CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Background and Approach

This chapter offers an overview of the research on the subject of conversational humour and laughter that is most relevant to the current study, leading to a rationale for a functional, social semiotic approach to this phenomenon. It has a three-fold aim: to review the literature in order to contextualise the current study of conversational humour in relation to relevant linguistic research; to establish the theoretical foundations on which the study of conversational humour is developed in this thesis; and to establish the methodology utilized in the analysis.

This chapter will review the literature from three key fields that inform this study: humour theory; conversational studies of humour and laughter; and systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Since humour is such a wide-ranging subject area for research across academic disciplines, and in order to set the parameters for this thesis, it is useful to briefly review the major traditions of humour theory through prominent linguistic studies that have carried them out and to engage with the roles of laughter and humour. Then, the review is narrowed to studies of conversational humour as the most pertinent to the current study. These will be explored in Section 2.1. Section 2.2 discusses the theoretical approach of systemic functional linguistics that is adopted in this thesis and highlights the role of the current study in research on humour within the framework. Finally, Section 2.3 outlines the methodology that has been employed in analysing the data of this thesis, including separating conversational sequences and performing a discourse analysis.
2.1 Humour, linguistics and conversation

Following Attardo’s (1994) argument that “it is important to position the linguistic theories of humor in the broader context of the general theories of humor” (p. 16), this section reviews prominent linguistic studies that exhibit and exemplify the three major traditions of humour theory. These will be shown to connect to and also to differ from the aims of the current study. The review then narrows its focus to linguistic studies of conversational humour that inform this thesis.

Humour and laughter have been studied from as far back as Plato and Aristotle (see, for instance, Foot, 1997; Monro, 1951; Morreall, 1983; Norrick, 1993a; Provine, 2000; Zijderveld, 1983; for reviews of laughter; Attardo, 1994 for reviews of humour), and range across academic disciplines from psychology, sociology, anthropology and literature to medicine, mathematics, and linguistics, to name but a few (Attardo, 1994, p. 15). Humour research is often grouped into three overall traditions of study, which have been pursued in the field of linguistics as well. Section 2.1.1 introduces the traditions of theory in humour studies through examples of these traditions in linguistic research.

However, research into conversational humour is still in early stages of development and, while researchers have constructed a number of theories for interpreting humour and laughter in linguistic texts, these are often based on structured joke texts such as those with a punchline. Those researchers who have focused on conversational humour, on the other hand, have found that it does not usually consist of jokes but rather co-constructed stories, banter and banal comments that emerge from the ongoing text in a “play frame” (Bateson, 1987) (cf. Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997, p. 277; Coates, 2007, p. 31; Provine, 2004, p. 215). It also relies on shared norms and values and is in this way much more context-dependent than other types of joking. Furthermore, conversational humour between friends may also be differentiated from more generalised studies of conversational humour, since it is overwhelmingly oriented towards solidarity and differs in this way from talk between participants in institutional roles. This will be developed in Section 2.1.2.
2.1.1 Traditions of humour theory and linguistics

There are three main traditions in the study of humour across disciplines that form a background for all studies of humour: the relief/release theory; the incongruity theory; and the superiority/aggression/disparagement theory (Attardo, 1994). The relief theory focuses on the physiological or psychological release of tension or energy in humour, particularly through laughter; the incongruity theory describes the cognitive mechanism or conflict between planes/frames/schemas of thought in a humorous text; and the superiority theory focuses on the aggressive social functions of laughter and humour based on the notion that laughter is an evolved cry of victory over a foe (Ludovici, 1932; Morreall, 1983, pp. 6–7; Rapp, 1951). This section explores these traditions through prominent linguistic studies to show how researchers are variously engaging with them in linguistics. Whereas each of these theories takes a different focus or angle on humour and laughter, a comprehensive study of humour cannot be completed without taking into account various angles simultaneously (Glenn, 2003a, pp. 22–23).

2.1.1.1 Chafe’s “feeling of nonseriousness” and relief theory

Relief theory explores the physical or psychological release of pressure that occurs following a humorous initiation and attempts to explain that response (cf. Freud, 1976 [1905]; Gregory, J.C., 1924; Grotjahn, 1957; Mindess, 1971, pp. 31–38; Spencer, 1911). This research often focuses on laughter, which is described as a release of a particular kind of energy; nervous, emotional, psychical, sexual or social. Chafe (2007) has developed a linguistic theory of laughter and humour in this tradition, explaining the laughter response in physiological and psychological terms. Physiological descriptions of laughter in relief theory refer to it as a kind of nervous or emotional energy that incapacitates the laugher as it is vented out of the body (Morreall, 1983, pp. 23–24; Spencer, 1911),¹ and Chafe supports this by explaining that it interferes with the breathing mechanism. Simultaneously, according to Chafe (2007, p. 13), laughter distracts the laugher psychologically with a sense of euphoria, which he calls the feeling

¹ The physiological effects of a laughter response are also examined by researchers studying laughter and health, including (and perhaps most prominently) studies of “mirthful laughter” by Fry and colleagues (e.g. Fry, 1994; Fry & Rader, 1977; Fry & Savin, 1988; Fry & Stoft, 1971; Miller & Fry, 2009).
of “nonseriousness”. Freud (1976 [1905]) referred to this as “the release of comic
pleasure” (p. 242), since a joke breaks down control and saves the expenditure of psychic
energy in thought or emotion. In Chafe’s terms, by laughing, participants reject those
situations that they do not take seriously from their repertoire of world knowledge and
instead take pleasure in the feeling of nonseriousness that the absurdity but also the
“pseudo-plausibility” of that humorous situation elicits (Chafe, 2007, p. 90). The laughter
disables the laughers by preventing him/her from physical action while the associated non-
serious feeling, or pleasure, keeps him/her from thinking seriously (Chafe, 2007, p. 68).
Thus, Chafe reasons that humour is merely a way of intentionally eliciting this feeling of
nonseriousness because it is so pleasant (Chafe, 2007, p. 12). In this theory, the feeling
entailed in the release of laughter also becomes the reason behind using humour; laughter
and humour derive simply from a feeling of distraction.

Chafe’s theory is useful in that it emphasizes the importance of the reaction to a
humorous initiation, particularly laughter, as an object of study. However, humour is
about more than a feeling, it also involves the implications of social interaction. In their
specific focus on the response, relief theorists such as Chafe (2007) do not develop what
is behind the humour nor explain those types of spontaneous humour in which laughter
occurs with no build-up of a particular energy (Morreall, 1983, p. 24). In the
conversational humour of this thesis, laughter occurs throughout ongoing talk without a
chance for accumulation of any type of nervous energy. Furthermore, researchers in this
tradition do not consider the communicative possibilities of laughter and its potential role
as a tool for meaning-making with humour in talk. It will be shown in Section 2.1.2.3 that
those who take these meanings into account have found that laughter conveys much more
than a simple feeling or release of energy.

2.1.1.2 Script-based semantic theories of humour and incongruity theory

Script-based semantic theories of humour are the most predominant incongruity-based
theories in linguistics. Incongruity theorists differ from relief theorists in that they focus

2 Note, however, that Raskin (1985, pp. 131–132) and Attardo (1994) have argued that script-based
theories are “neutral” in relation to the three major humour traditions and should not be categorised as
incongruity theories (see also Attardo & Raskin, 1991).
on the joke text and the mechanism behind what makes an utterance potentially humorous, often disregarding laughter and audience reaction. So, incongruity concerns the cause of humour rather than the reaction to it. The humorous mechanism is most often described in cognitive terms, and it is based on ideas and relationships between normal or expected patterns. In short, incongruity involves a collision between two meaning relations that are somehow incompatible, and the humour lies in the “oppositeness” between these levels or layers (Raskin, 1985, p. 100), so that what is presented as funny contrasts with an otherwise serious or expected meaning. While variously described as “bisociation” (Koestler, 1964) or breaks or shifts between “frames” (cf. Attardo, 2006; Bateson, 1987; Brône, Feyaerts & Veale, 2006; Kotthoff, 1996; Norrick, 2003a), script-based semantic theories describe the cognitive mechanism behind a joke text as a collision of “semantic scripts” (cf. Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994; Carrell, 1993; Raskin, 1985). The first of these was Raskin’s (1985) “semantic script theory of humor” (SSTH).

In the SSTH, a joke text is said to have two distinct semantic scripts—a surface linguistic form and the deeper conceptual script of the joke—that overlap and are opposed to each other. A punch line, delivering a lexical cue, works as the trigger to signal a shift between the scripts (a “script-switch trigger”), which the hearer must interpret to backtrack and realise that the other interpretation was initially possible (Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p. 308). The clash of incongruity, or “script opposition”, thus occurs between the congruous script leading up to the punchline and the unexpected incongruous script underlying it that is later made evident. Humour is created from the opposition between the scripts and the backtracking that occurs when the hearer consults his/her “world knowledge” to process the contrast and rescan the utterance as a joke. For instance, in the following joke text, the punchline signals the shift from one script to another unexpected co-occurring script to achieve a humorous effect:

Two guys were in a bar, and they were both watching the television when the news came on. It showed a guy on a bridge who was about to jump,
obviously suicidal. "I'll bet you $10 he'll jump," said the first guy. "Bet you $10 he won't," said the second guy. Then, the guy on the television closed his eyes and threw himself off the bridge. The second guy hands the first guy the money. "I can't take your money," said the first guy. "I cheated you. The same story was on the five o'clock news." "No, no. Take it," said the second guy. "I saw the five o'clock news too. I just didn't think the guy was dumb enough to jump again!"

A script congruous with the hearer’s expectations is built up in this text as the men at the bar go through the steps of a bet, including the establishment of the rules of honesty and honourability in betting when the first man admits he cannot win when he has attempted to cheat the other. The script opposition then occurs in the punchline when the script of cheating in betting is switched to a script of stupidity, since both betters had seen the news before and knew what to expect, but one man is too stupid to realise that the news does not change (i.e. the situation has already occurred and is being re-broadcasted). This is helped by language when the speaker acknowledges that the suicidal jumper is the “dumb” one, which is really applied to the speaker himself. The punchline that occurs at the ending line induces the hearer (or reader) to backtrack and reinterpret the joke in terms of the underlying “stupidity” script whereby the whole bet is underscored by the stupidity of the better.

It has been argued that script opposition alone cannot account for the humorous element or why something may actually be established as funny rather than just incongruous. Some define humour as a secondary phenomenon to (accompanying or resulting from) an incongruous meaning (cf. Carrell, 1993; Simpson, 2003, p. 42), or locate humour in the laughter reaction (e.g. Zijderveld, 1983), noting that the reaction shows that the contrast has in fact been interpreted as a humorous one. In conversational humour, laughter serves as the most identifiable signal for identifying humour in the text (cf. Archakis & Tsakona, 2005) and humour depends on the interactants’ negotiation of values in a similar way to Veatch’s (1998) description of verbal humour. Veatch determines a “funny violation” of a normal situation (or a “subjective moral order”) by incorporating an affective component into his theory. If the perceiver understands what is normal in the situation and is not too emotionally invested in this conception, the perceiver can judge a humorous violation (incongruity) to be funny rather than offensive or non-humorous. Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) later development of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) attempts to
appeal to the shortcomings of the SSTH through a resolution stage and by establishing of a play mode of interpretation.

The GTVH brings together the SSTH with Attardo’s (1989) five-level model of humour, and it has since been extended in various ways (cf. Attardo, 1997; Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Miao, 2002; Brône & Feyaerts, 2004; Hempelmann, 2004; Hempelmann & Ruch, 2005). The GTVH is similar to the SSTH but contains six knowledge resources from which the joke-teller must choose to create the humorous incongruity. In a sense, these are six different aspects speakers can play with to create incongruity, and they are meant to be all-encompassing. The resources are Raskin’s script opposition; a logical mechanism; a target; a narrative strategy; the situation including the audience; and the language. These inform the joke to lead to its interpretation as humorous (Carrell, 2000, pp. 8–9). Also, script opposition is not the only essential component to a humorous incongruity—it is bound by a setup and a resolution stage (Simpson, 2003, pp. 37–38). In the GTVH, a script with a neutral (or congruous) context, which is established for the hearer in the setup stage, contrasts with a contextually-specific second script, establishing an incongruity or opposition. In the resolution stage, hearers enable a “local logic mechanism” to search for a semantic rule to solve the incongruity (the process is often helped by a linguistic resource working as an enabling mechanism) (Attardo, 1997, p. 410). The incongruity is not, however, fully resolved but rather co-exists with the resolution.

This underlines the significant point in incongruity theory that there is some underlying coherent, or congruent, meaning by which speakers create humour and interpret something as incongruent (this will be taken up in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1). The humour relies on a contrast between what is said and what is implied (Partington, 2006), and the implied underlying meaning co-exists with the surface meaning to be interpreted as humorous (Giora, 1995; Giora, Fein & Schwartz, 1998). While the underlying meaning in script-based theories is a script congruous with one’s world knowledge, in conversational humour between friends it involves community values shared between them. This difference identifies a limitation in a cognitive, script-based explanation for humorous

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5 Attardo (2001, p. 25) argues that the resolution is optional since some types of jokes that do not have a resolution, such as “nonsense” jokes, can also be experienced as funny.
6 The resolution also “justifies” the incongruity as humour (cf. Attardo, 1994, p. 97).
incongruity in conversational talk. Both the SSTH and the GTVH are limited in that they focus on the joke text to model rather than casual interactions. So, the setup and resolution stages are suited to structured joke texts where there is a build-up of some underlying script directly preceding a punchline but not to spontaneous conversational humour which has no predetermined script but is open-ended (Davies, 2003). Moreover, the meanings of a canned joke are fixed across contexts, whereas meanings in conversational humour are highly context-specific and unpredictable.

Attardo (1996, 1998) attempts to provide for humorous texts that do not build up to a punchline by introducing “jab lines”, described as words, phrases or sentences including a script opposition that are integrated in any part of a text (as opposed to punch lines that occur at the end). However, finding these jab lines is a difficult task in casual conversation since discursive markers are highly variable. For this reason, laughter, though generally disregarded in script-based theories as a defining feature of joke humour, serves as an explicit signal by which we can identify humour in conversation. This is exemplified by Archakis and Tsakona’s (2005) application of the GTVH to conversational data, in which they incorporate laughter as a secondary, necessary criterion for detecting where the incongruity actually occurred (i.e. for interpreting the humour). Wennerstrom (2000) also combines laughter with script theory as a criterion for identifying humorous sequences in conversation and considers the laughter response as a meaningful aspect of the humour.

Script-based theories of humour alone thus do not account for the intrinsic relationship between laughter and humour in conversational talk and do not sufficiently explain how the interaction comes into play in conversational humour. Attardo and Raskin (1991) admit that both the SSTH and GTVH address the question “what is humour?” but not the

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7 This thesis does not pursue a study of conversational humour in terms of defined “types” of humour such as puns, irony, and wit, since conversational humour does not fit into these definitions. So, linguistic research that develops and defines humour types is not examined. This would include, for instance, important treatments of “irony” by Barbe (1993); Sperber and Wilson (1981); Giora (1995); Attardo (2000); or “puns” by Sacks (1972) and Sherzer (1985).

8 As Glenn (2003, p. 22) argues, incongruity theories such as script theories in linguistics consider jokes in isolation from their telling and their responses in the interaction, and they regard laughter only as a physical response to the experience of humour.

9 See also the discussion of Partington’s (2006) use of script theory in a comprehensive study of laughter-talk in Section 2.1.2.3.1 below. His development of the theory, particularly in his notion of “reversal of evaluation”, brings the notion of script opposition closer to the actual relations that occur in conversational humour.
questions addressed by the two other major traditions, including “how do people use humour?” in superiority theories and “why is humour pleasurable?” in relief theories (pp. 330–331). This limits their explicatory power for humour in conversations, as is evident in the studies that have attempted to apply these theories to conversation.

2.1.1.3 Social linguistic studies of humour and superiority theory

Theorists in the superiority tradition (as early as Plato and Aristotle; Bain (1859); Bergson (1940 [1911]); and Hobbes (1840 [1650])) describe laughter as an expression of aggression towards another, either in terms of achieving victory over them or degrading them for inappropriate social behaviours. This has been taken up in linguistics for example by Zajdman (1995), Archakis and Tsakona (2005) and Partington (2006). Because superiority theories emphasize the social aspects of humour, they are of particular interest to sociolinguists (Attardo, 1994, p. 50), conversation analysts and functional linguists. However, many studies in these perspectives have shown that the scope of linguistic enquiry into the social functions of humour goes beyond superiority, instead exhibiting it as one of many possible reasons for using humour. While Bergson (1940 [1911]) proposed that humour is a device with which we maliciously laugh at an outsider to gain superiority over them (Carrell, 2000, p. 2), Norrick (1993a, p. 5), for instance, argues that conversational joking allows participants to manipulate talk by presenting a self, to probe for information about the attitudes and affiliations of interlocutors, to realign with them, and to relieve tension and foster friendly interaction (Norrick, 1993a, p. 5).

