Problems when performing cross-culturally an "anesthesia to the heart." What Japanese students say about the cinema of Roberto Benigni

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Le comique exige donc enfin, pour produire tout son effet, quelque chose comme une anesthésie momentanée du cœur. Il s'adresse à l'intelligence pure.

Henri Bergson

Introduction

Humor is a double-edged sword. It can be used to build intimacy and camaraderie, but when it fails it can exclude those who do not grasp the point of a funny story, or do not share with us the same entertaining experiences. If, in the appropriate contexts, being able to tell amusing anecdotes can turn into an act of self-assertion which may raise one's profile or enhance one's positive face, the same linguistic activity can disrupt the flow of an interaction when someone in the group does not get a joke, or simply choose not to laugh at it (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert 2009, Goatly 2012: 131).

In spite of having the power of cutting the tension, humor retains its potential to injure. This is why, from speech events in which jokes are used strategically, to pedagogical contexts in which humorous texts are employed for educational purposes, any interaction involving humor must be seen as fragile and needs to be handled with care (Norrick & Chiaro 2009; XVII).

This paper focuses on verbally expressed humor (VHE) intended not as a conversational strategy but as a professionally produced art form, that is, the comic. The paper is divided in two sections, one theoretical and one experimental. In the first part I will review some literature describing VEH as both a cognitive endeavor, and a social activity. I will also illustrate some examples on how humor can manifests itself

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linguistically. In the second part I will discuss the preliminary findings of a qualitative study aimed at exploring how Japanese university students perceive humor in Italian movies used as pedagogical material in the classroom.

The pedagogical context from which the data were drawn was a class in Italian culture I teach at Nagoya University of Arts, in Japan. The educational objective of the class was to analyze the comical techniques used by Italian comedian and movie director Roberto Benigni in his latest film production, and to disclose the messages Benigni intends to convey on screen. At the end of the course a questionnaire in Japanese consisting of two short-answer questions was administered in order to find out how students perceived Benigni's humor, and to draw a map of cultural values traceable in students' judgments.

Theoretical background

Humor as an intellectual consensus

It is not uncommon that humor fails to produce the desired effect. Humor malfunctions can be due to various reasons, the two most salient being that it is not understood or, if it is understood, it is not appreciated (Bell 2009). As for the former type of misunderstanding, obviously the difficulty of processing a humorous utterance increases in proportion to the size of cognitive effort required to interpret it against a network of fragments of encyclopedic knowledge without the possession of which everything becomes meaningless.

Indicative in this respect is Umberto Eco's perplexity at the decision by his Chinese editor to translate into Chinese "La Bustina di Minerva," an old collection of Eco's columns that appeared on the magazine *l'Espresso* in the early eighties. These columns were intended for a public of Italian readers. As a result each editorial was full of Italian idioms, literary hints, and allusions to topical events that became quickly out of date, to the point that nowadays such references might make no sense at all to contemporary Italian university students.

Apart from that, the conclusion that Eco drew with respect to this matter was optimistic: Compared to the past, when people were relatively indifferent, or even overtly hostiles to other cultures, the "impossible translation" commissioned by the Chinese editor is to be seen as a good sign, proving that "there are people who want to overcome the division among cultures, and who try to understand what the 'others' understand" (Eco 2007).

According to Habermas the primary function of speech is to provide the invisible tracks along which interactions can unfold smoothly toward a mutual understanding, or an inter-subjective 'consensus' (from Latin *cum-sentire*, 'to share the same feelings') between the interlocutors (Finlayson 2005: 34-35). Speech can fulfill this function to one condition: That the meaning of what is uttered rests on reasons.

Similarly we can say that when engaging in (intentional) VEH speakers organize the linguistic action in such a way that what is uttered can unfold toward the hearers' uptake. The linguistic action can fulfill this function to one condition: That the hearers perceive the utterance as significant, acknowledging the reasons upon which humor rests. Without this agreement, or 'consensus,' hilarity vanishes.

Humor, however, is not just a rational activity and a pleasure of the intellect. It is also a public affair with social meanings. Therefore, any occurrence of VEH (*i.e.*, joke telling, punning, teasing, etc.) must be observed in relation to contextualization cues of power, gender, solidarity, and principles of politeness that may differ remarkably across cultures (Norrick 2006).

Humor as a social activity

With regards to conversational humor, Oda (2009) pointed out that in Japan people have "a unconscious sense of the appropriateness of the occasion," which he calls *waraino-ba* ('laughter appropriate places'). It can be objected that this is true not only in Japan but everywhere. The remark however discloses a prominent feature of Japanese linguistic etiquette, that is, the comparatively strong sense of *ba* ('place') the Japanese people feel, and their concern about the degree of intimacy one has with the interlocutor(s).

