

# CHAPTER 6

## Conclusions

This thesis has explored conversational humour between friends through three primary features: a social semiotic analysis of laughter in relation to conversational talk (Chapter 3); the development of attitude + ideation couplings as textual evidence of what friends laugh at (Chapter 4); and a theory of affiliation capturing the social negotiation of which humour is one strategy (Chapter 5). Based on this investigation, there are a number of contributions and implications of this study to be recognised, as well as potential areas for future research. This final chapter explores how this thesis relates to the SFL framework and to linguistic studies of humour, and it proposes future research that can be taken in relation to the model of affiliation that has been introduced. Section 6.1 outlines the contributions to and implications of this study for SFL theory and on linguistic humour research. In Section 6.2, future research directions are considered, including the development of the affiliation model, other applications of affiliation and a focus on other strategies of affiliation besides “laughing”.

### 6.1 Contributions and implications

This study employed SFL to analyse humour in casual conversation between friends, which provided a number of tools for completing a comprehensive analysis of this type of humour. In particular, these included the following: the concepts of *instantiation* and *metafunctions* specifically aided in extracting the linguistic coupling of meaning that causes laughter; the *social semiotic perspective* enabled the development of laughter as a semiotic system co-constructing meaning with speech; and aspects of the interpersonal social context of *tenor* and the *cline of individuation* informed the model of affiliation to capture the social negotiations at stake. This thesis has contributed to developing the

clines of instantiation and individuation in particular by focusing on how interpersonal and ideational meanings couple in instantiation through conversational text, and by bringing this together with how participants come together in affiliation as a perspective on individuation.

Issues of instantiation that this study has drawn out will be discussed in this section through the concept of couplings, which presents challenges to existing theory because of its dynamic nature. Because the couplings that have been considered in this thesis involve attitude and particularly *implicit* evaluation, they also impact upon the theory of APPRAISAL, which will also be discussed in this section. The impact of affiliation on the cline of individuation has been demonstrated in Chapter 5, in that an affiliation perspective required a repopulation of features on the cline in terms of bonds. This is summarised briefly in this section, and affiliation and individuation will be further discussed as future directions for research in Section 6.2. Finally, the contribution that this study makes to linguistic humour research is discussed.

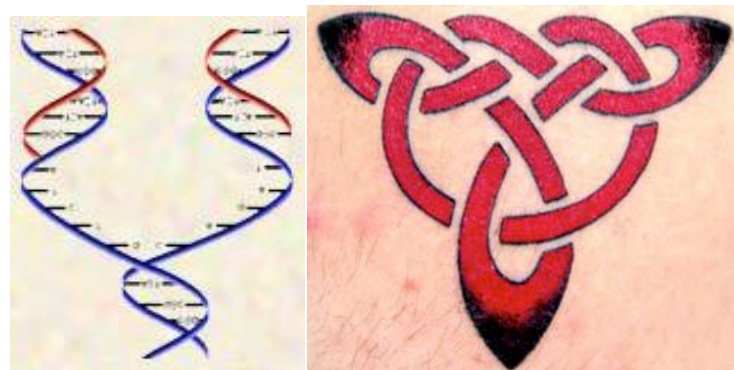
### **6.1.1 The dynamic nature of couplings**

In this study, couplings of attitude with experiential meaning were found to be the linguistic evidence for the cause of laughter in convivial conversational humour. Laughter provided a clear signal to where couplings could be located in conversational text, informing the description of couplings as both explicitly and implicitly expressed features in text. Attitude + ideation couplings were also connected to bonds in the social semiotic model of affiliation, providing a functional explanation behind why speakers may couple meanings together in talk. Notably, it was in focusing on the unfolding phase of humour that these particular couplings were found, emphasizing the significance of the *process* of bringing meanings together. In its treatment of couplings, this thesis promoted a process-oriented, time-based view of how meanings couple.

The treatment of couplings in this thesis draws from and further develops recent and ongoing theorising in SFL on how we can capture combined meanings in text. Zappavigna (2008, p. 169) explains that patterning in texts in SFL are typically represented in system networks, but a focus on couplings calls for a new type of

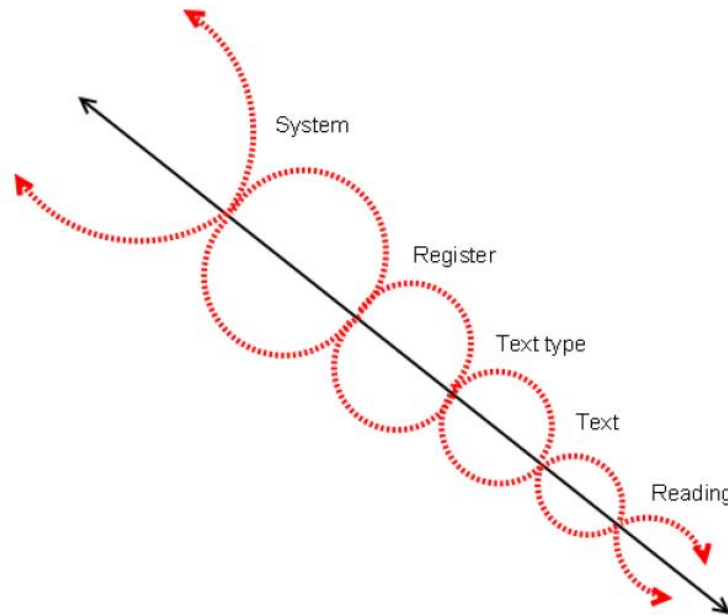
patterning. Couplings are found when we turn our focus to the instantiation cline and consider how meanings combine through the logogenesis of text, but to locate coupling in the theoretical framework is a considerable task. This is due to the fact that coupling is a *process* of meanings coming together in unfolding text, and to capture this process in synoptic terms to study it we are forced to “freeze” it in time.

Researchers so far have mapped coupling on the instantiation cline (cf. Zappavigna et al., 2008), or as a pattern in logogenesis (Zhao, 2010). Visual models have been suggested to capture the dynamic unfolding of coupling along the instantiation cline, including a double helix or Celtic knot formation by Martin (2008b, p. 44) (see Figure 6.1).



