

# CHAPTER 3

## Laughter in conversational humour

Laughter facilitates the study of humour in spoken discourse because it offers the most explicit signal to the presence of humour in talk. Linguists have postulated a number of alternative and complementary markers to humour, which are commonly referred to as “footing” (Goffman, 1981), “pretense” and “layering” (Clark, 1996), “keys” (Hymes, 1972) or “contextualization cues” (Gumperz, 1982). These include such elements as facial expressions, body postures, and prosodic cues like intonation, rhythm, pitch, and voice quality. Within language, there may also be grammatical, semantic, contextual or kinaesthetic cues that indicate entry into a play mode or act as a humour “keying” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 157). Kotthoff (2006) describes these cues as “collateral signals” that add the “funny” perspective to the cognitive shift that occurs in humour. However, Eggins and Slade (1997) observe that “there is general agreement among humour researchers that the clearest indication that something is humorous is that someone present laughs” (p. 157).

Laughter has been heavily theorised in the literature, studied as a phenomenon on its own with particular qualities (cf. Bachorowski & Owren, 2001; Provine, 1992, 2000, 2004; Sroufe & Wunsch, 1972), in relation to speech (Bonaiuto, Castellana & Pierro, 2003; Jefferson, 1979, 1985; Norrick, 1993a; Stewart, 1995) and in relation to or constitutive of humour (Apte, 1985; Archakis & Tsakona, 2005; Koestler, 1964; Martin, R.A., 2001; Morreall, 1983; Warren et al., 2006; Zijderfeld, 1983). In this research, I take laughter as the starting point for the study of conversational humour between friends because it offers an explicit and meaningful signal for locating humour in conversational talk. Because shared laughter proliferates especially in conversational talk between friends, it signifies an important area for research.

This chapter aims to develop the role of laughter as a meaning-making tool in casual conversation by focusing on the interaction between friends in phases of humour. Laughter will be established as a social semiotic resource that is organised by humorous phases in conversation between friends. Laughter is common to this type of casual conversation where it is used to co-articulate meaning with verbiage and is intrinsically related to the negotiation of interpersonal values. Not only does laughter signal that what is said is taken as humorous, it also has the potential to systematically communicate meaning between interlocutors.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Section 3.1 explores laughter's potential status as a social semiotic resource in a systemic functional model, arguing that it can be formulated as such when considered through instantiation. Section 3.2 presents laughter in casual conversation as a marker of humour that operates independently of exchange structure borders. Phases of humour are then extrapolated from conversations through the application of phasal analysis (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]).

### **3.1 Laughter as a social semiotic**

Laughter is inherently social and, in naturalistic social interactions, it is often affected by the dynamics of the face-to-face mode, by the need to interact amicably with others. People laugh together rather than alone (cf. Provine, 2000), and the frequency of laughing in social interactions signals the significance of laughter as a meaningful device in dialogue. As Provine (2004) proposes, "The necessary stimulus for laughter is not a joke, but another person" (p. 215). What is said may also be thought of as funny because of its relationship to the social context, including the text, the immediate micro-context and the macro cultural context (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 157). It is not just structured jokes that cause laughter, but other kinds of "humour" related to the sociality of the participants, especially in casual conversation.

In conversation, the occurrence of laughter is directly related to the expression of humour (cf. Hay, 2001, p. 56), as laughter can supply an overall "meta-message" of play (Bateson, 1987) or funniness to an utterance. Analyses of humour in conversation have

also shown that laughter is not simply a signal that humour is present but is necessary for the interpretation of a conversational humorous text (cf. Archakis & Tsakona, 2005), and has a complex functionality in relation to speech (Glenn, 2003a; Jefferson, 1979; Partington, 2006; Provine, 2000; Vettin & Todt, 2004). Through a conversational perspective, a laugh may be considered as a social communicative resource with semiotic potential, informing the analysis of conversational humour.

This section will explore laughter as a social semiotic system, and will focus upon the meaning potential of laughter in conversational humour between friends.<sup>1</sup> It begins by establishing the interpersonal orientations of laughing in a social semiotic model. Presenting two major perspectives on multimodality in systemic functional semiotic theory, it will be argued that laughter is a semiotic system that co-articulates meaning with language in context. In particular, laughter and language construct interpersonal meaning together in the discourse semantic systems of ATTITUDE and NEGOTIATION<sup>2</sup>. It must also be considered in relation to its situational context and, within the particular context of convivial conversational humour, its expression choices are systematized and represented as sets of paradigmatic options.

Much has been written about laughter as a physiological or psychological reaction to stimuli (e.g. Freud, 1976 [1905]; Morreall, 1983; Spencer, 1911); as an expression of emotion (cf. Chafe, 2007) and negative attitude (e.g. Bergson, 1940 [1911]; Rapp, 1951); and as a paralinguistic modifier of language (e.g. Abercrombie, 1968; Poyatos, 1993). However, laughter has not yet been theorised as a *system* of communication in social life, that is, as a social semiotic. By presenting laughter as a social semiotic, this section will demonstrate the important roles that laughter fulfils particularly in the analysis of convivial conversational humour, which will be further exhibited in Chapters 4 and 5. It will demonstrate what laughter does in convivial conversational humour as a social semiotic tool, as conversational participants use it to indicate differences between what may or may not be laughable in a negotiation of shared values.

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1 Because laughter is considered specifically in casual conversation in this thesis, the meaning potential that is posited is not exhaustive, as laughter may have further meaning possibilities in other contexts.

2 The system of negotiation is distinguished from the concept of social negotiation (e.g. how participants “negotiate” affiliation) that will be discussed in this thesis by the capitalisation of the system name.

It should also be noted that due to the focus on laughter as a social semiotic system in this thesis, the transcription conventions for laughter have been modelled to inform their analysis. So, aspects such as who is laughing, if the laughter is shared, and whether it occurs through speech are taken into consideration and represented in the transcripts as follows:

- (L) (named participant) laughs
- (SL) speaker laughs (after own utterance)
- (LV) laughter in voice (while speaking)
- (LO) laughter by other named participant during a speaker's speech
- (LA) all laugh
- (CL) continuous laughter (by named participant)

### **3.1.1 Taking a systemic functional perspective on multimodality**

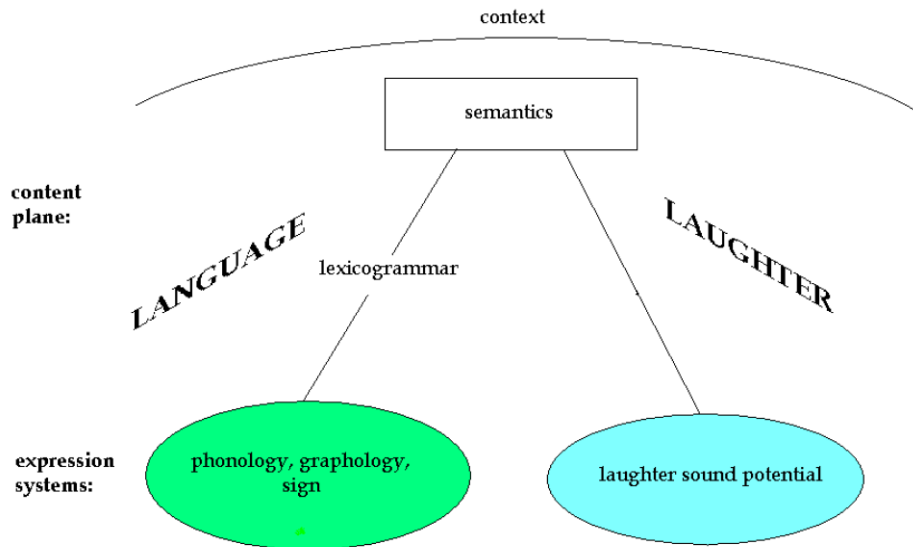
In considering laughter from a semiotic viewpoint, this thesis utilizes a systemic functional model for the analysis of multimodal relations. The systemic functional framework has recently been successfully applied to other social semiotics in multimodal research (cf. Knox, 2007 on visual-verbal relations in media; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996 on images; Martinec, 2004 on gesture; O'Halloran, 2005 on mathematics texts), elaborating the social semiotic perspective on language as theorised by Halliday (cf. Halliday, 1978; see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Communicative resources other than language can be perceived as systems of meanings in a similar way to language, with their meaning potential represented as sets of paradigmatic relations, since in systemic functional semiotics, meaning is interpreted paradigmatically (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 509; see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1). Systemic functional semiotic (SFS) theory (Martin, 2008b, p. 30) also considers the dynamic relationship between systems of meaning and their use in social contexts.

In SFL theory, "paralanguage" has been considered in relation to language in semiotic terms. Overall, there are two views on how a modality like laughter could make meaning in relation to language. The first of these views positions other modalities as an additional expression plane, making meaning alongside language in its semantic stratum; the second

view considers other modalities as distinct semiotic systems that make their own meaning and also interact with language in instantiation. This section will review these theories in relation to laughter, arguing that, by taking a perspective on instantiation (as in the second view), the meaning potential of laughter as a distinct semiotic system is more fully revealed. Then, laughter is developed as a semiotic system in the rest of the chapter. It will be shown that laughter co-articulates meanings with language that can be considered in relation to the affiliative functions of convivial conversational humour. Through the SFS model, laughter can be conceptualised in semiotic terms by establishing its meaning potential in a particular context, and this chapter will concentrate on its use in convivial conversational humour.

### **3.1.1.1 Modelling laughter as a semiotic system**

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), “all other semiotic systems are derivative [of language]: they have meaning potential only by reference to models of experience, and forms of social relationship, that have already been established in language” (p. 510). In this perspective, a modality like laughter would be seen to *complement* language along with other semiotic systems in the creation of meaning in context (cf. Matthiessen, 2006, p. 1). Language is distinguished from other semiotic systems because it has a level of grammar, or a “higher degree of systematisation of its meaning potential” (Matthiessen, 2006, p. 7), while laughter is a semiotic system that construes meanings of language with its own expression system. Laughter would thus be modelled as a two-stratum system that shares the semantic stratum with language (see Figure 3.1). Following Matthiessen (2006), laughter becomes a semiotic system that fuses with language in the semantic stratum where “different semiotic systems are integrated as complementary contributions to the making of meaning in context” (p. 2). That is to say, different expressive resources are distributed across semiotic systems, including laughter and paralanguage, which have different semiotic affordances on the content plane, but they combine with language to achieve a unified “performance” (Matthiessen, 2006, p. 3) of meaning in context.