The truth, I believe, is that [the Japanese] love to laugh. It is just that our conventional wisdom says that we should not laugh indiscriminately or excessively; and so Japanese culture prescribes where to laugh and where not to laugh. People tend to avoid laughter in formal occasions, but in compensation they reserve places they can laugh openly and to their heart's content. (Oda 2009: 18)

It is undeniable that in the Japanese society there exists a rather clear-cut opposition between *uchi* (in-group), with whom communication is safe, and *soto* (outgroup) or *yoso* (strangers), with whom the risk of ridiculing or being ridiculed should be prevented.

On the same line Nagashima (2009) suggests that the fondness the Japanese have

for *sha-re* ('puns') depends on its "safeness." Japanese speakers tend to avoid as much as possible bringing up conflictive situations by embarrassing themselves and/or the hearer. As people converse, Nagashima says, "the speakers wonders if an obvious joke might humiliate or embarrass the hearer," not only by mentioning arguments that can offend the hearer's sensibility, but also by hurting their own positive face in case they were unable to grasp the point of a joke.

Jokes and their appreciation often depend upon one's capability to understand them and one's personality and circumstances in life. In contrast, when *sha-re* is used there is no such risk of embarrassment because the rules are clear. The hearer is free to respond with any of the following reactions: 1) Just laugh at it, 2) Respond with a further *sha-re*, 3) Just ignore it. (Nagashima 2009: 78)

As Takekuro (2009) pointed out, *sha-re* based humor is harmless because it relies on a form of word-bounded rhetoric which does not expand the point of view outward, running the risk of triggering dangerous innuendo or insinuations, but remains enclosed within the scope of the discourse-context. On the other hand, conversational jokes and humorous narrations anchor the point of view beyond the discourse-context introducing new references.

In a study that compared Japanese and US movies, Japanese and US telefilms, and conversations among friends in Japanese as a native language (L1) and in English L1, Takakuro (2009) discovered that Japanese L1 and English L1 speakers conform to different communicative styles when engaging in conversational humor. Her data showed that English L1 American speakers do not appear to divide people rigidly in categories of personal distance as Japanese L1 speakers do. This, according to Takekuro (2009), may explain why many US L1 English speakers seem to be able to overcome the "awkwardness" in interpersonal relations, and to exchange jokes with anyone, regardless of personal-space divisions, accepting *a priori* the hazard of generating pragmatic failures.

In spoken English [...] self-assertion and individual expression play an important role, and the same is true for English jokes. Individual speakers use far-fetched rhetoric to elicit a source of jokes from outside the discourse-context in order to impress their own sense of humor on the conversational exchange. Thus, the way the point of view is drawn differently in Japanese and English jokes displays a preference in

each case for different rhetoric, which relates to distinctive socio-linguistic practices in each respective language and culture. (Takekuro 2009: 94)

Across cultures, the contextual parameters in which interaction unfolds may change. The availability of topics to be used for humorous purposes may vary, and the settings in which humor is considered appropriate/inappropriate may drastically differ. However, if the above is undeniable at a macro (*i.e.*, social) level of analysis, at the micro (*i.e.*, semantic) level, the mechanisms of humor are universal and transcultural (Attardo 1994, 2001).

Humor as universal pleasure in incongruity

In his essay on laughter, *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, Bergson (1900) defined humor as an inherently human quality that cannot possibly exist outside of what is strictly human. A landscape, for example, could never induce us laughing, unless we spot some human trace in it. We may laugh watching animals, but it would be only because we recognize some human behavior in them. We can ultimately laugh at an object, but it would be only because its shape reminds us of something human. Bergson used the words *comique* ('humor/comic') and *rire* ('laughter') interchangeably, but 'comic' is a source of humor, and 'laughter' is its consequence.

Any occurrence of humor, beside of being echoic of a human characteristic, shows a distinctive intrinsic feature, that is, incongruity. One of the best-known descriptions of laughter resulting from the discernment of incongruity is in Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1844):

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. (Quoted in Attardo 1994: 48)

Similarly Pirandello described humor as a bewilderment arising from the "sentimento del contrario" (feeling of the opposite) in his Saggio sull'umorismo (1908). Referring to the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (Raskin 1985), the above insights can be systematized into a linguistic framework of analysis which allows us to see incongruity as a clash between opposed semantic scripts, namely between forms in which people store stereotypical knowledge about actions and events in the world. With

Attardo (1994: 197) a script can be defined as "an organized chunk of information about something (in the broadest sense), [...] a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc." When confronted with a humorous occurrence, it is the surprising recognition of a sudden script-collision that releases the psychic energy we commonly refer to as laughter (Norrik 2006) or, in a less intense exhibition, as smile.

Verbally, humor can manifest itself in various forms, from puns to dialogue, from jokes to novels, plays and movies but, as Raskin (1985) pointed out, any text becomes humorous only when both of the following conditions are satisfied:

- 1) The text must be compatible, fully or in part, with two scripts.
- 2) The two scripts, with which the text is compatible, must be opposite.