This body of research includes studies of natural discursive interactions, rather than canned jokes, focusing on humour in the workplace (e.g. Ehrenberg, 1995; Holmes, 2000a, 2000b, 2006; Holmes & Marra, 2002, 2004, 2006; Holmes, Marra & Burns, 2001; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Mullany, 2004); in the classroom and in language-learning environments (e.g. Baynham, 1996; Bell, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007; Davies, 2003; Kehily & Nayak, 1997); studies of conversational humour in informal settings (e.g. Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997; Coates, 2007; Gibbs, 2000; Hay, 1995, 2000; Kotthoff, 2003; Morreall (1983, pp. 20–37); Raskin (1985, pp. 38–40).
Norrick, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 2004a; Queen, 2005; see discussion in Section 2.1.2); and those that take a focus on ideological categories such as gender roles (e.g. Crawford, 2003; David, Jan, Cheng & Chye, 2006; Eder, 1993; Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Hay, 2000; McGhee, 1976; Jenkins, 1985; Kotthoff, 2000; McGhee, 1976; Sollitt-Morris, 1997; Walker, 1988), ethnicity and nationality (e.g. Basso, 1979; Davies, 1990a, 1990b, 1997; Eisenberg, 1986; Fry, 1997; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Miller, 1986; Ruch & Forabosco, 1996; Ruch, Ott, Accoce & Bariaud, 1991; Ziv, 1986, 1988). Linguistic researchers have also concentrated on identifying styles taken on by individuals in their humorous expression in conversation in terms of how they perform their institutional role through “leadership styles” (Holmes & Marra, 2006), how they express their cultural belonging through their stylistic use of, for example, American English (Davies, 1984), or how they express particularly “personal styles” (Tannen, 2005) and “family styles” (Everts, 2003). This research is similar to the current study in that it takes into account the interaction, including the speaker and hearer(s) in discourse, and focuses on the multifunctionality of humour and laughter beyond superiority. Its functional orientation also aligns with the aims of this thesis, which involves focusing on the choices of meaning that speakers make in language rather than the rules that govern their discourse and are “violated” in humour.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the large body of pragmatic research on humour focusing on cooperation and maxims are not included in this review (e.g. Attardo, 1990, 1993; Hancher, 1980, 1981; Leech, 1983, pp. 98–99; Martinich, 1981; Morreall, 1983, pp. 79–82; Raskin, 1985; Sperber & Wilson, 1981, 1986; Yamaguchi, 1988).

Though superiority theories focus on one aspect of the possible functions of humour, these social linguistic studies identify a number of other functional possibilities, including those oriented towards affirming positive relationships. Furthermore, linguistic studies concentrating on conversational humour between friends have found that it does not involve superiority but rather is oriented towards achieving solidarity and rapport. This will be taken up in the following section.

While the three theoretical traditions that I have outlined provide a general background to any study of humour, analysts of conversation have emphasized that none of the general

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\textsuperscript{11} It also excludes principles such as the Non-Cooperation Principle (NCP) and Least Disruption Principle (LDP) (cf. Attardo, 1999; Eisterhold, Attardo & Boxer, 2006) that have been introduced to capture humour in formal linguistic theory.
traditions of humour theory is acceptable as an explanation of humour (Glenn, 2003, p. 22). As Ritchie (2000) argues, “If we are to develop a complete theory of humour and its use, all of these facets must be considered.” In developing the current study of conversational humour between friends, this thesis attends to all three perspectives: its social functions, the humorous mechanism/ incongruity, and the nature of the laughter reaction. This section has reviewed a number of linguistic studies that go beyond the three traditions of humour theory, contextualizing the current study in relation to the general state of humour study in this field. The next section will focus more specifically on studies of conversational humour and laughter in informal settings that work within a social linguistics framework, since this applies directly to the data. The discussion of these studies will reveal that conversational humour between friends is oriented towards solidarity, bonding and identity construction, and that a study that takes laughter as its point of departure can make the relevant connections between these functions and the humorous text.

2.1.2 Conversational humour studies

While linguistic research into humour has traditionally focused on canned jokes, more recent studies are focusing on naturally occurring conversational humour and presenting us with new ideas about humour. This is largely to do with the fact that approaches to conversational humour focus on the interaction and the functions that motivate the use of humour and laughter in talk.

This section details those linguistic studies that focus on humour and laughter in informal settings (such as friendship groups) and their functions. I will first provide an overview of studies that have demonstrated an over-arching function of solidarity in conversational humour between friends. Then, Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s (1997) theory of bonding and relational identity display in conversational humour will be discussed and shown to contribute to the current study. Finally, studies that take laughter as their point of departure, indicating the important role of laughter in a study of humour in talk, are reviewed. Key studies of laughter in conversation will be discussed, most especially the work of Partington (2006) on *The Linguistics of Laughter*. 
2.1.2.1 The solidarity orientation of friendship humour

Linguistic researchers have theorised that there are two functions of conversational humour that are always present which can be broadly described as the functions of solidarity and power. These align with the situational parameters of tenor in systemic functional linguistics (see Section 2.2.1.1.1). For Hay (1995, 2000), these are simultaneous functions that are in an entailment relationship (following Tannen, 1993), so both are always at play. In Priego-Valverde’s (2003, 2006) theory, conversational humour functions for both cooperation and competition.

However, in both studies, friends are shown to orient towards the positive end of these parameters. Hay notes that whereas categories of the power function seldom occurred, the solidarity function was overwhelmingly employed by the friends in her data for creating a positive identity that accorded with the group’s value systems. Humour facilitates and increases an underlying conviviality with friends, according to Priego-Valverde (2006). In her theory, aggressive humour can put this conviviality at risk, but other researchers have shown that even aggressive types of humour can be used by friends to achieve solidarity.

This is because friends share a “customary joking relationship” according to Norrick (1993a, p. 44), who has completed a number of studies on conversational joking (cf. Norrick 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2004a, 2004b). The close relationships and underlying shared bonds between friends and family members mean that they can avoid the need for politeness conventions (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and even present direct threats to face as amusing. The rapport function also depends on the relative status of the interactants, since it is “in general among approximate social equals” that conversational joking defuses aggression and creates solidarity (Norrick, 1993a, pp. 34–35). Holmes and Marra (2002) also show in their comparison between workplace colleagues and friends that equality fosters superiority-oriented humour, since a contestive “subversive” strategy of humour was used more frequently by the colleagues in different power relations, while friends reinforced collegial relations through more general humour as equals. The

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12 These are also complemented by a third psychological function (which includes strategies of coping and defending), and a general function that encompasses all three in Hay’s framework.
equality of status and underlying shared bonds that exist between friends will be exhibited as an important aspect of the conversational humour in this study.

Conversational humour has also been described as a strategy of “politeness” (Brown & Levinson, 1987) (cf. Antonopoulou & Sifianou, 2003; Dynel, 2008; Holmes, 2000; van Dam, 2002; Zajdman, 1995), particularly positive politeness (attending to one’s positive self-image), which is often conflated with “solidarity” (cf. Norrick, 1993a). However, many have offered alternative frameworks for considering humour due the limitations of the politeness theory; for instance, Holmes & Marra (2002) take a CDA approach; Mullany (2004) takes a “communities of practice” approach; and Davies (2006) describes humour through the notion of play following Bateson (1987). In conversational humour between friends, though solidarity is indeed an important factor, face-work and politeness are not as crucial to the maintenance of relationships. Conversational humour is thus not a matter of politeness, according to Kotthoff (1996), but instead concerns other types of “relational work” like informality and familiarity functions. In fact, it is in violating politeness in humour that friends create greater familiarity and intimacy between them (Kotthoff, 1996, p. 299). By doing so, friends also show that the relationship is “dependent on demonstrated harmony and can also integrate differences” (Kotthoff, 1996, p. 320). This notion of difference is vital to the current study, since humour is conceptualised as a strategy for managing differences as friends constantly negotiate who they are in talk (see Chapter 5).

These researchers thus demonstrate that solidarity (and its associated aspects such as informality, familiarity and conviviality) is the major function for conversational humour between friends, and it is associated with underlying shared bonds, shared knowledge, social norms and values, playfulness and a basis of equality. In addition to considering the solidarity-oriented functions of conversational humour between friends, this thesis attempts to connect features in the linguistic text systematically to these social functions following a systemic functional theory of language. It has been shown by socially-based linguistic researchers that the construction of solidarity by friends can be found through

13 However, in this study and in more recent work on conversational humour, Holmes acknowledges that politeness is insufficient for capturing all of the functions of this type of talk. Holmes and Schnurr (2005) contend that using a relational practice framework avoids “the definitional traps, referential slipperiness, and emotional baggage of the term ‘politeness’” (p. 124).
features in the unfolding text. Coates (2007), for instance, argues that solidarity is a direct consequence of the participants’ joint construction of a play frame, with humour emerging organically from the ongoing talk through features such as overlapping speech, co-constructed utterances, repetition\textsuperscript{14}, laughter and metaphor. By distinguishing these features, Coates demonstrates that it is possible to connect features of text with the functions of conversational humour between friends, and laughter is a significant factor in this connection.

While these studies have made clear that solidarity is an overwhelming function of conversational humour between friends, there has been little research that probes further into this functionality. Specifically, the studies compel the question, why do friends orient towards solidarity by using conversational humour? Holmes and Hay’s (1997) study probing Hay’s (1995, 2000) subcategories of solidarity provide an indication of the insights that can be made by focusing on this orientation in conversational humour between friends. By probing the solidarity function, Holmes and Hay identify how participants use humour to reflect contrast while also highlighting similarities and reinforcing connections in ideological memberships of ethnicity and gender. They note that speakers clarify their shared norms and group values in relation to those norms and values that are not identified with or shared between the interlocutors, and that this provides a contrast for humour. Once again, both similarity and difference are shown to be involved in conversational humour in the overall construction of solidarity, and group values are related to the humorous contrast. These are aspects that play a major role in the current study of conversational humour between friends.

Thus, this thesis investigates the solidarity-oriented function of conversational humour between friends and specifically what further functions and strategies are involved in this orientation. In this pursuit, it has been found that literature that details the bonding function of conversational humour offers a promising forward direction. The theory of bonding for conversational humour developed by Boxer and Cortès-Conde (1997) will be presented in the next section along with a review of studies that utilize this framework.

\textsuperscript{14} Repetition is also identified by Tannen (2007, p. 71) and by Everts (2003) as a key resource for conversational humour. Everts shows how it can be used to create relational harmony in family humour.
2.1.2.2 Bonding in humour

An overview of Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s (1997) theory of bonding will be given in this section. Their work and studies that have utilized this theory for conversational humour are given to show that the theory has been successfully applied to teasing (humour directed towards a conversational insider) but not to the type of humour found between friends that is the focus of this thesis. The framework that Boxer and Cortès-Conde offer is useful for considering why and how friends in conversation achieve solidarity by sharing a laugh because it explains how they both identify and bond together through humour.

In acknowledging that the bonding role of joking has been given little attention, Boxer and Cortès-Conde (1997) propose a framework that connects the way that speakers construe bonding to how they display their identities in conversational humour. By focusing specifically on bonding, they “sort out the factors that contribute to the functions” of humour (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997, p. 275). Bonding is about participants coming together through humour and creating “a bond of solidarity” (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997, p. 292) between them. It can therefore be understood that bonding contributes to an overall solidarity function in conversational humour. As conversational participants affirm solidarity and collegiality with one another, they form and reinforce the social bonds that bring them together as members of speech communities in which they can identify. By interpreting a bond of solidarity in ongoing talk, we can actually begin to locate in more specificity the meanings that tie participants together in solidarity. Moreover, Boxer and Cortès-Conde describe bonding as a motivation for relational identity display (RID) in joking and teasing, in that we relate together through humour to achieve a bonding effect.

Boxer and Cortès-Conde focus on conversational joking (CJ) that they divide into three “humorous speech genres”: teasing a conversational insider, joking about an absent other and self-denigrating joking (p. 279). The degree of bonding that takes place is thus differentiated by target. The functions of conversational joking are situated on a continuum ranging from “bonding” to “nipping” to “biting”, but they note that teasing is the only form of this type of humour that can nip or bite (while it may also bond
intimates). To illustrate this continuum, the following examples show a tease that bonds and a tease that bites:

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\begin{align*}
\text{N:} & \quad \text{== Passover’s coming up} \\
\text{F:} & \quad \text{OH GOD NO == NO::! ...} \\
\text{N:} & \quad \text{That means- that means matzo! Lots and lotsa matzo!} \\
\text{F:} & \quad \text{Oh god the stomach pains} \\
\text{N:} & \quad (L) \text{What? Farley’s having (LV) problems} \\
\text{F:} & \quad (L)
\end{align*}
\]

**Example 2.1:** Teasing that *bonds* in Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s terms (from Table 2.12 in Appendix A) (Laughter coding: (L) – participant laughs; (LV) – laughter in voice; see Transcription Conventions key for further laughter coding).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{K:} & \quad \text{Yeah but you see a lot of guys in Brazil who aren’t necessarily gay who like to dress like women...} \\
\text{T:} & \quad \text{== Yeah but they’re not men dressed like women; ... They-they wanna just have fun an-an I don’t know pick up girls that’s the idea of the thing. ...} \\
\text{K:} & \quad \text{== “Dressed like a girl” (SL) ==} \\
\text{T:} & \quad \text{== Well they don’t really *dress* like a girl! Alright?}
\end{align*}
\]

**Example 2.2:** Teasing that *bites* in Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s terms (from Table 11.11 in Appendix A) (Laughter coding: (SL) – speaker laughs; see Transcription Conventions key for further laughter coding).

Boxer and Cortès-Conde (1997) argue that “a shared schema is essential in the uptake” of a tease (p. 280) and in these examples it is clear that the speakers differ in what they can laugh at. While in the first example, F laughs along with (and bonds with) N, teasing him for his exaggerated disgust towards Passover food,\(^{15}\) T argues in response to K’s humour about Brazilian men dressing like women, showing that the tease bites. Biting does not bond the participants; instead, it can create conflict between them.

The level of bonding depends on how participants negotiate realignment through humour, which the researchers divide into either a display of individual identity (ID) or a relational identity with and through others (RID). Relational identity display is distinguished from individual and social identity as “the bonding between interlocutors that is formed by the group and for the group” (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 2000, p. 203), highlighting how we

---

\(^{15}\) Passover is a Jewish holiday, and matzo is a food eaten during this holiday.
bond together as members of groups (which will be pursued in Chapter 5). Specifically, Boxer and Cortès-Conde (1997) argue that humour is used by conversational participants in a “negotiation of a relational identity with others and through others,” (p. 282) leading to a sense of group membership and an effect of bonding, especially amongst friends. Boxer and Cortès-Conde present bonding to provide reasoning for why participants would use humour and negotiate particular types of realignment, since RID in fact may put a friendship at risk:

For ‘intimates’ or ‘friends’ this [RID] is a high risk game where the relational identity displayed is based on past encounters, and where the encounter taking place might re-affirm or weaken the existing relationship. If this is a high risk game we are led to ask why people play it. The fact is that if the negotiation of RID is successful through the joking and teasing, the outcome will be the much sought-after result of bonding between participants.

(Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997, p. 282)

Thus, beyond an orientation to solidarity and collegiality, friends in conversational humour seek to bond together and reaffirm those bonds that they have previously negotiated as something by which they can identify together. They may relationally identify by sharing insider knowledge or by uniting against others, “reducing the ‘others’ to some laughable characterisation that makes them different from us” (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997, p. 283). Participants bond together as members of an in-group in relation to an out-group, or they bite by directing humour towards an insider in friendship groups (such as through teasing). As Boxer and Cortès-Conde (1997) explain, “While there is room for the nip or bite among some intimates, this is not necessarily true with friends, acquaintances and strangers” (p. 292). As we have seen from the studies presented in Section 2.1.2.1 above, this relies upon an established relationship background such as a customary joking relationship (Norrick, 1993a).

Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s theory thus provides a more detailed description of what differentiates conversational humour among friends from other contexts: relational bonding is frequent among friends, and they bond to re-affirm their friendships. So, as participants create conversational humour in the service of solidarity, they form and reaffirm bonds together as they relationally identify around particular meanings in the text. The boundaries between bonding together and negotiating distance from one another
are identified as a matter of degrees and, as friends construe solidarity through their humour together, they negotiate these boundaries in order to bond.

The theory of bonding is particularly relevant to this study because it not only brings together the sharing and identifying that friends do through conversational humour in a systematic way, but it highlights bonding as a significant motivation for this type of talk. These aspects are essential to the interpretation of conversational humour in friendship groups, and bonding theory provides a connection between elements of the social context that move us beyond the wider function of solidarity (since the relation to “biting” shows that there is more of a scale involved). Bonding and the construction of identity are the functions that are most relevant to the data in this thesis, and this study expands upon Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s foundations in the field of conversational humour.

Nonetheless, there are limitations to be found in the application of this theory across linguistic studies of humour. While Boxer and Cortès-Conde further their work in such contexts as literary narratives (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 2002) and L2 classroom interactions (Boxer, 2004; Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 2000), those who have taken on their model in studies of conversational humour predominantly concentrate on the strategy of teasing. This is not surprising, since teasing is traditionally viewed as having an aggressive function, while Boxer and Cortès-Conde showed that it could also function to bond. For instance, Heisterkamp and Alberts (2000) and Tholander (2002) confirmed that teasing can be used for both biting and bonding between gay men and lesbians and between children of different genders. Habib (2008) showed that teasing can function for bonding in language acquisition and can thus be used as an educational tool. Dynel (2008) contrasts Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s claim by arguing that teasing may completely lack aggression (“biting”) altogether. In their study focusing on conversational humour in a friendship group, Archakis and Tsakona (2005) do not specifically consider teasing, but they do focus on the target of the humour, and as such they regard the presence of a target as a signal that speakers are expressing aggressive intention (following superiority theory). It is by “othering” that the participants are shown to reinforce bonds and solidarity, and humour is used to challenge the status quo. Therefore, even bonding

16 In terms of the script-based General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH; see Section 2.1.1.2 above), which they apply to their analysis of the humour, “target” is a knowledge resource.
results from criticism of others both inside and outside of the conversational group. Conversational humour between friends, though, is not always about others but about how we identify together based on both similarities and potential differences. Because the studies that have built on this framework predominantly focus on teasing, which has an aggressive aspect, they do not really inform the study of conversational humour between friends.