**Figure 3.1: Laughter as a semiotic system alongside language fusing in the semantic stratum; differing in expression systems. Laughter is here located in the expression plane of language and is a 2-stratum system that shares semantics with language.**

Laughter would be aligned in this view with Matthiessen’s (2006) notions of “paralanguage” and “body language”, which he distinguishes as semiotic systems that integrate with language in the content plane. As language develops from protolanguage, some vocal features are distributed as the expressive resources of language, while “periphery vocal features” become the expressive resources of paralanguage and gestures, and facial expressions become expressive resources of what we call body language; all of these are coordinated in the unfolding of meaning within a given context (Matthiessen, 2006, p. 6). According to Matthiessen (2006), “Body language and paralanguage thus emerge as sets of distinct semiotic systems when protolanguage is transformed into language” (p. 7), and laughter takes on expressive resources including some from both paralanguage (e.g. loudness) and body language (e.g. facial expression)<sup>3</sup> to make meaning in the content plane of language. Semiotic systems in Matthiessen’s terms make meaning in the semantic stratum of language and are thus expression systems within language.

<sup>3</sup> Following from its combination from ape displays in the evolution in human laughter where smiling and laughter shade into one another (van Hooff, 1997).

This view on multimodality, however, stresses the higher order position of language in relation to other modalities, claiming that laughter, for instance, is an expression system that is *dependent* on the co-occurrence of linguistic meaning. The second view on multimodality in the SFS perspective that will be taken in this thesis, on the other hand, conceptualises modalities like laughter as distinct semiotic systems realising their own meanings in context. Modalities other than language have been theorised and pursued in this perspective, for instance, by Caldwell (2010); Caple (2008, 2010); Iedema (2001, 2003); Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001); Martin (1999b, 2001b, 2008c); Martin and Stenglin (2006); Martinec (2000, 2001, 2004, 2005); O'Halloran (2005); O'Toole (1994); Stenglin (2004); Tian (2010); van Leeuwen (1991, 1999, 2005); van Leeuwen and Caldas-Coulthard (2004) (see also Royce & Bowcher, 2007). This view is facilitated by the instantiation hierarchy, particularly in that it allows us to focus on how meanings *combine*. Rather than laughter sharing meaning in the discourse semantic stratum of language, language and laughter *co-articulate* meaning in instantiation and, by doing so, they make more meaning together than can be made with one semiotic alone. This perspective asserts that semiotic systems like laughter have their own meaning but interact with language to make more meaning when they come together instantially. Following Lemke (1998), the different modalities “multiply” meaning (cf. Martin, 2008c, p. 25). Thus, by focusing on instantiation in multimodality, it is possible to consider how these resources interact and the distinct meaning potential of each.

Different modalities may have *similar* semantic relations, and they each have their own particular means of realising them (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 44). In Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) terms, possibilities for realising meaning are distributed across “semiotic codes” and are determined socially and by the “inherent potentialities and limitations of a semiotic medium” (p. 44). That is to say that different semiotic systems have different affordances and therefore different meaning potential.<sup>4</sup> This thesis continues to develop this field by exploring laughter and language intermodally. Specifically, it demonstrates that the interaction between these modes as two semiotic systems working together to make meaning in convivial conversational humour would not be possible without their combined meaning potential.

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4 (Martin, 2010, personal communication).

This perspective most clearly distinguishes laughter from its traditional description in linguistics as a form of paralinguage, which has a secondary status to language. Paralinguistic phenomena in this sense are “non-linguistic elements in conversation” (Abercrombie, 1968, p. 56) that work as modifiers or qualifiers of speech (cf. Poyatos, 1993), or “contextualization cues” (Gumperz, 1982), which are “often...a prosodic trigger that in conjunction with lexical material will invoke frames and scenarios within which the current utterance is to be interpreted as an interactional move” (Levinson, 2002, p. 33). While relating context to utterance, these are separated from other aspects of language use as “metapragmatic”, indexical devices that communicate the context in which meaning should be interpreted but have no semantic meaning potential of their own (cf. Gumperz, 1995, p. 102). These descriptions of paralinguage would relegate laughter as a signifier or differentiator of psychological states or emotions (Poyatos, 1993, p. 245), but lacking in structure and in the meaning possibilities of language based on the fact that it is “neither as precise nor as amenable to rigorous analysis as the rest of the language system” (Apte, 1985, p. 250).

Following the second perspective, it will be demonstrated in the following sections that laughter makes specifically interpersonal meanings in context and that it plays an important role in the construction of affiliation in convivial conversational humour. Laughter may even substitute for speech in conversation as an interactional *move* (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1), indicating that the co-articulation of meaning between language and laughter varies in its distribution in discourse. The interpersonal potential of laughter includes the discourse semantic systems of *speech function* in NEGOTIATION and *attitude* in APPRAISAL. Through the particular choices that laughers make in these systems in relation to co-articulated speech, an instance of laughter also impacts upon the social relations between interactants, as the co-articulation of meanings construes their cultural relations as members of social networks with particular sets of values (this will be developed in Chapter 4). The meaning potential of laughter is considered instantially in relation to speech (particularly couplings as will be further clarified in Chapter 4) and to the overall affiliative function of convivial conversational humour. Hence, in terms of semiosis, laughter will be shown to function as a semiotic system in its own right, co-articulating interpersonal and social affiliative meaning together with language in convivial conversational humour.



### **3.1.1.2 Interpersonal orientations to laughing**

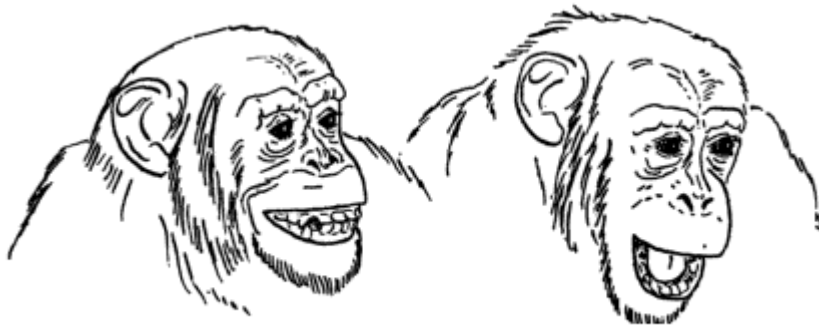
The meaning potential of a laugh is interpersonal, and this relates to its functional origins, which will be developed in this section. In Section 3.1.1.2.1, laughter will be described as originating in protolanguage through a perspective on the ontogenesis of language and through a consideration of its phylogenetic development from ape displays. Laughter develops into a semiotic system that co-articulates particularly interpersonal meanings with language, and this meaning potential will be described in Sections 3.1.1.2.2 and 3.1.1.2.3.

#### **3.1.1.2.1 Protolinguistic origins**

In the earliest phase of ontogenesis, laughter is treated by caregivers as an expression of meaning along with other sounds and features of protolanguage, as protolanguages are multimodal (Halliday, 1975; Matthiessen, 2006; Painter, 1984, 2003). Laughter begins with microfunctional (Halliday, 1975) meaning potential, in that it makes meanings in the semiotic contexts or “microfunctions” outlined for language by Halliday (1975). Early on, laughter can be seen to express meaning particularly within the *reflective* mode of consciousness (Halliday, 1992b). In these terms, it makes meanings in the personal and interactional microfunctions that are components of the reflective sphere but not in the regulatory and instrumental microfunctions of the active sphere. In other words, laughter expresses meanings about one’s cognitive and affective state (e.g. “I like that” of the personal microfunction) and meanings that set up and maintain an intimate relationship (the “let’s be together” of the interactional microfunction) (cf. Halliday, 2004a [1993], p. 330). Laughter also typically accompanies protolinguistic speech to convey an imaginative or play function with the meaning “Let’s pretend” (cf. Halliday, 2004a [1993], p. 330).

This functionality can be observed both in the beginnings of an infant’s laugh and in the origins of ape displays as proposed by Morris (1967). Morris argues that laughter in infants results from a combined parental-recognition gurgle and crying when they are presented with “shock stimuli” (such as tickling) by a parent they can recognise as a “safe protector” (Morris, 1967, p. 103). An infant’s laugh is in this way a signal to the trusted

mother of *non-threat* (removal of fear) that functions interactionally in bringing infant and caregiver together in bonding, a signal of togetherness with the meaning of (the now identified) “you and me” (Halliday, 1975). A similar facial display in chimpanzees involves the “play-face” and soft play-grunt, which are stimulated by a mixture of fright and safety or friendliness, and combine two otherwise distinct expressions to signal appeasement or non-threat (Morris, 1967, p. 104). These are distinguished by van Hooff (1972, p. 235; see also van Hooff, 1967) as two proximal ape facial expressions (see Figure 3.2) that have evolved into human laughter and the human smile and have come together through time to shade into each other (cf. van Hooff, 1997).



**Figure 3.2: A silent or ‘horizontal’ bared teeth display and a relaxed open-mouth display in two chimpanzees (*pan troglodytes*). Taken from van Hooff (1972, p. 219).**

There is a close connection between the social functions of signalling safety and of bonding in human laughter, originating from this combination in apes. Matthiessen (2006, p. 5) posits that chimpanzees use facial expression to express bonding in the interactional microfunction and a combination of face and pant-hoot vocalisation to express excitement and emotion in the personal. However, the meaning potentials of ape vocalisations and facial expression are related and can be brought together in human laughter (following van Hooff, 1972). Developing together, these expressions can combine more meanings in laughter such as *play*, along with bonding meanings of *submission* and *affiliation* (Preuschoft & van Hooff, 1997), *appeasement* (cf. Fry, 1977, pp. 24–25) and especially the signalling of *non-threat*. In fact, according to Provine (2000, 2004), a strongly interpersonal act like tickling may have served as a primitive social scenario forming a context for laughter, as it evolved from a reflex defence mechanism to protect one’s body from external “non-self” stimuli.

In both ontogenetic and phylogenetic perspectives, then, laughter begins with interactional and personal microfunctional potential in the reflective sphere. From its origins, laughter still functions to designate safety or non-threat (cf. Partington, 2006), friendliness and play in reaction to non-threatening activities and stimuli. In human ontogenesis, these functions also relate intrinsically to an interactional bonding relationship, exhibiting the communicative value and interpersonal potential of laughter in its development into a semiotic system with language.

In fact, the ontogenetic development of laughter is a driving force behind the move into the language proper (Painter, 2003), and the systems make an early connection through the development of the interpersonal metafunction in APPRAISAL. In Painter's (2003) study of the ontogenesis of the child Hal, she argues that apart from producing natural laughter, he produces a "stage laugh", which Painter identifies as a protolinguistic iconic sign that signals entry into the mother tongue of language. Because the feeling of the laughter itself is separated from its use as a symbol of that feeling in the stage laugh, this leads towards the institutionalisation of affect (Martin, 2000a) whereby the child takes on the full linguistic system of ATTITUDE in APPRAISAL. Metasemiotic development is also shown in transgressive behaviour when the child uses laughter to negotiate attitude by marking this behaviour as "funny" (as the beginnings of humour), and this is related to particular attitudes that are known to be shared by the interactants in the context (cf. Painter, 2003, p. 191). In its development with language, then, laughter is related to construals of attitude in the discourse semantic system of APPRAISAL. It forms part of a social negotiation that depends on the local social networking of the discourse participants in which particular attitudes are shared and can be played with in humour and misappraisal. As laughter marks the entry into the linguistic APPRAISAL system in ontogenesis, its role in interpersonal meaning-making is highlighted along with its important relationship with language.

