Taiwanese and Polish Humor

Taiwanese and Polish Humor:

A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

By

Li-Chi Lee Chen

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Taiwanese and Polish Humor: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

By Li-Chi Lee Chen

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9132-0
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9132-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Based on the notion that humor is culturally shaped, this study investigates the process of how humor is created, used and perceived by Taiwanese and Polish speech participants in talks among friends and on television variety shows. Since the aftermath of World War II, Taiwan and Poland have undergone rapid social and economic changes triggered by the processes of modernization. I believe that this has been influential on Taiwanese and Polish behavioral patterns and everyday linguistic practices, and is manifested in their humor.

The main body of this book is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter One describes the problem that this study intends to address. In this chapter, major social-psychological theories of humor (i.e., *Superiority*, *Relief* and *Incongruity Theories*) and linguistic theories of humor (i.e., *The Semantic Script Theory of Humor*, *The General Theory of Verbal Humor* and *The Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor*) are reviewed and discussed. In addition, background information on the data, transcription systems and research objectives is given.

Chapter Two reviews the various strands of research on humor that are relevant to this study. I discuss the use of humor in society and its social functions. Furthermore, I discuss the construction of modern Taiwanese humor, including previous work on Chinese and Japanese humor, as well as on the style of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' in Stephen Chow's farces. With regards to Polish humor, this chapter focuses on how humor is used in Polish politics, prose, poetry, fantasy literature, drawings, posters, the visual arts, on the Internet, in contemporary press and broadcast media. Finally, the analytical framework of this study, informed by conversation analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and interactional linguistics, is introduced.

Chapters Three and Four present my analysis of the discourse strategies used by Taiwanese and Polish friends to negotiate previously established friendships and intimate relationships in a humorous way. Taiwanese friends use six discourse strategies in their conversations, including quotations, rhetorical questions, theatrical performance, back-handed remarks, fictional episodes and dramatic expressions/codes. Additionally, the five discourse strategies that can be observed in my Polish data, including quotations, back-handed remarks, fictional episodes,

dramatic expressions and the highlighting of contradictions, are also presented. While similar discourse strategies are observed in both cultures to construct humor, they are used differently in different interactions.

Chapters Five and Six analyze different types of humor on television variety shows in Taiwan and in Poland. In my analysis, eight types of humor are found on *Kāng Xī Láile*, including personal narratives, wordplay, sarcasm, innuendo, other-deprecating humor, self-deprecating humor, self-bragging humor and *wúlítóu* 'nonsense.' On *Kuba Wojewódzki*, the humor types observed include personal narratives, wordplay, sarcasm, innuendo, other-deprecating humor, self-deprecating humor, self-bragging humor and teasing. My qualitative analysis of these types of humor highlights the cultural differences between Taiwan and Poland.

Chapter Seven discusses the implications of this study. In this chapter, various social issues concerning my findings are discussed, including attitudes to politics, religion and the LGBT community. In addition, the frequent use of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' in everyday verbal interactions in Taiwan and Polish 'directness' are discussed. This chapter also deals with gender issues, which remain untouched in the previous chapters. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the talking styles of the hosts on both programs, in an attempt to understand whether they are being humorous or merely vulgar. At the end of this chapter, the main characteristics of Taiwanese and Polish humor are summarized.

Finally, Chapter Eight summarizes the major findings of this study and suggests future research directions. In this chapter, I argue that quantifying the speech acts of humor, including its discourse strategies and types, is both possible and meaningful. An interesting direction may be to investigate how Taiwanese and Polish children perceive and use humor in their interactions and whether gender is also influential here. At the end of this chapter, I suggest that future studies on humor should focus more on how humor regulates cross-cultural communication between Taiwanese and Polish speech participants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Analyzing humor across different genres and cultures was a big task for me in writing this book. Starting in the very different field of linguistic pragmatics, I had not studied the theory of humor before I started work on this intriguing topic. Analyzing Polish humor also seemed to be an impossible mission for me in the initial stages of writing this book, as my knowledge of the Polish language was quite basic. As such, I owe my thanks to the many people who have helped me make this book a reality. Without them, the completion of this book would not have been possible.

First of all, I would like to thank Professor Chinfa Lien (from the Graduate Institute of Linguistics at National Tsing Hua University), Professor Piotr Cap (from the Department of Pragmatics at the University of Lódź) and Professor Norbert Kordek (from Taiwan Language and Culture Studies Center and the Institute of Linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) for their comments and warm encouragement. Being distinguished scholars in linguistics, they will always remain my academic role models and I deem it an extraordinary privilege to have my book reviewed and recommended by them.

I am also immensely grateful to Mr. Eryk Hajndrych for helping me with the transcription of the spoken Polish data from *Kuba Wojewódzki*. I am also grateful to him for his assistance in translating the Polish extracts used in this book and his patient explanation of them. Without his constant help with the Polish language, I would not have completed this book. I also wish to thank him for copy-editing this book: there are not enough words for me to express how grateful I am to him for all of these things.

I have also benefited greatly from the assistance and encouragement of my friends in Taiwan and Poland throughout the writing this book. I especially would like to thank Mr. Chia-Feng Su and Ms. Karolina Walenczak for the spoken data from everyday conversations. I am grateful to them and other speech participants in their recordings, as well as in mine, for 'unwittingly' contributing some very interesting examples to my data corpus. I, in particular, wish to thank Ms. Karolina Walenczak for not only collecting the Polish spoken data for me, but also doing the transcription for me. She also explained the background of each of her speech participants to me, so that I could analyze the data in a more objective way.