The risk of generating socio-pragmatic failures however needs always to be estimated. There are several pre-conditions to satisfy, among others: That the hearers will perceive what is being uttered as suitable to the context; That they will not be offended by what is being said, due for example to gender, religious or racial biases; That they will be undisturbed by any scatological or obscene material the text may contain, etc. (cf. Attardo 1994: 197).

This bring us back to the social facet of humor, as well as to Bergson (1900), who subsumed the above pre-conditions into the metaphoric expression "anesthésie du cœur" ('anesthesia of the heart'), indicating a withdrawal from any emotive involvement with the object of laughter.

How humor works linguistically: Script opposition, from syllable to discourse

Incongruity may operate at any level of language, on a linguistic continuum that extends from the morphological-syntactic level, right up to discourse (Simpson 2006). The following example can illustrate how VEH works, according to the mechanism described above.

Word play

Puns represent a type of lexical incongruity situated at the grammatical end of the continuum. In this form of verbal play two or more meanings are suggested through the use of multiple-meanings or similar-sounding words. Puns often occur in the punch line of a joke, and are common to all languages and ages. Previously I mentioned Japanese

sha-re, which is a widely used humorous technique, widely used in conversational jokes (cf. Takekuro 2009), in *rakugo* (Ōshima 2009), *manzai* (comical sketches performed by a duo playing respectively the role of *boke*, 'the fool,' and *tsukkomi*, 'the wit') (Stocker 2009), and TV commercial advertisement (Nakashima 2009, Wells 2009).

The reasons for this fondness in Japan are not only cultural, as we saw, but also linguistic. The Japanese syllabic system provides in fact an extraordinary fertile field for punning. Let us examine, as an example of *sha-re*, the following lexical item, which is a compound noun mainly used by middle-aged Japanese *sarariman* ('male working class'). One day a senior male colleague of mine invited me to the following communicative event:

The word is a fancy combination between the verb 飲む nomu ('to drink') and the English word 'communication' the meaning of which is "enjoying communication between co-workers while drinking alcoholic beverages after working hours."

Incongruity here is purely grammatical (i.e., morphological). The syllabic change ($/\text{kom}/\rightarrow/\text{no}/$) produces a distortion of the English word that is supposed to generate a funny effect. To grasp the witty side of the neologism, one needs to appreciate the coherent overlapping of the images suggested by the syllabic discrepancy. To do this one must also know the subculture of Japanese company employees, among whom drinking beer with colleagues after a day of hard work represents a valuable chance to communicate and to talk frankly to each other in a stress-free environment.

Clash of speech acts

To practically show students how script opposition operates, I usually analyze the opening scene of Benigni's *La vita è bella* (Appendix 1). Early in the movie the events are set in Arezzo (Italy) in 1939. To familiarize students with the context background historic information needs to be provided.

The political climate in Italy is dramatically changing. The foreign ministers of the Kingdom of Italy and Nazi Germany had just signed the Pact of Steel. Most important, it should not be forgotten that since 1938 the *leggi razziali* ('racial laws') are being promulgated to enforce discrimination, largely against the Jewish. The protagonist of the movie is Guido Orefice (Roberto Benigni), a young Jewish man who through the first

part of the story exasperates the fascist authorities with his eccentric behavior.

In the opening scene Guido and his friend Ferruccio are enjoying a driving in the countryside on a Fiat Balilla convertible. Suddenly the car's brakes stop working. As the car is approaching a village, the two friends start panicking, seeing that a crowd is gathering along the main road, waiting for the arrival of King Vittorio Emanuele III. Ferruccio tries to steer the car, while Guido stands up shouting the following:

(2) Via! Via! Non ci so'freni! Go away, move! There are no brakes!

In doing so Guido stretches his right arm, waving it in the air. That gesture is an indication of the danger, and a request that the people step aside. In response, the villagers greet him with the fascist salute, shouting the utterance in (3)

(3) Viva il re! Long live the king!

This scene is a collision of two scripts: The crowd expecting the arrival of the king's car, vs. the new scenario with Guido and Ferruccio driving a car out of control which unexpectedly bursts into the previous scheme. This clash activates a sequence of further oppositions.

For instance, at the verbal level we have an incompatibility of speech acts (*i.e.*, Guido's request vs. the crowd's acclamation). At the non-verbal level, there is a disagreement from the kinetic viewpoint (*i.e.*, Guido's stretching his arm for the purpose of warning vs. the crowd's salute). At the cognitive level, we perceive that a further misunderstanding has been generated with the exchange of identity that gives rise to a parody: The king is not supposed to stand up on the car greeting the crowd with the Roman salute. Therefore the image of Guido, whom the crowd thought was the king, reminds us of Mussolini. Ironically, a common man of Jewish descent has been mistaken with the rulers of a country where anti-Semitic laws apply.

