to the uninitiated. And, because they refer to a certain sum of presupposed knowledge, the uninitiated non-Danes may not grasp the irony, and thus they feel excluded.

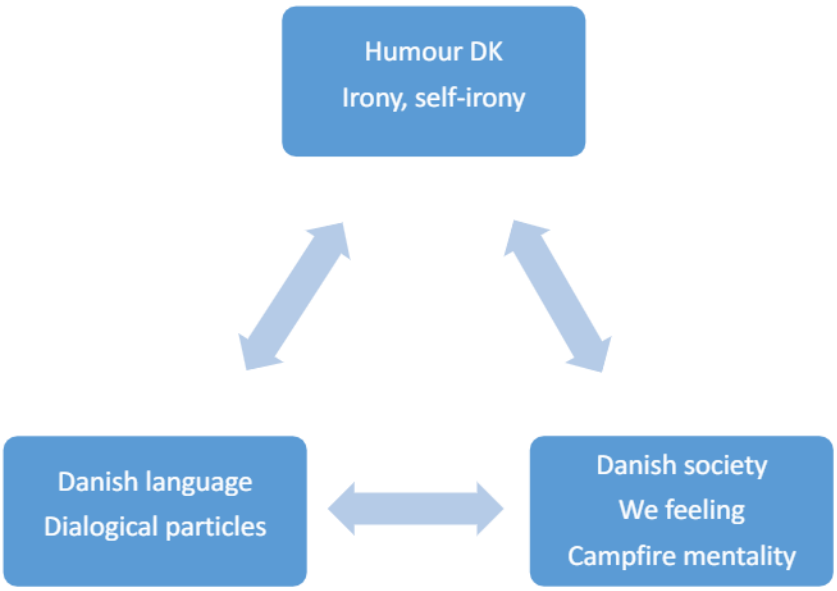
To sum up: for a Dane, the Danish dialogical particles clearly signal a certain distance and a personal attitude to the utterance. That is why these linguistic devices are well suited for expressing irony and self-irony; irony that "is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, an attitude or an evaluation (Grice 1978: 124) and the delight of which lies in the *secret intimacy* set up between the speaker and the receiver[9].

7. Conclusion

I have demonstrated the main idea behind the notion of humour socialisation focusing on how Danish humour has been moulded in an interaction with Danish society and the Danish language. I have presented the fact that Danes characteristically use two humour forms, irony and self-irony, even in professional relations with non-Danes, and that these forms have gradually become their specific "big humour", as a result of growing up in Danish society with its distinctive *we feeling* and campfire mentality, which is fuelled by the presence of dialogical particles in the Danish language. This is recapped in Figure 7.

[9] In Lundquist (2019), I mention other characteristics of the Danish language that contribute to making the term 'humour' in itself a "cultural word" (Levisen 2012, 2018), referring to a recurring phenomenon in Danes' lives.

Figure 7: Humour socialisation in Denmark

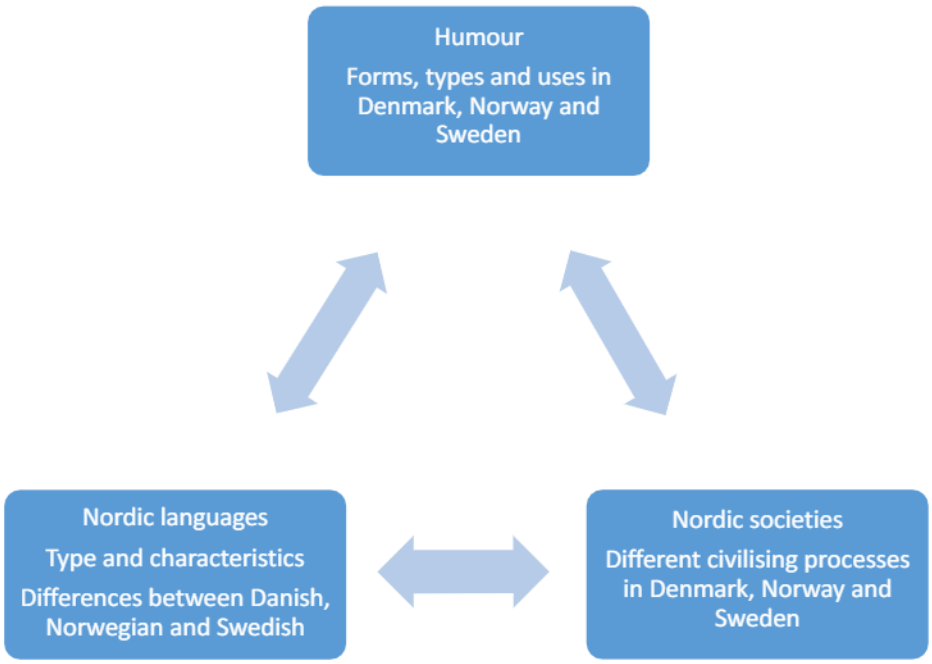


7.1. Perspectives

From another perspective, however, it would be interesting to test the soundness of the notion of humour socialisation proposed here by transferring it to other languages and countries. I can think of two scenarios for continuing humour research along this line. First, since we are working with three "variables": humour, language and society, we could strive to keep one variable more or less constant. We could do that by comparing humour uses in three Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway and Sweden, which have similar languages[10] and possess the same kind of dialogical particles. Differences in the use of humour could then be attributed to different processes of civilisation ending up in different "national mentalities". Ultimately, differences in the use of dialogical particles may be revealed across the three countries, in general and in connection with humour events in particular. Such differences might also be attributable to differences in historic "processes of civilisation" – and ensuing differences in mental nationality and specific form(s) of "big humour".

[10] The Danish, Swedish and Norwegian languages constitute the northern branch of the Germanic language family. Danish and Swedish constitute its eastern sub-branch, Norwegian the western sub-branch.

Figure 8: Comparing humour socialisation across the Nordic countries



On a larger scale, we could imagine a comparison of humour use between societies with Germanic languages and societies with Romance languages. I have carried out an initial comparison between the use of humour in Danish and French in professional settings. I found systematic differences (Lundquist 2013), which I explain (Lundquist 2020: 136-145) using the following theory: French mentality has been moulded from above, from the court society (Elias & Mennell 2006), into a hierarchical society with formalised civil manners and norms for elegant conversation as a means of social distinction (Gordon 1994; Le Roy Ladurie 1997). Denmark, on the other hand, has been moulded from below, from the peasant society, into a horizontal organisation with more informal social norms (Elias & Schröter 1996).

From a linguistic point of view, there are typological and systematic differences between the two languages that may also have an impact on humour forms, some of which will be more easily at hand than others. Where, as described above, Danish offers an inventory of short bonding adverbials, French has special morphological, derivational and metric characteristics (Herslund 2003), which are easily adopted in the forms of humour preferred by the French: elegant play on words ("jeux de mots", "mots d'esprit", "bons mots"), into which they are socialised via their court society. The comparison seems to confirm the theory that there is an interrelation between humour forms, language and society.

This observation lies at the base of the notion of humour socialisation. However, it also invites further investigations, of other humour situations, across other countries and other languages.

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