Moreover, beyond the focus on teasing, the methodology taken by Boxer and Cortès-Conde is not sufficient for the close linguistic analysis of conversational humorous texts taken in this study in that it does not connect the content of the text with its functions. Similarly to Boxer and Cortès-Conde, Habib’s (2008) study uses an ethnography of communication approach but neither study makes clear exactly which part of the text does the work of negotiating identity or bonding, but rather relies upon the analysts’ knowledge of the situational context and past history of the participants (Geyer, 2008, p. 99). Thus, the question remains, how does the text inform us that bonding and relational identity displays are being negotiated? Are there systematic textual variables that we can find to connect with these social functions?

Geyer’s (2008, Chapter 5) study of teasing and humour in Japanese teacher meetings provides a useful connection between bonding and text. Taking a discourse analytic perspective, she considers the content of textual information to interpret identity categories that are occasioned in discourse. Describing Boxer and Cortès-Conde’s notion of bonding as a matter of face-work, Geyer explores how the different functions that are attached to teasing are related to the face-work accomplished in talk. While she finds that teasing affirms alignment by obscuring the opposition between affiliation and disaffiliation, she also importantly finds that teasing exposes how the values of institutions and communities at stake come into play as participants display a shared stance towards a “prescribed institutional face” in the teacher meetings. Geyer links discursive textual clues to the construal of identity and affiliation in the social context in a systematic way. However, since her focus is on teasing in particular, and on the institutional face-work of work colleagues, it still remains to be found whether

17 In Geyer’s terms, a wide range of behaviours that include politeness as one aspect.
conversational humour between friends could be pursued in such a way (and if conversational humour will perform the same functions as teasing).

To summarise, while Boxer and Cortes-Conde offer a useful framework for probing the solidarity-oriented strategies of conversational humour between friends—one that identifies that bonding and identity construction are crucial aspects of humour—studies using this framework are limited in that they have centred on teasing. Geyer’s application of the theory in a rhetorical perspective, with a consideration of evaluative meaning in the text, has delivered insights into teasing that may be applicable to the kind of conversational humour at play in this thesis. This is because evaluative meaning is a crucial aspect of the humour. Studies using the bonding framework, however, have not yet drawn a significant link between the social functions and evaluative meanings in text. On the other hand, those who have taken laughter as their point of departure have indicated that laughter can inform the analysis of conversational humour as a potential meaning-making tool with language and can aid in connecting evaluative meaning with how we affiliate. These studies are discussed in the next section.

2.1.2.3 Studies that take laughter as point of departure

While the literature on laughter across disciplines is wide-ranging, linguistic studies of laughter are relatively few. The studies in this section focus specifically on laughter as the starting point in their analyses and are relevant to the themes developed in this thesis particularly because they focus on laughter as a communicative phenomenon in conversation. As an overview, the conversational uses of laughter that have been found across linguistic studies (including Brown & Levinson, 1987; Glenn, 1987; Labov & Fanshel, 1977; and Stewart, 1995) are presented in Table 2.1.
Table 2.1: Conversational uses of laughter, from Partington (2006, p. 18).

As the table makes clear, the functions of laughter are not only those found in studies of humour or joking but also across conversational interactions. Since this thesis focuses on conversation, I will discuss the treatment of laughter in conversational analysis.

It is in the conversation analysis (CA) field that the first systematic studies of laughter in conversation were completed, most predominantly by Jefferson (1979, 1984, 1985, 1994) and colleagues (Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff, 1987; Sacks 1972; Sherzer 1985). They showed that laughter is an object of research in and of itself. Conversation analysts have demonstrated that laughter as a response in conversation can be scaled in order to communicate different kinds of social meanings with others. The CA treatment of laughter informs how this thesis develops laughing as a meaning-making tool that interacts with language in conversation, most specifically through Jefferson’s (1979) “invitation-acceptance” sequence for laughter. This expresses how laughter can serve as an invitation to others to laugh and can be variously taken up in meaningful ways in conversation. Notably, the sequence indicates that there is an interaction going on between speaker and hearer and that laughter is a significant part of this interaction. To consider the sequencing of laughter in this way aligns with the aims of Chapter 3 of this thesis, in which laughter is discussed in a social semiotic perspective.

Research in CA has shown that laughter in conversation performs many interactional tasks but that alignment and affiliation with the talk and between the participants is
especially significant (cf. Ellis, 1997; Goodwin, 1986; Jefferson et al., 1987). This is developed most comprehensively by Glenn (1987, 1989a, 1992, 1995, 2003a, 2003b; Hopper & Glenn, 1994), who argues that laughter can fulfil both positive and negative functions of at two ends of a continuum from affiliation to disaffiliation. Thus, participants can variously create intimacy, align and play at the affiliation end, or they can mock, belittle and show superiority over others with a laugh. These factors also depend upon key features such as who produces the laugh when and the nature of surrounding talk (cf. Glenn, 2003a).

CA studies exhibit the extraordinary range of meaning potential for laughter in conversation, and they also provide findings about the functions of laughter that are similar to those found for conversation. For instance, studies of humour in conversation (such as those discussed in Section 2.1.2 above) also find that humour is used for bonding and affiliation, identity and intimacy. These themes are developed in this thesis as well.

However, modern CA research on laughter often separates it from humour. Glenn (2003a) explains that an over-reliance on the traditional humour theories (superiority, incongruity, relief) in past research exploring why people laugh “risks assuming that laughter necessarily is caused by humor, when that is often (perhaps a majority of the time) not the case” (p. 33). CA attempts to move the focus away from laughter stimuli and instead to laughs as wilful acts on the part of social actors. While Glenn rightfully warns against a stimulus-effect treatment of laughter in talk as merely a reaction to humour, what we call “humour”, particularly in conversation between friends, may be defined in part by laughter. In this way we can consider laughter and humour as two parts of the same phenomenon. For a study of conversational humour, it is necessary to use laughter as a signal, since it is created ongoingly and organically (Coates, 2007, p. 31) through the unfolding text at unpredictable points.

One study that gets away from definitional traps tied up with humour is Partington’s (2006) work on “laughter-talk”, “the talk preceding and provoking, intentionally or otherwise, a bout of laughter” (p. 1). Partington acknowledges that while laughter and humour are not coterminous, his findings on laughter-talk have implications on humour theory, and “intuition, experience and past literature tell us that they are closely related” (p. 1). Partington’s study of laughter-talk is discussed in the following section.
2.1.2.3.1 Partington’s study of laughter-talk

By taking laughter as his point of departure and using it to inform his analysis of humour and the linguistic text, Partington (2006) offers significant insights that are relevant to the current study. Overall, Partington’s model for laughter-talk brings together the foci of the three major humour traditions (relief, incongruity and superiority) through his analysis of laughter and language, his description of the (cognitive) humorous mechanism, and his adoption of a politeness model to describe the social functions at play. He argues that the three traditions can be seen to combine “in how bisociation and facework interact” (Partington, 2006, p. 232), linking the incongruity of humour with the social functions in the context of laughter. This is an important connection that will be pursued also in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which discusses how the social semiotic tension presented in text is worked out through laughter by friends in chat. However, there are limitations to Partington’s adoption of the major humour theory traditions as well, which will be explored in turn in the following paragraphs.

While he describes each aspect of laughter-talk separately, the most useful chapter for the current study is the final one on irony and sarcasm in which he ties the mechanisms and social functions of laughter-talk together. Endeavouring to take a functional perspective on “what laughter does” and “what people do with it” (Partington, 2006, p. 14), Partington supports and furthers the findings of researchers like Glenn (2003) that “...laughter communicates stance, the laughers’ orientation to the topic and to the interlocutor (affiliation, disaffiliation or neutrality), especially when it is the listener who laughs” (p. 20). He also argues that laughter expresses solidarity and shared values with the in-group and can be used strategically, for instance as “a good way of gaining upper hand in an argument” (Partington, 2006, p. 81). Taking into account the background of laughter’s origins, Partington hypothesizes that “laughter today is associated with the relief of tension and also, more sophisticatedly, with the management of social tension” (p. 233). This is an important hypothesis for this study because conversational humour is also used between friends to manage social tension in relation to solidarity and shared values. Furthermore, Partington also links laughter with “its combination with other mechanisms of laughter-talk” (p. 99), showing that our interpretation of the social functions and mechanisms behind humour is interrelated with our analysis of laughter.
However, because Partington employs politeness theory, the tension he describes is about the status of one’s “face”, which highlights the orientation to superiority that Partington also takes in his study. In fact, while laughter stresses group affiliation, Partington argues that this is often accomplished by laughing *at* another, in other words, by projecting someone as an outsider. The laughter of an audience, in this case, signals “relief of tension at not being the butt oneself” (Partington, 2006, p. 100). It is clear that Partington aligns with the superiority theory, and he explains that the politeness framework is used to address why we laugh at those we feel superior to, arguing that “laughing at what is perceived as inferior serves our personal face needs, bolstering our positive face and expressing our in-group belonging . . . laughter not only *expresses* superiority, it is very often an attempt to *create* it, to reify it, to construe one party as superior to its adversary” (Partington, 2006, p. 232). Conversational humour between friends, on the other hand, is oriented towards solidarity rather than superiority, as established in Section 2.1.2.1.

Because Partington works with White House press briefings involving audience–speaker relations, notions of face and superiority are relevant and salient in his data. Nevertheless, politeness theory does not account for the full body of relations at stake, and Partington both reformulates the definition and adds to the description of face in order to explain his findings. First, he posits a bridge between traditional notions of the theory and issues of group management and also describes politeness as “an all-encompassing theory which describes aggression and tension-management in human social interaction” (Partington, 2006, p. 236). He then proposes an additional type of face18 called an informal “affective face” that involves in-group collegiality and solidarity. Affective face relates some of the desire to be liked or admired in positive politeness to aspects of group inclusion, and in this Partington provides for the relational work of achieving solidarity in groups that is important in conversational humour.

This aspect is especially important in conversational humour between friends, but the association with controlling and channelling aggression is not. The relation of face work in Partington’s terms to the theory of superiority/aggression does not help to describe the

18 This is one of two kinds of positive face-wants proposed by Partington, along with a formal “competence face”, which involves one’s institutional self-image. This is of course particularly salient in the press briefings data.
way that friends bond in humour, especially that which does not involve “out-group casting face work” (p. 234). Partington seems to acknowledge that this is the case, noting that “politeness theory by itself cannot explain the quality of mirth, the real belly-laugh—such explanations, as we saw, need to be sought in the types of bisociative mechanisms used and the value system of groups . . .” (p. 236). Thus, it is in his explanation of the “bisociative mechanisms” behind laughter-talk that the notions most pertinent to this thesis can be found.

In particular, his argument for the inclusion of interpersonal meaning in the analysis of irony and humour is a convincing one since he offers a mechanism of “reversal of evaluation” that is significantly similar to the way that friends create convivial conversational humour. In laughter-talk, Partington proposes that “something very akin to bisociation plays a vital part” (p. 226) and he builds upon script-shift theories by proposing further logical relations/mechanisms (ways of bringing together two scripts/narratives/frames). These include the “reversal of evaluation”, a “proper-to-improper shift”, and “quirky logic” involving real-world cultural values. In a reversal of evaluation, a given evaluation is suddenly overturned so that “what is normally evaluated as good, appropriate, fitting, useful, beautiful and so on, finds itself evaluated, in the second narrative, as the opposite—bad, inappropriate, ugly and so on—or, of course, vice versa” (Partington, 2006, p. 46). Evaluation reversal is a useful tool since it brings evaluative meaning into our consideration of why we laugh, and combining this with laughter as a way to manage social tension is a way to explain the social relations actually being negotiated in convivial conversational humour. Furthermore, Partington notes that “evaluative meaning . . . is one of the principle ways speakers combine the ideational and the interpersonal functions in communication” (p. 201), and this will be shown in the data of this thesis to be an essential aspect of convivial conversational humour.

Yet, the simple reversal of a positive evaluation with a negative one, or vice versa, does not seem to suffice in the complex negotiation of values in conversational humour between friends. Consider the following excerpt:

19 While Partington (2006, pp. 202, 219) describes the reversal of evaluation as a dominant factor in irony, he notes that irony and humour are similar because they exploit similar mechanisms.
N: How was your holiday
U: Good ==...
N: So you had a good time
U: Yeah== it was good ...Yeah I saw like my family and friends...I ate well (SL)
N: We all ate well.
(LA)
U: ...On a diet (LV) now.
(LA)

Example 2.3: Evaluation in convivial conversational humour (from Table 1.1 in Appendix A) (Laughter coding: (SL) – speaker laugh, (LA) – all laugh, (LV) – laughter in voice; see Transcription Conventions key for further laughter coding).

There is no evident reversal of the positive evaluation given throughout this text to a negative one, but instead the positive evaluation continues to be given first to the holiday, then to eating holiday foods. According to Partington’s reversal of evaluation, we might posit that, when the speaker presents a positive evaluation for eating, this conflicts with an underlying narrative of negative evaluation for eating, and the final line “On a diet now” might support this. However, it is not just about an underlying negative evaluation, but about “eating well” meaning eating too much, particularly for these participants who are young female students. Moreover, when they laugh at “On a diet now”, it shows that they do not necessarily negatively evaluate eating enough to really go on a diet. What seems to cause laughter is not the potential switch between positive and negative evaluation but the ascription of a positive evaluation to what is being evaluated.

Thus, while Partington’s (2006) study is the closest to this thesis in terms of the aspects that he identifies and brings together, we need a more complex theory of evaluative meaning and of the incongruity that occurs in conversational humour between friends. While Partington presents evaluation as a two-term system following Hunston (2004), APPRAISAL theory (Martin & White, 2005) in the SFL framework offers a multi-termed system for attitudinal meanings (as well as providing for intensification and sourcing, which may come into play in humour). This study also leaves us with the need for a theoretical framework that allows us to concentrate on, and probe further into, the solidarity orientation of conversational humour between friends (rather than a superiority-oriented social theory).
2.1.2.4 Connections to the current study

Based on the background of literature on conversational humour and laughter in informal settings, this thesis sets out to accomplish a comprehensive study of conversational humour between friends by combining a number of perspectives. Similarly to Partington, laughter is the point of departure in pursuing the social functions and mechanism by which an utterance is made funny. Further, the *semiotic* possibilities of laughter will be examined to uncover how the combined meaning potential of laughter and talk impact upon these aspects. In investigating the social functions, the focus is on solidarity and the significant aspects of bonding, affiliation and identity construction that have been revealed by studies of conversational humour. Finally, the mechanism behind the humorous talk will be explored, not in cognitive terms, but by considering three aspects together: the interaction of evaluative and ideational meaning in the linguistic text, how they construe the particular affiliative relations in the social context, and how they are reacted to in the interaction.

In order to perform this analysis, the study requires a theoretical framework that offers a number of essential features. As demonstrated in the previous sections, the theory should be social, and it should provide a way to investigate the solidarity-oriented function of conversational humour between friends as a main focal point of analysis. Moreover, the social theory must allow us to connect the evaluative meanings in the linguistic text so pertinent to humour to the social context of the interaction in a systematic way. It must also allow us to concentrate on what laughter does in the interaction. Since laughter is considered the signal to humour in this study and is closely connected to it as a communicative feature of the ongoing talk, this thesis also requires a social *semiotic* theory that allows us to consider laughter as a meaning-making system.

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a social semiotic theory of language that provides these essential elements. Through the SFL framework we will see that laughter makes meaning and informs the analysis of conversational humour in many ways. Furthermore, while this study will be informed by SFL, it also builds a new model of social relations of affiliation to incorporate into the framework. The SFL approach is explored in the following section.
2.2 Theoretical Approach: Systemic Functional Linguistics

“A ‘sociosemiotic’ perspective implies an interpretation of the shifts, the irregularities, the disharmonies and the tensions that characterize human interaction and social processes.” (Halliday, 1978, p. 126)

The theoretical approach taken in this thesis is systemic functional linguistics developed by Michael Halliday (1973, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1984a, 1984b, 1985a/1989, 1985b, 1985c, 1985d, 1992) and extended most prominently by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, 2004), Hasan (1978, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1995), Martin (1992), Martin and Rose (2007), Martin and White (2005), and Matthiessen (1995). Fundamental to the theory of systemic functional linguistics is the social nature of language, which can only be understood within its social environment. Halliday (1978) describes language as a social semiotic, positing that language is one of many social behaviours that make meaning intersubjectively, through the interaction. Thus, SFL contends that all meaning is created in the interaction (that semiotic activity is inherently social). Within a linguistic interaction, language not only expresses but symbolises the social system, creating and being created by it, and it serves as a “metaphor for society” (Halliday, 1978, p. 183–186). Variations and modifications of the social system can therefore be found in text, while differences that we find in text also have direct implications on the social environment. This is fundamental for the current study which focuses on the social relations involved in why we laugh and their relation to the cause of laughter in conversational text.