**Figure 6.1: Martin's (2008b) suggested coupling motifs.**

Zappavigna et al. (2008, p. 169) explain that the double helix formation shows the meaning potential constraining as one moves down the cline, and they represent it with instantiation features in Figure 6.2.



**Figure 6.2: Coupling mapped along the instantiation cline (from Zappavigna et al., 2008).**

The process of coupling is summed up by Zappavigna et al. in their discussion of this structure:

The double helix structure captures the property that meaning potential does not bind directly into simple couplings but is instantiated through a process that involves interaction with co-text and context, and, is, in this sense, “constantly negotiated” [(Knight, personal communication)].

(Zappavigna et al., 2008, p. 170)

This interaction is crucial to the interpretation of couplings in text, as it is within particular contexts of interaction and co-textual environments that we instantiate interpretable couplings with our interlocutors. This was demonstrated in this thesis especially in implicit couplings, as the speakers interpreted the couplings and the humour only if they could understand the bonds that they construed. However, while the double helix visual model may show how different levels of generality are involved when we instantiate couplings, it does not capture the way that couplings come together through unfolding text in *time*—that is, their dynamic nature. As Martin (2010) notes, until we can design animated visualisations to represent the obviously processual nature of coupling, “we can't yet get a synoptic purchase on what is going on” (p. 29).

This thesis instead followed Zhao's (2010) time-based definition of coupling as a logogenetic pattern that can be interpreted at points of unfolding text. Coupling is in this definition one of "three types of time-based relations critical to the meaning making process" (p. 206) and it links two or more types of relations at a particular point in the logogenetic unfolding. By reintroducing the *time* factor into its conceptualisation, this definition of coupling is grounded in logogenesis rather than modelled on the instantiation cline. This study of convivial conversational humour showed that this was an important consideration due to the relationship between couplings and bonds. Recall that following Martin's (2000a) description of how to interpret couplings of attitude with ideation, three factors must be considered: the "particular point in the unfolding of a text, for the social subjects involved, at some moment in the evolution of the relevant institution" (pp. 163–164). Thus, as was explained in Chapter 4, to interpret the humorous couplings, we must consider where in the *unfolding prosody* of attitude coming together with ideation the interactants have established bonding. From this, we can see how laughter changes the terms of this bonding for the participants to negotiate a laughing affiliation. Laughter also shows us that the *participants* share a background of bonds to be able to interpret funny couplings in relation to this. Finally, it was shown in Chapter 5 that bonds change over time in the *communities* constructed, so that reactions to couplings changed depending on the bond's *negotiability*. Thus, the couplings of interest in the study of convivial conversational humour further promote a process-oriented, time-based definition in the SFL framework and demand the kind of animated visualisations that researchers are attempting to develop for such dynamic features (cf. Zappavigna & Caldwell, 2008).

### **6.1.2 APPRAISAL challenges**

In APPRAISAL theory, the notion of evaluative couplings developed in this thesis particularly affects our understanding of how attitude is invoked in ideational meaning, and the study of convivial conversational humour offers a new perspective on how we imply attitudes. In convivial conversational humour, it was argued that participants negotiate couplings of attitude with ideational meaning to construe value bonds in their sociality. This is fundamental to the theory of affiliation. To interpret this type of

coupling it was necessary to employ the framework of APPRAISAL, which made it possible to locate them in text most importantly through the strategies for “invoked attitude” that have been proposed by Martin and White (2005). This is because friends in conversation express many couplings implicitly due to their background of shared valued experiences. Additional strategies were proposed for invoking attitudes in evaluative couplings, including the employment of idioms and allusions, realisations of all systems of GRADUATION and of ENGAGEMENT, pronouns and naming. By proposing further strategies for invoking attitude, this thesis added to the repertoire of strategies in APPRAISAL theory by which we may locate evaluative meaning in conversational talk.

However, in pursuing evaluative couplings, it was also shown that there are elements of APPRAISAL theory that need to be resolved. This includes the definition of invoked attitude and the ways that we can analyse it. It was argued in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.2 that evaluative couplings can be interpreted through strategies for invoking attitude. This is due to the fact that, in implying attitude in ideational meanings, conversational participants identify these meanings as community members in relation to “some conventionalised system of norms” (White, 2004a, p. 7), which is the case with evaluative couplings (that is, in relation to a network of bonds). Particularly attitudes that are *afforded* in ideational meanings alone correspond with evaluative couplings, since interpreting the attitude relies entirely upon the appropriate positioning of the hearer and, according to that community, the ideational meaning is bound with that particular attitude. In terms of couplings, this also has to do with negotiations of attitude towards targets over time, following Zhao (2010), which couple together and eventually do not need to be made explicit to be understood. We can thus consider implicit attitude in terms of how well *bound* it has become to its ideational target over time. Furthermore, laughter and the prosodic unfolding of text in convivial conversational humour signal the invocation of attitudes that couple. So, by considering laughter as a signal and concentrating on the prosody surrounding laughs, we are able to see the binding of attitude with ideational meaning. In these ways, the study of convivial conversational humour has been useful for developing our notions of invoked attitude. However, future research in APPRAISAL should aim to distinguish the relation between invoked attitude and evaluative couplings, particularly since to afford an attitude is to couple it with ideation. Evaluative couplings may change our ideas of exactly how we imply attitudes in discrete realisations in text.

Evaluative couplings also demand that we consider the *whole text* in our interpretation of attitudinal meaning, since much is implied through the prosodic unfolding, and that we consider other factors in this interpretation. While strategies for invoking attitude across a whole text, particularly counter-expectancy and prosodic repetition as outlined by Martin and White (2005, pp. 64–68), are useful for capturing these meanings, other factors seem to come into play in humorous phases that have not yet been acknowledged. In the following example, both realisations of GRADUATION and the counter-expectant relation between couplings in the whole of the text indicate the attitudes being coupled, but these are also aided by the speaker’s choice of moves and projected “service encounter” genre (cf. Ventola, 1987).