Finally, and most importantly, I am deeply indebted to my family in Taiwan, including my parents, sister and many of my relatives. I, in particular, wish to thank my parents and sister. They have shown me affectionate support and full understanding and tolerance of my bad temper. Their endurance and unconditional love has brought peace to my mind and heart in the midst of chaos and it is to them that I dedicate this book.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> "Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it."
>
> Elwyn Brooks White (1899-1985)

Humor has long attracted scholarly interest in many academic disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, anthropology and cultural studies: this is contrary to White's second point—that few people are interested in analyzing humor. While I hold a different opinion to White's second point, I completely agree with him on his first and third points. That is, to understand the mechanism of humor, one needs first to 'destroy' it. And, while you learn a lot in the process, in the end, you might 'kill' what is humorous. However, the analysis of the mechanism of humor may be a key ingredient in understanding how the mind works in human interaction. Indeed, humor occurs in our daily lives in all corners of the world. It can be observed in talks among friends, on television programs, in newspapers, in magazines and so on. In other words, humor is ubiquitous in our everyday social interaction and is, therefore, an intriguing human behavior which requires explanation and study. This study aims to understand the mechanism of humor in social interaction in Taiwan and Poland and how differences between the two cultures are reflected in Taiwanese and Polish uses of humor. In the following, Section 1.1 discusses the problem of previous studies on humor. Section 1.2 describes the data used for analysis and the research procedure. Finally, Section 1.3 describes the research objectives of this study.

1.1 The Problem

Social-psychological theories of humor are commonly arranged in a tripartite division as *Superiority*, *Relief* and *Incongruity Theories* (Raskin 1985). These three major theories are designated as social, psychoanalytical and cognitive frameworks by Attardo (1994), as shown in the following table:

Table 1-1 The three families of theories

Cognitive	Social	Psychoanalytical
Incongruity	Hostility	Release
Contrast	Aggression	Sublimation
	Superiority	Liberation
	Triumph	
	Derision	
	Disparagement	

(Attardo 1994: 47)

Superiority theories of humor assume that people frequently laugh at others' misfortunes to show their superiority. Such theories are often connected to the great philosophers. According to Chapman and Foot, laughter was viewed by Plato as "malevolent behavior stemming from hurtful aggression, envy, or spite at seeing the enemy vanquished," while Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian regarded it as "a form of behavior from which civilized man should shrink" (2007: 1). In addition, comedy, as a form of humor, was viewed by Aristotle as "an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the *Ridiculous*, which is a species of the *Ugly*" (*Poetics* quoted after Raskin 1985: 36). This shows the viewpoint of superiority theorists towards humor. Relief theories, on the other hand, look at humor from a physiological or psycho-physiological perspective (Rutter 1997). Freud's (1905/1960) psychoanalysis of jokes and humor has revealed not only their psychological process, but also their tension relief function. As explained by Raskin, "The basic principle of all such theories is that laughter provides relief for mental, nervous and/or psychic energy and thus ensures homeostasis after a struggle, tension, strain, etc." (1985: 38).

Departing from the first two groups of theories concerning humor, incongruity theories view humor from a cognitive perspective and focus on its incongruity and resolution. In his philosophical study of humor and laughter, Morreall (1987) observed that many historical figures (e.g., James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, etc.) connected the cause of laughter to incongruity. Shultz (1976) and Suls (1972, 1983) have further proposed a two-stage incongruity-resolution model to look at humor, which has been applied to the analysis of garden-path jokes (see, e.g., Yamaguchi 1988; Dynel 2009).

Linguistic theories of humor, on the other hand, may include *The Semantic Script Theory of Humor* (Raskin 1985, 1987), *The General Theory of Verbal Humor* (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 1997, 2001; Raskin and Attardo 1994) and *The Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor* (Carrell 1993, 1997). As defined by Raskin, "The script is a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it." It is also "a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker" which "represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world" (1985: 81). In light of this, the semantic script theory of humor argues that when a text is fully or partially compatible with two opposite scripts, this text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text. This humor theory, however, ignores other factors, as it assumes that the most influential factor is script opposition. The general theory of verbal humor, thus, "incorporates, subsumes, and revises" the semantic script theory of humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 329) and suggests other more influential factors that inform the joke: script opposition, the logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy and language. Finally, the audience-based theory of verbal humor focuses on the audience of joking texts. This humor theory argues that whether a text is humorous or not is decided by its audience. While the above theories aim to capture the complex phenomenon of humor from social-psychological or linguistic perspectives, they focus exclusively on the structure and form or content of jokes and joking.

Certain types of joking behaviors in conversation have also been investigated. For example, Tannen (1984) illustrated the roles of joking and irony in talking among friends, as well as their relationship to different conversational styles. Norrick (1993, 2003) also analyzed joking behaviors in naturally occurring conversations. Norrick's work is inspiring in its study of conversational joking: he not only categorized different conversational joking forms, but also distinguished them by examining their humor mechanisms. Nevertheless, there is no clear distinction between each joking form—one joking form may fade into another in conversation. As Norrick has argued, "The flexibility and protean character of conversational joking forms is an integral part of their attraction." More specifically, "joke punchlines turn into wisecracks, witty repartees grow into anecdotes, anecdotes develop into jokes, and so on" (2003: 1338). Norrick's categorization of conversational humor, however, needs modification to take into account the data which I have collected in Taiwan and Poland that suggests humor is culture-specific.

