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Understanding humorous metaphors in the foreign language: a state-of-the-art review

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Abstract: Humor is not only a highly valuable tool for pedagogical purposes, it can also help language learners increase their feeling of engagement in everyday communication in the target culture (cf. Lee 2006). However, the understanding of humor in a foreign language (L2) requires the use of a great deal of knowledge that goes far beyond the mastery of mere linguistic features of the target language. It requires the use of specialized sociocultural knowledge (e.g. the use of political satire, local sights and sounds, historical references) and to some extent the creative elaboration of figurative meaning. In this context, it is quite surprising that cross-cultural humor research so far has neglected the contribution of conceptual metaphors as a mean to create humorous language. Therefore, the present article explores the theoretical and empirical interconnections between cross-cultural humor research and cognitive linguistic research on metaphor and shows some directions for future research on the comprehension of humorous metaphors in the L2.

Humor ist nicht nur ein wertvolles didaktisches Mittel, sondern er kann Sprachlernern dazu verhelfen, ihre affektive Beteiligung an zielkultureller Alltagskommunikation zu stärken (vgl. Lee 2006). Das Verständnis von Humor in einer Fremdsprache (L2) erfordert jedoch den Einsatz von Wissensbeständen, die weit über die Beherrschung rein sprachlicher Merkmale der Zielsprache hinausgehen. Es erfordert nämlich den Einsatz von soziokulturellem Wissen (z.B. die Verwendung von politischer Satire, Kulturgütern und Lauten, historischen Bezügen) und bis zu einem gewissen Grad den kreativen Umgang mit metaphorischer Bedeutung. Vor diesem Hintergrund mag es überraschen, dass die kontrastive Humorforschung die konzeptuellen Metaphern als linguistisches bzw. konzeptuelles Mittel des Humors bisher kaum erforscht hat. Daher untersucht der vorliegende Aufsatz die theoretischen und empirischen Verbindungen zwischen der kontrastiven Humorforschung und der kognitionslinguistischen Metaphernforschung und formuliert Desiderata für künftige Studien zu den Verarbeitungsprozessen humorvoller Metaphern in der L2.

Keywords: Humor, conceptual Metaphors, metaphoric competence; Humor, konzeptuelle Metaphern, metaphorische Kompetenz.

1 Introduction

Ever since Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal release, the cognitive-linguistic view of metaphors assumes they are not only a matter of language and meaning, but also of thought and knowledge. According to their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphor is approached in terms of a conceptual mapping from a source onto a target domain. This has led to a significant paradigm shift in the way we conceptualize figurative language in general, as well as its contribution to specific domains such as humorous discourse. In order to be able to appreciate the funniness of metaphorical expressions such as "His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free" (Attardo 2015: 96), we do not only need to combine different sources of knowledge (lexical, socio-cultural and discursive knowledge), we also need to perform cognitive mechanisms allowing for the identification of similarities among the attributes of the evoked concepts. Since humorous metaphorical expressions often rely on the incongruity of unprecedented correspondences between two or more concepts to generate funniness (in the previous example the thoughts are perceived as underpants in the dryer), finding similarities might be challenging (cf. Dynel 2009). This is even more the case for foreign language speakers whose linguistic resources and especially metaphoric competence (cf. Danesi 2008) are widely more limited than those of first language speakers. Considering that humor is prevalent in many speech genres and can effectively support inclusion and engagement in immersion environments (cf. Lee 2006), it is quite surprising that research so far has not directly addressed the question yet, of how humorous metaphors are understood and used in the foreign language learning context. In order to fill this gap, the present article will sketch out the theoretical foundations and discuss relevant findings from empirical research that might help elucidate how L2 learners understand humorous metaphors. In the first section (2), we will give an overview of the theoretical underpinnings regarding the interconnectedness between humor and metaphor processing from a (cognitive) linguistic point of view. In section 3, we will present the notion of metaphoric competence (cf. Danesi 2008) and stress its importance in the context of L2 learning. Section 4 discusses in a more systematic way empirical research into the different factors affecting metaphor and/or humor comprehension in the L2. Finally, section 5 draws conclusions and makes some suggestions for further research against the backdrop of existing literature.