<p>AD: but you go up to the counter, and you’re like          “I’m gonna have the <b>big fat triple decker</b>          ...burger, ...          And then you say “Can I have a <b>fruit cup</b>          instead of <b>fries</b>, they be like “I’m <b>sorry</b>          that’s a dollar <b>extra</b>” and y’like “Alright          I’ll just take the fries for free <u>and gimme*</u>          a <b>MASSIVE ASS TOO</b>  <b>(LO)</b></p>	<p>grad: mass + neg <i>t</i>-appreciation + burger           positive <i>t</i>-appreciation + fruit cup          negative <i>t</i>-appreciation + fries          neg <i>t</i>-apprec (expensive) + fruit cup          pos <i>t</i>-apprec (free) + fries          grad: mass + neg <i>t</i>-appreciation + ass</p>
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**Example 6.1: Evaluative couplings indicated by the interplay between invoking strategies of GRADUATION and counter-expectancy along with projected genre and move type (from Table 9.1 in Appendix A).**

While the GRADUATION in SIZE (QUANTIFICATION) indicates the couplings of negative attitude towards that which is expensive or big (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.2.2), the *positive* appreciation couplings are apparent only in relation to these meanings. As the graduated negative attitude couplings towards the “big” burger (“big fat triple decker burger”) and the “extra” dollar for a fruit cup (“I’m sorry that’s a dollar extra”) are presented, fries become coupled with positive appreciation because they are “free” in relation. Counter to the expectations of the participants that AD sets up in the text, the fruit cup ends up being coupled with negative appreciation, and the fries with positive appreciation due to their prices. The juxtaposition of *fruit cup* and *fries* indicates this counter-expectancy and contrast between positive and negative couplings. However, it is not just the GRADUATION that sets up the expectations in this phase, but the service

encounter genre that AD is projecting, in which she takes on the role of customer and the imagined person at the counter takes on the role of server, along with the moves she makes within this imagined transaction. To be specific, AD's "order" in the imagined fast food transaction indicates that the items she requests are in some way positively appreciated by her as a consumer, so that she first makes humour by ordering a negatively-appreciated "big fat triple decker burger", and then she indicates her preference for a fruit cup. The fruit cup is thus set up as a positively appreciated item, with fries then juxtaposed as the negatively appreciated item. In this way, counter-expectancy works with GRADUATION and with the moves made in the projected genre to imply particular evaluative couplings for humorous purposes. This suggests that it is important to take into close consideration what is being projected in humorous speech (i.e. while it occurs in chat, AD projects a staged genre) and other systems such as SPEECH FUNCTION when identifying evaluative couplings.

Another example from the data set demonstrates further that additional factors are necessary for the interpretation of evaluative couplings. Prosodic repetition indicates the coupled evaluative meanings that are clearly made by speakers in the text but the projected speech also indicates contrasting couplings for humour. In Example 6.2, the speaker first indicates a negative evaluative coupling with his teaching supervisor for "standing at the window *watching* me" while he is teaching, and then the supervisor's own positive appreciation coupling for having the kids watch the teacher is indicated by her projected speech.



<p>CO: I worked seven hours today  B: Did you? How was it  CO: It wasn't <b>that bad</b>. ... Besides her <b>standing at the window watching me</b> ... And the kids- the kids do this...like she's like "The teacher! <b>Watch the teacher!</b>" They're staring at her  <b>(LA)</b>  B: She's <b>just</b> (LV) <b>standing there watching</b> ...  CO: <b>Standing == there watching me</b>  B: == The kids are <b>all</b> watching her  <b>(LO- N,CO)</b>  (and they're all) like "<b>Are you watching?</b>"  <b>(SL)</b>  CO: She's like <b>trying to watch the teacher</b> and they're like they're doing one of these you know (LV) where they're like half looking at her and like <b>trying to pay attention to me</b>  N: <b>(L)</b></p>	<p>(negated pos apprec, grad: intens)  negative <i>t</i>-judgement + supervisor  <b>positive <i>t</i>-apprec + watch teacher</b>  <b>positive <i>t</i>-apprec + watch supervisor</b></p> <p>negative <i>t</i>-judgement + supervisor  negative <i>t</i>-judgement + supervisor  <b>positive <i>t</i>-apprec + watch supervisor</b></p> <p><b>positive <i>t</i>-apprec + watch teacher</b></p> <p>negative <i>t</i>-judgement + supervisor  <b>positive <i>t</i>-apprec + watch supervisor</b></p>
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**Example 6.2: Evaluative couplings indicated by the interplay between counter-expectancy and prosodic repetition along with projected speech and move type (from Table 4.1 in Appendix A).**

As Martin and White (2005, p. 64) explain, by re-analysing the text after a single reading, the analyst is able to reconsider utterances as invoking attitude in relation to its co-textual environment. Prosodic repetition in this case flags that what is being repeated has additional meaning, as the speakers repeat over and over that CO was being watched while the supervisor was urging the students to watch him (who were, in turn, watching the supervisor instead). While CO uses counter-expectancy and then repetition to couple negative judgement with his supervisor for distracting the students, this is funny in relation to the supervisor's own attempts to couple positive appreciation with paying attention to the teacher, and so it is the contrast between these couplings that creates the humour in this text. It is not clear, however, without a consideration again of what is projected and the moves being made in the text. In the projected speech of the supervisor, she makes a command move by telling the students to watch the teacher, and in the projected context of the classroom this reflects the hierarchical roles taken on by all of the participants. So, when she commands the students to "Watch the teacher", she is coupling a positive appreciation with this activity as a classroom value and is further putting pressure on the students to share this coupling in the classroom context. Thus, her command in the particular context that is projected here can be interpreted as an evaluative coupling, and this clarifies the humorous contrast that is made when the

students cannot take up this coupling due to the supervisor herself. The moves and projected context in this example aid in determining evaluative couplings along with identified invoking strategies. Such examples as those found in this thesis signal that it would be useful to systematize the particular strategies used by interactants with other systems of meaning (e.g. SPEECH FUNCTION) and aspects of text (e.g. generic stages) to imply evaluative couplings.