Japanese university students majoring in arts usually do not possess the background knowledge required to process this scene. However if the due amount of historical information is provided before watching it a second time, a "consensus" can be reached, and the humorous intent can become understandable.

Flouting of conversational maxims

The following examples by Eco (quoted in Attardo 1994: 178) show how discourse-incongruity of a non-cooperative kind are activated:

- (4) "Excuse me, do you know what time is it?" "Yes."
- (5) "Can you pilot a motor boat?""Certainly. I served the army in Cuneo."

Humor here stems from the infringement of two conversational maxims: Quantity in (4) and Relation in (5).

Moreover, in order to understand that the speaker is being ironic, in example (5) the hearer must be able to calculate the implicature: Cuneo is a mountain town situated in Northern Italy with no relation whatsoever with water sports.

Mismatch of text and discourse-context

As an example of discrepancy between text and discourse-context let us consider another scene from *Life is beautiful* in which Guido, the protagonist, beautifies reality through his ability to use the words in a fanciful way. One day Guido and his five year old son Giosuè are walking in the streets. The child notices a sign posted in the window of a coffee shop that says "*Vietato l'ingresso ai cani e agli ebrei*" ('Entry denied to dogs and Jews'). The child asks his father to tell him the meaning.

Giosué: "No Jews or Dogs Allowed." Why Jews and dogs are not allowed, daddy? Guido: Oh, that. They do not allow Jewish and dogs. "Not Allowed" signs are the latest trend! [···] For example, the farmacy over there ··· The other day I was with my Chinese friend and his pet kangaroo, but their sign said "No Chinese or Kangaroos Allowed," and I said to my friend, "Well, what can we do? They don't like Chinese and kangaroos." [···]

Guido manages to reveal the absurdity of the sign to the child without openly criticizing it, but by replacing the expected explanation with a fabrication that sounds like a fairy-tale in which Jewish and dogs, Spaniards and horses, Chinese and kangaroos, Visigoths and spiders become in turn protagonists of the ban. The child does not notice

the shift (*i.e.*, a fairy-tale is being provided rather than a rational explanations), and takes the story for an answer. But the audience is taken by surprise and understands that Guido's reply is satirical condemnation of that discriminatory measure (Zamborlin 2012).

The study

The survey involved 34 students who attended a one semester class (15 weekly classes of 90 minutes each) in Italian culture of which I am in charge at Nagoya University of Arts. In the academic year 2013 the class under consideration focused on the following movies written, directed and starred by Roberto Benigni: La vita è bella (Life is beautiful, 1996), Pinocchio (2002), and La tigre e la neve (The tiger and the snow, 2005).

La vita è bella is a tragicomedy in which Benigni plays Guido Orefice, an Italian Jewish man blessed with the gift of a vivid imagination and the talent of knowing how to use the words to beautify reality. Thanks to this skill Guido manages to create a playful world, parallel to the real one, that allows him to protect his son from the horror of the concentration camp of Auschwitz. Pinocchio is based on the novel The adventures of Pinocchio (1883) by Carlo Collodi. The plot unfolds through a relentless succession of extraordinary episodes protagonist of which is Pinocchio, an animated marionette, impersonated by Benigni. Along with Pinocchio's naivety, what stands out in this movie is the drama of responsibility inherent in human free will. Finally, La Tigre e la neve is a romantic comedy set in Rome and in Baghdad during the days of the Iraq war. Here Benigni plays the role of Attilio de Giovanni, a college professor of literature and a poet struggling for saving Vittoria, the woman he loves whom he found lying in a coma in an Iraqi hospital.

The pedagogical purpose of the class was to analyze the comical technique of Benigni, and to reflect on the message expressed in the target films.

Although most of the students obtained credits in Italian at the A1 level, this is still insufficient to grasp a full understanding of Benigni's works in the original; Knowledge of the L2 was not considered a prerequisite to attend the class, and the movies were integrally shown in Italian with Japanese subtitles. For the analysis of prominent scenes transcripts in Japanese reproducing the movie subtitles were provided. In several cases the texts were expanded to make them as faithful as possible to the original. Two native speakers of Japanese fluent in Italian helped me with the transcriptions and with the summary of critical essays on the cinema of Roberto Benigni (among which Celli 2001,

Russo Bullaro 2005, Benigni 2010, Minnini & Ballandi 2011). The materials for the class were bound in a booklet (Zamborlin 2013).

Method

At the outset of the inquiry the following exploratory questions were addressed:

- 1) How do students perceive Benigni's humor: Close to them or far from them?
- 2) What cultural values are traceable in students judgments, how these values influence the idea of VEH they have?