2 Humorous metaphors: A theoretical overview

In order to provide a comprehensive view of how humorous metaphors work, we need to integrate insights from both humor and metaphor theories. As pointed out

by Attardo and Raskin (2017: 49), the publication of Raskin (1985) shed new light into the linguistic approach of humor and allowed to have an overview of the different existing theories. This author presented three groups of humor theories (*incongruity*, *superiority*, and *release*)¹ and assumed that these complemented one another (Raskin 1985: 40–41). Amongst the most influential linguistic-oriented studies of humor, we find the so-called *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GVTH), an approach that originally comes from Raskin’s *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* (SSTH) and which has been broadened by Attardo and Raskin (1991). The authors Brône, Feyaerts and Veale (2006), on the other hand, who are part of “the new wave of cognitive linguists” (Krikmann 2009: 5), state the shortcomings of the traditional GVTH and SSTH (which we won’t discuss in this paper) and rather call for humor theorists and cognitive linguists to collaborate more closely (Krikmann 2009: 28). The connection between both fields, humor and metaphor, has been of high interest to many scholars in different fields (cf. Dore 2015; Kang 2016; Krikmann 2009; Kyratzis 2003). In Kang’s (2016: 361) terms, “researchers’ interest in the metaphor-humor relationship arose from discussions on how to distinguish between the two while focusing on their similarity”. The common ground between humor and metaphor has already been investigated in the 1960s with Koestler (1964), for instance, who defined the overlap of humor and metaphors as a “bisociation of ideas” (in Kyratzis 2003: 1). The idea of duality found both in humor and metaphor can be traced back to Aristotle. He wisely allowed the combined ideas of metaphors to be “closely related objects”, the relationship between them not being “obvious to everyone at first sight”, and jokes to be similar to metaphors in that “they all lead to pleasure derived from the unexpected surprise” (Müller 2015: 112). The dualistic view, according to which a double reference is ascribed to metaphorical expressions or humorous constructs, has been widely accepted throughout time. This point of view also contributed to the *incongruity theory* (Müller 2015) and represents the premises of research into the humor-metaphor connection.

Recent research into humorous metaphors has adopted a more cognitive approach (Kang 2016: 361) and does not necessarily meet a dualistic view (Müller 2015). In this vein, the incongruity theory or resolution model by Attardo (2015) has widely

¹ “[T]he three large groups of theories briefly discussed above are not at all incompatible [...] The three approaches actually characterize the complex phenomenon of humor from very different angles and do not at all contradict each other—rather they seem to supplement each other quite nicely. In our terms, the incongruity-based theories make a statement about the stimulus; the superiority theories characterize the relations or attitudes between the speaker and the hearer; and the release/relief theories comment on the feelings and psychology of the hearer only. [...] The script-based semantic theory of humor [...] is designed as neutral with respect to all of those theories and is, in fact, easily compatible with most, if not all of them, which is, of course, another way of saying that its goals, premises and terms are rather dramatically different from theirs” (Raskin 1985: 40–41).

been adopted in both humor theory and metaphor theory. In this model, the key to reaching a humorous effect lies in the unexpected juxtaposition of two dissimilar concepts (cf. Dynel 2009; Kyratzis 2003). In both humorous constructs and metaphors, incongruent concepts are said to be connected “by some cognitive mechanisms similar to metaphorical analogy” (Müller 2015: 114). Although metaphors can substantially contribute to achieving humor, humorous metaphors have, if we can say, hardly been investigated, especially from an empirical point of view.

Kyratzis (2003) studied the relationship between metaphor and humor and more precisely the cognitive processes involved when one faces laughter in discourse. In the author’s terms, the idea of duality is certainly important for metaphors, but “the boundaries of the two input spaces are fused. The more conventional a metaphor is the less aware we are of the tension between the boundaries of its input spaces” (Kyratzis 2003: 15). Even if the overlap of humor and metaphor can be recognized in terms of “cognitive (and conceptual) similarity”, the study of the connection between both is, if we can say, in its early days. In summary, “duality has played a continuous role in cognitive studies of both metaphor and humour” (Müller 2015: 114).