### **6.1.3 The contributions of affiliation**

In Chapter 5, affiliation was shown to contribute to SFL theory in a number of ways. As a brief summary of these contributions, the following points have been made:

- The affiliation model offers a way to talk about *communities* in the framework.
- Bonds as a social semiotic description of persons move us away from representations of the individual in biological terms and instead grounds identity in the interaction.
- Affiliation provides a different perspective on the individuation cline with a population of features that is based on a system of bonds.
- Such discourses as humour and gossip, which have received little treatment in SFL, can be described theoretically through affiliation in terms of the affiliative strategies that have been proposed.

This study has also contributed to SFL by providing the first full and comprehensive study of humour in the framework. By employing SFL tools, the study also contributes to linguistic humour theory in general as a new perspective on the phenomenon. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **6.1.4 Linguistic humour research and this study**

As the first full study of humour incorporating the SFL framework, this research offers a new angle on humour that is informed by these tools. Most broadly, the notions of couplings and affiliation that were enabled by the SFL model provide a social semiotic

lens on why we laugh with friends in talk. Rather than to describe humour exclusively in cognitive terms as a shift between cognitive scripts, for example (cf. Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Raskin, 1985), this study described how speakers create funny tensions between evaluative meanings to construct their social identities. In focusing on conversational humour between friends, this study also concentrated on the solidarity orientation and developed a model of affiliation to address why friends constantly reinforce solidarity through humorous talk. Though researchers have shown that functions such as group relations, bonding and identity are salient in conversational humour, this study provides a comprehensive model of these functions that relates systematically to evidence in linguistic text. Furthermore, laughter was taken as the point of departure and was shown to be highly meaningful in the investigation of conversational humour between friends in this thesis. This shows that laughter should not be disregarded in the study of conversational humour since it is a social semiotic tool. Therefore, by applying the SFL model to conversational humour, a social theory of humour has been developed that incorporates the meaning possibilities that laughter provides and also identifies a consistent textual feature in coupling. This not only contributes to work on conversational humour from a social perspective (e.g. Bell, 2005; Coates, 2007; Norrick, 1993a; Holmes, 2000a, 2000b), but to work on laughter (e.g. Chafe, 2007; Glenn, 2003a; Jefferson, 1984; Provine, 2000) and on the humorous “incongruity” (e.g. Veatch, 1998; Zijdeveld, 1983). It will necessarily have implications on how we look at conversational humour between friends and how we describe “what’s so funny”.

## **6.2 Future Research Directions**

This section discusses potential directions and areas for future research with regard to affiliation theory. First, how affiliation is modelled in the SFL framework requires further formulation, particularly because it involves a process and the social semiotic unit of the bond. This will be discussed in Section 6.3.1. Sections 6.3.2–6.3.4 explore future contexts and areas of research in which affiliation concerns may be analysed, addressing some of this study’s limitations. It is demonstrated in Section 6.3.2 through humorous characterisation in talk that other contexts such as comedy can be fruitfully analysed from an affiliation perspective. Section 6.3.3 proposes that future studies focus on groups

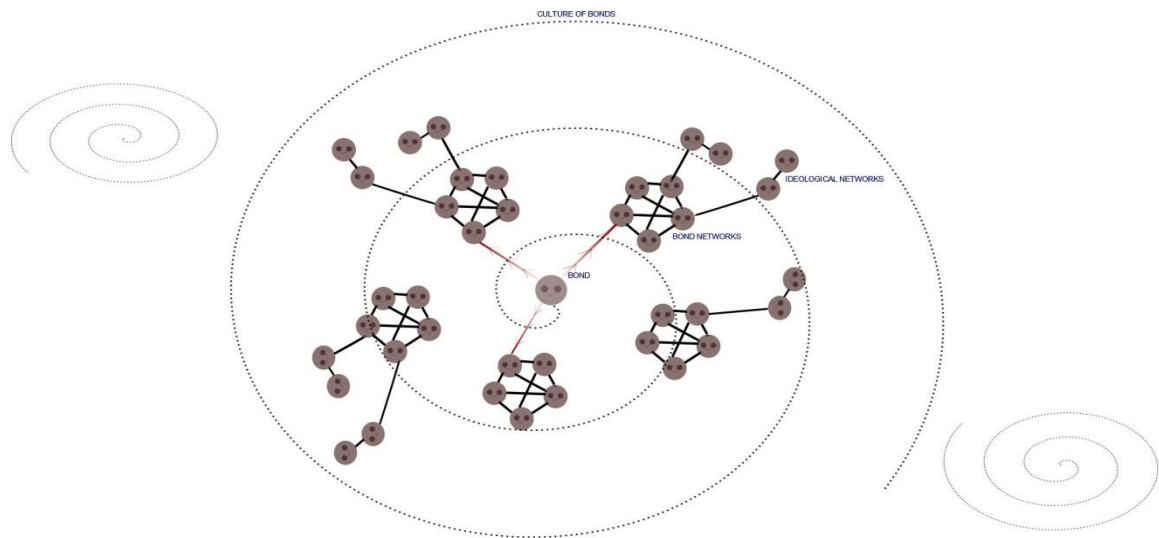
with other configurations, and ideology is shown to be a relevant concern in affiliation that compels further research. Further possibilities for meaning potential in laughter are put forward and the significance of incorporating the visual semiotic is recognised in Section 6.3.4. Finally, other studies that have already employed the affiliation model exhibit that it is informative and can be successfully utilized in a variety of multimodal texts, including rap music and youth justice conferencing.

### **6.2.1 Modelling affiliation**

In this section, it is suggested that the modelling of affiliation as a cline can be reconsidered in theoretical terms through a process-oriented perspective. As was discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, affiliation is modelled as a perspective on the individuation cline. Representing the particular features of affiliation on a cline is useful in that it provides a way to interpret the separation of different levels (e.g. bond from personal bond network from ideological network) and to visualise the process occurring through these levels. To develop the cline further, it would be useful to gain a perspective on the different kinds of bond networks involved. In particular, future research should enquire into how bonds cluster in particular ways through unfolding discourse. Research that considers a large body of texts in which participants construe many related bonds would aid in determining how bonds cluster, and from there the varying density of bond networks connected by many particular bonds could be identified.