With Jackendoff (2007), it can be said that values direct the ways people judge any forms of behavior—including language behavior, and VEH as a form of language behavior. In Jackendoff's terminology the word "value" defines "a conceptualized abstract property connected to (conceptualized) objects, persons and actions." Values serve as intermediary in a system of "folk logic," the rules of which function like a sort of internal accounting system.

Cultures vary in what values are conventionally assigned to what sorts of entity in what context, but, according to my hypothesis, the basic logic of value—that is, the internal accounting system—is to some degree universal: it establishes the terms in which judgments of value and inferences based on value are framed. (Jackendoff 2007: 277)

Values always come with a valence, positive or negative, and can be differentiated into various types, depending on the "inferences that they license" (Jackendoff 2007: 279), for example pleasure vs. suffering, appropriateness vs. inappropriateness. Based on Jakendoff's taxonomy, for the purpose of the current analysis I focused only on affective and normative values, which are defined as follows:

- A situation or action has affective value (A-value) for an individual X if it yields pleasure or suffering, if it *feels good* or *feels bad* to X.
- A situation or action has normative value (N-value) for an individual X to the extent that it conforms to norms, it is seems good/right or bad/wrong to X.

The data were drawn from a questionnaire in Japanese (Appendix 2) consisting of

two short-answer questions that was administered via e-mail by the end of the course.

- Question 1 One aspect of Benigni's works is that he approaches humorously situations that are not comical at all, as if he wanted us to smile even in front of serious circumstances. What do you think about his humor?
- Question 2 How does Benigni's humor differ from Japanese humor?

As for the introductory part of the first question, students had already become familiar with Benigni's works when the questionnaire was administered, having also had the chance to watch interviews, subtitled in Japanese, in which Benigni spoke about his films.

Regarding the second question, I admit that the expression "Japanese humor" is too general, and Benigni should not be seen as the representative of Italian humor tout court. The question however was provocatively worded in such broad terms. My intention was to give students the chance to formulate their judgments freely and to collect a wide a range of comments as possible.

Out of 53 students attending the class, 39 agreed to act as informants and replied. Five questionnaires were discarded for containing answers that were considered unclear, or not pertinent to the content of the questions.

Analysis and discussion

Descriptive coding was the approach I adopted to perform the content analysis of the 34 responses (Appendix 3). This procedure is usually carried out during a first cycle coding phase and consists in summarizing in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data such as interviews transcripts, field notes, journals or—as in this case—e-mail correspondence. According to Tesch (1990) "it is important that these [codes] are identifications of the *topic*, not abbreviations of *the content*" (quoted in Saldaña 2009: 70), the *topic* being what is talked or written about, and the *content* being the substance of the message. This method of analysis consents to develop a sort of "basic vocabulary" of data that will be used to build categories for further analytic work (Saldaña 2009: 71).

Table 1 Answers to Question 1

Overall judgment 67%	+	His humor is instrumental.
Affective values 55% feel good vs. feel bad + ←	+	I would like to be like him [4 33] He is wonderful [10 19 21 29] He has a kind heart [11] His humor is comprehensible and touches your heart [12 24] He is good [16] I admire him [18] His movies are good and worth watching [20] If I had a father like Guido everyday life would be enjoyable [22] I like him [28] He is altruistic [31]
	.555	At first it seemed too light, and it was sort of disturbing [1] I felt a gap between reality and his positive vision of life [7 9] I did not appreciate the mixture of serious and comic [32]

In square brackets the number of the corresponding comments (cf. Appendix 3)

Table 2 Answers to Question 2

Overall Judgment 94%	The difference is outstanding.
Motivations (taking Japanese humor	(a) Word-bounded rhetoric [1 3 4 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 23 24 25 29 30 32 33 34]
as a term of comparison) (a) 64%, (b) 38%, (c) 24%	(b) Pursuing of laugh in itself [5 6 12 13 14 19 20 22 23 26 28 30 32]
	(c) Concern of not to be offensive to hearers [2 10 11 24 27 30 31 33]

In square brackets the number of the corresponding comment (cf. Appendix 3)

Answers to Question 1 display a common pattern of assessment. They focused on the ability by the actor to use humor for creating a pedagogical discourse that, although quite unusual, was largely understood and appreciated by the young Japanese who participated in this survey. Based on this cluster of judgments the label that I found more suitable to describe Benigni's humor was "instrumental," as it goes far beyond the mere effort of making people laugh. In students own words Benigni's humor was described as "useful," "helpful," "healing," etc. That is to say, Benigni does not just entertain: He is seriously compromised in human life. His works have the moral intent of

persuading that life is precious and worth living, no matter what. He also teaches that imagination is a valuable resource for finding solutions to problems, and that love is above everything. These are quite robust qualities that usually impress students attending the class.

In 55% of the comments A-values were explicitly stated, predominantly to express admiration and approval (cf. Table 1). Only in 4 cases negative values were detected. These judgments reveal that the proactive mental attitude and the sense of humor displayed by the protagonists can be perceived as upsettingly in conflict with the events narrated in the movies.