As a social semiotic theory of language as behaviour, SFL also offers tools with which to pursue studies of other potential social semiotic systems that encode behaviour in social interactions. Social semiotic studies on modes other than language have been undertaken by a number of researchers within an SFL framework, including studies of visual images (Caple 2008, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; O’Toole, 1994), sound and music (Caldwell, 2010; van Leeuwen, 1991, 1999), architecture (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996;
O’Toole, 2004; Ravelli, 2000; Stenglin, 2004); gesture (Hood, 2007; Martinec, 2004) and facial expression (Tian, 2010; Welch, 2005). This approach thus allows us to consider phenomena such as laughter through the same lens as we do language, facilitating the study of laughter as a social semiotic that is undertaken in this thesis (Chapter 3).

The complex architecture of this theoretical approach contributes to the current study in a number of ways. This section explores the SFL approach and how its theoretical dimensions come into play in this thesis and also reviews the few SFL-based studies that have considered humour. Section 2.2.1 describes the hierarchies in the theory, including the realisation hierarchy connecting the strata of language; the instantiation cline that unites the language system with its use; and the cline of individuation which shifts our linguistic lens to the language of the individual. Section 2.2.2 presents the dimensions of SFL that can be considered as complementarities, with particular attention drawn to the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. It also introduces APPRAISAL theory (Martin & White, 2005) and Stenglin’s (2004) concept of bonding as important models on which to draw for the analysis of conversational humour. Section 2.2.3 discusses those SFL studies that have addressed humour, with specific interest in those studies that have focused on the role of APPRAISAL and discordant couplings (Martin, 2000a) in humour.

2.2.1 Hierarchies

SFL has established three hierarchies for language: realisation, instantiation and individuation. Each of these hierarchies contributes to a comprehensive interpretation of conversational humour, but the challenges presented by humour also demand that we adapt and change how these hierarchies have traditionally been perceived. Martin (2008a) argues that we must hold all three hierarchies, realisation, instantiation and individuation, in our minds at one time, since “all systems proposed for a given language and culture along the realisation hierarchy instantiate and all individuate as well” (Martin, 2008b, p. 53). That is to say that the hierarchies participate in every language instance in equal measure, and while attention has been paid mostly to the realisation hierarchy through SFL research across decades (cf. Martin, 2008a, p. 32), such discourses as humour indicate a need to pay similar attention to the other hierarchies. Specifically for this study, a focus on instantiation (and logogenesis) offers a view on the process of meanings
coupling
together in an unfolding text of humour, and individuation is implicated in important ways with the affiliation model developed in Chapter 5, of which humour is one strategy. This section unpacks the hierarchies of SFL and discusses their application in the current thesis.

2.2.1.1 Realisation

Language is modelled in SFL in three strata of abstraction: phonology/graphology, lexicogrammar, and discourse semantics (or semantics). Following Hjelmslev (1963), these strata are organised in two planes: expression and content (see Figure 2.1).

![SFL strata of language organized into content plane and expression plane.](image)

SFL stratifies the content plane into discourse semantics (meaning) and lexicogrammar (wording), while the expression plane concerns those resources involved in sounding and writing (or gesturing in sign language). Thus, semantic meaning and lexicogrammatical wording are expressed through phonological or graphological resources, and the relation

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20 Lexis is perceived as most delicate grammar in SFL theory (rather than separated from grammar as in other linguistic accounts) so the term “lexicogrammar” captures this relation (cf. Hasan, 1987).

21 In the early stages of language development in children, this is a two-stratal system of protolanguage that later develops into a tri-stratal system in language proper (cf. Halliday 1975; Painter 1984).
between these planes is an arbitrary one (that is, there is no natural link between the content and its expression, cf. Eggins, 2004, p. 14).^{22}

Each stratum consists of *systems of choice* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 22). The strata are related by realisation, described by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 26) as “the process of linking one level of organization with another”. Realisation organises systems hierarchically into the strata in relation to one another; thus, choices in the systems at the discourse semantic level are realised by choices in lexicogrammar which are realised by choices in expression. This has also been described as a relationship of metaredundancy by Lemke (1984, 1995), whereby discourse semantics is seen as a pattern of lexicogrammatical patterns, which are in turn a pattern of graphological patterns (cf. Martin, 2008b, p. 31). In SFL, all of the strata are considered in relation to one another so that we constantly employ a trinocular perspective (Halliday, 1996, p. 16; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31); viewing language from above in the semantics, from below in phonology, and viewing it level from lexicogrammar (as the stratum internal to language). This trinocular perspective also applies to the stratification of social context, which is realised by language most directly through the stratum of discourse semantics. As Martin explains,

> ...texts are social processes and need to be analysed as manifestations of the culture they in large measure construct. This means that alongside a theory of language, functional linguistics has to take some responsibility for a theory of the contexts in which language plays a part.

(Martin, 1992, p. 493)

The next section explores the stratum, or strata, of social context in the SFL model.

**2.2.1.1 Language and social context**

Social context is situated above the strata of language, and interfaces with the stratum of discourse semantics in SFL (see Figure 2.2).

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^{22} According to Martin (1999a), though, arbitrariness is experiential and aspects of phonology such as rhythm, intonation and phonaesthesia have a natural link as meaning-making phonological resources (p. 37).
The social context is described as a set of semiotic systems on two strata above language by Martin (1992, 1997, 1999a; Martin & Rose, 2007). Register is a semiotic system interfacing with discourse semantics, and is constituted by the variables of field, tenor and mode, and genre is a semiotic system one level above. Field is the set of activity sequences that the participants are engaged in; tenor refers to the roles and relationships of the participants; and mode is the part language is playing, the symbolic organisation of text (cf. Halliday, 1978, pp. 143–145). For Martin, these correlate with the metafunctions of language, and register concerns patterns of discourse patterns. Register, in turn, construes patterns in the stratum of genre above (Martin, 1999a, p. 30). These relationships are displayed in Figure 2.3.

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23 It is represented as a semiotic system on a single stratum above language by Halliday (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), who describes the “context of situation” and “context of culture” (following Malinowski, 1923) in terms of instantiation (cf. Halliday, 1992c).

24 Halliday describes register as a linguistic, rather than contextual, category at the semantic level which construes field, mode and tenor in the context of situation (Thibault, 1987, p. 610).

25 Martin (1992) also proposes “ideology” as a fourth communicative plane along with genre, register and language, but more recently models ideology dynamically (see Stenglin, 2004, p. 64) in relation to the individuation cline (cf. Martin, 2010).
Along with his stratified model of social context, Martin also models the stratum of discourse semantics as metafunctionally diversified, describing systems of ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning that can be directly related to the three variables of the context of situation. The contextual parameter of tenor, which involves the two key variables of power and solidarity (or status and contact\textsuperscript{26} as modelled by Poynton, 1985, and Martin, 1992), is particularly relevant for this thesis since it concerns roles and relationships (most especially in terms of solidarity). In addition, Eggins and Slade (1997) propose another tenor dimension of “orientation to affiliation”, which involves insider and outsider positioning in formal and informal groups and relates the “extent to which we seek to identify with the values and beliefs of interactants in different social contexts” (pp. 52–53). Their parameter involves the inclination to negotiate identification and to affiliate with people as insiders or others, conveying the areas of alignment and identification that are of concern in the affiliation model presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{26}Poynton (1985) also identifies “affect” as a variable, but Martin and White (2005) argue that this has been relocated to the discourse semantic system of APPRAISAL “as a pattern of lexicogrammatical patterns construing evaluation” (pp. 31–32); that is, as an element of the discourse semantics rather than register in the social context.
At the level above register, Martin (1997, 2001a) describes genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process. Genres have stages moving towards a point of closure for completion, and realise a distinct social purpose; at the same time, they are realised by patterns of register through discourse semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns in language. Casual conversation has been identified as a macrogenre that has both structured, genre-like elements (or “chunks”) and unstructured, phase-like elements (or “chat”) (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 230) that interact in its unfolding. The current study focuses on the macrogenre of casual conversation, and particularly sequences of humorous chat, which will be described in terms of “phases” (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]) in Chapter 3.

This thesis adopts Martin’s model of social context because it allows us to focus on the three types of meanings that the humorous texts realise at the level of discourse semantics and their implications in context. This is especially important since the interpersonal and ideational metafunctions interact in particular ways that can be captured most clearly through systems at the level of discourse (namely, through APPRAISAL and IDEATION). By focusing on the discourse semantic level in the analysis of text, we are able to conceive of the social relations at stake as directly interfacing with those meanings. The dimension of solidarity that is incorporated in Martin’s model of register will also be explored, since friends in conversational humour orient towards solidarity (see Chapter 5 for discussion).

However, while SFL provides a systematic link between the levels of language and social context and a consistent model of social context, humour involves play with meanings and relationships that the realisation hierarchy does not entirely capture. Solidarity itself does not describe the way that participants bond together while identifying across different communities of values. We look, then, to the other hierarchies of SFL: instantiation and individuation. The next section describes the cline of instantiation.

### 2.2.1.2 Instantiation

When speakers make choices from the whole system of language, they are actualized in text through the process of instantiation. That is to say that “the system of a language is ‘instantiated’ in the form of text” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 23). Text is thus the
actual linguistic use of the meaning potential offered by the language system. This relationship between language system and an instance of text is represented as a cline (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Cline of instantiation (adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 25).

The cline situates “system” and “text” at each end, connecting the traditionally distinct dichotomies of “langue” and “parole” (Saussure, 1986) or “competence” and “performance” (cf. Chomsky, 1965, 2000) by describing the language system and instantiation of text as two different, related perspectives. The interaction between system and text has been described by Halliday in analogy to that between climate and weather: the same phenomenon viewed from different perspectives. Climate is the potential that weather can bring into our daily lives, while weather is the actual instance of that potential, just as a text is an actual instance of the potential that the language system of options offers to us in all of our interactions in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 26–27). Both of these aspects are essential to an act of meaning, since a “text in English has no semiotic standing other than by reference to the system of English” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 26), and instantiation represents this connection.

27 The cline of instantiation, in Martin and White’s (2005, p. 25) terms, includes “reading” as the closest level to the instance, as texts are read in different ways depending on the subjectivity of the reader. This is the furthest point of the cline at which the meaning potential is “progressively narrowed down” (Martin, 2008b, p. 33). This is not included here because of current work on affiliation and individuation, which may alter the theoretical placement of reading.
Halliday (2002 [1992]) explains that each instance of language represents “an incursion into the system in which every level of language is involved” (p. 359).

In between the system end and the instance end are the sub-potentials of register and text type. As individual texts only employ some, but not all, of the available options in the meaning potential, the options they choose will vary, and this is conditioned by the social context in which the text is operating. Thus, a subset of the meaning potential often reoccurs in particular social settings, and this creates registers (or genres in Martin’s terms) that are chosen from by participants in discourse. There are also text types that are less institutionalised but systematically reoccurring combinations of meanings in texts that can be seen as the “generalized actual” of an instance. That is, they are repeated instances of texts that are not consistent enough to be formalised as genres of the culture.

Instantiation thus offers different focal points for the analysis of language (instead of dividing them as two disparate aspects of language). When interpreting a text, the analyst can shift his/her lens towards the instance end of the cline of instantiation or towards the opposite polar end of the language system. Whether one analyzes genres of texts or an instance of text, every aspect is only and always understood in relation to the total picture of language. A single instance of text may thus be taken as a “window on the system”, since it is its “actualized meaning potential” (Halliday, 1978, p. 109). Moreover, it is necessary to shunt between the perspective of the system and the perspective of the instance, as it is “through instances that systems negotiate both stability and change” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 25).

The language system is also importantly construed as the meaning potential of a culture, and whereas the realisation hierarchy is a scale of abstraction in SFL theory, instantiation can be seen as “a scale of generalization, aggregating the meaning potential of a culture across instances of use” (Martin, 2008b, p. 32). Texts, therefore, also express the culture, and we can consider how the meaning potential is combined in particular ways through this hierarchy. By focusing on instantiation, we can explore “just how far specific texts both confirm expectations and uniquify meaning” (Martin, 2008b, p. 38), and one of the ways that Martin (2008b) suggests we do this is through coupling, “the ways in which meanings combine, as pairs, triplets, quadruplets or any number of coordinated choices from system networks [of language]” (p. 39). This is a vital point for the current research.
since speakers couple meanings to construct convivial conversational humour and to construe relations of affiliation together. By adopting an instantiation perspective and concentrating on humorous phases, the couplings at stake in humorous negotiations are revealed. The process of coupling that occurs through the unfolding of the humorous phase as it is instantiated can be further explored through the notion of semogenesis, specifically logogenesis, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.1.2.1 Semogenesis

SFL considers changes in the meaning potential of semiotic systems to occur in three timeframes of semogenesis: logogenesis, the unfolding of the text (text span); ontogenesis, the development of the individual (life span); and phylogenesis, the evolution of the systems of a culture (culture span) (see Figure 2.5).

![Scales of semogenesis](image)

**Figure 2.5: Scales of semogenesis (taken from Martin 1999a, p. 49).**

Each of these timeframes provides the environment or context for one another, while they, in turn, provide semiotic material for one another:

In other words, where a culture has arrived in its evolution provides the social context for the linguistic development of the individual, and the point an individual is at in their development provides resources for the instantiation of unfolding texts . . . Conversely, logogenesis provides the material (i.e. semiotic goods) for ontogenesis, which in turn provides the material for phylogenesis; in other words, texts provide the means through which individuals interact to learn the system.  
(Martin & Rose, 2003, pp. 266–267)
Semogenesis is important for the current research because identity and ideology in particular are connected across all three timeframes. Martin (1997) explains that all three timescales frame how we interpret language and context (register and genre) in that these semiotic systems “constitute the meaning potential that is immanent [sic], from moment to moment as a text unfolds, for the social subjects involved, at the point in the evolution of the culture where meanings are made” (p. 10). So, it is in the logogenesis of the text that this thesis finds the continuous, moment-to-moment negotiation of couplings crucial to convivial conversational humour, and this analysis is informed by the ontogenesis of the social subjects and the phylogenesis of the communities and culture they are construing (see Chapter 4).

Notions of identity and ideology have also been pursued through a final hierarchy in SFL: that of individuation. The following section explores individuation and briefly reviews the research that has contributed to current understandings of individuation in SFL.

### 2.2.1.3 Individuation

Individuation is a complementary hierarchy to realisation and instantiation coined by Matthiessen (2003, cited in Martin, 2007a) and recently conceptualised by Martin (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Martin, Zappavigna & Dwyer, to appear). This theoretical parameter provides a perspective on identity that is informed by notions of ideology, and it describes how individuals may display differential access to the linguistic resources of the culture. In relation to realisation and instantiation, individuation shifts our linguistic lens specifically to the individual and the culture as we analyze a text. While SF linguists have studied aspects of individuation, only Martin has distinguished it as a separate hierarchy to complement realisation and instantiation. In his terms, while realisation is a hierarchy of abstraction and instantiation is a hierarchy of generalisation, individuation is a hierarchy of allocation (Martin et al., to appear; see also Martin, 2010).

Informing our notions of individuation (Martin, 2008a, p. 36), research by Hasan and colleagues (e.g. Cloran, 1989, 1999, 2000; Hasan, 1984, 1992, 2005; Hasan & Cloran, 2008 And, in Martin et al.’s (to appear) terms, also a hierarchy of affiliation (see following).
has explored mediating ideological forces in the child’s development of language, focusing on how culturally available meaning potential is differentially disseminated to children. This work confirms the claims of Bernstein (1990) about speech codes or “coding orientations” that regulate the child’s verbal communication and it exhibits his relation of reservoir to repertoire—how the whole reservoir of meanings in a culture is disseminated to the individual repertoires of language users. It is this relation that is taken up by Martin (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Martin et al., to appear) and Matthiessen (e.g. 2007, 2009) in individuation theory. As Martin (2006) explains, individuation “interprets the relation of system to individual (of cultural reservoir to individual repertoires in Bernstein’s [2000] terms...)” (p. 276), and this relation is mediated by coding orientation.

Matthiessen (2007) aligns reservoir and repertoire with system and instance on the instantiation cline and considers coding orientation (“codal variation” in his terms) as variation in semantic style (Matthiessen, 2007, p. 539). He situates codal variation between dialectal and registerial variation on the instantiation cline (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: Kinds of variation in relation to instantiation and stratification (taken from Matthiessen, 2007, p. 539).

Repertoire for Matthiessen refers to the individual meander’s set of “registers” taken from the speech fellowship’s potential (the reservoir), and his concern is with statistically
significant patterns of class variation that can be found in individual repertoires through the study of semantic variation (styles). However, when we focus on couplings in instantiation, it is useful to consider individuation as a separate dimension.

In contrast to Matthiessen, Martin (2008a, Martin et al., to appear) formulates individuation as a separate cline of relations alongside instantiation and realisation and argues that it “complements and must be read in relation” (Martin, 2008a, p. 36) to these hierarchies (see Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Individuation (reservoir to repertoire, informing ontogenesis) alongside the instantiation (system to text, informing logogenesis) and realisation (stratified levels of the language system, informing phylogenesis) hierarchies. Taken from Martin (2010, p. 30).

29 Matthiessen (2009) also recently discussed individuation as a term he coined for adopting a “people view” on text, to shift focus from system to the collectivity of the people. This is done through the study of “personalised acts of meaning”, or semantic variation. Though he distinguishes a cline for individuation along instantiation, it is still mapped onto instantiation and not defined as separate for Matthiessen.
Martin has aligned coding orientation with ideology (cf. Martin, 1992, p. 495) and situated it on the cline in between the reservoir of meanings available in the culture and the individual repertoire (see Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: The cline of individuation (from Martin, 2006, p. 294).

