

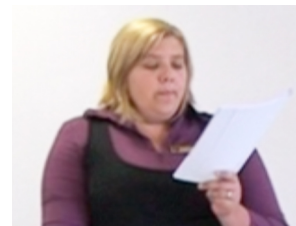
Laughter as Interactive Achievement

Through our analyses, we learned that it humor, jokes, wit, and so on are interactive achievements of which laughter is an integral part. It is not that some situation is inherently humorous, jocular, witty, and so on. Rather, all parties work together, making invitations and offers and accepting them. For example, in Episode 1, the teacher Victoria asks a question that appears to have an obvious answer. Many students laugh. Now we should not think that a situation of this kind is *inherently* funny. If humor is singular – it cannot be predicted or anticipated – and shared, then it is an interactive achievement.

Episode 1

01 V: ben and jane (1.33) you dont know who ben and jane are but listen and you will find out

02 S: <<f>h:>



> 03 V: ben and jane have recently grADuated from qu u t as civil engineEers (0.61) they have secured jobs with quEEnsland depARTment of mAIn roads what do THEY build *



04 (0.41)

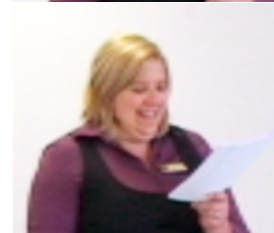
> 05 S: <<f, several Ss in unison >[rOAds]>

> 06 V: [roads] yea

<<smiling>[good (0.44) [a:nd]

[*]

> 07 Ss:<laughter>[hehaha]



The question of what is a joke cannot be decided on the basis of the intellectual content of an utterance. There are instances – even coded as funny by the teacher – that are not associated with laughter, on the part of the speaker or the audience. In the present instance, the teacher asked the obvious: What does the Queensland

Department of Roads build? Up to this point, she has been reading with a serious facial expression. Then, right at the end of what turns out to be the question, her head jerks a little forward and her face changes to produce a facial expression that one might gloss as expressing surprise and laughter simultaneously. There is a little pause before about 6 to 8 students, together with Victoria, articulate in a loud voice, “roads” (turn 05). Victoria acknowledges, “Yea,” and several students laugh. Victoria, too, has a broad smile on her face as she moves to continue reading from the teacher booklet.

In this instance, the laughter does not just come because something is funny. It arises from the situation following specific resources that after the fact can be seen as *accepted* invitations. It begins with Victoria reading while featuring a serious expression on her face. Then, immediately after asking the obvious, her body moves in a jerk, constituting a marker, followed by a radical change in the facial expression. It can be seen as an invitation to laughter; it can be seen as marking the preceding text as something that does not need to be asked because it is the obvious. Several students respond in unison, which marks a complicity of the kind that allows jazz musicians to play in unison during their improvisations and jam session. This is followed by student laughter, and accompanied by a big smile on the teacher’s face. In this case, then, the teacher invites not only a response but also to evaluate the question as the obvious, perhaps even as ridiculous because it is the obvious, and sufficiently ridiculous to warrant laughter and smiles.