In 94% of the answers to Question 2, the difference with Japanese humor was said to be outstanding. Japanese humor was described as characterized by word-bounded rhetoric. This corroborates Takekuro's (2009) findings. In this respect it is interesting to note that during class I never mentioned any of the studies on Japanese humor to which I have referred in this paper. The respondents' feedback was based only on what they taught to be "Japanese humor." In students' words, a typical trait of Japanese professional VHE is that language is *geijutsu*, 'an art.' Comedians color their discourse with an astonishing variety of wordplay and *kotoba no aya*, 'figures of speech.' I have found relevant the comment of a student who lived in the US for several years. He observed that in the West, humor is widely and cleverly used by ordinary people in everyday interactions, while in Japan it is more a technical and artificial form of expression that only professionals know how to handle well (cf. Comment 3).

Between Benigni and the Japanese comedians, what seems to make the difference is Benigni's ability to transcend the language and to lead with nonchalance the comical discourse into a deep dimension in which philosophical, moral, historical, and political issues are interweaved.

Conversely, Japanese humor was said to be confined to language: "It is full of word games," "It is made of words and voice." For this reason, as students pointed out, it can appear nonsensical to foreigners who do not possess a solid competence in Japanese. Benigni, on the contrary, is comprehensible even to those who cannot enjoy his movies in the original, because his humor is "deep," "resounds in your hearts" and "is like a medicine."

In 38% of the answers it was observed that the Japanese comedians do not appear to have either pedagogical intents or political concerns. In Japan, students said, professional humor is basically *warai* ('laugh'), the art of pursuing laughter as an end in itself. Therefore, compared to Benigni, Japanese comedians may seem extremely

superficial. Moreover, *warai* was said to revolve only around the idea of *omoshirosa*, a term that indicates what is funny, weird, ridiculous, comic, curious, or all these qualities at once. It was also observed that Japanese *warai* often features harsh elements such as aggressiveness, self-harm, and coarseness, whereas Benigni's art is constantly pervaded by lightness and grace—not surprisingly as in many ways Benigni is reminiscent of Charles Chaplin.

What struck me most with these remarks is that students associated Benigni exclusively to Japanese actors participating in *owarai bangumi*, comedy programs broadcast nightly on several TV channels which are very popular among the younger generation. The term of comparison however is inaccurate. I was expecting much broader comparisons. None of the informants, for instance, referred to Japanese humor on the big screen. From which we may assume that the form of professional humor students are mostly familiar with is warai.

Finally, in 24% of the comments I found N-values, that is, values that concern "conformity to social norms, including moral/ethic norms, [···] and cultural norms such as custom, manners and etiquette" (Jakendoff 2007: 277). A prominent trait in Japanese humor was said to be the adherence to *jōshiki* ('commonsense'). Benigni appears to be free from this constraint. He goes straight on his own, without worrying about the consequences of what he says, Benigni is above all a satirist.

On the contrary, Japanese comedians do not venture into non-canonical themes. Benigni surprises, provokes, shocks the audience with unexpected topics, mixing serious with profane. In Japan this way of acting could be problematic, and it is preferable to keep comedy and tragedy, serious and funny matters apart. I have found this line of comments particularly intriguing and worth exploring as it may offer precious insights to investigate the reasons for the almost total lack of satire in Japan (cf. Wells 2009).

Conclusion

Although the mechanisms of humor work the same everywhere, for Bergson's "anesthesia of the heart" to be effective many variables need to be taken into account. Internal factors, such as individual preferences in communication styles, vary and norms of linguistic etiquette diverge widely across societies, making it reasonable to assume that people do not use and react to humor the same way ubiquitously.

To answer the questions addressed above, we can say that Benigni's humor was perceived both as close and distant. Students felt Benigni's humor near to them at the A-value level, but far from them at N-value level. Respondents enjoyed and admired

Benigni for the ability he has of approaching life in its totality, proposing messages universally convincing with courage, downplay and self-irony. Nevertheless the distance appeared to be abyssal when students focused on humor as an action regulated by social and cultural norms. In brief, Benigni *feels good* and *seems good* in so far as he is seen as the product of a foreign culture.

The idea that emerged from the Japanese students' responses is that humor is a delicate balance: The possibility of hurting hearer(s) needs always to be taken into account. Their feedback strengthens the image of humor as a double-edged sword. The students, however, seemed to focus their concerns largely on the sharper side of the blade.