In Taiwan, conversational humor is seldom studied academically. Many previous studies have focused on *xiàngshēng* 'traditional humorous Chinese

verbal performance' (see Tong 1999) or ancient Chinese jokes (see Chen 1985; Huang 2009). Kuo's (1996) study looked at conversational humor in the context of Taiwan. She applied Norrick's (1993) categorization of humor (i.e., personal anecdotes, jointly produced narratives, wordplay and wordplay interaction, punning, sarcasm and mockery) to her analysis, focusing, in particular, on gender difference. Her research, however, was limited by Norrick's model and does not capture the whole gamut of conversational humor in Taiwan. Liao's work (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) also analyzed how humor is expressed and perceived in contemporary Taiwan with a special focus on its perception. Her research, however, was mostly based on old Chinese jokes, rather than conversational data.

Neither Kuo's (1996) nor Liao's (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) work can account for the data that I have collected in contemporary Taiwan—partly because the language has changed greatly over the past decade. Moreover, while Kuo's (1996) research findings were based on conversational data in Taiwan, she did not discuss how humor was used in institutional discourse settings (e.g., television variety shows), which have greatly influenced the use of humor in casual conversation.

On the other hand, studies on Polish humor have flourished like mushrooms. In his overview of Polish humor studies in philosophy, literary studies and linguistics in the twentieth and twenty-first century, Chłopicki (2012) has pointed out that Polish researchers, particularly linguists, have been focusing more and more on international humor research. His observation is backed up by the number of recent studies on Polish humor. For example, many studies on Polish humor have discussed how humor is presented in different written genres, including prose and poetry (see Jarniewicz 2012; Kamocki 2012; Lemann 2012a; Lemann and Gucio 2012), fantasy literature (see Lemann 2012b), drawings and posters (see Libura 2012; Libura and Kiełbawska 2012), visual arts (see Curyłło-Klag 2012), the contemporary press (see Wojtak 2012) and on the Internet (see Grochala and Dembowska-Wosik 2012b). Others have focused on how humor contributes to political discourse (see Brzozowska 2012; Dynel 2012b; Świątkiewicz-Mośny 2012) and the broadcast media (see Dynel 2012a; Grochala and Dembowska-Wosik 2012a; Grzegorczyk 2012). While these studies have outlined the overall perspective of contemporary Poland by analyzing Polish uses of humor in different genres, they looked at Polish humor from within the limits of Polish society. In other words, they do not discuss how Polish humor is perceived outside the context of Polish culture.

Therefore, this study intends to present a cultural perspective in thinking about Taiwanese and Polish humor in casual conversations and on

television variety shows. It is hoped that the research findings can both complement studies on Taiwanese and Polish humor and that they can further show differences between these two cultures. I also propose that studying cross-cultural patterns in humor can provide invaluable insights into how the mind works.

1.2 Database and Research Procedure

In the following subsections, I introduce the data used for analysis and the background of the two television variety shows analyzed. Next, Taiwan's multi-lingual environment and the two transcription systems used for transcribing Mandarin and Southern Min data are described.

1.2.1 Background Information on the Data

The data used in this study come from casual conversations among Taiwanese and Polish friends and from television variety shows in Taiwan (i.e., *Kāng Xī Láile*) and Poland (i.e., *Kuba Wojewódzki*). In the case of the conversational data, all recordings were from private conversations among close friends, made either at home or in a quiet coffee shop. Although the conversations were quite personal, all the participants fully understood that the recordings would be studied and used for academic purposes. In addition, while just a few of them knew that I was interested in the humor used in everyday social interaction, none of them were told about my research procedure. Moreover, none of them had received training in linguistics, psychology, human behavior studies or other relevant fields. Although many of the recordings were made without me being present, the participants were asked to interact in different groups, including same- and mixed-sex groups. In other words, the variable of sex was controlled for.

In the case of the data from the two television variety shows, I did not record any all-female interactions—there was always a male host on each of the two programs. The background of the two programs is introduced in the following.

Kāng Xī Láile was a late-night variety show in Taiwan and was structured like a talk show. It maintained high viewing figures since first being broadcast in 2004. It was popular, not only in Taiwan, but also in China, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia and some Mandarin-speaking South East Asian communities. On October 16, 2015, the host, Cài Kāng-Yǒng, officially announced that he was quitting for personal reasons. Upon hearing Cài's announcement, Cài's co-host, Xú Xī-Dì, immediately announced that she would stand shoulder to shoulder with

him. This program went off the air at the beginning of 2016 and the last episode was broadcast on January 14, 2016. As shown by its consistently high viewing figures, many people born in the 1980s are fans of this program and likely grew up with it. This program was conducted by pairing two hosts with completely different interviewing styles. While Cài was quiet, straightforward and liked to ask serious questions, Xú was an unruly, sexy woman, who frequently joked about her guests or did things to embarrass them. The chemistry between the two hosts made the program extremely popular and it became one of the longest-running television variety shows in Taiwan. In addition, the name of this program involved a mash-up of the hosts' names with a character being taken from each—that is 'Kāng' and 'Xī.' Interestingly, the combination of these two characters mimics the reigning title of Xuányè (1654-1722 A.D.), the second Chinese emperor of the Qing Dynasty, who is usually referred to as Kāngxīdì or 'The Kangxi Emperor.' In 2007, Chén Hàn-Diǎn joined the program as a regular assistant host to liven up the atmosphere, in particular, if the invited guests were silent types. Each episode, of about 45 minutes in length, featured celebrity interviews with entertainers, politicians, sports-persons, Internet celebrities and other invited guests. The examples examined in this study come from six episodes randomly selected between 2010 and 2012.