As we have shown, different scholars have indeed studied the relationship between humor and metaphor, but research into the “potential funniness of some metaphors” remains scarce (Dore 2015: 200). At this point, we shall summarize the contributions of different authors to the field of “humorous metaphor research”.

According to Attardo, the term *humorous metaphor* serves as an umbrella term covering a variety of phenomena, ranging from semantic or pragmatic order to conceptual processes. The very concept of humorous metaphor covers “at least three different phenomena: Metaphors that are funny in and of themselves (1), metaphors that describe a referent that is inherently funny (2), and failed metaphors; metaphors that are involuntarily funny, or that are produced pretending to be involuntarily funny (3).” (2015: 92–93). Here are examples of these phenomena:

- (1) My bed and I love each other more than anything, but the alarm clock just doesn't want to understand.
- (2) As independent as a hog on ice.
- (3) The red brick wall was the color of a brick-red Crayola crayon.

For many decades, the *distance theory* has remained one of the most influential approaches to humorous metaphors (Attardo 2015). In this theory, there is said to exist a “threshold of semantic distance beyond which the linkage between two domains in the metaphorical construal becomes too distant and is therefore perceived as humorous” (Attardo 2015: 91). However, Attardo (2015), who studied the question of what makes a metaphor humorous, rejects this *distance theory*, considering

it, when used to address the issue of the potential humorousness of a metaphor, as problematic mainly because the distance between domains cannot be quantified. In order to illustrate his point, the author mentions different examples of metaphors of *life* (LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LIFE IS AN APPLE and LIFE IS A BOX OF CHOCOLATES) and wonders when one can say that the two concepts are “too distant” (Attardo 2015: 92). In other words, how is the distance theory able to quantify the distance between *life* and *apple*, or between *life* and a *box of chocolates*? Attardo concludes his study by claiming that developing a unified theory of why some metaphors are humorous and some are not, is not possible. He rather states that the causes for humorous metaphors being funny varies according to the metaphor’s *type* and argues that different *degrees of incongruity* across humorous metaphors exist, which could contribute to the comprehension of (humorous) metaphors both in the L1 and in the L2 (Attardo 2015: 108). For the purpose of this paper, all three types of humorous metaphors as defined by Attardo will be considered.

3 Humorous metaphors in the L2

The importance of including metaphors into the L2 learning process has been stressed by the so-called metaphoric competence (MC), which refers to the ability to deal with metaphors, both the understanding (i.e. processing) and the production of metaphorical construes (cf. Danesi 1993; Danesi 2008; Littlemore 2001a; Littlemore/Low 2006; Littlemore et al. 2014; Low 1988; Suñer 2018; see also literature review by Hoang 2014). This all-encompassing skill has traditionally been analysed in L1 research and was first introduced by Danesi (1986) in L2 research, as he stated that metaphors, as well as idioms, have an important role to play in the language learning process. The same author adds in another research (1993) that metaphors and idioms are central to language and contribute to reaching native-like production skills. About a decade later, Littlemore (2010) demonstrated the linkage between MC in the L1 and in the L2. Different studies on this topic are presented further below.

Despite the fact that the term metaphoric competence has been defined quite differently, there is a consensus concerning its importance in language learning. In line with this idea, different scholars show how challenging it can be for language learners to understand metaphors in the L2 (cf. Hoang 2014; Littlemore 2001b; Littlemore/Low 2006). Low (1988) introduced, for instance, the idea that L2 learners may struggle with what he calls the *topic* and the *vehicle* of a metaphor, and more precisely the transfer between both. The first notion refers to “what is being talked about in a metaphor” (Hoang 2014: 7) and the latter is defined by Hoang as “what is being used to talk about the topic”. Besides this, Littlemore and Low (2006) state