However, it remains to be seen what principle is behind the relations of bonds to communities and communities to culture. In other words, while the cline is an initial attempt to model affiliation relations, it is not clear whether this organisation of levels is most appropriate to represent their interaction. Future research may show that a scalar representation is not in fact the most effective way to model the relations involved in affiliating. First, as was explained in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1.4.1, bond networks are related to Milroy's (1987) social networks and are considered in terms of density and plexity. Bonds participate in bond networks that vary in density and are part of the overall potential of bonds available in the culture. A bond that is construed in talk connects to other bonds in bond networks, which are themselves connected to ideological bonds. Recall that while personal bond networks have many flexible bonds, ideological networks

are characterised by fewer, more oppositional bonds all of which are made available in the cultural potential. The way that bonds connect to networks and then to the larger culture may thus be represented rather more like a solar system<sup>1</sup>, with bond networks revolving around the bond at stake like planets bound to the sun and orbiting its rotation (see Figure 6.3).



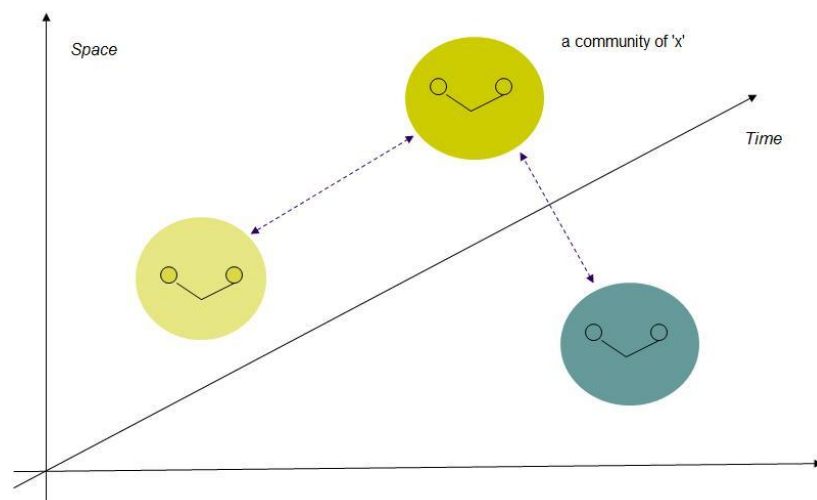
**Figure 6.3: Relations of affiliation as a solar system; bond networks revolve around the bond at stake and are part of a larger system of culture complemented by other cultural systems.**

Affiliation could perhaps be visualised and described similarly to a solar system where elements are connected by gravity. In these terms, the particular bond that is construed in talk attracts other connected bonds in networks that revolve around it, and less dense ideological bonds are connected to these, orbiting around our personal bond networks. All of these bonds make up the system of culture revolving in a kind of social galaxy, and we can imagine other cultures orbiting around and offering bonds for negotiation as well. This representation would emphasize the cohesive nature of bonds and would allow us to focus more closely on how bonds, bond networks and cultures of bonds are connected to one another at varying levels of density.

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<sup>1</sup> As suggested by Martin (2009, personal communication).

Furthermore, *time* may be a more important principle to factor in for future work on affiliation (Zhao & Knight, 2009). As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1.3, bonds are constantly negotiated and shifted across conversations, and their stability and negotiability in a community can change over time. So, it is important to consider bonds not only in relation to their construal (through couplings) in a single instance of talk, but in relation to their status in a community across time. The process may then perhaps be visualised as in Figure 6.4.



**Figure 6.4: Affiliation negotiation of bonds in time perspective; a bond of a community (dark yellow) in relation to its construal over time (light yellow) and with another community (blue) (from Zhao & Knight, 2009).**

In these terms, we focus on the process perspective of affiliation rather than attempting to build a static set of relations as on a cline. Affiliation is in this way underscored as a perspective on identity and community as constantly in flux, negotiated through bonds that are changing through time as we interact. This representation emphasizes this constant change and reminds us that, when we are labelling couplings and bonds from a single text, we must do so with regard to their unfolding in real time. However, this representation does make it difficult to gain an impression of the many different kinds of communities that are involved at any one time in a text, since it does not allow us to model them altogether in clusters.

Thus, it is still unclear at this stage what representation is best suited for the affiliation model, and future work on affiliative texts could be usefully pursued with regard to the nature of affiliation as a social *process* occurring in time. Furthermore, once a definitive model of affiliation is provided, the relation between couplings and bonds can be clarified. While the instantiated feature of text (coupling) relates to the social unit of a bond between speakers, this is not a relationship of realisation (as in systemic choices construing tenor relationships). A term needs to be developed to describe the relationship between instantiation and individuation, two underdeveloped clines in SFL theory, and this can be informed by work on affiliation.

As affiliation is more fully developed, other indicators may be found as well to construe bonds beyond attitude + ideation couplings. That is to say that there may be other ways of affiliating. For instance, Bednarek (2010) suggests some linguistic practices that “put bonding at risk”, including references to emotion, beliefs, and linguistic repertoires (e.g. “as you know...”) (p. 253), and Zappavigna et al. (2010, forthcoming) show how vocatives can be involved in constructing communities. These may also be fruitfully pursued through future research on a body of humorous and non-humorous texts. Other types of humorous texts considered through the affiliation model will be explored in the following section.

## **6.2.2 Characterisation and the affiliation perspective on humour**

Clearly, there are many types of humour beyond convivial conversational humour, and many of these could also be usefully pursued through an affiliation perspective. For instance, Caple (2010) describes how what she calls “allusive word-image play”<sup>2</sup> (p. 119) is used by newspaper writers to bond with their readership and to build and retain communities as loyal audiences. This may be done through use of famous quotations that iconize a character or actor as bondicons for fans (e.g. Dirty Harry’s “Go ahead, make my day”). Characterisation is an important device in humour and affiliation, as speakers add a performative aspect to their negotiation of bonds. If we consider characterisation

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<sup>2</sup> Multimodal news stories in which headings draw on puns or allusions, which are picked up in the photo and possibly the caption for humorous effect.

(cf. Culpeper, 2001) used by speakers in convivial conversational humour and its relation to presenting bonds in affiliation, it can be seen how other types of talk such as comedy may also be considered in these terms.