Kuba Wojewódzki, on the other hand, is an entertainment talk show in Poland and first aired in 2002. Until June 2006, it was broadcast on Polsat, Poland's second biggest television channel. Since September 2006, it has been broadcast on TVN (TV Nowa), another Polish commercial television network. This entertainment talk show is, as its name suggests, hosted by Jakub Władysław Wojewódzki, a Polish journalist, television personality, drummer and comedian. On *Kuba Wojewódzki*, numerous controversial issues are explored in an entertaining way. The examples examined in this study come from five episodes randomly selected from the 2006 season and with each episode lasting about 45 minutes.

Interestingly, the two programs, *Kāng Xī Láile* and *Kuba Wojewódzki*, have many characteristics in common. They both last for an hour with commercials, and the three hosts, Cài, Xú and Wojewódzki, are likely to ask 'face-threatening' questions to entertain the audience. In addition, opinions about both programs are widely divided. While some viewers think that the three hosts' talking styles are entertaining and can be viewed as 'humorous,' others think that they are simply being rude to their invited guests. Using data from both programs, therefore, helps highlight the differences between humor employed on television and that in everyday interaction.

1.2.2 Taiwan's Multi-lingual Environment, Data Collection and Transcription

My data comes from casual conversations and television variety shows in Taiwan and Poland. Although Mandarin Chinese (hereafter Mandarin) is the official language of Taiwan,[1] many Taiwanese also speak Southern Min and Hakka. All three languages belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Additionally, aboriginal groups are found in Taiwan, with 16 tribes speaking different versions of Formosan. These languages belong to the Austronesian language family. There is also a Japanese Creole in Taiwan, which is blended with two Taiwanese Austronesian languages (Atayal and Seediq), Southern Min and Mandarin in phonology, lexicon and grammar (see Sanada and Chien 2009; Chien and Sanada 2010).

Although many languages are spoken in Taiwan, Southern Min is spoken by the majority of people alongside the official language—Mandarin. According to research by Huang (1995) and Ang (2013), about 70-75% of Taiwanese people speak Southern Min. Sandel (2003) has further pointed out that, although the language practices of a particular group or of an individual were once evaluated negatively as a result of the ruling KMT's (Kuomintang—the Nationalist Party) language policy,[2] thanks to the liberalization of Taiwan's political environment under President Lee Teng-Hui's leadership in the 1990s, there has been a new market value attached to local languages. Therefore, it will not be

[1] The term 'Mandarin Chinese' also refers to the official language of mainland China. However, there are many linguistic differences between Taiwanese Mandarin and mainland Mandarin (see Chen 1999: 41-49). Chung's (2001) study further points out that as Japanese was once the official language of Taiwan, Japanese cultural dominance is reflected in linguistic borrowings in Taiwanese Mandarin. In other words, Taiwanese Mandarin (or Taiwanese-accented Mandarin) has distinctive linguistic features reflecting the specificity of the island's cultural history. In order not to obfuscate the issues under discussion, the data used for my analysis comes only from interactions among native Mandarin speakers who were born in Taiwan or were brought up in Taiwan. Regional linguistic varieties in Taiwanese Mandarin (e.g., Taipei accent vs. Taichung accent (see Liao 2008); Taipei accent vs. Tainan accent (see Su 2012)) that do not influence the discourse/pragmatic functions of an utterance will not be discussed.

[2] As investigated by Sandel (2003), the KMT government enforced its Mandarin Language Policy from 1945 to 1987, strictly sanctioning the use of local languages or dialects only in fields it could control. For example, students' use of local languages or dialects would lead to severe physical punishment or heavy fines. Sandel further points out that this policy has had an impact on successive generations of bilingual speakers in Taiwan.

surprising to find that in my data from casual conversations among Taiwanese friends, speech participants code-switch to other languages from time to time.