that L2 learners differ from native speakers in that they don't have "native speaker competence" which comprises, amongst other things, cultural conventions awareness, cultural connotations, and figurative language repertoire. Considering the fact that metaphors are fully part of our everyday life (cf. Lakoff/Johnson 1980), if learners of a second language cannot understand and make use of figurative language properly, the situation is problematic (cf. Hoang 2014; Jakubowicz Batoréo 2018). This is even more the case for humorous metaphorical expressions, which require not only a mastery of formal and conceptual aspects of language, but also plenty of sociolinguistic skills and sociocultural knowledge. In some cases, the inability to solve the incongruity emerging from such humorous metaphorical expressions can produce puzzlement or anxiety and make L2 learners feel excluded (cf. Staley/Derks 1995). Furthermore, the ability to appreciate humorous moments in conversations and to deal with creative language has proven beneficial for L2 learners' motivation and linguistic awareness, as well as helpful for the increase of their communicative repertoire (cf. Bell/Pomerantz 2016).

Although much research has been made into the development and teaching of metaphoric language in the L2 (see Hoang 2014 for an overview) and the benefits of humor and creative language use in the L2 learning context (e.g. Bell/Pomerantz, 2016), none of the few studies investigating the factors affecting metaphor comprehension in the L2 (e.g. Suñer 2018, 2019; Türker 2016) has looked into humorous metaphors. It should nevertheless be mentioned that some studies have shown that metaphor processing in the L2 behaves differently in specific subject areas than in general subject areas (e.g. taboo subjects, De Cock/Suñer 2018), which also might be the case for humorous metaphors.

4 Factors influencing the comprehension of humorous metaphorical expressions in the L2

This section reports on existing studies focusing on metaphor comprehension in the L2 and humor in the L2. From these, we make assumptions on the factors that could shape the processing of humorous metaphorical expressions in the L2 in order to draw a list and suggest ideas for future research in the field.

4.1 Learner-inherent factors

The first category addressed in this section includes the following factors: *language proficiency* (mostly in the L2), *humor competence* (L1 and L2), *L2 vocabulary knowledge* and *metaphoric competence* (L1 and L2). All four factors are linked to each other in that they are inherent to the L2 learner himself/herself. We decided to label this category "learner-inherent factors".

First, different authors have been interested in the differences between native speakers and L2 learners when facing metaphorical expressions (cf. Cieślicka 2006; Suñer 2018; Türker 2016). What essentially differentiates both types of language speakers is their *proficiency level*. Gibbs (1989) states that speakers with a high proficiency level do process figurative language similarly to native speakers, in that they do not necessarily access literal meanings first. Other authors, on the other hand, make the claim that L2 learners do access the literal meaning before the figurative meaning in a metaphorical expression (cf. Cieślicka 2006; Giora 2003; Giora/Ofer 1999). Littlemore et al. (2014) also pointed out that the use of figurative language varied quantitatively and qualitatively alongside the language learning process. Other factors related to metaphoric competence such as L2 intra-lingual transfer of metaphors (cf. Boers 2003) might be of less relevance since humorous metaphors mostly rely on novel metaphors that cannot be drawn from other already existing conventional metaphors.

As far as humor in the L2 and language proficiency are concerned, Jaroenkitboworn (2015) studied the understanding and appreciation of jokes by EFL Thai students. She claims that *L2 humor competence* – which is said to be linked to the ability to understand the linguistic ambiguity and to sociocultural knowledge – has an influence on the processing of humor in the L2. *Vocabulary knowledge* in the L2, which is obviously related to language proficiency, influences humor comprehension in the L2 too (cf. Jaroenkitboworn 2015). Considering that *language proficiency* (L1 and L2) affects L2 comprehension of metaphoric expressions and also has an influence on humor comprehension, we can claim that this first factor shapes the way L2 learners process humorous metaphoric expressions. Similarly, *vocabulary knowledge* in the L2 is said to influence humor processing. Considering that L2 learners need to mobilize, among others, a great deal of linguistic (lexical) knowledge to successfully infer the meaning of humorous metaphors and thus appreciate funniness, we can hypothesize that comprehension of humorous metaphoric instances will be affected by language proficiency and more specifically by vocabulary size.