Through the separation of this cline, the individual is distinguished from an instance of text, and we can focus specifically on the identity of the speaker in social semiotic terms. In other words, Martin’s division of two separate hierarchies allows for two different meaning relations, since ―instantiation relates to how a text is different from the system, and individuation relates to how an individual is different from the community‖ (Bednarek, 2010, p. 243). The speaker is individualizing language according to a particular social valuing system while instantiating it (two processes happening always and at once). Having a separate cline also allows us to reconsider instantal features such as couplings, re-interpreting them in relation to communities of values in the culture.

Once we begin to perceive speakers in terms of communities, however, we must also consider not just how an individual differs from the community but how social persons affiliate together into communities. Individuation theory has thus far in SFL been dominated by the study of coding orientation and its impact upon the individual in ontogenetic terms, so research has maintained a focus on individual semantic style or variation (particularly in relation to social class). The hierarchy of individuation shifts our focus to the language users rather than language use (Halliday, 1964; cf. Martin et al., to appear) and should include not only a focus on semantic variation but on the relations of
identity and community that are to be found in the logogenesis of text (this will be further discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1). Both Martin (2008a) and Matthiessen (2007) focus on the semantic or codal variations of speakers in order to establish a sense of individuation, representing identity in terms of an individualized repertoire of genres/registers. This is an allocation perspective on individuation according to Martin et al. (to appear), which can be complemented by the affiliation perspective that is introduced in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

In an affiliation perspective on individuation, the identities of members of social networks are co-constructed and can be found through couplings that unfold within instances of text. It concerns how participants negotiate their social bonds through these couplings and commune as co-members of social networks in the culture. It will be shown that this is the social work that laughter is doing in convivial conversational humour, as friends constantly negotiate who they are together in ongoing talk. Affiliation exhibits how resources of the culture can be deployed to members to commune, rather than allocated to individual repertoires (Martin et al., to appear). Thus, following Martin et al. (to appear), this thesis proposes affiliation as a complementary bottom-up perspective on individuation (Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9: Affiliation as a complementary, bottom-up perspective on the cline of individuation (taken from Martin et al., to appear).
In Figure 2.9, Martin et al. (to appear) populate the cline with relations of persona, subculture, master identity and culture. These labels generally cover the orientation to allocation that has been traditionally taken in individuation theory. In this thesis, on the other hand, the cline of relations involved in affiliation will be described in terms of the focus taken on social networking and, specifically, the social semiotic unit of the bond. So, in the theory of affiliation developed in Chapter 5, the levels on the cline of individuation are reformulated in affiliation terms as “bonds” at the level of “persona”; “bond networks” at the level of “sub-culture”; “ideological networks” at the level of “master identity” (though this description aligns); and culture is represented as a system of bonds.

Thus, by taking all three hierarchies of realisation, instantiation and individuation into our minds at the same time, we are informed by and are able to build further dimensions in the SFL model to interpret convivial conversational humour.

2.2.2 Complementarities

Alongside the hierarchies of SFL, there are complementarities. Whereas hierarchies order their elements (along a scale), complementarities coordinate their elements (in relation to one another). Choices that are made in the systems of language at various strata can be viewed in both paradigmatic and syntagmatic terms, and at the same time, they are diversified across three general, simultaneous functions. The complementarities of axis (system and structure) and metafunction are presented in this section.

2.2.2.1 Axis: System and structure

SFL represents both paradigmatic relations of choice and syntagmatic relations of sequencing as two axes in its theoretical framework but gives priority to the paradigmatic. In SFL, language is considered a resource for meaning involving choice rather than a system of rules concerned with restrictions in linguistic forms (Martin, 1992, p. 3). Choices of meaning take place in the environment of other choices and are interpreted in
relation to the potential of alternative choices that could have been made. The paradigmatic perspective thus allows us to consider, for instance, why friends use humour as one of many choices in conversational talk and to reason about that choice in relation to others, rather than to focus on the rules of serious discourse that they may have broken.³⁰

Conversely, syntagmatic relations concern sequences in language, or the chaining of words together in sequence. Both of these aspects are related in SFL as “axes of chain and choice” (cf. Eggins, 2004, pp. 198–201). Structures are analysed functionally based on their part in relation to the whole and may be taken as a point of departure for systems, since they are derived from choices made in the whole of the systemic potential. The paradigmatic relations provide the meaning of text, while structures show the order, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) indicate:

> Structure is the syntagmatic ordering in language: patterns, or regularities, in what goes together with what. System, by contrast, is ordering on the other axis: patterns in what could go instead of what. This is paradigmatic ordering in language.

(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 22)

SFL represents paradigmatic choices in systems, developed from Firth’s (1957) system structure theory as the set of options specified for a given environment. Through systems, linguistic meanings are interpreted as a range of semiotic alternatives from which speakers choose. These inter-related options are further modelled in a “system network” in SFL, which organises sets of oppositions along a scale of “delicacy” from left to right (Martin, 1992, pp. 4–5). “Any set of alternatives, together with its condition of entry, constitutes a system”, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 22), and the entry condition states the environment in which a choice must be made (Halliday, 1978, p. 41). System networks are used in SFL to model the systems of options at every stratum, since “the underlying organization at each level [of language] is paradigmatic” (Halliday, 1978, p. 40), while structures are the output or the “expression of a set of choices made in the

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³⁰This is the concern of many pragmatic studies of humour, in which researchers have variously explained how humour is a violation of a maxim (Grice, 1975; e.g. Martinich, 1981; Zajdman, 1995; Kotthoff, 2006), or abides by a Non-Cooperation Principle (NCP) (Attardo, 1994, 1999, 2006), or is simply a matter of a “play mode” vs. a “serious mode” (cf. Kotthoff, 2000).
system network” (Halliday, 1978, p. 41). A text is the product of ongoing selection of options in a system network (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10: System network of MOOD with realisations.

Figure 2.10 presents a system network of basic options of the lexicogrammatical system of MOOD\textsuperscript{31}. The terms, or features, represent the oppositions (or alternatives of choice) for making meaning in this system, with MOOD as the entry condition (i.e. you must enter the system of MOOD to choose from within it). The square brackets show that the features are contrasting options (either/or)\textsuperscript{32}, so that one must choose between indicative and imperative; as one moves further through the choices, they increase in delicacy. Once having chosen indicative, for example, the more delicate choice between declarative and interrogative must be made, and so on. The realisation of choices in structures is represented through down-facing arrows. The range of options in the network represents the potential for meaning-making. While the options in the system are contrasting, they are also related or “agnate” to one another. For instance, indicative is agnate to imperative, declarative is agnate to interrogative, and yes/no is agnate to WH; and each of these are related to the general environment provided by the entry condition (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31). In the current study, the system network has been particularly useful for systematically mapping out the meaning potential of laughter (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2). Through this resource, the paradigmatic choices that are made evident in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} In SFL notation, system names are represented in small caps to distinguish them in written text.
\item \textsuperscript{32} System networks may also provide for simultaneous (and) choices through angled or left-curling brackets around options that are co-occurring and must be chosen at the same time. This can be seen, for instance, in the system of appraisal in Section 2.2.2.2.1.
\end{itemize}
laughter in the data can be constructed to show that speakers are making meaning with their laughs: that laughter is in fact a social semiotic system.

The system network shows agnation typologically, but even options in language and other semiotics that are better represented topologically (cf. Martin & Matthiessen, 1991) (i.e. they relate to each other by degree or scale) can be represented in a network. In these cases, gradable choices can be represented with scales between features or tilted systems for continuous values ranging from high to low (Martin & White, 2005, p. 16). For instance, van Leeuwen (1999, p. 151) has shown in his representation of features like sound quality that the system network is still a powerful resource for representing choices in meaning in degrees if one considers the relation between the choices as scaled (see Figure 2.11).

![Figure 2.11: System network of topological choices in sound quality (adapted from van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 151).](image)

This is useful for a semiotic system like laughter, which involves expression choices that are scaled in degrees (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2.1). Laughter is similar to sound quality

33 This is in contrast to looking at laughter only in terms of its sequencing in relation to talk—how laughter “goes with” talk—in the syntagmatic perspective taken by researchers in the CA tradition (see Section 2.1.2.3).
in that features of its expression, such as pitch, range from high to low options that are not discrete but scaled. Thus, choices in the system network for laughter in Figure 3.5 of Chapter 3 of this thesis will be scaled.

In summation, the paradigmatic perspective of SFL and its representation of language choice in systems suitably capture the range of meanings to be explored in the current study of conversational humour among friends. In other words, it provides the means to capture both the choices available in using humour and the possibilities for meaning in laughter. These choices are, furthermore, functionally diversified in the systemic functional perspective. The metafunctions of SFL are described in the following section.

2.2.2.2 Metafunctions

Halliday divides language into three intrinsic functions that it has evolved to serve in people’s lives (Halliday, 1978, p. 4; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31). These are called metafunctions (Halliday, 1978, p. 21) and are divided into ideational, interpersonal and textual (see Figure 2.12).

![Figure 2.12: Metafunctions of language.](image)

Each of these metafunctions is built into the organisation of language as a system, so that when we instantiate and individuate choices from systems on the realisation hierarchy, we
create three kinds of meaning simultaneously. There are systems of meaning in discourse semantics that are ideational, interpersonal or textual, lining up with systems in lexicogrammar and in phonology, and speakers choose from all of these systems in an instance of language. The metafunctions also encode the social context of situation, or the register, through language: patterns in the ideational metafunction realise the field, patterns in the interpersonal function realise tenor, and patterns of the textual metafunction realise mode (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 51). Figure 2.13 shows the relationship between the dimensions of language.

![Figure 2.13: Metafunctions of language encoding meanings in three dimensions of register.](image)

Textual meanings enable the building of text and sequences of discourse, organising the information distribution of the other two metafunctions to create a cohesive text. This metafunction also connects waves of semiosis and language with other modalities (Martin & White, 2005, p. 7). One of the ways that the textual metafunction organises discourse is by backgrounding and foregrounding various units of information. This may have an impact on the way that participants construct convivial conversational humour, for instance by backgrounding shared meanings while foregrounding meanings that create humorous tension. It may also have an important role in stage-managing the investment
of attitude in experience (Martin, 2004b, p. 337); that is, it may be involved in the binding of ideational with interpersonal meaning into couplings. However, it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to interpret the potential of textual meanings in conversational humour. Instead, the relationship between meanings in the ideational and the interpersonal metafunctions will be focused upon, as they form the basis of the theory of conversational humour that will be here developed. An investigation of how the textual metafunction fits into this theory is a topic for future research.

The ideational metafunction concerns the resources with which we construe both inner and outer experience. It is sub-divided into experiential and logical components. As Martin and White (2005, p. 7) explain, experiential meanings show what is going on and who is doing what to whom, where, when, why and how, while logical meanings show the relation of one activity or “going-on” to another. In the discourse semantic stratum, experiential meanings are modelled in the system of IDEATION (according to Martin’s (1992) framework), which includes choices in activities, events and states, the participants involved in them (concrete and abstract), and the circumstances surrounding them. The construal of experience in discourse is particularly important to the current study, and the system of IDEATION is taken up in the analysis of convivial conversational humour (discussed in Section 2.3.2.2).

The interpersonal metafunction concerns the enactment of social relationships through negotiations of propositions or proposals and sharing attitudes. In discourse, the systems of NEGOTIATION and APPRAISAL construe these meanings in interaction along with the system of INVOLVEMENT which concerns non-gradable resources (like slang and swearing) used to negotiate group identity.34 Participants interact in the speech situation by choosing from different speech functions in NEGOTIATION, which are organised by speech role and commodity: speakers can either give or demand information or goods and services (cf. Halliday, 1985a/1989, p. 69) (the system of NEGOTIATION will be further discussed in Section 2.3.1). To share attitudes in the interaction, participants choose from the system of APPRAISAL, which accounts for the evaluative meaning found in lexis and in the prosody of a text. Attitudinal meanings in particular are vital to the interpretation of

34 Martin and White (2005, p. 34) note that there has not yet been much work done in this area in SFL to establish the system.
convivial conversational humour. Specifically, the interaction between the interpersonal and ideational metafunctions is made evident through a close consideration of attitudes in humorous phases of text.

The metafunctional hypothesis facilitates the perspective on coupled meanings taken in this thesis and developed in Chapters 4 and 5. In the description of instantiation in Section 2.2.1.2, it was stated that speakers in convivial conversational humour were found to couple meanings together in the logogenesis of an instance of text, and that this finding is revealed by exploring the hierarchy of instantiation. Interpreting the coupling of meanings is also aided by exploring the interaction of the metafunctions of language. Specifically, speakers in convivial conversational humour couple interpersonal attitude with ideational experience to create humour and construct affiliation together. By bringing value together with experience, bonding and identity construction are enabled as speakers negotiate who they are as members of communities of values. The metafunctions facilitate coupling in that they distinguish between the different types of meaning that linguistic choices can make, particularly in between the interpersonal, relationship-building aspects and the ideational, information-giving aspects. In terms of the SFL hierarchies, then, we can identify those meanings that realise different metafunctions to then decipher how they come together for particular reasons (such as affiliation) in instantiation. From the initial perspective offered by the division between metafunctions, we turn to instantiation to account for those meanings that bind metafunctional meanings such as couplings.

We can also turn to individuation to explore the social relations at stake when metafunctional meanings are coupled. While tenor is the registerial parameter concerning social relationships and is the most closely identifiable parameter to capture the kinds of affiliation, bonding and identity relations at stake in convivial conversational humour, it is realised by interpersonal metafunctional meanings. For instance, the tenor variables of power and solidarity have been shown to be realised strictly by interpersonal systems such as NEGOTIATION and MOOD (see, for instance, Eggins and Slade’s (1997) account). In this way, tenor does not capture the meanings made by cross-metafunctional couplings of interpersonal with ideational. Therefore, this thesis attempts to explain the social relations that are constructed through cross-metafunctional couplings by proposing a model of affiliation (Chapter 5) as a perspective on the hierarchy of individuation. This model is
specifically informed by the combination of interpersonal attitudinal meanings with experiential meanings. APPRAISAL theory is one of the most significant and relevant aspects of the SFL framework to this thesis. It will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.2.2.1 APPRAISAL theory

Since casual conversation is motivated by the interpersonal, by the need to share values (cf. Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 2000b), a theory of evaluative meaning in text is crucial to its interpretation. In SFL, Martin and White (2005) have developed a theory of APPRAISAL which “provides the only systematic, detailed and elaborate framework of evaluative language” according to Bednarek (2006). It covers the expression of positive and negative attitudes of different types along with their sourcing and intensification in lexical items and across whole texts.

These aspects are captured in the three subsystems of APPRAISAL: ATTITUDE, which includes AFFECT, JUDGEMENT, and APPRECIATION; ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION (see Figure 2.14). Through the choices in these systems, we can interpret the ways that “writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and with how they position their readers/listeners to do likewise” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 1).

35 Bednarek does propose her own comprehensive parameter-based approach to evaluative meaning building in part on APPRAISAL theory.
In ATTITUDE, the system of AFFECT concerns the expression of feelings and emotions, while JUDGEMENT deals with the assessment of the character and behaviour of persons, and APPRECIATION involves aesthetic valuing of objects and experiences, concrete and semiotic. All of these systems, as well as that of ENGAGEMENT, are scaled through GRADUATION, which “attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). ENGAGEMENT is the system of dialogistic positioning through which speakers construct a background of other voices and viewpoints towards their utterances (Martin & White, 2005, p. 97). Through this resource, speakers make the sources of attitudes clear and take a stance towards them (i.e. showing where they stand towards a proposition by proclaiming or entertaining it, for example). As outlined in the Transcription Conventions in this thesis, realisations of AFFECT will be coded in red, realisations of JUDGEMENT in green, APPRECIATION in blue and GRADUATION in pink.
Attitudes can be either explicitly “inscribed” in text through attitudinal lexis, or implicitly “invoked” in ideational meanings alone. Martin and White (2005) outline in a system network the choices that speakers make for how explicit their attitude is according to whether they inscribe it or invoke it, and if invoking, they can “provoke” or “invite” the attitude in ideational meaning. Further, in inviting an attitude, speakers choose from “flagging” it or “affording” it. Each of these strategies is exemplified by a particular realisation (see Figure 2.15).

![Figure 2.15: Inscribed and invoked appraisal (from Martin & White, 2005, p. 67).](image)

While in a system network these options are represented as discrete and distinct choices, they are in fact clinally related (White, 2004b, cited in Bednarek, 2006, p. 31) in degrees of explicitness from explicitly attitudinal, to denoting attitude (provoking) to connoting it only (inviting).  

Hood and Martin (2007) outline these strategies as follows:

The feature [inscribe] refers to the direct realisation of attitude through lexis which explicitly encodes AFFECT, JUDGEMENT or APPRECIATION. The term [provoke] refers to implicit attitude which is evoked through lexical metaphors. Choosing [flag] means that we deploy some kind of GRADUATION to alert readers to the feelings at risk. The [afford] option makes room for the ways in which ideational meanings alone imply evaluation.  

(Hood & Martin, 2007, p. 746)

36 Martin (2008b) has more recently re-interpret these degrees of explicitness as degrees of commitment, so that the speaker activates less and less meaning potential or semantic weight from provoking to affording attitudes. In these terms, inscribing attitude is described as more committed than flagging it, with affording attitude as expressing the least committed attitudinal meaning.