As my data is not only from Mandarin, but also from Southern Min, I have used two transcription systems. In transcribing the Mandarin data, I have used *Hànyǔ Pīnyīn* 'Transcription of Chinese Characters,' which is commonly used by many international institutions. As Mandarin is a tonal language, the tone of each transcribed character is marked on the vowel.[3] For the data in Southern Min, I have used *Bbánlám Hōng'ggián Pìngyīm Hōng'àn* 'Southern Min Dialect Spelling System,' a romanization system for Hokkien Southern Min.[4] For the data in Polish, on the other hand, no transcription system is needed since Polish uses an alphabetic writing system. Each example in Mandarin, Southern Min and Polish is accompanied by an English translation marked with transcription symbols.[5]

As part of my data comes from casual conversations among Taiwanese and Polish friends, pseudonyms are used in order to protect the confidentiality of speech participants. In addition, due to the fact that different cases of proper names in Polish are morphologically distinguishable, cases of Polish speech participants' pseudonyms will be used in accordance with those of their real names in the original conversations. In presenting the data from *Kāng Xī Láile* and *Kuba Wojewódzki*, on the other hand, the speech participants' real names are used: they are already well known in Taiwan and Poland, and since their conversations were aired on television, there is no need to use pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study will illustrate and discuss how humor is employed in Taiwanese and Polish interactions, in particular, through analysis of casual conversations and television variety shows. I intend to address the following questions:

---

[3] For example, *ma* marked with different tones has different meanings. *Mā* 'mother' is marked with a high-level tone. *Má* 'linen' is marked with a rising tone. *Mǎ* 'horse' is marked with a falling-rising tone. *Mà* 'to scold' is marked with a falling tone. Finally, *ma*, a modal particle, is marked with nothing as a neutral tone.

[4] The transcription of the Southern Min data in my study is based on Lin's (2007) *Dictionary of Mandarin and Minnan Dialect*.

[5] See Appendix.

(1) What are the discourse strategies adopted by speech participants in creating humor to negotiate previously established friendships and intimacy? Are they verbal or non-verbal? What are the pragmatic functions of these discourse strategies in talks among friends?
(2) What are the types of humor found on television variety shows? How are these types of humor constructed? What are their pragmatic functions in interactions on television?
(3) What do the uses of humor in casual conversations and on television variety shows reveal about the differences between these two genres?
(4) Do Taiwanese and Polish uses of humor reflect a user's society and characteristic personality traits? If so, in what ways?
(5) Is gender an influential factor in the production and appreciation of humor? If so, how?
(6) Are the controversial styles of the hosts on both programs humorous or simply vulgar?
(7) Does humor reflect cultural differences between Taiwan and Poland? How are these differences reflected in the characteristics of Taiwanese and Polish humor?

In order to provide a rough answer to each of the above questions, it is important to review some major works on humor in the academic literature.

CHAPTER TWO

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON HUMOR AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, major works on humor are reviewed and discussed. In the following, Section 2.1 discusses the use of humor in society and its social functions. Section 2.2 discusses the construction of modern Taiwanese humor. In this section, there is some discussion of Chinese, Hong Kongese and Japanese humor. Section 2.3 discusses humor and its historical development in Poland, as manifested indifferent genres. Section 2.4 introduces the methodological approaches used in this study. Finally, Section 2.5 concludes the literature review and its discussion.

2.1 Humor, Its Uses in Society and Its Social Functions

According to Weems, humor is a psychological coping mechanism, resulting from "a battle in our brains between feelings and thoughts"—"a battle that can only be understood by recognizing what brought the conflict on" (2014: 9). It can be used to shape human interactions in intra-group situations, inter-group situations and inter-group interactions (Martineau 1972). For example, joke-telling (as an expression of humor), in addition to its entertainment functions, can be used to soften face-threatening acts. In her analysis of joke-telling in Taiwan, Liao (2003b) observed that one might tell a self-disparaging joke to get out of social danger thanks to the politeness involved in joke-telling. In observing Nigerian stand-up comedy, Adetunji has observed that comedians may use self-deprecatory scripts to "[reduce] their stage-authority and social or economic aloofness" (2013: 19).

The pragmatic/interpersonal functions of humor can also be seen in different societies and across generations and gender. In her investigation of humor in business meetings in New Zealand and Japan, Murata (2014) observed that humor can be used to create team spirit among meeting-members, despite differences between the two cultures. Franzén and Aronsson (2013) have analyzed staff-resident interactions at a treatment

home for boys. The results of their findings show that humor and teasing are essentially ambiguous. By using the ambiguity of humor and teasing, staff members are allowed to temporarily violate the social order while strengthening localized rules of conduct. On the other hand, the boys may magnify or transgress institutional and generational boundaries by joking together with staff members.

Reichenbach's (2015) recent study on young Bahraini women's laughter also points to the ambiguity of humor. In this context, humor allows women to juggle with gendered identities in a society ruled by men. As she further points out, different types of humor can be used by young Bahraini woman "to negotiate closeness or distance in social relations" (533). Men, on the other hand, may use sexist humor to promote male in-group cohesion, to serve as a form of sexual harassment and to enlarge self-reported rape proclivity and victim blame (Thomae and Pina 2015). Sexist humor, as Thomae and Pina conclude, helps men "establish positive distinctiveness through inter-group comparisons and reduce male in-group threat," which results from their "adherence to in-group norms and a perceived instability or illegitimacy of the inter-group hierarchy" (200). Indeed, women and men may use humor to construct a stereotypical gender identity, despite the fact that these norms are frequently challenged (Holmes 2006; Schnurr and Holmes 2009).

Strain, Saucier and Martens (2015) have also investigated how men and women perceive anti-men, anti-women and neutral jokes in printed Facebook profiles. According to their findings, both men and women rate anti-women jokes as more sexist than neutral ones. Women also rate anti-men jokes as sexist humor. When men display anti-women humor, they are perceived less positively than men displaying anti-men humor and women displaying either anti-men or anti-women humor. Ford et al. (2015), however, warn that sexist humor may have a lasting and harmful outcome for women, as it can result in a temporary state of self-objectification in women.