It is important to note that, in contrast to research into more general metaphor comprehension, the study of humorous metaphors not only needs to consider the construal mechanisms from a cognitive point of view, it should also integrate the affective factors modulating the appreciation of humor. In other words, the cognitive processing of humorous metaphors does not automatically mean that L2 learners will have a feeling of enjoyment. In fact, certain humorous metaphors relying on aggressive humor (e.g. in advertising) may cause dislike and reticence by the target audience in some cultural contexts (cf. Yue et al. 2016). In this vein, some scholars have investigated the impact of the so-called humor tolerance on the processing of

humorous instances, which has been often described as being subject to shared cultural values (cf. Yue 2011), but has also shown a considerable intra-cultural variation (cf. Crawford/Gregory 2015).

4.2 Cross-linguistic differences

The second category of factors that are studied at this point refers to cross-linguistic differences, i.e., differences between the L1 and the L2. The factors included in this category are the following: *conceptual*, *sociocultural* and *formal differences*.

Some authors studied the processing of figurative language by L2 learners and analysed the effects of the L1 from different perspectives. For example, Türker (2016) investigated if L1 *conceptual knowledge* and L1 *linguistic knowledge* (besides L1 *frequency*) had effects on L2 learners' processing of figurative language. He claims that L2 learners better understood figurative language when the L1 and the L2 were similar at the conceptual (and lexical) level(s). The conceptual system refers to the way we think and act (cf. Lakoff/Johnson 1980), hence differences at the conceptual level concern discrepancies between two languages in terms of perception and understanding of everyday situations. In line with Türker (2016), Saygin (2001) analysed L2 learners' metaphor processing in a translation task. She deduces that the availability of the corresponding metaphor in the target language influenced learners' translations and clarifies that most of the metaphoric expressions are translated literally when subjects translated from their L2 to their L1. The factors of *conceptual distance*, *formal distance*, and *sociocultural differences* have shown to play a role in the comprehension of metaphors by L2 learners.

As far as humor in the L2 is concerned, Bell (2007) studied conversations in the context of humor between non-native and native speakers. The results of her study show that there were no interactional difficulties. She states that the absence of interactional difficulties may be linked to the avoidance of taboo topics or potentially dangerous forms of humor. She exclusively worked with what she calls "highly advanced non-native speakers of English" engaged in conversation with native speakers. What constitutes a "taboo topic" is certainly linked to the culture of speakers. L1 speakers avoiding certain forms of humor and topics are embedded in the factors of the *sociocultural* and *conceptual differences*.

In the case of *formal differences* between two languages, the structure (and form) of metaphors and humor is concerned. Word structures can heavily vary from one language to another, the case of German nominal compounds (ex: *Bohnenstange*; Engl. "Beanpole") clearly illustrates this point. The comprehension of such structures could cause problems to L2 learners (for English see Uygun/Gürel 2017). As mentioned earlier in this paper, Kang (2016) points out that research into humor at

the lexical level is scarce. Similarly, Kyratzis (2003) clarifies that the linguistic and cognitive theories of humour have mainly focused on canned jokes and conversational humour. Kang (2016) hence filled the gap in this area by analysing more specifically humorous metaphor-based nominal compounds in German. Since humorous nominal compounds can be considered as the smallest form of verbal humor (and since the German language contains many nominal compounds), they are of major interest in the study of humor and metaphors. In the same vein, Steen (2004) focused on metaphor recognition and argues that it depends on five structural factors, including the number of metaphorically used content words (*metaphor complexity*) or the position of the metaphorically used word(s) in discourse. Massey (2017) also mentions *metaphor complexity* when investigating cognitive processes in the context of metaphors in the L2.