As participants in conversation play with humour, creating and acknowledging wrinkles, they may do so through an additional layer of identity by putting on a “character” (a fictitious “other”). In the conversational data of this thesis, it was found that speakers projected a character in their humour in order to portray themselves humorously as a “wrinkle-maker”. When speakers pretend to be a character (cf. Goffman, 1972) rather than their actual self, the focus shifts to the *individual* who participants must also read with the bonds he or she is presenting. The role of characterisation is an interesting topic for future research in conversation particularly in terms of affiliation, since speakers also concentrate on individual performance in their communing.

While with actors and comedians, participants are familiar enough with their role to be able to interpret the characterisation being put on, in conversation they must pay attention to clues in the discourse. In conversation, when speakers create a wrinkle while pretending to be a character, they do so to mark the wrinkle, to add to the humour, and to attribute spoken couplings to someone else. Apart from setting oneself up as the wrinkle-maker, and presenting bonds that the other interactants may not expect, speakers also use prosodic features such as pitch range and variation, loudness, voice quality (Culpeper, 2001, pp. 216–221) and intonation. As Martin and Rose (2007) explain, in spoken discourse speakers might use special intonation or voice quality to signal projection (what might be represented as scare quotes in writing) and to disown the evaluation that they have embodied and attribute it to an alternative source (p. 84). In laughing affiliation, interactants can use these expressive features to project a character as they participate in performance or role-play (cf. Holmes & Marra, 2002, pp. 78–79) for humorous effect. Specifically, they perform by taking on the role of an “other”, so that they can shift responsibility for the humorous tension that is created in the utterance to the character. Expressive features orient the listener towards the speaker as well, focusing their attention on the performance of the individual in addition to the bonds that are presented for laughter.



Characters in conversation, moreover, may not necessarily be fully fictitious identities but can be imaginary versions of the speaker him or herself. Example 6.3 demonstrates a speaker projecting a character (a version of herself) to create a wrinkle. In this text, the speakers create humour by reflecting on an episode of the television comedy show, *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), in which the actor Chris Farley pretended to be a male exotic dancer despite his overweight appearance. After the participants laugh off the wrinkle that Chris Farley has made by participating in this skit, speaker C creates a wrinkle in character by presenting a bond around the older actor, Patrick Swayze.

<p>M: The funniest thing I've ever seen is- do you ge- it was like a really really old SNL skit and Patrick Swayze was on and they were doing this um</p> <p>C: Chippendales?</p> <p>M: The Chippendales ==</p> <p>C: == With Chris Farley? == Yeah</p> <p>M: == with Chris Farley!</p> <p>G: == Oh::: yeah::: ew:::</p> <p>L: == Oh my (LV) god!</p> <p>M: == Chris Farley's like rollin off his shirt</p> <p>M, G, L: (L) ...</p> <p>C: And you realize like in that moment that Patrick Swayze's kinda hot and then you're like "Oh!* Patrick Swayze!" (LO-L, G) and you're like == "Wait wait" ...</p> <p>M: == And then you look at the hair and you're like "Oh wait kinda old"</p> <p>L: == (L)</p>	<p>(grad: intens 'not serious')</p> <p>(grad: intens negative appreciation)</p> <p>positive <i>t</i>-appreciation + Chippendales</p> <p>negative <i>t</i>-appreciation + Chris Farley</p> <p>negative <i>t</i>-appreciation + Chris Farley (negative attitude<sup>3</sup>)</p> <p>positive <i>t</i>-appreciation + stripping</p> <p>positive appreciation + Patrick Swayze</p> <p>positive <i>t</i>-affect + Patrick Swayze</p> <p>neg <i>t</i>-appreciation + Patrick Swayze's hair</p> <p>neg appreciation (old) + Patrick Swayze</p>
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**Example 6.3: Projecting a character to create a wrinkle between attractiveness bonds (from Table 8.25 in Appendix).**

The participants negotiate a laughing affiliation around male attractiveness ideals, establishing first that they couple Chris Farley with negative aesthetic appreciation and that he has created a wrinkle in presenting himself as an attractive Chippendale dancer (see Figure 6.5).

<sup>3</sup> Indicated by euphemism (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.4; also Table 8.25 in Appendix).



**Figure 6.5: Actors Patrick Swayze (left) and Chris Farley (right) play roles as “Chippendales” strippers (*The sketch: Chippendales*, n.d.).**

C then furthers the humour by creating a wrinkle with age bonds, pretending to be attracted to Patrick Swayze, using voice quality and intonation to mark the wrinkle and her projected character (“Oh! Patrick Swayze!”). C’s voice quality is breathy and low, and she uses a marked Tone 5 (Halliday & Greaves, 2008) instead of the Tone 3 she has been using, indicating that her projected speech is out of the ordinary and is attributed to the generalised “you” that she has identified. These features are “implicit cues” to characterisation (Culpeper, 2001, p. 190) signalling C’s positive affect and her attribution of that affect to the character that she is projecting. When M reacts by coupling negative appreciation with Patrick Swayze for being too “old”, it becomes clear that C has jokingly presented a coupling that does not align with the bond around youth that she shares with these participants. However, because C adopted a character—a kind of imagined version of herself—in presenting it, these participants laugh together and play along with it as they are all “in on the joke”. Thus, projecting a character in convivial conversational humour allows speakers to create and acknowledge wrinkles while attributing them to a fictitious individual “other”, representing values that are in turn separated from the actual participants at talk.

In comedy, the portrayal of funny characters may also be considered through affiliation in a similar light. For instance, the popular film characters played by actor Sacha Baron Cohen such as “Borat” and “Bruno” (see Figure 6.6) create wrinkles that are laughed off by film audiences because they are attributed to the exaggerated, out-of-place, naïve characters (see also Behn (2009) on Baron Cohen’s character, “Ali G”). By displaying his

characters as humorously naïve, he confirms his underlying identity as a shared non-naïve “bearer” of the appropriate bonds (Wennerstrom, 2000, p. 315).