Thus, laughter will now be described as a semiotic system that co-articulates interpersonal meanings, and affiliative relations, with language in the context of convivial conversational humour. In the next sections, the meaning potential of laughter at the level of content is exhibited through the systems of *attitude* in APPRAISAL and *speech function* in NEGOTIATION. Then, the expression features of laughter are presented in a system

network to exhibit how speakers can vary their meanings through systemic choices in this semiotic system.

### 3.1.1.2.2 Laughter and attitude

Laughter not only has the potential to express and to elicit emotion (cf. Chafe, 2007) or “positive affective responses” in others (Owren & Rendall, 1997, 2001), it can target these evaluative meanings as well, conveying meaning in the system of APPRAISAL. Researchers aligning with the superiority theory of laughter and humour (introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1.3) have shown that laughter can be used to express negative attitudes towards defeated enemies or those who do not abide by social norms of behaviour. On the other hand, when a laugh is considered in relation to its development from ape displays (cf. van Hooff, 1972), a potential to express positive evaluations to construe bonding and safety is revealed. These positive connotations allow laughter to be used by interlocutors in conversation to construct affiliation (Ellis, 1997, Glenn, 2003a) and intimacy (Coates, 2007; Jefferson et al., 1987), and to align towards the ongoing talk (Goodwin, 1986). So, just as laughter can be used to laugh *at* another and convey a negative evaluation towards those deemed “inferior” in the social scale, it may also express positive evaluative meanings to those with whom we wish to affiliate.

In the system of APPRAISAL, laughter can convey attitudes by indicating an emotional, aesthetic or ethical stance towards a particular target, making meaning in the attitude sub-systems of AFFECT, APPRECIATION and JUDGEMENT. These meanings may be either positive or negative in attitudinal polarity. In its interaction with language, a laugh may reinforce those attitudes expressed in the verbiage or convey an alternative attitudinal orientation. Laughter may also convey attitudes on its own without the complement of speech. Interactants in conversation elicit this meaning potential, as they often refer to and discuss laughter as making meaning in their everyday lives. In this excerpt, three Canadian university students are discussing a previous event in which a close friend, Marissa<sup>5</sup>, has reacted unfavourably as a director in auditioning potential actors for her play:

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<sup>5</sup> Names have been changed for privacy.

C: And Yana somehow it's like she only got in because she was  
 N ( )  
 C: When she was auditioning, ==  
 N: == Oh yea::h ( ) laughing  
 C: Marissa laughed so she felt bad (LV) so she let her in  
 N,C: (L) ==  
 F: == Oh:::!  
 N: (L) ==  
 C: == It was like she just started laughing in the middle of our audition so she was like felt so bad (LO-N) and she was like "Let her in" (L)

**Example 3.1: Laughter reported as conveying attitude<sup>6</sup>** (Realisations of AFFECT coded in red, JUDGEMENT coded in green, GRADUATION coded in pink; invoked attitude marked by lighter shade; Laughter coding: (L) – participant laughs, (LV) – laughter in voice, (LO) – laughter by other speaker; see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL and laughter coding).

In this story, Marissa is reported as having negatively judged herself for laughing at Yana in the audition. C reports this with the use of inscribed attitude in “she felt *bad*” and later as graded up in force in “she felt *so bad*”. In this example, the speakers discuss instances of the shared experience of laughter and its meaning potential, providing insight into the potential for laughter to convey attitudes on its own without speech. In telling her funny story to her friends, C is not suggesting that Marissa herself inscribed in speech her negative judgement of Yana’s audition; rather, C interprets the attitudinal meaning potential of Marissa’s laughter as suggesting this negative judgement. Marissa’s negative self-judgement is also derived from the fact that, having laughed at Yana’s performance, she subsequently gave her a part in the play to minimise the negative judgement she had conveyed towards her. In this conversation, the speakers’ references to laughter in a previous interaction are seen to convey evaluative meanings. Within this interaction, the participants’ shared laughter reactions also work together with language to construct the humorous meaning.

Laughter, like images in multi-modal texts, co-articulates attitude with speech to establish an “evaluative orientation” in the text (Martin, 2001b). It does so by making the interpersonal position given by the humorist negotiable, or laughable, while often challenging the attitude presented in the verbiage and conveying an opposite attitudinal polarity. For instance, in the following example, the reaction of laughter challenges the

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B for full transcribed text for examples in this section, and Appendix C for sound clips.

inscribed positive appreciation given by the speaker and conveys a negative orientation. When C claims that her own theatre play, which F is also involved in, is not “the worst play”, the hearers react with laughter:

C: I uh that's okay I was like new reassurance that my play isn't **the worst** play anyway.  
F,N: (L)  
C: It *isn't* Farley!

**Example 3.2: Laughter conveying negative attitude** (Realisation of APPRECIATION coded in blue, see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL coding).

Speaker C reacts to this laughter by denying (“it *isn't*”) the proposition she interprets as conveying a negative attitude towards her play as *the worst*. While C has negated this inscribed negative appreciation in her speech, F and N’s laughter conveys a negative attitude to this negation in the preceding speech, and this is confirmed by C’s reaction (this is also substantiated by the sound choices made, see Section 3.1.2).

A laugh can also challenge negative attitudes presented in text, conveying an orientation to positive ones, as in Example 3.3. Here, the interactants discuss games they play with their young students in the classroom as teachers, and the negative attitude that CO inscribes towards playing a “spin the bottle” game is challenged by his own and N’s laughter:

N: Do you dance and sing songs?  
CO: That's all I do  
N: Really?  
B: Today that's what- I play the spin the bottle game  
CO: (L) *That's* **disgusting**!  
N: (L)

**Example 3.3: Laughter conveying positive attitude.**

CO inscribes a negative appreciation (invoking judgement) in reaction to B playing a game with his students that traditionally involves kissing (“spin the bottle”). He marks this with a laugh and N laughs along, challenging the negative attitude in the verbiage and showing that it is laughable. The laughter indicates a positive attitudinal orientation towards B and the game (as the interactants convey that it is dissociated from its sexual

connotations in the classroom), and B confirms this by continuing to discuss playing it afterwards.

This humorous negotiation is also related to the construal of social values, as laughter challenges not only the interpersonal position given but also the attitude *toward* the experiential meaning as the interactants construe themselves as members of a community in which this is not shared as a value. In the example above, a reaction conveying negative attitude towards the game by CO and N would position B in something of a paedophile community, while the laughter indicates an opposite attitude for it as a different type of classroom activity in the teachers' community. Just as the interaction between verbiage and image "play[s] an important role in aligning communities around shared values" (Martin, 2001b, pp. 334–335), laughter will be shown in this thesis to play a significant role in participants' negotiation of values across different communities in affiliation. These connections will be further pursued in Chapters 4 and 5.

Just as a laugh can indicate meanings in the attitude systems of JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION, laughter also makes meanings in the attitudinal system of AFFECT. Martin and White (2005, p. 49) list a laugh as a surge of behaviour realising the AFFECT category of "happiness: cheer". While laughter may be used to share a positive feeling as a burst indicating shared happiness and affection, as shown above, it also conveys what is being shared as something *laughable* to the interactants in humour. In this way, laughter can also reinforce attitudes given in speech while marking a tension in the interaction as laughable (this will be further developed in the discussion of "wrinkles" in Chapter 5). The speakers in Example 3.4 share a laugh as they overlap each other's speech conveying heightened positive affect for the television actor Jason Bateman:

C: Who was on Saturday Night Live last night  
 G: (It was just) nobody **good**  
 C: ()  
 G: Oh! it was uh what's his name from Arrested Development [pause- 2.5 secs] Hm. Jason Bateman.  
 C: Oh:: ==  
 G: == I **loved** him  
 C: == I **love** Jason **(LV)** Bateman  
 G: **(L)** Yeah.

**Example 3.4: Laughter indicating positive affect: happiness: cheer while marking laughable tension** (Realisations of AFFECT coded in red, JUDGEMENT coded in green, infused GRADUATION coded by pink outline; see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL coding).

As C and G inscribe positive affect in their speech, realised by “love”, they do so simultaneously in overlapping speech. This causes laughter, which they share in reaction, reinforcing the positive affect while also marking that they have created a laughable tension by their mutual intensification of love towards a television actor. This example differs from the appreciation and judgement examples because it is clear that the interactants share in, and *reinforce* rather than challenge, the attitude in the verbiage due to the repetition of wording and G’s final agreement “Yeah”.

One of these speakers also conveys negative affect with laughter and speech towards other television actors, as demonstrated in Example 3.5, showing that a laugh may indicate negative affect as well. In this example, laughter in C’s voice reinforces the negative affect inscribed in her speech, while also marking her “hate” of certain television actors in the comedy series *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* as laughable:

G: The guys are usually **pretty good** too but like if the-  
 C: °I **hate** them° **(LV)** Now that I have == no idea what  
 G: == WILL SASSO!  
 C: I don't **like** Will Sasso I **don't think he's funny** ==

**Example 3.5: Laughter indicating negative affect while marking laughable tension** (APPRAISAL coding as above; see Transcription Conventions key for further APPRAISAL coding).



While G inscribes a positive judgement towards the male actors in *SNL*, C inscribes negative affect (evoking negative judgement) for them in “laughspeak” (Provine, 2000) (see Section 3.1.2). The tension between the two opposing attitudes between G and C is marked by C’s laugh, while she reinforces her negative attitude given in speech towards the actors with it at the same time (and this reinforcement is made clearer in her following speech).

Finally, laughter can also convey affect by *challenging* the interpersonal position expressed in the verbiage as in Example 3.6. N attempts to restore the positive affect shared between friends C and F as they argue, inscribing negative affect in her verbiage in humour and causing F to laugh:

C: I di- th- the *script* is a project for *my* class and I think it fits together **just** ==  
**fine**  
N: == Okay that’s not ( ) (L)  
F: == **GREAT!** That’s all that == matters then!  
C: == What’s the problem!...Okay ==  
N: == **Fight fight fight** ==  
C: the only thing ==  
N: == **Fight**  
F: (L)

**Example 3.6: Laughter indicating positive affect** (Invoked affect marked by lighter shade of red).

Two of the interactants argue about a play script that C has created, and N jokingly taunts them by encouraging a physical fight. F’s laughter reaction then negotiates the negative affect that has been built up and made explicit by N (“Fight fight fight”) as laughable, conveying positive affect to be shared once again.