Some researchers have focused on recipients' reactions to humor. Hay (2001), for example, has analyzed the strategies used to support humor in interaction, as well as the implicatures that show full support of humor. According to her investigation of conversational data, a recipient of humor may show his/her support by contributing more humor, playing along with the gag, using echo or overlap and offering sympathy or contradictory self-deprecating humor. These implicatures indicate that the recipient recognizes a humorous frame, understands the humor, appreciates the humor or agrees with any message associated with the humor.

In summary, while humor is mainly produced for entertainment, it can be employed for various purposes in different societies and cultures. In addition, gender is also influential in the production and perception of humor. Although humor differs across societies, cultures and gender, the bottom line is that "We all enjoy a good laugh" (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997: 293). As humor may elicit laughter, it may bring about positive effects on people. By laughing together, closeness and solidarity can be established.

2.2 What Has Constructed Modern Taiwanese Humor?

This book holds the view that Taiwanese humor greatly overlaps with Chinese humor and is influenced by Hong Kongese and Japanese humor. Before going into our discussion regarding what has constructed modern Taiwanese humor, I would like to give a brief introduction to the history of Taiwan.

The Han Chinese people are the largest ethnic group in Taiwan. Before their immigration, however, Taiwan was primarily inhabited by aboriginal peoples: Austronesians who first came to Taiwan more than 8,000 years ago. In 1542, Portuguese mariners came across a forest-cloaked island on their way to Japan. Amazed by its natural beauty, they named it *Ilha Formosa* 'Beautiful Island.' This island, now known as Taiwan, was later colonized by the Dutch and Spanish during the seventeenth century.[1] Both colonies subsequently fell. The Spanish colony fell with the Dutch invasion of 1641. After Koxinga (Zhèng Chéng-Gōng)[2] defeated the forces of the Dutch East India Company in 1662, the first Han Chinese polity was established in Taiwan. Koxinga later took over Taiwan and used it as his base against the Manchu-ruled Qing Dynasty of China, in his attempts to restore the Ming Dynasty. After the Taiwan-based Ming loyalists were defeated in 1683, Taiwan became part of the Qing Empire. In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan, and in 1945, the Republic of China assumed control over Taiwan after Japan's surrender. The historical development of Taiwan has constructed this small island as a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community. Such diversity is further reflected in modern Taiwanese humor.

[1] As investigated by Andrade (2008), there was also a short-lived Spanish colony in northern Taiwan (1626-1642 A.D.) during the Dutch colony (1624-1662 A.D.).

[2] Koxinga was a Ming loyalist. More information about Koxinga can be seen on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koxinga).

There is no direct evidence showing that modern Taiwanese humor has been influenced by Spanish and Dutch cultures—their colonies occurred more than three hundred years ago. However, this book holds the view that modern Taiwanese humor is a big melting pot of Chinese, Hong Kongese and Japanese humor, but with particular adaptations to its diversified environment. In the following, Subsection 2.2.1 reviews previous studies on Chinese humor and discusses how they overlap with modern Taiwanese humor. Next, Subsections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 discuss Stephen Chow's *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' and the characteristics of Japanese humor, which are believed to have influenced Taiwanese ideas and uses of humor in people's daily lives.

2.2.1 Chinese Humor, Its Types and Historical Development

Chinese humor first appeared in the form of riddles or jokes (Liao 2001). Chen (1985) has observed four sources of Chinese written jokes, including *xiàohuà* 'commoners' jokes,' *xiānqín yùyán* 'pre-Qín (prior to 221 B.C.) parables,' *huájī xì* 'huaji play' and *qīngyán jí* 'Qīng-yán anthology.' The term 'huájī' first appeared in the ancient Chinese literary work, *chǔ cí* 'The Songs of Chǔ,' written by the ancient poet-patriot, Qū Yuán (343-290 B.C.), to describe "a 'smooth and ingratiating manner' with the prince which he obviously did not possess" (Kao 1974: xix). Chen (1985) further argues that the concept of 'huájī' later changed to that of modern humor and had five types, including *mean*, *obscene*, *witty*, *ironic* (*sarcastic*) and *humorous*. Liao (2003c), however, has questioned this idea and argued that modern humor contains more wisdom and elegance than 'huájī,' despite the fact that the latter also contained funny action, ridiculous speech and witty thought.

According to Yue (2010), Chinese humor has a history of over 3,000 years. Yue has further categorized different types of Chinese humor according to its forms and the period when they first occurred, as shown below:

Table 2-1 Major forms of humor in Chinese history

Form	Time of appearance	Brief description
Comic performance		
comic acts *páiyōu*	around 800 B.C.	Humor performed by professional comedians including comic action and acrobatics for royals and aristocrats.