37 Correction following a personal communication with Martin (May 2009).
Invoked attitudes are denoted by lighter shades of the appropriate colour in this thesis (so for instance, a realisation of invoked affect would appear in this shade: \textcolor{affect}{affect} instead of the darker inscribed shade: \textcolor{affect}{affect}). Martin and White (2005, pp. 67-68) note that recognising invocations allows for double codings of borderline categories of attitude, such as explicit judgements of people that also invoke appreciation of their accomplishments or appreciations of activities that also invoke judgement of the one who accomplishes them (e.g. “That was a \textcolor{breathtaking}{breathtaking} performance”); and also for hybrid attitudinal lexis that both inscribe affect and invoke judgement or appreciation (e.g. “I was \textcolor{disappointed}{disappointed} with the hockey game”). In this thesis, these categories are marked by a coloured outline of the appropriate implied attitude around the realisation of the double coding (as in the examples just given).

The system of ATTITUDE, particularly invoked attitude, is the most relevant to the conversational humour analysis of this study, since attitudes form a crucial half of the textual evidence of the coupling when speakers value their experiences in humorous ways. GRADUATION is also used with couplings to grade the attitudes at stake, while both GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT are important in the data because they work as signals to the presence of couplings, as argued in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3. The analysis of APPRAISAL that was undertaken in this thesis will be discussed in the Methodology section of this chapter. The study of APPRAISAL has also led to a conception of how we bond together around values that we share. Bonding theory in SFL is explored in the next section.

2.2.2.2 Bonding theory

As was explained in Section 2.1.2.2, Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997) have shown that bonding is a crucial aspect of conversational humour. However, their theory has not yet been applied to conversational humour between friends, and importantly, it does not systematically connect social bonding with evaluative meaning in text. In SFL theory, on the other hand, the concept of bonding has been introduced through the study of APPRAISAL. Bonding theory was developed by Stenglin (2004) for three-dimensional

38 Note also that realisations of infused graduation are also coded in this way. See Example 2.4.
space in describing how visitors to a museum may build “togetherness, inclusiveness and affiliation” (p. 402) around spatial elements including bonding icons (“bondicons”). Bonding icons/bondicons are symbols encapsulating the ideologies of the people they belong to (Martin & Stenglin, 2006). Specifically, they are symbols “crystallising strong interpersonal attitudes to ideational meanings” (Stenglin, 2004, p. 410) such as flags, logos, colours and memorabilia (Martin & Stenglin, 2006) around which community members identify and rally.

In language, Martin (2001b, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2008c) identifies bonding through the negotiation of attitudes in appraisal towards ideational experience in text. Through unfolding discourse, readers/hearers are positioned and aligned around communing sympathies through shared affect, around standards of character and principles through shared judgement, and around mutual tastes and preferences through shared appreciation (Martin, 2004b, p. 329). Bonding can be construed through bondicons in discourse as well. They may come in the form of slogans, such as those exemplified by Humphrey (2008, p. 256) for activist groups such as “Think Globally, Act Locally!”, since these function as symbols of belonging that rally members (and motivate action). It is thus by sharing value-infused experiences, both concrete and abstract, that participants bond together into a community of like-minded people (Stenglin, 2004, p. 402) and build solidarity. In this way, bonding theory also brings together evaluative meaning with ideational meaning in order to explore how it is that participants commune together.

The SFL theory of bonding is useful for this study because it not only connects bonding between participants to evaluative meanings in the linguistic text, but it describes how these connect to ideational meanings as symbols of community. However, there are limitations in the descriptions of the SFL theory of bonding. Descriptions of bonding conflate two essential aspects: the infusion of feeling into ideational experience (the coupling of linguistic meaning), and a social process of aligning into communities around shared values (the bonding of social persons). Moreover, bonding as a social process of alignment has consistently been described as an unproblematic communing between persons; that is, bonding is always about rallying together within a community around a bondicon. Bondicons tend to involve quite strong and serious values such as nationhood (see Stenglin, 2004, p. 410) and peace (see Martin, 2008a, p. 131), and so they either bring people together in bonding or exclude them completely as outsiders.
This thesis proposes that the two essential aspects that have been identified—coupling of linguistic meaning and bonding of persons—can be distinguished separately and that humour shows that there are other strategies by which we can align other than simply communing. In Chapter 4, the coupling of attitude with ideation in text is captured in “evaluative couplings”, which are the linguistic evidence for convivial conversational humour. It will be shown that bonding is facilitated by the patterning of coupling in unfolding conversational humorous texts and that laughter indicates that humour puts communing at risk. Chapter 5 then presents bonds as the social semiotic units that bring us together and affiliation as a social process to account for the various ways that we construe social bonds together beyond communing. Thus, the current study builds on the foundations offered by bonding theory and uses this to expand on the strategies for how we affiliate and to identify how we do so through text in the analysis of conversational humour.

2.2.2.3 Summary of SFL concepts

In summary, the aspects of SFL theory that have been developed in these sections contribute to the current study of conversational humour in the following ways:

- SFL is a social semiotic perspective, which allows us to consider phenomena such as laughter through the same lens as we do language.
- Realisation provides a systematic link between the levels of language and social context, so that we can view meaning from many different, but interrelated, perspectives (e.g. we are not constrained to the discourse semantic level alone).
- Through instantiation, we can look to an instance of text as a window on the system of language and on culture, since it is through instantiation that the meaning potential of a culture is combined into couplings (and we are further informed by a perspective on the logogenetic unfolding of the text in an instance).
- Individuation shifts our perspective from the text to the language user, providing a focus on identity that is informed by the linguistic text and informing the model of affiliation that brings identity together with bonding in this thesis.
• SFL’s functional, paradigmatic perspective allows us to consider the use of humour in terms of systems of choices rather than rules, and the system network is a useful tool for mapping the meaning potential of laughter as a social semiotic system.

• The metafunctions distinguish the different ways that we make meaning in interaction and, as a complementarity, provide for a view on the binding of metafunctional couplings and the social relations of affiliation that result.

• Since attitudes are vital to the interpretation of conversational humour between friends and combine with ideational meaning for affiliation, the system of APPRAISAL in the discourse semantics captures the different types of attitudes at stake in conversational text. Further, bonding theory shows how these meanings relate to how we come together in communities in the social sphere.

2.2.3 Humour studies in an SFL framework

Though it is clear that SFL provides a number of useful aspects to the study of conversational humour, there are few treatments of humour in this theoretical framework. Simpson (2003) recognises a “notable absence of any serious provision for humorous discourse across the systemic–functional work, and for that matter across the critical discourse work that draws on functional linguistics” (p. 75). In the literature, the systemic functional framework has only been employed in case studies that include humour as one aspect of the overall study. Or, SFL concepts have been used in sections of humour studies to a minimal degree (cf. Alexander, 1997; Partington, 2006). In this literature, SFL has been employed in the humour of online discourse (Goertzen & Kristjánsson, 2007; North 2007), political discourse (Graham, 2004; Swain, 1998, 2003), the classroom (Baynham, 1996), film and literature (Martin, 2000a; Martin & White, 2005), newspapers (Caple, 2008, 201039; Swain, 2003), comic strips (Lim Fei, 2006) and professional settings (Hood & Forey, 2005; Lipovsky, 2005). Types of humour have included jokes, verbal humour (Alexander, 1997; Halliday, 1979, p. 160) and satire (Simpson, 2003), while SF linguists have also considered how children develop humour (Painter, 2003) and

39 Notably, Caple (2010) recently explores allusion and bonding in what she refers to as “image-nuclear news stories”, completing a multimodal analysis of intersemiotic word-image play. This study shows that notions of bonding and community in the SFL framework are useful for pursuing play and humour.
how it works multimodally (Lim Fei, 2006). However, the most comprehensive treatments of humour in SFL are those that have been done in studies of conversation, particularly research that explores the social implications and the function of APPRAISAL in humour.

This section briefly reviews SFL studies of humour, focusing on those studies that are particularly relevant to this thesis. Section 2.2.3.1 discusses studies that focus on the level of social context in humour, and Section 2.2.3.2 explores key studies that consider the role of APPRAISAL in humour.

### 2.2.3.1 The social context of humour

The research in this section employs the SFL approach and shows how the connection of language to social context in this framework is useful for interpreting humour. It also provides a perspective on the role of interpersonal metafunctional meanings, which are particularly salient in conversational humour.

Halliday makes an early connection between the different strata of language and the social context in the use of verbal play:

> Verbal play involves all elements in the linguistic system, from rhyme and rhythm to vocabulary and structure. But the essence of verbal play is playing with meaning; including…playing with the meaning that is inherent in the social structure.  
>  
> (Halliday, 1978, p. 160)

Halliday thus highlights the important role of social meaning in verbal play and exhibits how the SFL framework is useful for the study of humour. First, it connects all elements of the linguistic system that are relevant in verbal play (a type of humour) through realisation. Second, it is a theory of meaning, so that we interpret humour as an act of meaning that has particular features in text and particular implications for the interactants in the social world.
Different types of humour have also been situated on different levels of the SFL realisation hierarchy by Simpson (2003). Using Martin’s (1992) model of social context, Simpson (2003, p. 76) locates satire in between genre and the original parameter of ideology (as a discursive practice that assimilates other genres); puns and wordplay as shadowing lexicogrammar; and parody as shadowing genre and register since it alludes to these and bridges satire and wordplay (see Figure 2.16).

![Diagram of SFL hierarchy with satire, parody, puns & word-play]

**Figure 2.16: Types of humour in the SFL hierarchy according to Simpson (2003), labelled “Satirical discourse within a systemic-functional framework?”**

(From Simpson, 2003, p. 76).

By this allocation, Simpson captures how satire is a discursive unit with structural elements that are developed through genres and registers. In contrast to Raskin’s (1985) semantic script theory of humour (which was discussed in Section 2.1.1.2), the incongruity of satire is described in discursive, rather than cognitive, terms through SFL notions. Expectations of the structure of a genre are built up and it is the departure from this structure which triggers a discursive shift wherein the hearer notes that the generic goal has not been achieved for the purpose of humour (Simpson, 2003, pp. 35–37). Satire in this way depends intrinsically upon the cultural knowledge of the participants.

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40 Simpson includes a question mark in his figure title, indicating that his framework is suggestive rather than conclusive.

41 Simpson’s theory in fact involves a number of other factors and steps: satire derives from a particular culture with frameworks of belief and knowledge (a “genus”), and its impetus is the satirist’s disapproval of a potential target (the satirized). The humorous incongruity involves a discoursal “prime”, or an echoic utterance of another genre, text, or register, which creates incongruence with the participant’s knowledge of a particular text structure (a “dialectic”). This causes a dissonance that then creates the interpretive pragmatic framework for satire, and humour is an epiphenomenon to this process (Simpson, 2003, p. 42).
Simpson thus displays how SFL provides for a social interpretation of humorous incongruity that is interpretable through features of linguistic text. This is an important point for the current study which also attempts to provide a description of humorous incongruity in discursive and social terms through the SFL framework.

However, Simpson’s arrangement of types of humour within strata of the realisation hierarchy has limitations. As Halliday has shown with verbal play, every level of the hierarchy is involved in humour, particularly the social context which is always significant for making meaning. Situating humour types within a single stratum does not provide for their description across these levels in a systematic way. Also, since ideology is no longer located on the realisation hierarchy, satire and other forms of humour may more usefully involve the concerns of dimensions such as individuation. This is pursued in the current study, which deals with ideological concerns in conversational humour through a theory of affiliation in Chapter 5.

In terms of metafunctions, Baynham’s (1996) study exhibits the salience of interpersonal meaning-making in conversational humour through the lens of the SFL strata of discourse semantics and tenor. Baynham emphasises the importance of humour as an interpersonal resource that has implications for roles and relationships in the adult learner classroom. In particular, exchange structure and expectations about turn-taking are relaxed temporarily by humour, so that students have more right to take on powerful discursive roles. In this way, humour is used by students to cope with stress and conflict and to manage the multiple identities that are in play in the adult numeracy classroom (Baynham, 1996, p. 194). Baynham’s study shows how the connection between discourse semantics (specifically in exchange structure) and interpersonal tenor (specifically social distance) offers a useful tool for describing the social work going on in the classroom when humour is brought into discourse. It also highlights the important identity work that humour does, which is a crucial aspect of the affiliative relations construed in the data of this thesis.

Baynham does note, however, that the dynamics of his classroom interactions would differ from casual conversation since, for instance, chat and banter would not be permitted to drift since the teacher tends to terminate exchanges abruptly to re-establish
classroom business (Baynham, 1996, p. 199). The shift in the hierarchical power relations of the classroom is, as in Bakhtin’s (1965) carnival, short-lived. This indicates that social distance may not be as salient an interpersonal dimension in conversational humour between friends, since it is oriented towards solidarity. Also, while this research exhibits how the discourse semantic system of NEGOTIATION (involving speech functions and exchange structure) is played with in humour, further insights can be made when the APPRAISAL system is focused on (as will be discussed in the following section).

North’s (2007) study of online discussion groups further highlights how metafunctions and realisation can be usefully applied to the study of humour. She argues that features of the online environment that are used by participants in humour, such as emoticons and acronyms, make meaning through all three metafunctions, reflecting field, tenor and mode variables. Furthermore, with a metafunctional perspective, North finds that wordplay contributes to “dense textual cohesion” in which the interpersonal and ideational and the humorous and serious interweave and converge as participants collaboratively construct humour. This is similar to the findings of this thesis, as the interweaving of interpersonal and ideational metafunctions is a crucial aspect of how friends create humour in conversation. North also makes the important point that solidarity is built in humour as long as it aligns with group norms and values and shows how, through an SFL approach, humour can be seen as multi-functional. Though face-to-face conversational humour between friends does not prevalently feature wordplay, North’s study underlines the value of a metafunctional perspective on the unfolding of humorous text since they come together in particular ways and of the realisation hierarchy that links textual features with functions in context.

The review of SFL studies so far has described research which demonstrates the usefulness of the dimensions of realisation and metafunctions in particular to the study of humour. In relation to the current study, though, it is particularly the interpersonal discourse semantic system of APPRAISAL that is most informative of the relations at stake in conversational humour between friends. Those studies that have applied the APPRAISAL framework to humour are discussed in the following section.

42 Hirst (2003) takes a sociocultural approach to humour incorporating notions of SFL (such as metafunctions) generally to a LOTE (languages other than English) classroom. She also shows how humour is used for identity and power relations but with the students taking power over the teacher.
2.2.3.2 Humour and APPRAISAL

This section reviews studies that demonstrate APPRAISAL as an especially effective tool in the SFL approach for uncovering meanings in conversational humour.

One of the most notable works on conversational humour in SFL is Eggins and Slade’s (1997) chapter in their book on analysing casual conversation, which takes an interpersonal perspective on the genre. They apply a comprehensive analysis to their conversational texts that includes all of the interpersonal systems on the realisation hierarchy, so that not only APPRAISAL, but the discourse semantic systems of NEGOTIATION and INVOLVEMENT (cf. Martin & White, 2005, pp. 33–35) are considered as well for humour. Most significantly for this thesis, Eggins and Slade describe how APPRAISAL and INVOLVEMENT are used in humour to enact differences in values and social relations and to negotiate alignments and insider–outsider relations. This is an important finding for the current study since the incongruity or tension in conversational humour is linked to how we differentiate ourselves in the social world and to how we align. In other words, difference comes into play in the negotiation of our alignments, and the difference in humour is fundamentally social. In particular, Eggins and Slade show through conversational teasing the “tension between integration (solidarity, acceptance) and difference” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 159).

However, because they develop their analysis from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective to specifically examine power relations in conversation, for Eggins and Slade difference is tied up with social distance. Humour, according to them, brings out conflicts and contradictions in the social structure. By making social differences relevant in talk, humour is used by interlocutors to enact their positioning in the social structure and bring a formal hierarchy of power from the “macro-context of public life” into the immediate context of interaction. At the same time, Eggins and Slade argue, humour disguises this positioning and distances interactants from the serious message since they can claim to be “only joking” (1997, pp. 166–167). While Eggins and Slade concentrate on the power dimension of tenor, this thesis instead pursues the orientation to solidarity taken in the conversational humour between friends in the data and particularly the ways that participants laugh off differences to negotiate communality and affiliation.
These aspects are brought out by other researchers in the SFL framework who have used the same discourse semantic resources. For instance, Goertzen and Kristjánsson (2007) also apply APPRAISAL and INVOLVEMENT when analysing online discourse and the use of humour. Through this analysis, they show that humour in fact can perform a variety of functions beyond the power dimension, including “typically signaling alignment and support while also enabling participants to negotiate matters of potential sensitivity with less risk”, as well as “negotiating change, encoding critique, and lightening up the discussion” (Goertzen & Kristjánsson, 2007, p.220).

Further to these findings, Lipovsky (2005) shows that solidarity and affiliation are significant functions of humour and APPRAISAL in job interviews. Building on Eggins and Slade’s (1997) conclusion that humour enables interactants “to negotiate attitudes and alignments, and provide[s] a resource for indicating degrees of ‘otherness’ and ‘in-ness’” (p. 155), Lipovsky describes this as a “co-membership” achieved by both interviewers and candidates. Co-membership is constructed when participants establish a common characteristic—something shared—to show that there is a special relationship between them. Specifically, Lipovsky finds that participants use humour to bond by revealing shared attributes of their social identities. Furthermore, affiliation and alignment within a community are achieved when the interviewer in a higher position licenses a momentary equalization between the participants, so that humour is shown not to bring in the social hierarchy (as proposed by Eggins and Slade, 1997) but to flatten it. Friends can be seen to share aspects of their social identities in humour to negotiate co-membership in convivial conversational humour as well. The data on which Lipovsky focuses, however, limits its applicability to this type of talk. While in job interviews equality has to be licensed by the interviewer in power and they maintain a certain social distance by not participating in laughter, friendship groups already manage their humour on a basis of equality and laughter is constantly shared. Also, humour may be more of a “test of affiliation” (Lipovsky, 2005, p. 22) in job interviews where the participants have just met, whereas friends build on a past history of affiliative negotiations (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.1).