Laughter in convivial conversational humour indicates all of the systems of attitude in APPRAISAL, including JUDGEMENT (as in Examples 3.1 and 3.3), APPRECIATION (Example 3.2 and 3.3), and AFFECT (Examples 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6). In this way, laughter communicates more than inner emotional states; it communicates attitudes towards targets in interaction, both human and non-human. It does so by its co-articulation with speech, and its meaning potential is crucially related to the position of laughter in the text, as the attitude it changes depends on which utterance the laugh orients to and whether it is given in an

opening or reacting move in the conversation. Laughter's potential in fulfilling moves in the system of SPEECH FUNCTION in NEGOTIATION is detailed in the following section.

### **3.1.1.2.3 Laughter and speech function**

In the system of speech function, which includes choices made in moves in the dynamic exchange referred to overall as the discourse semantic system of NEGOTIATION (following Eggins & Slade's (1997) model; see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1), participants can open an exchange or sustain an opening by continuing or reacting (Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 192–193); with laughter, this is an important distinction. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2.3, laughter's role in turn-taking has been studied in conversation analysis, most prominently by Jefferson (cf. 1979, 1984, 1985, 1994; Jefferson et al., 1987), who established it as an important feature for study. Jefferson et al. (1987) first argued that laughter has “the status of an official conversational activity” (1987, p. 156), which Coates (2007) notes “is an important claim, which moves us away from the idea that laughter is just an accompaniment to talk: it is talk” (p. 44). Conversation analyses often place laughter in adjacency pairs with previous turns at talk, showing its meaningfulness in the interaction in terms of its orientation to surrounding speech. Different meaning possibilities for laughter may be classified depending on its relation to sections of conversation, as shown by Norrick (1993a), as well as in relation to the telling of jokes in conversation (cf. Sacks, 1974). Its placement in the ongoing discourse is therefore a significant feature of its interpretation.

A laugh relates to surrounding speech in moves of a conversational exchange, working as an initiation or response. This aligns with Jefferson's (1979) classification of the invitation–acceptance sequence, whereby an initial laugh particle is treated as an invitation for recipient laughter, and possible responses include acceptance or silence or declination of the invitation through serious speech. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1, within the framework of SFL, turns at talk are reformulated in semiotic terms as Halliday's (1984b, 1994a) speech functions and are patterned by moves in the discourse semantic system of NEGOTIATION. The functions of laughter in NEGOTIATION may be demonstrated in convivial conversational humour.



this context is a response to the humour that is similarly minimal in content but “indicates a willingness to accept the propositions or proposals of other speakers” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 206). Example 3.9 shows laughter as reactions to SH’s continuing discourse about a female customer, and as they constitute acknowledging moves, they indicate the laugher’s willingness to accept the negative attitudes that SH is conveying towards this woman:

SUSTAIN: CONTINUE: APPEND: EXTEND	SH: And so she waddles up to my snack (LV) tray
REACT: SUPP: ANSWER: ACKNOWLEDGE	N: (L)
SUSTAIN: CONTINUE: APP: ELABORATE	SH: Because she can't walk
REACT: SUPP: ANSWER: ACKNOWLEDGE	AD: (L)

**Example 3.9: Laughter as an acknowledging move (from Table 9.2 in Appendix A).**

As the hearers react to SH’s speech with laughter, the laughter alone constitutes acknowledging moves, reinforcing SH’s negative judgements towards the woman while marking them as laughable.

When in combination with speech, laughter and language co-construct reacting moves, such as in Example 3.10. The speaker, K, reacts to T’s argument about the intentions of cross-dressing Brazilian men with speech and laughter, which together make up her countering reaction move:

SUSTAIN: CONTINUE: PROLONG: EXTEND	T: They-they wanna just have fun an-an I don't know pick up girls that's the idea of the thing. Well that's how they ( ) ==
REACT: CONF: CHALLENGE: COUNTER	K: == °Dressed like a girl° (SL) ==

**Example 3.10: Laughter and speech co-constructing a reacting move (from Table 11.11 in Appendix A).**

In the above example, K does not convey a willingness to accept the proposition of the previous speaker but counters this in her speech; since laughter punctuates her speech, it also works within the move to convey a negative attitude along with this challenge. In terms of speech function, then, differences in meaning for laughter depend on whether it is part of the initiation or the reaction and where it occurs in relation to verbiage.

To summarise this discussion of the content plane of laughter, laughter construes meaning in the systems of NEGOTIATION and APPRAISAL, and with speech it co-articulates more meaning such as marking attitudes inscribed in speech as laughable.

Turning to the expression plane, speakers may vary the meaning indicated in their laughter by changing the characteristics of its expression. Laughs can be distinguished by the way that speakers deploy the expressive resources in each instance. By considering laughter within a particular context, it is possible to represent these choices of sound features systematically and paradigmatically in a system network in the expression plane of laughter. The following section will present a system network that models the expression choices of laughter in the data set of convivial conversational humour, relating its interpersonal systems of meaning with particular uses in the social context.

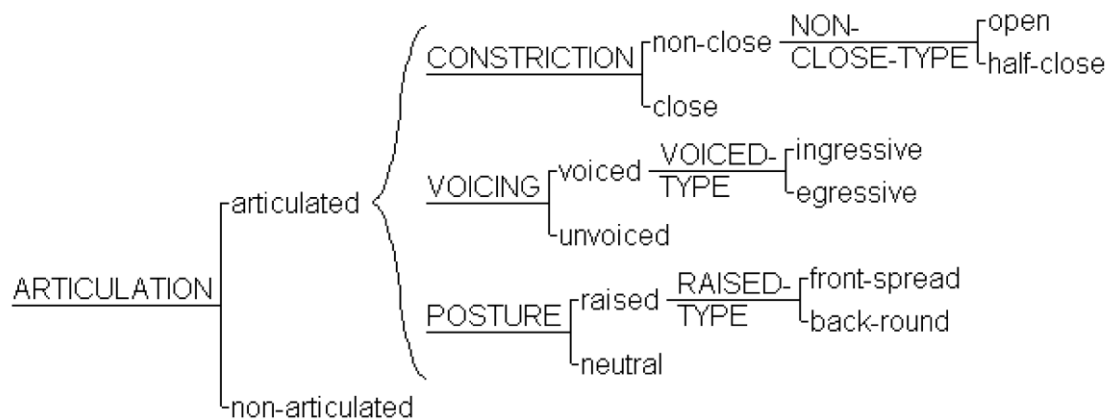
### **3.1.2 Laughter expressions in convivial conversational humour**

In their study of conversational laughter, Vettin and Todt (2004) found that acoustic features are systematically linked to conversational context in that they differ between situations, convey information about and depend on the conversational role of the laugher, and are sensitive to communicative norms (so that laughter could be expressed by a speaker to mitigate or change the meaning of his/her previous utterance). It will be proposed here that articulatory features can also be systematically linked to meaning differences in laughter in convivial conversational humour and that they are sensitive to contextual constraints.

Interpreting different expressions of laughter is dependent on the context and the co-articulated speech that occurs in the interaction. So, in making choices from the specified options, it is important to interpret these in their situational environment; that is to say that *who* is laughing (e.g. speaker or hearer(s)) must be considered in relation to the utterances in the text. Whether the verbal co-text specifically precedes or follows or is overlapped by the laugh conveys information about meanings produced as well. A system network for expression choices in laughter will be presented and exemplified through convivial conversational humour in this section.

### 3.1.2.1 System network for laughter

Specific expression options for laughter construing APPRAISAL and NEGOTIATION and constructing affiliation in convivial conversational humour can be identified and systematised; this system will indicate the valeur (cf. Saussure, 1986) of possible choices that may be combined into distinguishable laughter expressions. Choices in the sound features combine with choices in the interaction of the laugher’s speech role, and these are interpreted along with what choices in speech have been made surrounding the laughter utterance to co-articulate meaning. These paradigmatic options are presented in a system network in which laughter is considered with respect to its articulatory and its prosodic features,<sup>7</sup> and these can change depending on its movement. These aspects are divided into three subsystems for laughter expression: ARTICULATION, PROSODY and MOVEMENT. The subsystems of this network will be explored, beginning with ARTICULATION (see Figure 3.3):






**Figure 3.3: ARTICULATION system of laughter sound potential.**

<sup>7</sup> These may correspond with “calls” in laughter for the former and “bouts” of laughter for the latter (see Owren, 2007). Chafe (2007) also refers to these as “pulses” and “laugh clusters”. Each laugh should be considered as a whole, but its pulses can be distinguished by the constriction, posture, and voicing characteristics, while the whole cluster makes differences in amplitude, length, character and pitch in relation to all of its pulses.

The square brackets represent a choice between features in system network notation; the first choice in this system is a choice between whether to laugh or not. Choices in the systems of “constriction”, “voicing” and “posture” are simultaneous, as represented by a curly bracket, and laughers choose among the options from all three in their articulation.

As a laugh is articulated, the closure of the mouth is captured in the system of *constriction*. While it is represented as distinct choices, it may be seen to follow Stewart (1995) in that the vocalic sound that combines with the initial /h/ aspiration (e.g. *ha*) can be measured on a continuum based on the opening of the mouth.<sup>8</sup> Szameitat et al. (2007) also find that laughter is mainly based on central vowels, with possible slight variation in vowel height from schwa to open (a) due to the opening of the jaw.



A laugh can also be articulated as voiced or unvoiced in the system of *voicing*, and this combined with the closure of the mouth affects whether the laugh is more nasal or oral. Chafe (2001) notes that options in oral articulation of laughter include vocalic laughs in which air passes unrestricted through the mouth (see Laughter clip 1 in Appendix C )<sup>9</sup>, or consonantal laughs in which the lips constrain the air and force it to pass through the nose (see Laughter clip 2 ). Chafe (2007, p. 28) also identifies ingressive voicing (recovery inhalations with enough laryngeal friction to make audible) as a feature of laughter that is not found in ordinary speech and that has a highly distinctive sound (see Laughter clip 3 ). This has been incorporated into the network as an option in voicing—voiced between “ingressive” and “egressive” (with ingressive voicing as the marked choice).