two-person show *cānjūn xì*	around 500 B.C.	Humor performed by two comedians, one playing a smart person and one playing a dumb person, making fun of life, political or otherwise.
witty show *qǔyì*	around 600 A.D.	Humor performed via cross-talks, single man talk shows, etc. to ridicule the funny and unfair things of life.
comic drama *xìjù*	around 800 A.D.	Humor performed through plays and operas to portray funny or humorous scenes, events and figures in life.
cross-talk *xiàngshēng*	around late 1800s	Humor performed via comedic performance in the form of a monologue or a dialogue.
Satire		
satirical prose *zhūzǐ sǎnwén*	around 500 B.C.	Humor performed via various idioms, scripts, proverbs, fables and parables in ancient times.
folk satire *mínjiān xiàohuà*	around 500 B.C.	Humor performed via folk jokes, folklore, folk shows, folk rhymes, etc.
satirical novels *fèngcì xiǎoshuō*	around late 1800s	Humor performed via novels and short essays, ridiculing an undesirable political reality.
political satire *zhèngzhì xiàohuà*	around early 1900s	Humor performed via various political jokes, satires and stories, ridiculing an undesirable political reality.
Modern humor		
cold humor *lěng yōumò*	around early 1970s	Dry, harsh and bitter humor shown in various verbal and non-verbal acts.
jerk humor *pǐzi yōumò*	around early 1980s	Humor shown via self-deprecation, other-deprecation and self-bragging.
nonsense humor *wúlítóu yōumò*	around early 1980s	Malicious and self-entertaining humor shown via various verbal and non-verbal acts.

(Yue 2010: 407)

As Yue's table shows, modern Chinese humor first appeared in the 1970s and has three forms: *cold humor*, *jerk humor* and *nonsense humor*. These three types of humor also overlap with modern Taiwanese humor. For example, jerk humor, in terms of its characteristics, can be further categorized into three humor types that are frequently used in Taiwanese society: self-deprecating humor, other-deprecating humor and self-bragging humor.[3] In addition, nonsense humor is also a frequent humor type in contemporary Taiwan.[4]

It is believed that Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and his sayings have greatly influenced the thinking of the Chinese people. However, whether Confucius was a humorous person or not remains controversial. In quoting conversations between Confucius and his disciples, Kao (1974) has come to the conclusion that Confucius did indeed use humor to present his message. Kao, however, fails to explain why these conversations should be regarded as funny. While Liao (2001) holds the same viewpoint as Kao (1974), she goes a step further in explaining why Confucius should be considered humorous. As she observes, Confucius employed verbal techniques to create humor, mainly by self-deprecating, other-deprecating and self-bragging. However, Liao has also pointed out that Confucius was not regarded by Lín Yǔ-Táng as humorous.

Lín Yǔ-Táng was called *yōumò dàshī* 'Master of Humor' in China and it was he that first brought the concept into Mandarin and translated it as *yōumò* 'humor,' a neologism first coined in 1924. According to Lee's (2009) research, Lín Yǔ-Táng was China's most well-known bilingual writer—he wrote books in English promoting Chinese culture from 1935-1967. While many of his books were bestsellers, he also set up magazines published in Mandarin to promote Western literary humor. For example, he launched the magazine, *Lúnyǔ* '*The Analects Fortnightly*,' in Shanghai in 1932 to support humorous writing styles, which had an immediate effect on literary trends.

To better understand the humor of Lín Yǔ-Táng and Confucius, Liao (2001) proposes the 'psychological distance theory.' She has also proposed the social theory of *yùjiàoyúlè* 'wrapping instructions in entertainment/amusement' to understand Chinese and Taiwanese verbal humor. Her findings are as follows: firstly, as humor has both entertaining and educational functions, it is regarded as a positive thing by both Chinese and Taiwanese people. Secondly, humor mainly serves to educate and trigger a thoughtful smile in the recipient. Thirdly, recycled jokes are a

[3] See Sections 5.5-5.7.
[4] See Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 5.8.

favorite joke type in Taiwan. Fourthly, Taiwanese people think that a man with a sense of humor does not need to laugh ostentatiously because laughing in this way is considered abnormal. Fifthly, joking is not always regarded as humorous by the Taiwanese. Sixthly, the Taiwanese think that it is improper to develop a joking or humorous relationship with fathers and work superiors. Finally, for Westerners, humor may include joking, magic, clowning, cartoons, comic strips and so on. For Taiwanese people, these activities and objects are not equal.

Although Liao's (2001) study was intended to understand Taiwanese perceptions of humor, her research was conducted from a traditional Chinese perspective. In other words, Liao can be regarded as studying Taiwanese perceptions of traditional Chinese humor (i.e., the humor of Lín Yǔ-Táng and Confucius). Her findings, therefore, cannot be used to explain why certain types of humor are popular in contemporary Taiwan. Nevertheless, Liao's study indicates the vague boundary between traditional Chinese humor and modern Taiwanese humor. While modern Taiwanese humor has developed its own characteristics, it still overlaps with Chinese humor and is greatly influenced by it.

2.2.2 Hong Kongese Humor: The Style of *Wúlítóu* 'Nonsense'[5]

Hong Kongese humor can be said to be characterized by *wúlítóu* 'nonsense,' which is an important element in Stephen Chow's farces (Tan 2000; Jiang 2004; Chueh 2006; Yen 2009; Tao 2010).[6] As a farce is intended to promote laughter through highly exaggerated and extravagant situations, the style of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense,' therefore, has these characteristics embedded in it, usually through the rhetorical devices of hyperbole and irony.