Though they also focus on a professional setting, Hood and Forey’s (2005) study of humour in conference presentations offers further insight into the construction of solidarity through APPRAISAL in humour between friends. Even more significantly for this
thesis, it provides a description of the creation of the humorous disjunction that is informed by APPRAISAL theory. In their multimodal study, Hood and Forey argue that an inconsistent appraisal is given to a particular target, and this is responded to as humorous by an audience who interprets it in context. Specifically, a speaker, who is known by the audience in the context to be an expert in the field, gives a negative self-evaluation that creates a disjunction with his expert status. Since the audience can interpret that the speaker’s expertise is not actually in dispute, that is, by acknowledging his status in the context, they can commune with the speaker in their shared laughter (or smiling). Hood and Forey present an argument that is significant for this study, as they show that the disjunction (incongruity/tension) made in humour relates both to appraisal towards an ideational target (the speaker) and to the construction of solidarity. Moreover, they demonstrate that this is dependent upon an underlying understanding of particular evaluations of targets in context.

This indicates what Martin (2000) has referred to as “discordant couplings” in his analysis of APPRAISAL in sarcasm used in the play Educating Rita. In short, Martin proposes that sarcasm can be analysed by considering how appraisal is coupled in a discordant way with its ideational target according to the value systems of institutions and communities. It has been demonstrated by Swain (2003) that discordant appraisal couplings are indeed significant for the analysis of humour. Focusing more specifically on APPRAISAL in her discussion, Swain (2003) identifies four different types of discordant appraisal, for which she differentiates certain types of humour since “certain types of discord tend to be foregrounded in certain types of humour” (p. 8):

- Between the appraiser’s real known stance towards the appraised and the appraisal he/she makes of it (as in irony and sarcasm)
- Between an appraisal of someone/something shared by a culture or community (a “common sense” view) and the appraisal made (as in mockery, political satire)
- Between a mutually exclusive positive and negative appraisal of the same thing, immediately following the first appraisal of the appraised in the text (as in oxymoron, bathos)
- Between generic norms governing appraisal and the appraisal made (as in parody).

(Swain, 2003, p. 6; 2009, personal communication)
In this typology, the humour lies in the contradiction between the appraisal of something or someone given in the text and the reader/hearer’s expectations, which have either been set up in the text or derive from their knowledge of language, generic, situational or world norms (Swain, 2003, p. 5). Swain also notes that there may be overlap between these categories in the same humorous text. This is the case in conversational humour between friends because bonding and relational identity construction come into play, bringing categories together. It will be shown in Chapter 4 that speakers present couplings that are discordant with the values shared by a community (Type 2) but that it is also discordant with the stance of the speaker him/herself who is negotiating him/herself as a member of that community (Type 1). Also, discordant couplings are shown to be found in an unfolding prosody of bonding set up in the text preceding them and often involve play between positive and negative polarity of appraisal (Type 3). However, since humorous phases take place in casual conversational chat, there are not specifiable generic norms of appraisal (as in Type 4). Instead, the couplings are considered in relation to the value systems of communities of the culture (described in the model of affiliation in Chapter 5). Thus, Swain provides an impetus to the study of discordant couplings in conversational humour but also identifies need for a theoretical underpinning to explain how couplings are established as discordant and by what means they are identified in the text.

This concept of discordant appraisal couplings is key to the current study, as friends present couplings of APPRAISAL with IDEATION in humour that are discordant in relation to values of communities. The analysis of conversational humour between friends will be pursued along these lines in Chapters 4 and 5. The work presented in this section is therefore especially valuable for the interpretation of conversational humour between friends. This is because these researchers not only exhibit the usefulness of APPRAISAL in the SFL framework, but they elicit how discordant couplings of APPRAISAL with IDEATION are fundamental to the humorous incongruity. This thesis builds on this concept to create a theory of affiliation for conversational humour and to further expound theoretically what relation exists by which couplings are found discordant—how we can identify them in text. Discordant couplings have not yet been pursued in conversational humour, and the studies that have been here reviewed demonstrate that there is room for such an analysis in SFL research. While the studies that have been discussed highlight why SFL theory is appropriate for the study of humour, they still form a small body of research,
and there has not yet been a comprehensive theory of humour in SFL. This thesis provides a step in that direction.

2.3 METHODOLOGY

As has been established in this chapter, SFL is the theoretical framework that is employed in this study of conversational humour between friends. As Eggins and Slade (1997) explain, SFL theory offers two major benefits for conversation analysis: an “integrated, comprehensive and systematic model of language which enables conversational patterns to be described and quantified at different levels”, and a theory that allows conversation to be shown as a way of doing social life, with its linguistic patterns both enacting and constructing “dimensions of social identity and interpersonal relations” (p. 47). In the study of conversational humour, it has also been shown that insights can be made by focusing on how APPRAISAL couples together with ideational targets to make meaning. This involves looking at the unfolding of text as interactants co-construct sequences of humour together, and so the methodology requires more than a micro-interactive analysis of short stretches of text as in CA. Thus, this thesis employs a larger-scale discourse analysis of conversational humour between friends.

In this section, the methodology undertaken for the SFL analysis of humour in conversations (shown in the tables of Appendix A) is discussed. Section 2.3.1 describes Eggins and Slade’s (1997) model of exchange structure which was used to extract analysis texts from larger conversations. Section 2.3.2 explores the systemic functional discourse analysis that was employed to phases of humour.

2.3.1 Extracting texts for analysis: Conversational exchanges

Convivial conversational humour takes place in sections of chat, where speakers co-construct text that is organised locally on a move-by-move basis, rather than globally as

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43 This is then complemented by a “phasal analysis” (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]) to identify stretches of humour that are not bound by exchange structure conventions (discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2).
in pragmatic genres where there is a predictable macro-structure (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 230). Whereas when we do not achieve the staged completion of a “chunk” of talk (i.e. a genre) we feel a sense of frustration (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 11), chat concerns the sharing of evaluations and exhibits a propensity for conversational continuity. We therefore need a model by which we can capture sequences of talk in order to put boundaries on our interpretation of the data (and to help define a humorous sequence). While CA offers a model of “turn-taking” (Sacks, et al., 1974) to account for sequences of talk, the SFL approach taken by Eggins and Slade (1997) in their concept of exchange structure provides a more comprehensive model for this thesis that is informed by the semiotic, linguistic criteria afforded in SFL. This section describes Eggins and Slade’s model of exchange structure and exhibits why this model was chosen for identifying conversational exchanges in this study.

The CA model of turn-taking captures the way that speakers coordinate their conversations one at a time at the micro level of interaction. Conversation analysts focus on the taking of “turns” in conversational sequence (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974), which are verbal utterances or non-verbal expressions by which one participant holds the floor (Edelsky, 1981) in a conversation, and they can be realised by a range of grammatical and phonological constructions. Turns are organised into turn constructional units (TCUs) (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 702) of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences, and at a unit’s possible completion point, a transition relevance place (TRP), the current speaker selects the next speaker (including self-selecting) or the next speaker may self-select. TCUs are analysed in pairs44 or what CA calls adjacency pairs (cf. Psathas, 1995, p. 16), which are identified by predictable pair parts such as “greeting” and “return greeting” (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 238).45 Each turn is studied in relation to the turn that came before, so that an exchange is formed by the taking of a turn by a speaker (i.e. when someone else starts to talk). However, in identifying exchanges in conversation, this thesis is grounded in a semiotic perspective that focuses on the meaningful functions of the turns we take at talk, rather than the rules that dictate their sequencing. Furthermore, the CA approach

44 CA also accounts for longer sequences (cf. Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) that can prolong exchanges by interruption, suspension, or prolongation (with adjacency pairs as the minimal unit).
45 Dispreferred responses are also possible, such as a rejection of an offer (but for particular cultures, cf. Al-Khatib 2001).
does not identify the unit of the turn (or the exchange) based on systematic linguistic categories but is instead informed by a behavioural model.

Eggins and Slade’s (1997) approach to conversational exchange, on the other hand, adopts the SFL concept of the conversational “move”, which is a reformulation of the TCU based on semiotic criteria. Moves express and sequence patterns of speech functions (Halliday 1984b, 1994a) as a process of exchange, and they differ from turns in that one turn can realise several speech functions (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 184). According to Halliday (1994a), a speaker makes a move by choosing a speech role (giving or demanding) and a commodity (information or goods and services), which combine into one of four speech functions: statement (giving information), question (demanding information), command (demanding goods and services) and offer (giving goods and services) (see Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech role</th>
<th>Commodity exchanged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goods-and-Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>command</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Speech functions (based on Halliday 1994a, p. 69; taken from Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 181).

The initiating speech functions outlined by Halliday are also complemented with responding speech functions which Eggins and Slade reformulate as either supporting or confronting (following Burton, 1980) (see Table 2.3). This reflects how conversational structure tends to follow patterns of confrontation and support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiating speech function</th>
<th>Responding speech functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>offer</td>
<td>supporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confronting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>command</td>
<td>acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statement</td>
<td>compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>refusal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>question</td>
<td>acknowledgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contradiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disclaimer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Speech function pairs: initiating and responding (adapted from Halliday, 1994a, p. 69; taken from Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 183).
Particularly valuable for the current study is Eggins and Slade’s addition of logico-semantic relations and continuing moves, which account for the constant overlap in the conversational data through which the speakers actually demonstrate harmony (Coates, 2007, p. 39). Because conversational talk involves such a great amount of co-construction, interruption and overlap, Eggins and Slade extend the system network for speech function by adding Halliday’s (1994) categories of logico-semantic relations to account for longer sequences of moves (for example, when a speaker elaborates upon the experiential meaning of a move), and continuing moves for when a speaker continues to talk past his initial move. Logico-semantic relations include three types of expansion: elaboration, extension and enhancement, which are described by Halliday (1994) as grammatical categories relating clauses in clause complexes, but Eggins and Slade adopt them as discourse semantic categories to describe the relationship between moves in sequence (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 196).46 Whereas in CA, the notion of “ideal delivery” (cf. O’Connell, Kowal & Kaltenbacher, 1990, p. 348) precludes harmonious overlap since simultaneous speech is resolved by having one speaker eventually drop out or else risk a conversational “breakdown”, Eggins and Slade’s addition of continuing moves provides for speech that continues past allocated “turns”. It supports how the overlapping found in the data of this thesis does not preclude the conversational continuation but rather propels it. Eggins and Slade’s speech function network is represented in Figure 2.17:

46 The consideration of logico-semantic relations as units in discourse analysis was first suggested by Ventola (1987), who used these categories to put forth a “move complex” (p. 111).
Figure 2.17: Eggins and Slade's (1997) speech function network.

The choices include reactions to initiations that work to prolong the conversation by developing its content, such as:

O: STATE: FACT\textsuperscript{47} C: ( ) We played the coin game though.
C: EXTEND With the chips,
R: TK: CONFIRM N: YOU played the COIN GAME,

or by tracking or challenging either in a "dispreferred" response, such as:

\textsuperscript{47} Move coding conventions following Eggins & Slade (1997).
Initiating speakers may also use expanding moves by expanding their initiation with a “prolong” move or continuing from an interrupted move with an “append”, such as in the following example:

O: STATE: FACT J: And you asked me earlier why I like it so much; and it’s like ==
R: DEVELOP: ELB CO: == that’s a big part of the reason you know
C: APPEND: EXT J: everything’s so affordable.
C: EXTEND Uh::: the people are super friendly.
C: EXTEND The weather was great.
C: EXTEND And uh the girls were amazing!...

Minor clause realisations are also incorporated into the move options, such as in “engaging” moves which are “minimally negotiatory” and work to agree to the talk going ahead, along with “backchannels” and outbursts of evaluation such as “Oh my god!” (see for example Table 8.25 in Appendix A) which may realise register moves to encourage the speaker to take another turn (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 204). These realisations occur through the conversational talk in the data of this thesis.

While turns may realise more than one speech function, moves are each assigned to a single speech function and are sequentially organised into discourse patterns that operate across turns. For instance, this excerpt shows how one turn realises three separate moves as the speaker makes a command, extends it to include another action, and gives a qualification for his command:

O: COMMAND CO: Get- get people to stop talking
C: EXTEND and once you record you have to start recording
C: ENHANCE I already signed.
Furthermore, one move may be completed in more than one turn (and by more than one speaker), as in the following excerpt:

APPEND: ENHANCE F == like I've seen yours and I've seen the script for Dale's so.
R: s: ACKNOWLEDGE C Yeah
APPEND: F Yours is the:: more a==
... EXTEND C == absolute complete sense whereas mine's like...whu- there's no end to it yet

The boundaries of moves are established grammatically and by referring to co-occurring linguistic patterning at different levels of the linguistic hierarchy, providing a systematic unit from which to classify the conversational exchange. Following Martin (1992), Eggins and Slade define a move as a dynamically established discourse unit “whose unmarked realisation is as a clause selecting independently for Mood” (p. 59), but they also add prosodic criteria in that the end of the clausal realisation should correspond with the end of a rhythm/intonational unit (p. 186). Grammatical mood types, such as declarative and interrogative mood, are related to moves in terms of whether they are unmarked or marked realisations. For instance, an interrogative mood type is an unmarked realisation of the discourse function “question” (a move demanding information), while an imperative mood type is marked (as in “Tell me what the problem is.”). Furthermore, speech roles in the interpersonal situational variable of tenor (Halliday, 1978) constrain the options in speech function at the level of discourse semantics, which are in turn constrained and motivated by the lexicogrammar. Because there are specific linguistic criteria by which we can identify move types, this model “avoids the sometimes ad hoc or purely lexical basis of analytical categories in CA” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 179).

Conversational exchanges are thus captured in this model through a sequence of moves that negotiate a proposition made, and Eggins and Slade (1997) identify an exchange as follows:

An exchange can be defined as a sequence of moves concerned with negotiating a proposition stated or implied in an initiating move. An exchange can be identified as beginning with an opening move, and continuing until another opening move occurs. The general structure of the conversational exchange is therefore one opening move followed by all related continuing and sustaining moves.

(Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 222)
This is the definition that will be taken up in this thesis, as it is based on semiotic criteria and informed by the systematic linguistic categories of SFL. Also, because convivial conversational humour is most often found in the chatty sections\(^{48}\) of conversation which have an unbounded telos that “lexicalises the potential for expansion” (Martin, 2000b, p. 35), this notion of exchange is not limited by bounded exchange “slots” as in institutional discourses. In SFL theory, the exchange has been theorised as a rank above move in the discourse semantics (Martin, 1992\(^{49}\); see also Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 43–47; Martin, 2000b; Martin & Rose, 2007; and Ventola, 1987 for a review) (see Figure 2.18).

Figure 2.18: Moves as rank below exchange in discourse semantics (based on Martin, 1992, p. 50). **NEGOTIATION** is given as the system at the rank of exchange, and **SPEECH FUNCTION** is the system at the rank of move, while Eggins and Slade (1997) only include the rank of *move* for the speech function system, which takes part in a more dynamic exchange called **NEGOTIATION**.

For pragmatically oriented texts that have predictable stages and precipitate closure (Martin, 2002, p. 38), this model captures that there are a certain number of expectant slots to be filled by moves in these encounters to make up an exchange. For casual chat, however, this exchange model is too limiting because moves are structured serially and

---

\(^{48}\) These segments could also incorporate genres or be embedded within genres.

\(^{49}\) Since this thesis takes on Martin’s (1992) model of discourse semantics, the perspective taken on discourse structure differs from the notion of cohesion as described by Halliday and Hasan (1976), and from Cloran’s (e.g. 1994) grammatically-based Rhetorical Unit, and so this work will also not be discussed.
unfold without an expectant point of closure. Because chat is motivated by the potential for expansion, expanding moves allow it to continue indeterminately, and these moves do not make up the components (i.e. fill the slots) of a higher unit of exchange. Instead, exchanges begin with an opening move and end only when another opening move is made with no limit on the amount of moves that may occur in between these boundaries. The exchange is thus not a higher unit above move in a rank scale, but in Eggins and Slade’s (1997) terms, it is a dynamic complexing of interdependent moves in chat.

This definition suits the nature of casual conversation between friends, and Eggins and Slade’s model is used in this thesis to determine the boundaries of segments of chat. From there, by following expressions of laughter, humorous sequences of talk could be found. The borders of the exchange surrounding the laughter were first established through the application of the “opening move to opening move” definition (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 222), and the start of a humorous sequence was determined by the initiating move that preceded the first bout of laughter.

It will be shown, however, that sequences of humour in conversations between friends are far more unpredictable than even segments of chat. This is made clear by the laughter that is taken as the point of departure for analysing humour in this thesis. Thus, once laughter has been described, it will be further explained in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1 that, though Eggins and Slade provide an effective model for determining sections of chat for analysis, it is not entirely sufficient for capturing humour. Instead, a phasal analysis (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]) is applied to the texts in order to extrapolate phases of humour and interpret their linguistic content. Once phases were distinguished in the data, a discourse analysis was performed.