The system of *posture* follows Halliday’s (1992a) classification for Chinese syllabic phonology, to capture the placement of the tongue and lips as neutral (ə) or raised; if raised, the tongue can be fronted and lips spread (y), or the tongue can be back with the lips rounded (w). In combination with choices in constriction, a front-spread laugh with

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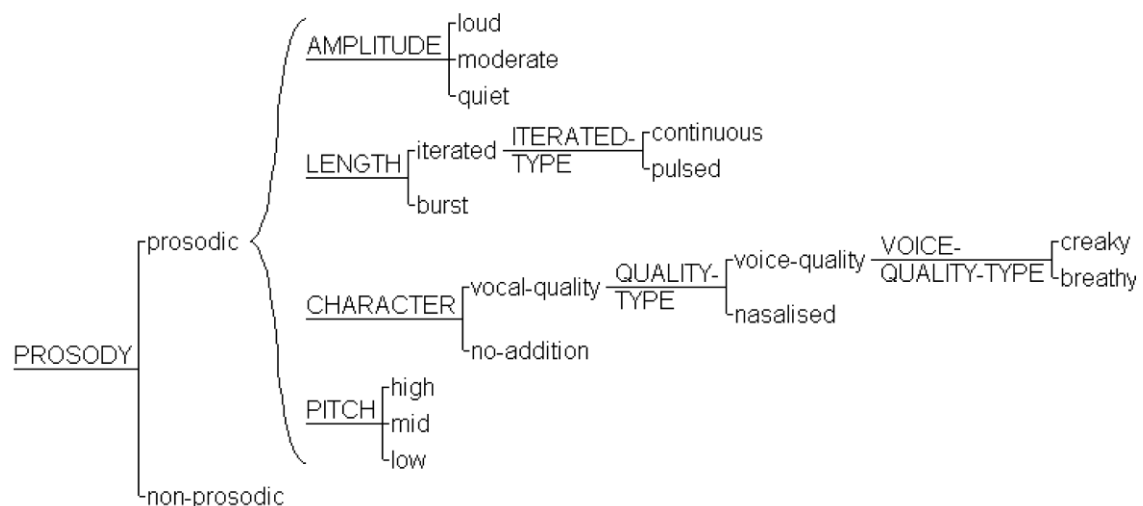
8 This is adapted from Halliday’s (1992a) system for aperture, but in constriction, it is the opening and closure of the vocal chamber with the lips rather than its narrowing or opening by the placement of the tongue that is chosen from in laughter.

9 The speaker icon signals that a laughter clip can be played from the attached disc (Appendix C) for exemplification as indicated.

close constriction is audible in Laughter clip 4 , and a back-round laugh with half-close constriction can be heard in Laughter clip 5 .

These choices in the articulation of laughter affect the meanings it makes in the discourse semantic system of ATTITUDE and the social context of affiliative meanings and must be considered in analysis of convivial conversational humour. For instance, a difference between voiced and unvoiced laughter has been shown to make an impact on attitudinal meanings. Through acoustic and experimental analyses, scholars have found that there are differences between positive and negative emotional correlates with voiced and unvoiced laughter. Unvoiced laughs are perceived as related to *negative* emotions and attitudes, while voiced laughs are more often perceived as related to *positive* emotions (Devillers & Vidrascu, 2007) and these cause similar emotional responses in listeners (Bachorowski & Owren, 2001; Owren, Trivedi, Schulman & Bachorowski, 2007). This suggests that there is an impact on attitudinal polarity in relation to the presence of phonation in a laugh.










ARTICULATION is complemented by simultaneous choices in the system of PROSODY, which accounts for the non-segmental features of a laugh. This system network is presented in Figure 3.4.




**Figure 3.4: PROSODY system of laughter sound potential.**

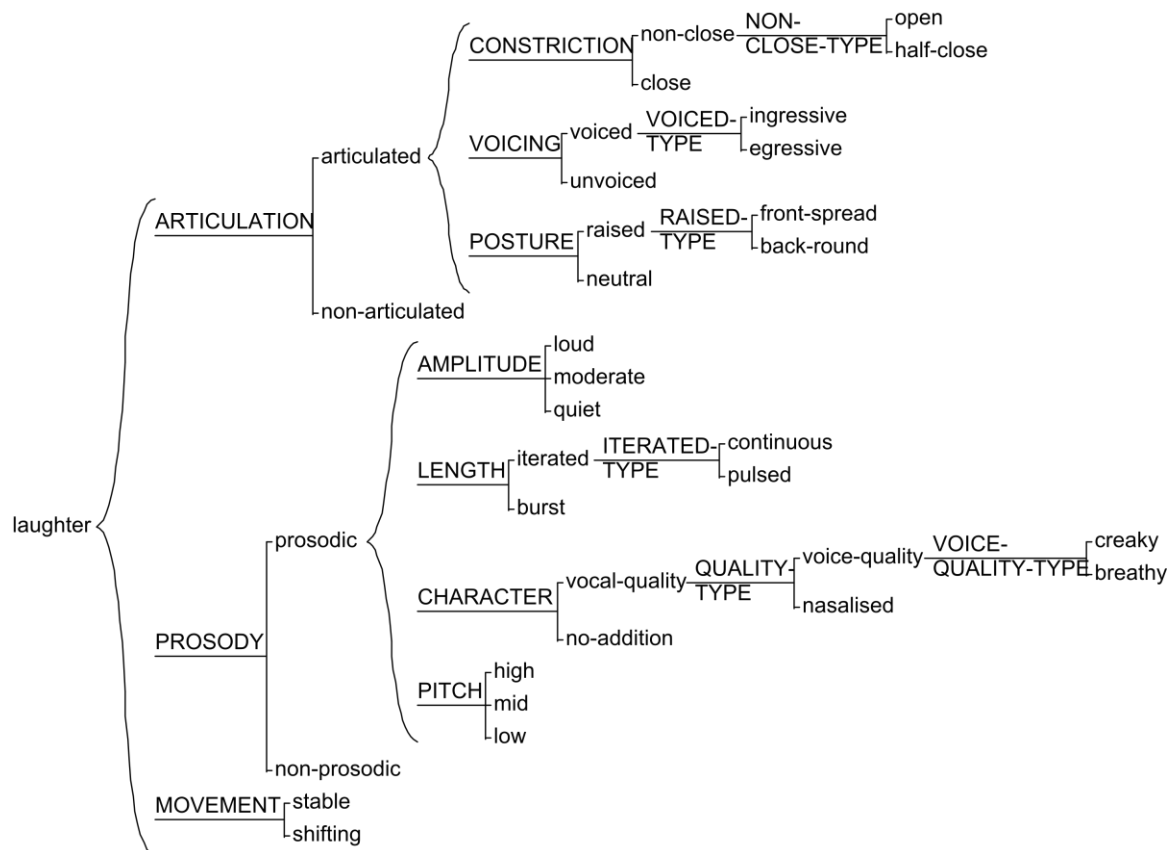


Taking an integrative Firthian view on the analysis of prosody (cf. Reed, 2006, pp. 18–21), the prosodic features of laughter include its amplitude, length, pitch, and its character through changes in vocal quality.


*Amplitude* involves the intensity or loudness of the laughter utterance and can be interpreted perceptually by its volume levels as either moderately intense or especially loud (Laughter clip 6 ) or quiet (Laughter clip 7 ). Duration and repetition of the laughter is included under *length*, as continuous or pulsed laughter has a longer duration with distinct features from a laughter burst, which often involves a more forceful expulsion of air in the initial instigation (see for example clip 8  vs. clip 9 ). *Pitch* differences range from low to mid to high pitch (e.g. see Laughter clips 10, 11 and 12 for range of low  to mid  to high  pitch for a single speaker), and additional sound quality can affect the *character* of the laugh through voice quality (creaky or breathy) (Clark & Yallop, 1990, pp. 60–61) or nasalisation. Voice quality has been shown to have its own meaning potential (van Leeuwen, 1999), including realising degrees of social distance (e.g. breathy voice conveys intimacy), conveying tension (e.g. in rough voice quality), or negative value judgements (e.g. in nasality). As a combined variable in a laughter expression, it gives the laugh a particular character, indicating attitudinal and social interactional meanings associated with it as well. Laughter types may be distinguished by the voice quality postures or “laryngeal states” (Esling, 2007) of “breathy voice” (see Laughter clip 13 ) and “creaky voice” (see Laughter clip 14 .

The initial choices in the ARTICULATION network between articulated and non-articulated and in the PROSODY network between prosodic and non-prosodic allow for laughter that may be classified through a smile only or integrated into speech, as in “speech laughs” (Nwokah, Hsu, Davies & Fogel, 1999; Trouvain, 2001) or “laughspeak” (Provine, 2000). That is to say that laughs may occur on their own, in combination with separate speech, or they may punctuate the speech itself. When laughs occur within speech, their articulation and prosodic features cannot be separated from the sound features of the verbiage (see, for example, Laughter clip 15 ). It is important that the co-textual environment of speech is considered in interpreting a laugh, especially since a laugh punctuating a speaker’s speech will orient towards the meaning conveyed within that speech.

Finally, the subsystems of ARTICULATION and PROSODY are accompanied by a choice in the *movement* of the sound features within a laugh. Figure 3.5 presents the full system network for laughter expression, exhibiting the system of MOVEMENT alongside the other subsystems.



**Figure 3.5: A system network of laughter expression in convivial conversational humour.**

In the system of MOVEMENT, the stable vs. shifting distinction also follows Halliday’s (1992a) classification<sup>10</sup> and captures the possibility of a laugh changing its course, from which the laughter re-enters the system; or if it is stable, only one entry into the system is necessary. This may impact upon the meaning made as the speaker may alter his or her attitude by changing to a different combination of sound features (for instance, Laughter clip 16 ).

<sup>10</sup> This classification is, however, incorporated here as an overall option rather than in relation only to what Halliday has classified as “aperture”.

The curly brackets surrounding the three systems (as well as subsystems) indicate that they are simultaneous choices, so that speakers make choices from all of them when uttering a laugh. Many of these choices have fuzzy boundaries, however, and should rather be considered more in terms of continua (as mentioned for constriction).

The options in this system are freely combinable, though there may be particular combinations that are familiar across contexts in a culture. This includes laughter types such as a “snort”, combining the features of a close constriction, unvoiced phonation, nasalisation and a short length burst; or a “giggle”, combining a close to half-close constriction, front-spread posture, quiet amplitude and high pitch pulse. These are terms that are used in the English language to describe types of laughter (cf. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008) and so are institutionalised enough as to be interpretable as distinct expression types. In terms of their meaning potential, while a snort is tied consistently to negative attitudinal connotations, the attitudinal meanings conveyed by a giggle can vary, as can be seen in the following examples from the British National Corpus (BNC)<sup>11</sup>:

(1) Madame Mattli *snorted angrily*.

(2) She *snorted indignantly*.

(3) She *giggled nervously*.

(4) Miguelito *giggled happily*.

This variation depends upon various social and contextual factors. So, each laugh may combine any of the options, and the meanings that it makes are considered in its particular use in the context and in relation to the co-articulated verbiage. Meanings of laughter in convivial conversational humour depend on what speech role the laugher takes on and on its relation with co-occurring speech, so that combinations of sound options in the laugh expression convey APPRAISAL and NEGOTIATION within the frame of these considerations. Different expressions of laughter construing these meanings are exhibited in the following section.

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<sup>11</sup> These examples can be found through a search on the website [www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/](http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/).