In light of the empirical research presented so far, we can assume that cross-linguistic differences (*conceptual, sociocultural* and *formal* differences between the L1 and the L2) do impact the way L2 learners comprehend metaphoric construes in their L2. These also have an influence on L2 learners' humor comprehension. Considering this, we can easily imagine testing these for L2 learners' processing of humorous metaphors in their L2. The study of Kang (2016) will be discussed in depth further, as it constitutes, according to us, a giant leap in humor and metaphor research.

4.3 Contextual information

In this third category, we first study the factor of *context* in humor and metaphor research and see how it can be applied to humorous metaphors. We will then look at other strategies developed by L2 learners, such as analogy building or guessing (from context). While the role of contextual information has been investigated by many authors in the field of metaphor comprehension, it does not seem to be similar in the field of humor in the L2. We will briefly summarize some findings and present at this point studies that investigated the interaction of the context with other factors in the processing of humor and metaphor in the L2.

On the one hand, some authors do not consider that contextual information has a positive impact on L2 learners' metaphor comprehension. For example, Picken (2001) even claims that contextual cues can result as much in literal reading than in a metaphorical reading of metaphors. In this vein, Colombo (1993) studied the effects of context on the activation of literal and figurative meanings of idioms and states that the activation of figurative meanings requires the presence of the idiomatically biasing context, especially for ambiguous idioms (p. 183). On the other hand, Littlemore (2003) makes the claim that the context can have a positive impact on L2 learners' understanding of metaphors. She suggests that intersecting factors

influence metaphor comprehension; *contextual clues* can help L2 learners to comprehend a metaphoric construe and *cultural differences between the L1 and the L2* may cause comprehension problems when interpreting metaphoric instances. The factors of *sociocultural* and *conceptual distances* have been studied by different authors in the context of L2 metaphor comprehension, as we have suggested in a previous section. De Cock and Suñer (2018), for instance, studied the impact of *conceptual and sociocultural differences* between the L1 and the L2 (as well as the context). They found out that the context does not always imply a correct interpretation of a metaphor by L2 learners.

The context clearly plays a role in the comprehension of humor or metaphors in the L2. The consequence to be drawn from these insights is that this factor will certainly shape L2 learners' comprehension of humorous metaphoric expressions as well. Additionally, we can claim that the factors contributing to L2 learners' comprehension of humorous metaphoric expressions may also be intersecting ones.

4.4. Conventuality, familiarity, and frequency

Another group of scholars has mentioned further factors influencing the comprehension of metaphors (in some cases in the L2 context). Some of these will be studied at this point since they could be applied to humorous metaphoric expressions. First, we shall mention the factor of *frequency* (cf. Gibbs 2010; Saygin 2001). If we consider that a series of humorous metaphors already exist, the factor of frequency does necessarily influence L2 learners' comprehension of these. Muelas Gil (2016), for instance, defends that *conventuality* or *familiarity* of a metaphoric expression has an impact on its comprehension by L2 learners. Having considered this, it can be easily hypothesized that existing humorous metaphoric expressions may be better understood by L2 learners than newly created ones. And, analogically, native speakers may better understand existing/conventional/familiar humorous metaphoric expressions, than newly created ones. These are hypotheses, but they could easily be tested in the context of the comprehension of humorous metaphoric expressions in the L2.

5 Conclusions and outlook

We have discussed different factors that may influence humorous metaphor comprehension, but we cannot conclude this paper without mentioning Gibbs' quite critical paper *The dynamic complexities of metaphor interpretation* (2010). According to this author, studying metaphors is a complex and ambitious task since "understanding metaphor is not a single type of activity, and metaphoric meanings are

inherently indeterminate, with both of these shaped by numerous personal, contextual, and linguistic factors which interact with one another in complex, dynamic, often nonlinear, ways (Gibbs 2010: 677)”. Gibbs (2010) concludes his exploration of the dynamic complexities associated with interpreting metaphors in discourse by saying that it is “virtually impossible to provide a single theory on what metaphors mean or how they are understood (Gibbs 2010: 677)”. Bearing this in mind, we want to conclude the article by suggesting some directions for further research into the process of humorous metaphors comprehension. The suggestions are based on the state-of-the-art review presented in the previous sections, which mostly focused on insights from either L2 metaphor comprehension or L2 humor comprehension, but did not address the interplay of both aspects.