**Figure 6.6: Sacha Baron Cohen as “Borat” (left) and as “Bruno” (right). (Sacha Baron Cohen in the movie “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.”, n.d. (Copyright 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox); Bruno, n.d. (Copyright Universal Pictures)).**

Even racist remarks, such as anti-Semitic comments made by Borat, are made “comedic” by the fact that not only is it attributed, and under cover of, the fictitious character but that audiences can interpret an underlying bond on the part of the actor that they can share together. That is, as an actor playing in a play frame and one who is in fact a member of the Jewish community, Baron Cohen’s characterisation allows him to create wrinkles with bonds that he can expect are unshared by his viewers (who are instead expected to commune around bonds against racism and such), and not to be seen as the “wrinkle-maker” himself.<sup>4</sup> The character is set up to be one who everyone can laugh at due to all of the wrinkles he makes in our cultural context, and by his inability to negotiate the proper bonds (see also Paolucci & Richardson (2006) on *Seinfeld*).

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4 Baron Cohen’s characters are, however, highly controversial since he often creates tension with ideological bonds and makes his characters so blatantly (and extremely) ignorant to these that they can create “violations”, rather than wrinkles, with the bonds and bondicons that are core to large communities. Also, there is a chance that some may interpret the characters’ behaviour as acceptable, and commune around the bonds instead, promoting the prejudice and other negative ideologies that he is laughing off.

Characterisation allows speakers to distance themselves from a message by pretending to *be* the attributable other, thereby *acting out* the message and making it more explicitly playful. So, for instance, while the bonds presented by Baron Cohen's characters may be taken at face value, as serious, he is able not only to offer the justification that he is being humorous (creating wrinkles) but that it is not he but his *characters* who presented them. Humorous communication is in this way "retractable" (Attardo, 1994, p. 326). The retractability of humour and possibilities for characterisation are useful for affiliation purposes because participants can maintain affiliative ties by claiming that they are attempting to laugh things off with their interlocutors (and thereby bond together). In laughing affiliation, "neither participant will be able to hold the other responsible for what has been understood" (Goffman, 1986, p. 515), and in these terms humour may be a kind of coercive strategy as well. That is, speakers can use humour to their advantage when creating a potential violation because by excusing their talk as 'only joking', they appeal to maintaining affiliation with their interlocutors and can thereby coerce them to laugh along. From this consideration of characterisation and comedy, it is apparent that how we affiliate is relevant across instances of humour use and so affiliation could be successfully applied to other types of talk.

### **6.2.3 Focus on ideology: the boundaries of what we can laugh off**

While this thesis concerns conversational humour and the friendships that are reinforced through it, affiliation also involves more serious talk and ideological values. Research approaching these areas through affiliation would be useful, as the tensions between kinds of bonds that *cannot* be laughed off would inform us of what kinds of bond networks are salient in the culture being constructed. This would involve a focus on the condemning strategy of affiliation, whereby participants reject bonds that are too serious to defer, such as bondicons at the level of ideology (e.g. religious icons). The boundaries between what we can laugh at and what we can condemn would also be an interesting area for the study of bond networks at the level of culture. This type of research would contribute to the affiliation model by informing the levels of the individuation cline and to critical discourse research by developing in particular how ideology affects how we affiliate.

In regards to the limitations that have been stated for this study in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1.1, it would also be propitious to consider text examples from contexts other than casual conversation between friends who are positioned in the particular ideological configurations of this data set. So, data of participants from other cultures outside of Canada and who vary in age, gender, class, and other categories of ideology could be studied to show how they may vary in their use of conversational humour. In terms of age, for instance, Ervin-Tripp, Lampert, Escalara and Reyes (2004) have proposed five identifiable changes from children's to adult's humorous conversations (including a radical change from topics in the immediate context to shared social topics by the age of ten).

Data of participants who are not friends would further affect the use of strategies of affiliation. In affiliation theory, ideological bonds are brought into conversational humour to defer them and manage the tensions as a reality of other, alternative affiliative discourses (rather than the current conversation). This is particularly evident for conversations amongst close friends who share similar cultural and community backgrounds. However, in other discourses it may perhaps be the case that ideological bonds are brought into the conversation to be confirmed (such as in institutional discourses, for example). Holmes (2000a; see also Holmes & Marra 2002, 2004, 2006), for instance, has shown that humour in the workplace can function both repressively by superiors to maintain positions of power and subversively by subordinates to challenge those power structures, with humour still providing a way to maintain social cohesion and collegiality. These humorous negotiations thus have similarities to the negotiation of contrasting affiliative bonds, and this would be an interesting topic for exploration.

#### **6.2.4 More on laughter and visual semiotics**

This study has offered the first systemic functional semiotic study of laughter and has shown that it can be perceived as a semiotic system in its own right. In convivial conversational humour, laughter was shown to convey attitudinal meanings in the system of APPRAISAL. Future research may show that attitudes conveyed by laughter in conversational humour can also be graded in terms of the system of GRADUATION: FORCE:

INTENSIFICATION.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in the synonyms and related words for laughter in the Merriam-Webster online thesaurus, laughter is differentially defined in degrees and by sound types:

Giggle, snicker, snigger, titter, chortle, chuckle, guffaw, cackle; and also shriek, hoot, scream, shout, snort, roar (with laughter).

Words such as “snigger”, “guffaw”, and “hoot” suggest differentiation in sound types, while a “roar” will likely be more intensified than a “titter”. Expression features such as amplitude and length will affect how intensified a laugh may be. Certain laughter types such as “giggle”, “snicker” and “chuckle” seem to realise low GRADUATION (or mitigation of intensity), while structures such as “roar”, “shout” and “scream” realise high GRADUATION (other defined structures seem relatively neutral). For instance, a scream is defined as “to voice a sudden sharp loud cry” (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2010), and the meaning of high INTENSIFICATION is indicated by its expression features. A scream is characterised by open aperture, voicing and a front-spread posture, and involves a single burst of loud amplitude (see *Scream* 🗣️ in Chapter 6 examples of “other clips” in Appendix C).

