

This smells like cat's wee: Laughter and gaze during disagreements about hummus

Vidya Somashekarappa, Chiara Mazzocconi, Vladislav Maraev and Christine Howes

In conversation, interactants generally aim at an optimal level of co-operation and equilibrium avoiding direct disaffiliation as much as possible (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2012). Nevertheless, social interactions often require the production of speech-acts that can make this equilibrium unstable or at risk (Raclaw and Ford, 2017). Such situations can be marked by non-verbal cues such as laughter and gaze (Raclaw and Ford, 2017; Hunyadi, 2019). For example, a laughter can occur to smooth a perceived disagreement with one's interactional partner (1). Following Mazzocconi et al. (2020), we refer to any situation where there is a clash between a social norm and/or comfort to the current situation as social incongruity.

We investigate whether different laughter functions related to social incongruity are associated with different gaze patterns, and can therefore demonstrate different interpersonal dynamics at play. Our preliminary observations are based on the analysis of video recorded dyadic spontaneous interactions in the context of hummus taste-testing, constituting as a part of the Good Housekeeping Institute corpus (GHI) previously annotated for gaze (Somashekarappa et al., 2020).

(1)

A: oh my god ((sniff)) is that cat's wee

[Gaze: A (hummus).....A (B).....

B (A).....B (questionnaire)....]

A and B: ((co-active laughter))

[Gaze: A (B)....A(questionnaire)....A (B)

B (questionnaire).....]

B: hasn't got a lot of smell

[Gaze: A&B (questionnaire).....]

A: ((laughter: [response to disagreement]))

[Gaze: A&B (questionnaire).....]

In our data, when laughter is related to social incongruity as in (1), the partner tends not to look at the laugher. The opposite pattern is observed when the laughter is related to humorous comments (i.e. the laugher tends not to look at the partner), consistently with results from (Gironzetti, 2017).

In laughs used to mark irony, we observe a similar pattern of mutual gaze avoidance, together with the avoidance of shared attention on an external target. The tendency to avoid mutual gaze in the context of disapproval or non-literal language such as irony may be a way to mark distance from the produced speech-act, either from its "harmful" intent or with respect to commitment to its literal meaning, similarly to eye-rolling (Colston, 2020).

References

Colston, H. L. (2020). Eye-rolling, irony and embodiment. *The Diversity of Irony*, 65:211.

Gironzetti, E. (2017). *Multimodal and Eye-tracking Evidence in the Negotiation of Pragmatic Intentions in Dyadic Conversations: The Case of Humorous Discourse*. PhD thesis, Texas A&M University–Commerce.

Hunyadi, L. (2019). Agreeing/disagreeing in a dialogue: Multimodal patterns of its expression.

Frontiers in Psychology, 10.

Mazzocconi, C., Tian, Y., and Ginzburg, J. (2020). What's your laughter doing there? A taxonomy of the pragmatic functions of laughter. *IEEE Transactions on Affective Computing*.

Pomerantz, A. and Heritage, J. (2012). Preference. *The handbook of conversation analysis*, pages 210–228.

Raclaw, J. and Ford, C. E. (2017). Laughter and the management of divergent positions in peer review interactions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113:1–15.

Somashekarappa, V., Howes, C., and Sayeed, A. (2020). An annotation approach for social and referential gaze in dialogue. In *Proceedings of The 12th Language Resources and Evaluation Conference*, pages 759–765.