The term *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' consists of three Chinese characters: *wú* 'without,' *lí* 'millimeter' and *tóu* 'head.' According to Tan's (2000) research, this term first appeared as a popular Cantonese saying in Fóshān, a prefecture-level city in central Guǎngdōng, China. When a person's

[5] The relevant discussion of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' in this book, including its examples, was published previously in an article entitled "A socio-pragmatic analysis of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' in Taiwanese verbal interactions" (see Chen 2016a).

[6] Stephen Chow, also named Zhōu Xīng-Chí, is a famous Hong Kongese actor, comedian, film director and producer. More information can be found on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Chow).

behavior and words are hard to comprehend, being vulgar, arbitrary and without clear purpose, this person might be referred to as expressing *wúlítóu* 'nonsense.' Tan further adds that *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' is performed through people ridiculing or mocking one another. In an interaction, whether it be verbal or non-verbal, a participant's use of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' still gets to the essence of the topic while displaying a playful attitude towards life. Its use conveys a profound social connotation. Jiang (2004) further summarizes the characteristics of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' as having no rhyme or reason in one's verbal and non-verbal behavior.

Based on the above observations, we may conclude that when a speech participant's contribution is contrary to expectations in a certain speech context, perhaps deviating from the main topic but still getting to the essence of it, this participant can be referred to as performing *wúlítóu* 'nonsense.' This type of humor can also be understood in terms of a relevance-theory notion of weak implicatures: this acknowledges that its implicatures may be weakly manifested and that the relevance of the speaker's utterance does not depend on any particular one of them (Sperber and Wilson 1986; Allott 2013). The following extract from a Stephen Chow film illustrates the characteristics of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense':

Extract (01)[7]
Línglíngqī Dàzhàn Jīnqiāngkè

01. → *Woman: nǐ yǐwéi nǐ duǒ qǐlái wǒ jiù zhǎo búdào nǐ le ma? méiyǒuyòngde, nǐ shì nàyàng lāfēngde nánrén, bùguǎn zài shénme dìfāng, jiù hǎoxiàng '**qīhēi zhōng de yínghuǒchóng**' yíyàng, nàyàngde xiānmíng, nàyàngde chūzhòng. nǐ nà **yōuyùde yǎnshén**, **xīxūde húzhāzi**, shénhūqíjìde dāofǎ, háiyǒu nàbēi dry martini, dōu shēnshēnde mízhù le wǒ.*

02. → *búguò, suīrán nǐ shì nàyàngde chūsè, dànshì hángyǒuhángguī. bùguǎn zěnmeyàng, nǐ yào fù qīng zuówǎn de guòyè fèi a! jiào nǚrén búyòng gěi qián ma?*

03. *Man: wǒ yǐwéi píng wǒmen liǎngrén de jiāoqíng, kěyǐ tán yìdiǎn gǎnqíng de, xiǎng búdào hái shì yìbǐ mǎimài.*

04. *Woman: jiǎng gǎnqíng yě shì yào fù qián de a!*

[7] *Línglíngqī Dàzhàn Jīnqiāngkè* '*From Beijing with Love*' is a 1994 Hong Kongese action and comedy film. More information can be found on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/From_Beijing_with_Love).

Translation

From Beijing with Love

01. → Woman: Do you think you can hide away from me? You will not make it. A chic man like you is like '**fireflies in the darkness**.' You are always bright and outstanding no matter where you are. Your **gloomy eyes**, **stubble**, wonderful kitchen knife skills and that glass of dry Martini. All these have deeply attracted me.

02. → However, even though you are such a perfect man, I am not supposed to break my own rules. Anyway, you should pay me for last night! Do you think prostitution is free?

03. Man: I thought we are already on friendly terms and could go out sometimes, but it still turns out to be transactional sex.

04. Woman: Going on a date with me also costs money!

The above extract is taken from one of Stephen Chow's films, *Línglíngqī Dàzhàn Jīnqiāngkè* '*From Beijing with Love*.' In a scene from the film, a man and a woman are talking in a market. The man is a pork vendor. His upper body is naked apart from a blue apron. He is somewhat dirty from chopping pork. On the side of his cutting board is a glass of dry Martini. The woman is wearing a white dress and gazing soulfully at the man. From the outfits of both characters, it seems reasonable to suppose that they both belong to the lower-middle class.

The dialogue starts with the woman showing how much she appreciates the man. From the utterances in line 1, we might be lured into a parsing suggesting that the woman is pursuing the man and longing to win his heart. In line 2, however, she abruptly changes the topic and shows us her real intentions; that is, she is a prostitute and she is asking the man to pay her for her sexual services of the previous night. This abrupt change of the proposition is unexpected and is a typical case of garden-path humor (see Yamaguchi 1988; Dynel 2009). More specifically, the audience is led to construct a situation fitting the first part of the dialogue. This innocently constructed situation, however, is eventually contradicted, generating a sense of incongruity. Incongruity can also be regarded as one of the characteristics of *wúlítóu* 'nonsense' and is a characteristic of many of Stephen Chow's films.

The woman's description of the man is also worth mentioning. She uses many expressions to show her appreciation of the man: *yōuyùde yǎnshén* 'gloomy eyes,' *xīxūde húzhāzi* 'stubble' and the metaphor *qīhēi zhōng de yínghuǒchóng* 'fireflies in the darkness.' It is interesting to note that the first two expressions are about the details of the man's face, both suggestive of male 'sexiness' attractive to woman. In the scene, however,