2.3.2 Discourse analysis

Because this thesis is interested in both the micro-interactive features of conversational text (such as laughter) and the macro-discursive patterns found in longer stretches of text, it has employed an SFL discourse analysis to humorous phases. Martin and Rose’s (2007) theory of discourse analysis was utilized because it offers the most useful resources for interpreting conversational humour in the SFL framework. Martin and Rose outline
discourse semantic systems for each metafunction and the role that they play in construing meanings (see Table 2.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Metafunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPRAISAL</td>
<td>negotiating attitudes</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEATION</td>
<td>representing experience</td>
<td>ideational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONJUNCTION</td>
<td>connecting events</td>
<td>ideational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTIFICATION</td>
<td>tracking people and things</td>
<td>textual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERIODICITY</td>
<td>the rhythm of discourse</td>
<td>textual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGOTIATION</td>
<td>enacting exchanges</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4: Table of discourse semantic systems adapted from Martin and Rose (2007, p. 11)

The application of these resources to humorous phases of conversation is discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 after the crucial starting point of laughter is described in detail. This section will briefly introduce those systems given in Martin and Rose (2007) that are most applicable to the analysis.

### 2.3.2.1 Interpersonal systems

The interpersonal systems of APPRAISAL and NEGOTIATION that were employed in the analysis have been described in Sections 2.2.2.1 and 2.3.2.1. In terms of NEGOTIATION, Eggins and Slade’s (1997) speech function system was employed through conversational exchanges and each move identified and named according to the orthographic conventions used in Eggins and Slade (1997, pp. 1–5). For instance, an opening move choice of “statement: opinion” followed by a responding supportive “agreement” are coded as follows:

O: STATE: OPIN G It's *nice* out!
R: s: AGREE P Yeah!
To identify moves that are projected, they are marked in parentheses, exhibited in the following:

C: APPEND: EXT P Now everybody's like
(O: STATE: OPIN) “yeah it's so cold”

For APPRAISAL, the coupling of attitudes with ideational elements was key for the interpretation of convivial conversational humour. The APPRAISAL analysis undertaken focused on the system of attitude and it was done with close consideration of the ideational targets at stake. Inscribed realisations of attitude were coded for the type of attitude they construed and then considered in relation to their ideational target, while implicit couplings were interpreted by the ideational realisations that variously invoked attitudes (this is explained in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2).

Conversational speakers in the data played with the attitude subsystems of AFFECT, JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION by coupling their realisations with different ideational targets. For instance, realisations of AFFECT could be coupled with the “Emoter” (the participant who experiences the emotion) or with the “Trigger” (the phenomenon responsible for that emotion), as demonstrated in this example:

G: You know what pills scare me a little bit... I find them fascinating actually...now
C: == (L)
G: == that I'm taking this genetics class,

Example 2.4: Play with AFFECT coupling in conversational humour (from Table 2.12 in Appendix A) (Realisation of AFFECT coded in red and couples with the trigger pills; realisation of APPRECIATION coded in blue; GRADUATION coded in pink; see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL coding).

G realises negative affect as a matter of the feeling disinclination, as a kind of unhappiness in the three systems of oppositional feelings in affect: un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction. The oppositions are further classified as either surges of behaviour or as a general ongoing states or moods (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 46–47),

50 The systems of GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT also came into play as strategies for indicating implicit couplings, while realisations of GRADUATION could also participate in couplings (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.4).
and G’s realisation conveys an ongoing disposition towards the irrealis stimulus pills as the Trigger of this emotion (in other words, “pills make me scared”), with G (me) as the Emoter. Realisations of AFFECT include the modification of participants and processes, modal Adjuncts, grammatical metaphor, and affective behavioural processes and affective mental processes (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 45–46). This example shows the use of an affective mental process scares to construe affect. G then plays with this coupling of negative affect with pills by presenting an incongruous coupling of positive appreciation with fascinating.

Realisations of the system of JUDGEMENT are coupled with people, since judgements involve the positive or negative assessment of the character and behaviour of people in terms of subsystems “social sanction” and “social esteem”. Martin and White (2005, p. 52) note that humour plays an important role in the judgements of social esteem that characterise oral discourse such as chat and jokes, since social esteem is about judging normality, capacity, and tenacity. So, speakers in convivial conversational humour often couple human targets with a judgement of social esteem, for example:

C: Dude* they're **SO STUPID** THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO ANYTHING RIGHT!
N: (L)

**Example 2.5**: Play with JUDGEMENT coupling in conversational humour (from Table 2.1 in Appendix A) (Realisations of JUDGEMENT coded in green and couple with they/THEY; invoked attitude marked by lighter shade; GRADUATION in pink and infused GRADUATION marked by pink outline; see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL coding).

A judgement of negative capacity for C’s own theatre group is given here, showing how she plays with this attitude towards the ideational targets as something laughable with her interlocutor. In social sanction, however, speakers present moral judgements of persons given as either praise or condemnation for veracity (truthfulness) and propriety (ethicality). The subsystem of social esteem is more characteristic of convivial conversational humour, since talk about truthfulness and ethicality brings participants to the borders of what is generally laughable (discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.3.3).
Appreciations are coupled with things in conversational humour, as in concrete, natural phenomena or semiotic products and processes. The system of appreciation is divided into three variables which include “reactions” to things (do they catch our attention; do they please use?), their “composition” (balance and complexity), and their “value” (how innovative, authentic, timely, etc.) (Martin & White, 2005, p. 56). A humorous contrast of appreciation couplings is shown in this excerpt:

G: It’s nice out!
P: Yeah!
P: So uh gaw… in Quebec it’s so frickin cold
G: (L)

Example 2.6: Play with appreciation coupling in conversational humour (from Table 1.2 in Appendix A) (Realisations of appreciation coded in blue; graduation in pink; nice couples with Toronto’s weather and so frickin cold couples with Quebec’s weather; invoked attitude marked by lighter shade; see Transcription Conventions key for further appraisal coding).

Despite being a Quebecker herself, P contrasts a negative appreciation for the province of Quebec with her shared positive appreciation of the weather in the speakers’ current Toronto location. Appreciations can also be made towards human beings when they are evaluated not as persons but as objects of a sort (i.e. objectified) (cf. White, 2001), and in convivial conversational humour this is used to humorous effect (see, for example, Table 2.1). Chapter 4 details the play with evaluative couplings in conversational humorous discourse between friends.

Additionally, because friends in the conversational data often project speech of others when they create humour, attitudinal meanings were divided into “personal” and “projected” (see tables in Appendix A). To be precise, personal appraisals were made by the speaker him/herself, while projected appraisals were given to represent the appraisals of a projected other. This proved important for interpreting couplings because speakers often created humour by acknowledging a “funny” coupling given by another person.
2.3.2.2 Ideational systems

As the ideational metafunction is divided into the experiential metafunction and the logical metafunction, there are different systems for each. The system of IDEATION concerns experience, while the system of CONJUNCTION concerns logical relations (and also functions in the textual metafunction). In the logical metafunction, CONJUNCTION concerns “adding units together, comparing them as similar or different, sequencing them in time, or relating them causally—as cause and effect, or evidence and conclusion”, according to Martin and Rose (2007, p. 179). Conjunctive relations can relate textual elements to the outside world beyond the text (external conjunctions) or they organise elements within the text itself (internal conjunctions). Conjunctive relations aid in the interpretation of ideational targets in the conversational humorous phases in this study particularly by illuminating the connection between the participants’ meanings and the outside world, since external conjunctions are more typical of casual spoken discourse between friends than internal ones. Realisations of this system, both through explicit conjunctions (such as then, if, and, because) and implicit conjunctions, can make clear the conditions involved in why couplings are humorous to the participants. This is because conjunctive relations also help to manage expectancy (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 180).

For instance, the speaker in the following excerpt makes clear through conjunctive relations that the coupling he is presenting (of positive appreciation with 24-hour shoe stores in Taiwan) is something humorously counter-expectant to what the participants have established in previous text:

CO: Yeah I- it's funny because... the lo-like things- not everything's open twenty four hours in Taiwan, but some things are and what's always open twenty four hours is shoe stores!
K: (L) ==

Example 2.7: Conjunctive relations in conversational humour (from Table 11.13 in Appendix A).

51 There is also a small set of conjunctions known as continuatives which, unlike conjunctions, primarily occur within a clause and are far more restricted in terms of their options for logical relations (cf. Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 188).
The cause of the humour is shown partly by CO’s signalling realisation *because*, while the counter-expectancy of couplings is shown with the realisation of comparative difference *but* and is emphasised through his adding *and*. Thus, conjunctive relations are helpful in pointing towards and connecting elements involved in the humour of conversation between friends.

Realisations of the experiential system of *ideation* actually *took part* in couplings in the conversational texts of this study, since they construed the experiences, persons and things towards which participants shared their attitudes. They developed the field that was being valued. The system of *ideation* focuses on the construal of experience in discourse, including the “people and things involved in them, and their associated places and qualities, and on how these elements are built up and related to each other as a text unfolds” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 109). This includes three sets of lexical relations:

- Taxonomic relations relate unfolding elements across clauses in a text to one another in terms of, for example, hyponymy, synonymy and repetition.
- Nuclear relations are configurations within clauses between participants, the process that they are involved in, and the circumstances surrounding them.
- Activity sequences are relations of processes from clause to clause that unfold in a series through the text.

How these relations are implicated in the data of this thesis will be described in turn, focusing on taxonomic relations and nuclear relations. In particular, taxonomic and nuclear relations interacted with *appraisal* in the data to inform the interpretation of couplings, while the unfolding of meanings including processes from clause to clause was considered in the analysis of humorous phases (described in Chapter 3, Section 3.2).

Taxonomic relations of *hyponymy*, *synonymy*, *antonymy*, and *meronymy* were examined through lexical items to determine how they related within and across clauses. These realisations build up expectancies for what types of ideational meanings are to follow and be coupled with value in humorous discourse. For instance, an antonym aids in determining an implicit coupling in the following excerpt, in which the speaker presents
the ideational meaning *girls* to describe the *guys* in her friendship group as negatively judged:

C: They don’t really like him
M: Why?
C: Cause they’re ga- they’re such *girls*! They’re the girliest boys I’ve ever met in my life

**Example 2.8: Taxonomic relations in conversational humour (from Table 8.2 in Appendix A).**

While these speakers are discussing boys, the antonym *girls* counters their expectations and helps to signal that C is presenting a coupling that they will react to as humorous.

Ideational meanings also informed the analysis of humour, since different classes of entities indicate different fields from more commonsense to more technical and institutional. Since the data is casual conversation between friends, divergence from the commonsense field of discourse could signal a site for humour. For instance, in the following excerpt, the speakers use technical terms for genetic entities to humorously represent themselves as experts in an imaginary scientific field and to convey values in this guise:

G: I’m taking this *genetics* class, ... like antibiotics, like “they totally mess up your DNA”
C: ... And I ruined my DNA!
F: == Probably not. *Radiation* screws with your DNA
C: == Does this mean I can’t make a clone?
G: Yeah (L)

**Example 2.9: Fields of discourse construed in conversational humour (from Table 7.18 in Appendix A).**

The lexical relations between the elements of participants, process and circumstances within a clause, or nuclear relations, are useful for determining couplings because they shed light on how speakers position their meanings to construct couplings. In nuclear relations, the Process is the essential element of the clause, along with the core participant of the Medium, followed by possible other participants of Agent, Beneficiary and Range. The Agent is a second participant which instigates the process and affects the Medium, and a process may be extended to a Beneficiary as a third participant, or to a Range which
is unaffected by the process. These elements are more or less nuclear or marginal to the central process and range between four degrees of nuclearity from centre to nucleus, marginal to periphery. The degrees of nuclearity of the identified patterns are illustrated in Figure 2.19.

![Figure 2.19: Nuclearity in the clause diagram from Martin and Rose (2007, p. 145).](image)

These constituents are further differentiated grammatically into different types, including participants as Actors, Goals, Carriers, Sayers, etc. involved in different types of processes, such as Material, Behavioural, Relational, Verbal, etc. (cf. Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000, pp. 46–65). By analysing which element the lexical items fulfilled within each clause in the analysis, this resource enabled the identification of targets that were coupled with attitude. For instance, in the following text, the speakers have presented “pills” as a Phenomenon, then a Carrier and an Actor involved in different process types (mental, relational, material). In realising negative appreciation with the Material process, *ruin*, C makes clear that pills as the Actor are being coupled with negative APPRAISAL for its effect on the Goal, DNA:

C: == Did pills just ruin my DNA?

Thus, in the tables of analysis in this thesis, nuclear relations are identified in IDEATION to exhibit what target is involved in a coupling of attitude and ideation. By analysing the taxonomic and nuclear relations in addition to the APPRAISAL in humorous phases, we can interpret where these meanings occur in sequence and how they are involved in creating humour between the participants.
2.3.2.3 Textual systems

The discourse semantic systems of the textual metafunction include PERIODICITY and IDENTIFICATION. PERIODICITY concerns how whole texts can be framed into waves of information through predictive Themes and summarising News at different levels which form organisational hierarchies (Martin & White, 2007, p. 294). Because this study involves casual conversation which is linearly structured, the discourse analysis did not involve a study of PERIODICITY.

IDENTIFICATION provides resources for introducing participants and keeping track of them through discourse (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 245). This includes “presenting references” for participants whose identities are unknown and “presuming references” for identities that are recoverable in various ways. We introduce participants through such realisations as the indefinite determiner “a”, while we track participants through realisations like pronouns, proper names, the definite determiner “the” and demonstratives like “these”.

Identities are recovered from presuming references through the following resources:

- Anaphora: reference that points back within a text
- Bridging: inferred reference that points back to something indirectly introduced in a text
- Cataphora: reference that points forward within a text
- Esphora: reference forward in what the element is modifying in same nominal group (tells us which, e.g. “the people of the struggle”)
- Homophora: reference from language to something outside the text in the culture
- Endophora: reference from language within the text
- Exophora: reference from language to something outside the text in the situation of speaking

52 “Theme” and “New” are labels attached to parts of a clause; “hyper-Theme” (like topic sentence) and “hyper-New” are parts of a paragraph; and “macro-Theme” and “macro-New” are parts of a text. Identification also concerns comparative and possessive references, which can be used in nominal groups which both present and presume identities (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 252). Additionally, Martin and Rose (2007, pp. 254–256) present apparent anomalies for presenting and presuming references.
Resources of IDENTIFICATION in the analysis of this study clarify which ideational meanings are being coupled with attitude for humour, particularly because friends in conversation use much presuming reference. Furthermore, these references are often exophoric or homophoric, and so they inform us about where to look to identify what is being joked about. By tracking participants through discourse, the conversational speakers connect these elements as well, constructing and maintaining humour around couplings with ideational participants. The following excerpt exhibits how a speaker uses presuming exophoric references to connect humorously coupled meanings in different contexts with her interlocutors:

AD: **==** but you go up to the counter, and you’re like “I’m gonna have the big fat triple decker ...burger,... And then you say “Can I have a *fruit cup* instead of *fries*; they be like “I’m sorry that’s a dollar extra” ...like when *we* were at the restaurant and I said “Can I have a *salad*?” and *he’s* like “That’s a dollar extra” and I’m like “*Yeaw!* IT’S LETTUCE”

N: Yeah (L)

**Example 2.10: IDENTIFICATION in conversational humour (from Table 9.1 in Appendix A).**

Realisations of presuming references like *the, we* and *he* in this example are recovered in the situational context, since the participants are at a fast food restaurant and have recently eaten in a restaurant together. By connecting these together through her presuming references, AD indicates how the contrasting couplings are evident in both contexts, adding to the humour that she can share with her interlocutors.

All of the discourse semantic systems that I have discussed inform the analysis of humorous phases in this thesis, as will be further detailed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2. The systems of APPRAISAL and IDEATION are particularly relevant in that they participate in couplings in convivial conversational humour. Couplings and the social semiotic units of bonds that they construe will be described in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.
2.4 Summary of Chapter Two

The main aims of this chapter were to contextualise the current study of conversational humour in relation to relevant research in humour and linguistics, to establish and justify the theoretical approach of SFL that is employed by this thesis, and to present its application in the methodology.

Section 2.1 reviewed theoretical traditions in the interdisciplinary study of humour and linguistic studies of conversational humour that have both contributed to and exhibited room for this study. In Section 2.2, the theoretical approach of systemic functional linguistics was explored, along with a review of the few studies of humour that have been completed in this framework. It was demonstrated that SFL is a comprehensive and effective theory for the study of conversational humour between friends, and studies of humour in this framework show the particular importance of its theory of evaluative meaning in APPRAISAL and its systematic connection between language and the social environment. Section 2.3 introduced the discourse semantic resources employed in the SFL discourse analysis of the methodology.

This chapter has established some crucial concepts to be explored in this thesis. First, it was demonstrated that by taking laughter as the point of departure in exploring conversational humour, important insights and connections can be made. Because the SFL approach that I take offers a social semiotic perspective, laughter is considered as a meaning-making tool with language and will be explored in Chapter 3. Also, it informs the extrapolation of units of analysis as humorous phases, which are described in Section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

Secondly, considerations of evaluative meaning in conversational humour have shed light on the meanings that are involved in causing laughter. It is particularly couplings of evaluative meanings in the interpersonal metafunction with ideational meanings in the experiential metafunction that are at stake in humorous incongruity, and these will be explored in Chapter 4.
Finally, the SFL approach connects language with the social context, and it was explained that the binding of metafunctions into couplings compels a social model to be constructed to describe why friends laugh together so much in casual conversation. This will be provided in the model of affiliation that presented in Chapter 5. Thus, the chapters of this thesis aim to provide a comprehensive study of conversational humour that includes a range of perspectives, focusing on what laughter does, what causes it, and why we laugh together as social creatures.