### 3.1.2.2 Analysis of laughter expressions

By combining expression choices, laughter co-articulates particular attitudinal meanings and fulfils particular moves in discourse with speech. In Example 3.2 (repeated below), the laughter reaction of the hearers conveys negative appreciation towards the play that C has mentioned, as it challenges the (somewhat) positive appreciation she has given to it in her verbiage as not “the worst”:

C: I uh that's okay I was like new reassurance that my play isn't **the worst** play  
anyway.  
F,N: (L)  
C: It *isn't* Farley!




#### **Example 3.2<sup>2</sup>: Laughter expression construing negative appreciation.**

The expression of this laugh (see Laughter clip 7 ) makes this meaning more clear. The hearers share the laugh, and they combine sound features into two different types that are similar to a snort and chuckle. The laugh is quiet, pulsed, unvoiced and stable, and while one hearer combines this with a nasalised voice quality, the other combines it with breathiness. Nasalisation is commonly associated with a negative value judgement (van Leeuwen, 1999). In emitting this type of laugh expression, F construes a negative attitude towards the play that C has presented and additionally towards C herself as the one involved in its production. N's laugh also conveys this negative attitudinal orientation, as the quiet amplitude reveals that this laugh is unshared with the speaker and creates a distance between her and the verbiage in the initiation. Its relation to this speech is evidently critical; the reaction move situates the laugh as a challenge following C's inscribed interpersonal orientation, and the expression features of the hearer laughter support this interpretation.

A speaker construes a negative judgement towards herself through her combination of laughter expression features in Example 3.11 below, in which the laugh co-constructs a continuing move with speech. As the three female university students discuss their holidays away with family, speaker U jokes about her eating habits during this time.

U: == Yeah I saw like my family and friends...I ate **well** (SL)  
 N: We *all* ate **well**.  
 (LA)  
 N: (Dude) we all (LV) ate (CL-P) **good** pie!  
 U: Yes (CL-N) I agree. **On a diet** (LV) now.  
 (LA)

**Example 3.11: Laughter expression construing negative judgement (taken from Table 1.1 in Appendix A).**

After expressing positive appreciations for her holiday activities, U inscribes a positive appreciation for the eating that she has done and then follows her own speech with a laugh (Laughter clip 17 ). This laugh is a single quiet breathy burst with a front-spread posture. Her laughter signals that the positive attitude she is expressing in her verbiage is not to be taken seriously but is creating a tension for her, and the character of this laugh construes a negative self-judgement for having been a heavy eater with her family and friends. The high front-spread posture suggests the speaker's self-consciousness (Edmonson, 1987), while the breathiness may be associated with an intimacy (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 133) that the speaker is attempting to draw between her and the hearers; the quietness also supports the derogatory attitudinal nature of the laugh utterance. The hearers, however, react with different laughter sound combinations, signalling their shared solidarity around common holiday activities for which they may negatively judge themselves. First, they laugh continuously through the speech, marking it as humorous. They amplify the laughter targeted towards all of them ("we all") as co-participants in this "bad behaviour", as the laugh becomes shared (Laughter clip 18 ) and is marked by an increase in amplitude and a decrease in pitch with a continuous iteration. In this context, the laughter expression conveys amplification and a further indication of negative judgement towards the speakers for eating too much food. However, even this negative self-judging is laughable, as the interactants then share an even louder laughter "roar" (Laughter clip 19 ) that is more open in constriction after joking that they are "on a diet now". The continued shared and amplified laugh thus indicates the opposite attitude, as it equals or even overpowers the laughter towards over-eating that they have just shared, so that they are able to laugh off dieting instead.

These examples display various combinations of expression choices in laughter that speakers and hearers can make in convivial conversational humour and show how,

interacting with language in context, particular forms of laughter indicate distinctly attitudinal meanings. Their placement in the text also shows how their positioning as moves in NEGOTIATION impacts upon the meanings made. Laughter and speech fulfil speech roles together and independently, weaving conversation together as they unfold through humour.

At the same time, in conversational humour between friends, laughter takes on a life of its own. While conversational talk is organised into sections of chunks and chat (Eggins & Slade, 1997), and chat sections are further organised by conversational exchanges (as reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1), laughter distinguishes its own distinct sequences of humour in chatty discourse that do not follow exchange boundaries. As a social semiotic in its own right, laughter does not conform to the linguistic exchange but instead coordinates units of humour closer to *phases* (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]). These sequences are co-constructed by friends as they maintain the progression of the conversation by constantly negotiating values and laughing together. The following section will explore convivial conversational humour in terms of these phases.

## 3.2 Laughter in humorous phases

Laughter and language are intrinsically related in casual conversation, as has been shown in Section 3.1, and they both contribute to the meanings made in humorous talk. Though humour scholars are careful to acknowledge that “not all humour involves laughter, and not all laughter involves humour” (Chafe, 2007, p. 1; see also Attardo, 2003, p. 1288), this thesis focuses on the discourse surrounding laughter in conversation between friends as an essential component to the interpretation of this phenomenon and characterises “convivial conversational humour” in relation to where laughter occurs.<sup>12</sup>

When laughter occurs across stretches of speech, it serves to signal the construal of humorous sequences in large sections of conversational talk. While laughter may not

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<sup>12</sup> Supportive responses to a humorous initiation other than laughter also occur. These are interpreted in the environment of laughter identified in a phase of convivial conversational humour, and the segments are analysed according to Hay’s (2001) listing of “humor support strategies”. Humor support strategies work with laughter in the data and function similarly for affiliation.

necessarily always be tied to humour, in conversational text it marks that what is said is taken as funny, and it offers a clue to locate where this “humour” begins and ends. As a social semiotic with its own meaning potential, laughter also drives the boundaries of the co-constructed sequence of humour in chat beyond those of the typical conversational exchange, indicating a distinctive unit of humour that is differentially organised.

This section contends that laughter does not operate according to the boundaries of the conversational exchange but is organised by a unit closer to that of a phase (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]). Section 3.2.1 demonstrates how Eggins and Slade’s (1997) framework for the conversational exchange does not capture relations of laughter across conversational text, and argues that they relate instead to what Gregory and Malcolm (1995 [1981]) have defined as “phases” in Section 3.2.2. An analysis of a phase of convivial conversational humour is given in Section 3.2.3 to demonstrate the applicability of this concept and to depict the method by which units of humour were extrapolated in this thesis from the conversational data set. Through these phases, participants laugh together around laughable values, creating a particular type of social negotiation that will be described in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **3.2.1 Laughing and the conversational exchange**

Units of chat in conversation can be determined by their move-by-move exchange structure, as established in Chapter 2, but units of humour are marked by laughter, which affects how humorous sequences are organised. Distinguishing a humorous unit is complicated because laughs are not organised by the typical structural boundaries of exchange structure as developed for conversational talk.

As was outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1, Eggins and Slade (1997) provide a framework for the structural organisation of conversational talk in terms of exchanges. To review, a conversational exchange is made up of a dynamic sequencing of *moves*, which are discourse units that express *speech functions* (Halliday 1984b, 1994a). Moves are realised by clauses that fulfil mood types in lexicogrammar (e.g. an “interrogative” mood type is an unmarked realisation of a “question” move) and correspond with a prosodic intonation unit. The dynamic complexing of interdependent moves makes up a

conversational exchange, which is bounded in Eggins and Slade’s terms from one opening move until the next opening move, as displayed in Table 3.1. In this table, the beginning and end of the exchange are marked alongside the moves that realise these boundaries, with the initial opening move marked in bold. Through the “Move” column, reacting moves follow from the initial move that expresses the speech function “QUESTION”, and the exchange ends before the next opening move to occur in this text.

Exchange	Move	Text
Begins	<b>OPEN: QUESTION</b>	C: Do you think we have school on Easter Monday?
	ANSWER	N: Yeah. == But I’m surprised.
	TRACK: CLARIFY	C: Yeah but, what’s the deal!
	WITHHOLD	N: I don’t know but I just ==
	REGISTER	C: == Oh right
	ELABORATE	N: realized today that we can’t have rehearsal on Easter Sunday because mm- <i>Adriana’s all Catholic</i>
	DEVELOP: EXTEND	C: Yeah nobody wants to rehearse on <i>mine</i> Friday either
	CONTRADICT	F: Hey I have no problem with that
Ends	DEVELOP: ELABORATE	C: You and me Farley ==

**Table 3.1: Conversational exchange from opening move to opening move.**

This model is utilized in this thesis to distinguish sequences of chat in casual conversation. However, in focusing upon laughter and the talk surrounding laughs in an analysis of conversational humour, the boundaries of an exchange are found to be insufficient in accounting for the unit of humour. While Eggins and Slade’s framework of exchange effectively organises speech in casual conversation, laughter does not conform to these boundaries in conversation between friends. Instead, laughter often continues beyond the borders of the exchange or ends before the exchange has been completed, as in the extended example in Table 3.2. In this text, three university students involved in theatre discuss how the religious memberships of their theatre cast and crews are impinging upon their rehearsal time during the Easter holidays. While the first opening move “question” begins the exchange, the developing reaction move “elaborate” ends it after laughter occurs, and a second exchange begins with N’s next opening move, marked in bold. Laughter is highlighted in yellow to indicate how it continues through two separate exchanges:



Exchange	Move	Text
Begins	<b>OPEN: QUESTION</b>	C: Do you think we have school on Easter Monday?
	ANSWER	N: Yeah. == But I'm surprised.
	TRACK: CLARIFY	C: Yeah but, what's the deal!
	WITHHOLD	N: I don't know but I just ==
	REGISTER	C: == Oh right
	ELABORATE	N: realized today that we can't have rehearsal on Easter Sunday because mm- <i>Adriana's all Catholic</i>
	DEVELOP: EXTEND	C: Yeah nobody wants to rehearse on <i>mine</i> Friday either
	CONTRADICT	F: Hey I have no problem with that.
	ACKNOWLEDGE	<b>C: (L)</b>
	ACKNOWLEDGE	<b>F: == (L)</b>
Ends	ACKNOWLEDGE	<b>N: == (L)</b>
	DEVELOP: ELABORATE	C: You and me Farley ==
Begins	<b>OPEN: QUESTION</b>	<b>N: == Why can't everybody be Jewish (SL)</b>
	ANSWER	== There's a good reason for that
	DEVELOP: ENHANCE	F: == Jewish (religion) == Jewish (really don't care who they take)
	Ends	<b>N: (L)</b>

**Table 3.2: Laughter (highlighted) continuing past borders of move exchange; opening moves and laughter in bold.**

When F (Farley) mentions that he has “no problem” rehearsing during Easter (as a member of the Jewish community) while pretending to be only a highly devoted play member, the interactants laugh together and N then jokes about Farley’s Jewish membership. While N opens a new exchange about this with a question, “Why can’t everyone be Jewish”, she continues to laugh and create humour beyond this move, while relating it back to F’s humorous comment.