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Appendix 1 Excerpt from the materials prepared for the class (cf. Zamborlin 2013)

名古屋芸術大学 2013年度 異文化入門 【イタリア】 愛の三部作 ~ロベルト・ベニーニの名作の手引~ 第2回: ライフ・イズ・ビュテフル(1)



これは素朴な物語だが、語るのは難しい

映画の始まりには、短いシーンがあります。普通、初めて『ライフ・イズ・ビューティフル』を見る人はこの開幕シーンを見逃してしまいがちですが、重要な部分ですので、完全に映画を理解するために、このシーンに注意しなければなりません。霧に包まれた暗闇の中を歩く人の姿が見えます。その人は寝ている子供を抱いています。それからボイスオーバーが聞こえます。

«Questa è una storia semplice, eppure non è facile raccontarla. Come in una favola c'è dolore, e come una favola, è piena di meraviglie e di felicità.»

«これは素朴な物語だが、語るのは難しい。童話のように悲しみがあり、童話のように驚きと幸せにあふれている。»

ここで大事な情報を得ることができます。まずこれは「物語」です。そしてこの物語は悲しみ、驚き、幸せにあふれています。終わりに同じボイスオーバーが聞こえます。すると映画の中のある誇張された「マジック」の部分に新たな光を投げかけ、それらの場面をもっと相応しく理解することができます。終幕の驚きを台無しにしたくないので、まずこれだけを念頭に置いてもらいたいと思います。フェルッチョの詩とショーペンハウアーの「素敵な理論」ストーリーがはじまると、闇から光にあふれた風景へと移ります。そして白い文字「Arezzo, Italy 1939」が現れます。この情報も見逃してはいけません。大事なことを示しているからです。これはファンタジーの空間に設定されたおとぎ話ではありません。特定の歴史的、地理的

空間に設定された物語です。最初に話しはじめる登場人物は、主人公のグイードではありません。彼の友達のフェルッチョです。フェルッチョは室内装飾家として働いていますが、詩を書き、哲学の本を読む趣味もあります。映画が始まる時、フェルッチョとグイードは、フェルッチョの車でアレッツォに向かっています。その車はフィアット・バリッラ (Fiat Balilla) です(この車の販売によってイタリアでは大規模なモータリーゼーションが始まりました)。グイードは運転しているフェルッチョのとなりで昼寝をしていて、フェルッチョは運転しながら自分が書いた詩を口ずさんでいます。



フェッルッチオの車、**Fiat Balilla**

«Canto quello che vedo, su niente soprassiedo! "Ecco" dissi al Caos "eccomi son tuo schiavo". Egli rispose "Bravo!". "Di che?" diss'io "Chi fu?" Libero alfine sono, che serve una carezza, quando di me l'ebbrezza, di me s'impossessò?!»

"何も省かず僕は目の前にある物事を詩に歌う。「ほら」とカオスに向かって僕は言った。「ほら、僕は君の奴隷だよ。」「いいね!」と彼は答えた。「何が?」と僕は言った。「誰だったのかな?」やっと自由になった。愛撫はいらない、喜びに酔っているから (...)》

この詩は、ただランダムに発した言葉のようですが、そうではないと思います。下線部に注意しましょう。これらの言葉は、この映画の人生に対する眼差しを表しています。キーフレーズはこれです。「何も省かず僕は目の前にある物事を詩に歌う。」この言葉は、レアリズム、つまり実現主義的な見方を表わしています。後で明らかになるように、フェルッチョはアルトゥル・ショーペンハウアー(1788-1860)という哲学者のファンです。この映画では、いくつかの箇所でショーペンハウアーに言及していますが、皮肉なことに彼の思考を逆転させています。ショーペンハウアーは『意志と表象としての世界』(1819年)という名著のなかで悲観的な人生観を表わしました。ショーペンハウアーにとっては、確かに「ライフ・イズ・NOT・ビューティフル」でしょう。なぜなら、彼にとって人生とは存在する意志に他ならず、生きる意志とは生きるための要求であり、要求することは苦しみを意味するからです。さらには、喜びや愛などはただの幻覚にすぎず、世の中は全てがカオス、すなわち大混乱で、そこには摂理もないと言うのです(「摂理」とは、キリスト教の創造主である神が、自ら創造した宇宙とその歴史を善へと導くために立てた永遠の計画を指し、これによって神は、被造物をそれぞれの目標に導きます)。最終的にショーペンハウアーは、人生に対する最もふさわしい態度は、要求を無くし、苦しみから解放されるために苦行することだと考えました。この考え方は映画のメッセージとは全く異なります。

フェルッチョの詩から浮かび上がるイメージは、ショーペンハウアーの悲観論と一致しません。それはむしろ「生きている喜びと幸せの賛歌」と捉えることができるでしょう。映画の中で、ショーペンハウアーの哲学に話が及ぶのは「寝る前のシーン」です。アレッツォについた夜、眠りに落ちる前にフェルッチョは、グイードに説明します。ショーペンハウアーによると人間は「意思」さえあれば何でもできるので、何かを願う時その願いに強く意志を込めれば、願いは必ず叶えられるというのです。明らかにフェルッチョはショーペンハウアーの思考を曲解しました。ショーペンハウアーの悲観論を根底から覆し、逆にそれを希望