- As shown by De Cock and Suñer (2018), the sociocultural distance between the target expressions and their equivalents has a greater impact on taboo metaphor comprehension than conceptual distance, suggesting that metaphor comprehension in such specific topic domains behaves differently than with regard to more general topic domains. Therefore, studying the impact of these factors on humorous metaphors could shed more light on whether the same effects can be observed in other specific domains.
- Formal distance between the target expressions and their equivalents has also been found to play a role in metaphor comprehension (cf. Suñer 2019). However, formal features are often described in very broad terms and include different constructional patterns, so that firm conclusions about specific cross-linguistic effects of those features cannot be drawn. It would be more fruitful to look into the impact of more specific formal features on L2 metaphor comprehension, such as the different meaning construction types, in which metaphor can work within a German nominal compound, as proposed by Kang (2016). A cross-linguistic empirical evaluation could add to our understanding of whether the different construction types impact the comprehension of humorous metaphor in the L2 and whether the effects hold between L2 learners with different L1 backgrounds (e.g. regarding the presence or absence of nominal compounds in the L1 of the L2 learners).
- Humor research has widely investigated the impact of the different types of humor (*comic wit, sentimental humor, satire, sentimental comedy, and full comedy*, Beard 2008) on the cognitive and affective processing in the L1 and has found out, for example, that cognitive aspects play a more important role in *comic wits* than in *sentimental humor* (cf. Speck 1990). L2 humor research has not only failed to conduct quantitative research in experimental settings to find out the role of those types of humor in the L2 (cf. Crawford/Gregory 2015), but it also has neglected to apply those insights to the

study of L2 metaphor comprehension, especially against the background of culturally tinted attitudes towards certain humor types.

- Using the contextual information to compensate for the lack of lexical knowledge about the target metaphorical expressions has also been found to be a crucial strategy in the L2. However, research so far has neglected to measure the influence of the informativity of the contextual information as well as its interplay with learner-inherent variables such as vocabulary size, intra-lingual transfer, and exposure to authentic input. To be more comprehensive, predictive models need to take into consideration those factors when conducting quantitative research into L2 humorous metaphor comprehension. Considering that the degree of informativity might vary across the different levels of proficiency according to the CFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), specialized tools allowing a grading of the lexical units used in and around the metaphors (cf. CEFRLex, François et al. 2014) can help better determine how difficult it is for learners at the different proficiency levels to infer the meaning of humorous metaphors from the context.
- Another research strand that might be worth looking at is the multimodal metaphors used to produce humor (especially in commercials). Multimodal metaphors combine linguistic symbols with visuals, sounds, music, gestures, etc. and require thus an even wider range of meaning-making processes which often rely on highly specialized socio-cultural knowledge. So far, only a few experimental event-related potential (ERP) studies have been conducted into multimodal metaphor comprehension suggesting that the different cognitive mechanisms used differ from those for processing verbal metaphors (e.g. Ma et al. 2016). Consequently, research into humorous metaphor comprehension should also look into the differences in processing both types of metaphors in the L2 and investigate the importance of socio-cultural knowledge for processing metaphorical images.

Although all these directions for further research are presented separately, they are all intertwined in many ways (e.g. the processing of multimodal metaphors in the L2 could be studied with regard to the different humor types), so predictive models should aim to include as many factors as possible in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the cognitive mechanisms and affective variables at play. Furthermore, a major concern is that recent cross-linguistic humor research has mostly applied content analysis, but has failed to conduct quantitative research in experimental settings (cf. Crawford/Gregory 2015). So further research should employ methodological triangulation in order to increase the validity of the findings. Overall, investigating such humorous instances with a focus on cultural transfer would undoubtedly fill the gap in research into this particular topic.

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