The laughter in this example works as a reaction to and marker of humour, indicating that what was said is interpreted as funny. The laughing creates a play frame around a surrounding sequence of humorous chat, indicating that the speech surrounding the laughter is not to be taken at face value. Specifically, the humour is co-constructed by the interactants as they laugh about a lack of devotion towards rehearsals and about the possibilities for “being Jewish”. Laughter propels further discussion and play around these values. However, the location of the laughs indicates that this humour does not conform to the boundaries of exchanges outlined in Eggins and Slade’s (1997) framework. Instead, they continue past the next opening move:

**OPEN: QUESTION** N: == Why can't everyone be Jewish **(SL)** ...

The sequencing of the humour would be discontinuous if the sections of talk bounded by opening moves were considered as two distinct humorous “exchanges”.

The exchange framework also does not account for when the laughter ends at a point *within* a conversational exchange, marking the end of a humorous unit before exchange completion. This is exhibited in Table 3.3, in which a sequence of humour about one person’s notion of “women’s duties” continues and then leads into more serious talk before the exchange ends (see Table 11.10 in Appendix A for full speech preceding this excerpt).

Exchange	Move	Text
continues...	ELABORATE	CO: She's like "I'm a <i>woman</i> of <i>course</i> I can sew!"
	ACKNOWLEDGE	K,N: <b>(L)</b>
	EXTEND	CO: "I can clean too you know"
	ACKNOWLEDGE	K,N: <b>(L)</b> ...
	DEVELOP: EXTEND	T: You know and they can <i>cook!</i>
	ACKNOWLEDGE	CO: Yeah they can <i>cook!</i>
	ACKNOWLEDGE	N: <b>(CL)</b>
	ACKNOWLEDGE	K: == <b>(LV)</b> Oh my god <b>(L)</b>
	...	...
	DEVELOP: ENHANCE	CO: But if she's been raised with those <i>skills</i> then that's part of her purpose is to help people with those skills that she has
	ACKNOWLEDGE	N, CO: Mm.
Ends	REGISTER	K: Yeah.

**Table 3.3: Laughter ending before the last move of the exchange.**

In this excerpt, the speakers stop laughing at the humour co-constructed by CO and T after K’s laughing reaction “Oh my god”. However, the exchange does not end here, as they continue their discourse around women in Thailand, talking seriously about how their skills may give them a particular purpose. The laughter ends well before the end of the exchange with K’s registering move “Yeah”.

This suggests that humorous sequences do not generally conform to the structure of moves and should be considered independently from the structural boundaries of the exchange. Instead, these sequences revolve around the interactants sharing in ongoing

laughter. Laughter thus does not correspond to or synchronise with moves of the exchange; it marks a different kind of unit for humour.

### **3.2.2 The phasal unit of conversational humour**

Though exchanges and laughter are differentially structured in humour, the meanings involved come together in a consistent way and are coherent with the ongoing discourse. For instance, in Table 3.2, the topic continues to develop classifying participants by a religion (“Adriana’s all Catholic”; “be Jewish”), and the values towards Easter remain negative (“can’t have rehearsal on Easter Sunday”; “I have no problem with that”), while anaphoric references connect talk about religion with exophoric references to the speakers’ play members, creating humour in their interplay. Thus, the ideational taxonomic strings, interpersonal appraisals and textual identifications (cf. Martin & Rose, 2007) create a consistent sequence of metafunctional meaning around the laughter to be captured.

This metafunctional interaction is similar to that described in “phases” by Gregory and Malcolm (1995 [1981]; Gregory, 1982, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 2002; Malcolm, 1985a, 1985b, 1998, 2005, forthcoming). In their framework of Communication Linguistics, Gregory and Malcolm offer phasal analysis as “an alternative (some might want to see it as a complement or supplement) to existing methods of handling discourse in a constituent structure way” (Gregory, 2002, p. 340), proposing a process-oriented model for capturing discourse. Gregory (1995a) defines phases as characterising “the stretches of text where there is a significant measure of consistency in what is being selected ideationally, interpersonally and textually” (p. 161), and these strings of metafunctional meanings (following Halliday’s (1973) metafunctional model) are considered through “codal resources”, or systems of the language strata.

Sequences of humour in conversation between Canadian friends enact this “tri-functional consistency” (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995 [1981]) through the unfolding of the text, as shown in Table 3.2, and are dynamically propelled by the sharing of laughter. In this way, laughter operates within a unit closer to that of a *phase*, and humour may be captured in conversation through a model that incorporates phasal analysis. In particular, humorous

phases are constructed ongoingly and shift through the text, and they are discernable through patterns unique to the discourse, reflecting the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of conversational humour. These patterns can be detected surrounding the laughter for a certain period of time and, while they do not construe predictable stages of a genre since they occur in chat, their organisation may be considered on an individual basis according to where laughter occurs. Gregory and Malcolm's phases are considered from the bottom up<sup>13</sup> (i.e. from language to context), and deployed in the analysis of conversational chat (a type of text that is not amenable to generic structural conventions) (cf. Eggins & Slade, 1997). Phases are "micro-registerial shifts" (Malcolm, forthcoming, p. 345<sup>14</sup>; see also Gregory, 2002, p. 323) in a single discourse that is "constantly changing" (Gregory, 2002, p. 345).

Humorous sequences are phasal units that are varied and tied to the discourse of which they are a part, and they are determined by laughter and a recurrence of a configuration of metafunctional meanings. They are characteristic of conversational chat and operate independently of exchange boundaries. However, Malcolm (forthcoming) notes that "the phases of adult friends are not as complete as those of strangers nor as long" and friends may present isolated phases that jump from one set of tri-functional consistencies to another, or "they may structure their discourse in a discontinuous way: where one set of phasal consistencies might end at one point only to return moments later" (Malcolm, forthcoming, p. 347). So, though laughter and sometimes phasal "transitions" (Gregory, 2002) give a clue to the *endpoint* of the humorous phase, the beginning of the phase is more difficult to ascertain. This is because conversations between friends may involve discontinuous phasal strings (Malcolm, 1985b), and laughter often follows an utterance that should be considered within the humorous phase. To capture this discontinuity, it is necessary to propose a supplementary feature for the analysis of humorous phases.

In order to systematically extract a phase of convivial conversational humour from conversation for analysis, the initial boundary may be aligned with the closest *opening*

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13 This differentiates Gregory and Malcolm's phases from those defined by Rose (2006; Martin & Rose, 2007), as he describes phases in a top-down perspective as sub-stages of a genre that are more variable than generic stages. Macken-Horarik (2003) reformulates the notion of phase as a unit of analysis that is intermediate between the generic stage and the sentence. These concepts reflect the differences in types of data considered, as Rose and Macken-Horarik work with institutional, academic genres that have predictable staging, while Gregory and Malcolm focus on conversation, which is not captured by generic analysis.

14 The page numbers that are referenced for this publication are taken from an earlier draft.

*move* preceding laughter in the surrounding conversational exchange. An opening move provides an identifiable discourse unit to more systematically gauge the initial phasal boundary in conversational humour between friends, especially where shifts are discontinuous, and it even adds to the interpretability of the phase by giving more context to the humour. For instance, in the text of Table 3.2, the opening move “Do you think we have school on Easter Monday?” occurs nine moves before the first expression of laughter, but it begins to build the context of the humour around Easter holidays and religion interfering with play rehearsals, without which it would be difficult to interpret F’s utterance “Hey I have no problem with that” as funny. *That* is an anaphoric textual reference back to the activity of rehearsing on Easter Sunday and requires the contextualisation that the previous moves provide from the opening question. The phase ends with N’s last laugh around “everybody” being Jewish, before a shift out of this metafunctional consistency.

Accordingly, three features are important for distinguishing a convivial conversational humorous phase: laughter, phasal metafunctional consistency and the closest opening move preceding laughter in the surrounding conversational exchange. These relations may be considered through the application of a functional discourse analysis (Martin & Rose, 2007; see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 for introduction), which will be demonstrated in the following section, further elaborating upon the nature of humour in conversation between friends.

### **3.2.3 Analysis of humorous phases**

Laughter is the most immediate and recognisable indicator of a phase of convivial conversational humour. Since laughter and language construe meanings together in the discourse semantic systems through these phases, discourse semantic tools are employed to determine the metafunctional consistency that they create. Conversations are divided into phases in the tables of Appendix A, which have been analysed with the discourse analytic tools outlined by Martin (1992) and Martin and Rose (2007). These systems were introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, and include the interpersonal systems of NEGOTIATION and APPRAISAL, the ideational systems of IDEATION and CONJUNCTION, and

the textual systems of IDENTIFICATION (as well as PERIODICITY, which system is not focused upon in this thesis due to the linear nature of the data).

The discourse analysis undertaken in this thesis provided the linguistic realisations surrounding laughter that were found to combine across metafunctions into phasal consistencies, informing the phasal analysis. Malcolm (forthcoming) describes how phases are found in the analysis of systems, which realise experiential, interpersonal and textual functions of language working together interdependently and remaining consistent for a time until they shift together (p. 344). While these systems are referred to as “codal” systems<sup>15</sup> in traditional phasal analysis, they align with systems in SFL like transitivity, mood and modality (cf. Malcolm, forthcoming), and so this suggests that discourse semantic tools are similarly applicable. This thesis thus substitutes codal resources with the discourse semantic resources utilized from the SFL framework to inform the phasal analysis. This thesis will use the example from Table 3.2 (repeated below) to explore this analysis, first by discussing the way that metafunctional meanings remain consistent and come together through discourse semantic systems in this phase:

- C: Do you think we have school on Easter Monday?  
N: Yeah. == But I'm surprised.  
F: == Some.  
C: Yeah but, what's the deal!  
N: I don't know but I just ==  
C: == Oh right  
N: realized today that we can't have rehearsal on Easter Sunday because mm- *Adriana's* all *Catholic*  
C: Yeah nobody wants to rehearse on *mine* Friday either  
F: Hey I have no problem with that.  
C: (L)  
F: == (L)  
N: == (L)  
C: You and me Farley ==  
N: == Why can't everybody be Jewish (SL) == There's a good reason for that  
F: == Jewish (religion) == Jewish (really don't care who they take)  
N: (L)

**Example 3.2<sup>2</sup>: Phase of convivial conversational humour (from Table 2.9 in Appendix A).**

In this phase, the boundaries have been drawn from the first opening move (“Do you think we have school on Easter Monday?”) to the final bout (Owren, 2007) of laughter by

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<sup>15</sup> “Semological”, “morphosyntactic” and “phonological”.

N. Beginning with this move, the interactants build up humour around the interference of Easter holidays first with sarcasm in “Adriana’s all Catholic”<sup>16</sup>, and then with F’s utterance “Hey I have no problem with that”, when laughter marks this phase more explicitly.