A “giggle”, on the other hand, indicates low INTENSIFICATION with its combination of features. It is voiced with close constriction, front-spread posture, pulsed iteration and quiet amplitude (see *Giggle* 🗣️ in Chapter 6 examples of “other clips” in Appendix C). This type of laugh is defined as “to laugh with repeated short catches of the breath” (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2010), which emphasizes the contained character of the giggle and also shows how it is iterated. These features would contribute to the meaning of low INTENSIFICATION in GRADUATION.

The chuckle also indicates low INTENSIFICATION but differs from a giggle by its constriction as it is mid-contained but not fully closed and by its posture which is further back (see *Chuckle* 🗣️ in Chapter 6 examples of “other clips” in Appendix C). It is voiced with low amplitude, and its iteration is pulsed. A chuckle is defined as “to laugh inwardly or quietly” or “to make a continuous gentle sound resembling suppressed mirth”

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Susan Hood for suggesting this to me and to Chris Cléirigh for helping me to consider the potentiality of laughter.

(*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2010), showing its potential both in the systems of GRADUATION and ATTITUDE. Especially the low amplitude and pulsed iteration of the laugh indicates its construal of mitigated INTENSIFICATION.

For future study, these different laughter sound types could be found to systematically distinguish differences in choices of GRADUATION, increasing the meaning potential of laughter in a social semiotic perspective. Additionally, while this thesis has provided an outline of laughter's semiotic resources for convivial conversational humour, future studies could pursue its potential in other contexts.

Beyond laughter, it was explained in the limitations of this study that the audio recorded data of this thesis did not allow for a treatment of visual semiotics like gesture and facial expression. Future research incorporating visual data could identify non-laughter reactions to humour such as smiling and additional elements of the humorous performance (Norrick, 2004b) as clues to where humour occurs in conversation. It would also be useful to explore how affiliation may be construed through a range of non-verbal semiotic resources, such as those considered by Zappavigna (2010), as well as image-verbiage relations examined by Caple, by Knox, Patpong, & Piriyaasilpa, and by Tian (in Bednarek & Martin, 2010). In the following section, for instance, affiliation is shown to be informative in the analysis of music by Caldwell (2010).

### **6.2.5 Other applications of affiliation: reintegrating, restoring and creating a fan base**

Initial applications of the theory of affiliation have shown its value as a model for interpreting texts of different genres and modalities, such as rap music (Caldwell, 2010) and youth justice conferencing (Zappavigna, 2007; Zappavigna et al., forthcoming). In his multimodal study of the music of popular rap artist Kanye West, Caldwell (2010) uses affiliation to describe how West creates a wide-ranging fan base. Rather than reinforcing ideological networks as do other rappers, West associates with many different personal bond networks by expressing a variety of distinct meanings, thereby avoiding polarisation of his audience. West presents bonds in the form of rapping identities, realised by

different styles of rhythmic synchronicity, that appeal to many and varied kinds of bond networks. Caldwell shows that West in this way infuses himself with a range of bonds, and that he himself becomes a bondicon to his audiences around which they commune. Affiliation is therefore revealing for the study of how particular entertainers are more or less successful in a culture.

It is also useful to consider affiliation in the legal context, as has been demonstrated by Zappavigna's (2007) and Zappavigna et al.'s (forthcoming) studies of discourse in Australian Youth Justice Conferences (YJC). Zappavigna (2007) exhibits how Braithwaite's (1989) notion of "reintegrative shaming" in the conferences can be seen through affiliation, in terms of how the conference participants present bonds that reflect the attitudes of the community into which the young person (i.e. the perpetrator of the crime) is being re-socialised. She finds that the young persons (YP) construe their families as significant networks through bonds realised by evaluative couplings in their discourse. In Zappavigna et al. (forthcoming), the authors identify an instructive "push-pull affiliation" strategy/movement that is employed by an Ethnic Liaison Officer (ELO) interacting with a Lebanese Islamic YP. Considering how particular couplings, such as "respect + mother" and "respect + Hijab", accumulate in this officer's discourse, they show that the ELO alternates between appropriate and inappropriate bonds of the Lebanese Islamic community to align himself with the YP and then judge his behaviour. This alternation makes clear what bonds the YP should hold to be reintegrated as part of this community. This is informative for theorising affiliation as well as it shows how speakers not only commune, laugh and condemn together, but how they may be reintegrated into communities with others through discourse.

Thus, the model of affiliation developed in this thesis can be usefully applied to different contexts and can be analysed as a process that occurs over different timeframes (e.g. the ontogenesis of the "star" Kanye West; the logogenesis of a single conference text of restorative justice; and the phylogensis of the communities involved).



## 6.3 Conclusion to this study

To summarise, this thesis has undertaken a study of conversational humour between friends that has multiple focal points. These points included the kinds of meanings that can be interpreted in laughter; the solidarity-oriented social functions of the humorous negotiation between close friends; and the linguistic devices with which they most clearly accomplish these negotiations. It has also provided a social semiotic theory of communities in affiliation, which accounts for how conversational participants co-construct social bonds to come together and also negotiate tensions in their social identities as members of a culture. These features were analysed in a systemic functional linguistic framework, which provided a social theory of language as meaning that enabled the functional analysis of why we laugh. By using the SFL framework for the first time in a full and comprehensive analysis of humour, this thesis has contributed to linguistic humour research with new insights informed by systemic tools. The developments that have been made both contribute to systemic functional theory and offer challenges to be met in the future.

It is intended that the affiliation model will enable linguistic researchers to connect identifiable features in text, such as couplings, to a systematic model of communities that can be described in strictly social semiotic terms. This is particularly useful for texts pervaded by evaluative meaning, such as casual conversations, but is also relevant in other types of texts. It is acknowledged, however, that there is much more work to be done on the model of affiliation that has been introduced. As Martin (2001b) notes, the exploration of humour in multimodal text brings with it extreme pressure to better account for what is going on, but “that’s what new frontiers of description are for” (p. 335). This thesis faces the pressure brought on by the study of humour by presenting affiliation at the frontiers of a social semiotic theory. This thesis thus offers a starting point in the vast realm of inquiry into language as social interaction for pursuing the ways that we use talk to affiliate, while also conveying ideas, enacting relationships of solidarity and power, creating coherent texts, and ultimately, co-constructing our multi-faceted social lives.