In the ideational metafunction, there are cause and effect sequences marked by (explicit and implicit) causal conjunction (realised explicitly by *because*); these combine with conjunctive devices marking comparison (between N and C’s theatre play groups and between them and F) linking the different causes for their concerns about religious classifications. In terms of experiential taxonomies, a compositional string linking Easter and its component parts in days is constructed, connecting Easter Monday, Sunday and Friday, all which present an impediment to the interactants’ sharing in their rehearsal. These serve as circumstances to the interactants’ process of rehearsing and are tied to the classification of their play actors (particularly Adriana) as *Catholic*; this classification is later linked (in a religious classification taxonomy) to that of Farley and “everybody” as *Jewish*.

Realisations of IDENTIFICATION in the textual metafunction also exhibit this connection, as the textual reference *that* in “I have no problem with that” refers anaphorically back to the activity of rehearsing during Easter mentioned by both N and C and connects the humour around being Jewish to the religious classification of being Catholic. Similarly, in N’s utterance “There’s a good reason for that”, this anaphoric textual reference refers to her previous remark about everyone “being Jewish”, and allows for the further humour by F, who continues the joke that the Jewish religion is inclusive of “everybody”.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, presuming exophoric references, both pronominal and nominal, to each participant’s play and play members are made (e.g. “**we** can’t have rehearsal on Easter Sunday”; “**Adriana**’s all *Catholic*”; “**nobody** wants to rehearse on **mine** Friday either”; “**You** and **me** Farley”), bringing the text together around rehearsals along with religion.

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16 This is not met with laughter, but the intonation contour contrasts noticeably with the rest of the discourse (it is a strong Tone 5, cf. Halliday & Greaves, 2008), which marks sarcasm (Attardo, Eisterhold, Hay & Poggi, 2003). Sarcasm is not often met explicitly with laughter, so marked intonation is taken into consideration in this analysis.

<sup>17</sup> This is taken to be funny by the interactants because the “reason” that N notes and F implies is that of the “raison d’être that had sustained Jewish identity and Jewish faith through the ages” (Eisen, 1995, p. 3): the notion of their status as a chosen people of God (cf. Deuteronomy 14:2 in the Torah, King James Bible). For this reason, Jewish religion does in fact “care who they take”.

This is aided by the interpersonal metafunction, as the speakers invoke (Martin & White, 2005; see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.2.1) negative appraisal towards the Easter holidays and its associated Catholicism and convey their own play members' negative appraisal (e.g. "nobody wants to rehearse on *mine* Friday either") towards rehearsing. F turns this around by expressing a positive attitude towards rehearsing ("I have no problem with that"), which is said in humour and reacted to with laughter, and N picks up on an underlying meaning of positive appraisal towards *being Jewish* instead. While these appraisals seem to vary across the phase, when their ideational targets and the humorous play are considered, they are actually more consistent than they appear. F's positive attitude towards rehearsing connects to their previous talk in which they shared this value (by complaining about being unable to rehearse during Easter); but as a humorous utterance met with laughter, it also implies a positive attitude towards being Jewish, which is brought out and played with by N through humour at the end ("Why can't everyone be Jewish"). This shows that appraisal is a significant feature around which the interactants create humour, and when these are connected with other meanings in the text, the humorous meaning begins to reveal itself. The laughter appeals especially to the exchange of values in convivial conversational humour, and the phase offers a broader picture of this negotiation. In addition to the appraisal, moves are realised by interrogatives followed by declarative responses through the phase, creating short question–answer sequences that are developed for humour.

The phase ends without a "transition" marking the change when the next speaker, C, utters, "I have like five rehearsals." The laughter has ceased, and C begins a new exchange and ends the phase by changing the ideational meanings to focus specifically on rehearsals, rather than the Easter holidays and religion, which kept the phase consistent in humour. The interactants then begin to discuss how many rehearsals they all have in more serious talk and make exophoric references to themselves rather than homophoric references (as they did in the humour here). Thus, the consistency of meanings of the humorous phase of talk, along with the laughter, has ended, and the unit can be extracted based on the boundaries created by consistent metafunctional meanings.

The analysis of the humorous phase of Example 3.12 is summarised in Table 3.4. Lexicogrammatical realisations of experiential and textual discourse semantic systems are



listed according to the system they construe following Martin and Rose (2007) (with participants lexically rendered). Selections in the interpersonal discourse semantic systems are detailed following Martin and White (2005, p. 71) for APPRAISAL and Eggins and Slade (1997) for moves, and colours display the metafunctional consistency across the phase.

Experiential			Interpersonal			Textual	
Participant	Process	Participant	Circ	Appraisal & Target		Negotiation	Identification
C, N, F	have	school	Easter Monday			O: QUSTN	you (N), we (C,N,F)
N	'm	surprised				ANSWER	I (N)
N	just realized		today			CONT:ELB	I (N)
N & play group	can't have	rehearsal	Easter Sunday	neg +ve apprec <i>token</i> <sup>18</sup>	having rehearsal	ELABRTE	we (N's play group)
Adriana	's	all Catholic		-ve judge	Adriana		Adriana
C's play group	(not) wants to rehearse	on (C's show)	(Easter) Friday	neg +ve affect	having rehearsal	DEVP:EXT	nobody (C's play group), mine (C's show)
F	have	no problem with (rehearsing)	(on Easter)	neg -ve apprec	having rehearsal	CONTRDT	I (F), that (rehearsing on Easter)
Farley & C	(have)	(no problem with rehearsing)				DEVP:ELB	You and me (C, F in play group), Farley
Everybody	(why) can't be	Jewish		+ve judge <i>token</i>	everyone	O: QUSTN	everyone
There	is	a good reason for (everyone not Jewish)		+ve apprec	reason	ANSWER	a good reason, that (everyone not Jewish)
Jewish religion?, Jewish	really don't care	who they take		neg +ve affect, +ve judge <i>token</i>	who they take/ everyone	DEVP:ENH	they (Jewish/Jewish religion?)

**Table 3.4: Analysis of a phase of convivial conversational humour.**

<sup>18</sup> "Token" is another term for invoked attitude, and it signals here that the attitude is not presented explicitly (i.e. not inscribed), but is implied (i.e. invoked). "Neg" indicates negation of the attitude.

The table provides an overview of a humorous phase, and shows where the meanings are repeated and come together across the metafunctions. For instance, the lexis *Catholic* and *Jewish* are located in the same experiential column (highlighted in blue) as they both realise Attributes in relational identifying clauses,<sup>19</sup> and Easter (as a Circumstance) can be tracked along negated positive appraisals (highlighted in green) until F changes this in humour to the opposite appraisal, whereby positive appraisals (highlighted in yellow) are then connected to the experiential meanings of being Jewish. The identification column also displays the exophoric references to the play groups and textual references to previous utterances about religion coming together and connecting around F's humorous utterance ("I have no problem with **that**"). Laughter is crucial to the interpretation of this phase, especially as the interactants' laughter indicates that there is an underlying meaning (of "being Jewish") to F's utterance "I have no problem with that" which connects the phase as a whole. As demonstrated through the above example, speakers co-construct phases of humour around laughter, and these phases can be captured through a combination of phasal analysis and the opening move of the conversational exchange, creating a systematically identifiable unit of humorous discourse.

As laughter unfolds through phases of convivial conversational humour, it highlights how conversational participants constantly play with meanings together to construct humour ongoingly through the text. It was shown in Section 3.1 that laughter co-articulates with language, particularly interpersonal, evaluative meanings as a social semiotic, and the values expressed by this interplay form the humour for friends who are constantly reinforcing relationships in the social interaction. Distinctively, a laughter reaction in a humorous phase signals that values expressed in speech are interpreted as funny or laughable to the hearers. Instead of taking seriously the values presented in the text and accepting them straightforwardly, participants *negotiate* this value differently together. Laughter therefore forms part of the negotiation of which values are laughable or not laughable to the interactants as they present them in discourse, and it can be highly meaningful in this negotiation alongside language. Due to this close relationship with the exchange of attitudinal values, the prosodic unfolding of appraisal and appraisal targets in

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19 "Jewish" seems to also realise the participant role of Senser in a mental process clause in the final utterance by F (though it is likely that he initiates with "Jewish religion"), which also connects the Jewish classification with positive appraisals as in the previous moves.

these texts will be the focus in Chapter 4 in considering what kind of textual evidence can be found as the *cause* of laughter.

### 3.3 Conclusion of Chapter Three

While laughter has been variously linked to differing origins and social functions, by considering it as a semiotic system that functions interpersonally (and, as will be demonstrated, to negotiate affiliation), it is clear that laughter is a meaningful mechanism for the maintenance of cohesive relations between interactants. Laughter was shown to have interpersonal meaning potential through the systems of APPRAISAL and NEGOTIATION, and its expression system was presented as a system network of choices.

By considering laughter in terms of instantiation, it was demonstrated that laughter and language co-articulate more meanings than laughter could convey alone. In particular, laughter interacts with language to construe conversational moves in different distribution, and in terms of attitude, laughs can challenge or reinforce the attitudinal meanings given in speech. Without the combined meaning potential of laughter, the attitudinal values expressed in speech in humorous phases would be interpreted straightforwardly (i.e. they would not have the implied attitudinal orientation that laughter brings to them); and without co-articulated speech, the meanings of laughter may not be interpreted in convivial conversational humour. At the level of expression, systematized choices of sound features may be combined to make particular meanings within a specified context, and this will be further exhibited through convivial conversational humour in Chapter 4. It will be shown that interactants combine these variables not only to indicate particular attitudes but to negotiate different degrees of *affiliation* in relation to their complex identities. In this way, laughter functions as a powerful tool in casual conversation for the management of values and social networks that bring people together in culture. Laughter is thus a social semiotic system that interacts with language in instantiation to enable the important discourses of humour and affiliation that are the focus of this thesis. In its close association with appraisal values, it offers a clue to the nature of the humorous talk, which will be considered through a focus on the meanings

driving its prosodic telos. Laughter in conversation works with appraisal to keep the talk going and is an aspect of the negotiation of values (as more or less “laughable”).

In the examples presented in this chapter, laughter was shown in relation to surrounding verbiage in which attitudinal meanings are inscribed, making the interpretation of what laughter is doing within the text a simpler task. However, in the following chapters, humorous phases are presented that do not include explicitly inscribed appraisals but more implicit ones, suggesting that laughter is doing much more than co-articulating interpersonal choices and marking humour with language. In fact, laughter has a particularly important role to play, as it not only conveys with talk the attitudes that are meaningful to the ongoing conversation but also works as a strategy for negotiating particular attitudes *towards particular experiences* that are specified within the boundaries of the participants’ shared communities. This will be developed in the following chapters, as laughter is described as a signal to negotiated units in text, and as a *way in* to the negotiation of affiliation.