に対する信頼感に代えたのです。しかもグイードはその考え方をとても気に入

り、"Che bella teorial"「何と素敵な理論だね!」といいながらそれを自分の「哲学」にすることにします。しかしながら、どんなに強く意志を込めても願いが叶えられる訳ではありません。世の中はそんなに甘くはないのです。グイードはこれから色々な「マジック」を行います。時によって彼は出来事の進行を制御できるかのように見えますが、それらは幸運と手品の偶然のコンビネーションにすぎません。フェルッチョとグイードが勝手に造った「ショーペンハウアーの素敵な理論」は人生に対する積極的な態度にはなりますが、それはあくまでも態度、メンタリンハウアー ティーであり、けっして魔法を使う方法にはなりません。グイードは、人生には

ベンハウァー ティーであり、けっして魔法を使う方法にはなりません。グイードは、人生には 苦しみに立ち向かわなければならない時があることをよく知っています。しか

も彼は現実から少しも逃げようとはしません。これからの出来事の進展を理解するために、グイードのこの現実主義的な、積極的なスタンスを見失わないように注意しましょう。 では、物語のあらすじに戻りましょう。

王様に万歳!

フェルッチョの車はコンバーチブルです。いい天気なので二人は自動車のルーフを開けて、トスカーナの 田舎で楽しいドライブを楽しんでいます。しかし、突然車のブレーキが故障します。二人の乗った車がある 村に近づくと、道端に集まった大勢の人の姿が現れます。彼らは国王ヴィットーリオ・エマヌエーレ2世の 到着を待っているのです。グイードは車の中に立って叫びながら人々に注意を促します。「危ない!ブレー キが故障した!退いて!」道を空けてもらうために身振り手振りで伝えようとして腕をまっすぐ伸ばしてい



るグイードに、人々はファシスト式の敬礼をし、大声で「王様万歳!」と挨拶します。ここで大きな誤解が生じます。猛烈なスピードで去って行くグイードの乗った車は、王様の車と間違えられたのです。「本物」の王様と女王様が乗った車はすぐ後で現れますが、時すでに遅し。緊張から解放された群衆は気もそぞろになっていて、王様と女王様は無視されてしまいます。ここはとて

もコミカルなシーンですが、滑稽な側面 (→誤解) は深刻な現実 (→暗い時代を思わせるファシスト式の敬礼) と絡み合っています。

現実の美化

次のシーンで、グイードとフェルッチョは農場の近くで車を止めます。フェルッチョは車の修理をし、グイードは散歩します。彼は農家に近づくと、エレオノーラという 女の子に出会って話しかけます。その会話を見てみましょう。

G: Oilà bella bambina! (きれいなお嬢ちゃん!) ごきげんいかが? 何しているの? [...] お名前は?

E: エレオノーラ。

G: はじめまして、僕はグイード王子でございます。

E: 王子さま?

G: 僕は王子だよ。知らないの? [...] それでは、失礼いたします。お姫さまに会う約束をしているので。

E: いつ?

G: 今すぐ。



Molto placere, "Principe Guido." 初めまして、僕はグイード「王子」 でございます。

この会話には、グイードの性格とこの映画の独特なユーモアの技法が表れています。グイードは女の子に、冗談で自分のことを「王子さま」と言いましたが、それはただの冗談ではありませんでした。けれどもそれは根拠のない嘘ではなく、前の場面の誤解と関連した想像的な展開になっています。そのプロセスを見てみましょう。 \rightarrow ① 最初に群衆はグイードが乗った車を王様の車と間違えました。これは事実です。 \rightarrow ② グイードは自分が王様であるかのように人々に感じさせることができました。ここからグイードの想像力が働き始めます。 \rightarrow ③ グイードは王様より年が若いので、遊びのつもりで「王子」になりました。もちろんグイードは、自分がほんとうの「王子さま」だとは思っていません。それは、ただの「プレイ(遊び)」なのですが、その時からグイードは、遊びのつもりでつぎつぎと同じような「嘘」をつきます。しかし、それらは不合理な、悪意からでた嘘ではなく、必ず前に起こった出来事(現実)に基づいています。しかもこのような遊びには、善良な意図があるのです。それらは「現実の美

化」だと言えるでしょう。つまり、好きな人を楽しませたり驚かせたりするために、グイードは言葉によって素敵な雰囲気を生み出すのです。そうすると現実は美しくなります。映画の前半ではこの「現実の美化」はただのプレイですが、後半ではその能力は愛している人(息子)を守るための方法になります。

グイードの最初の「嘘」に戻って、その展開を詳しく見てみましょう。女の子に別れの挨拶をしたとたん(「それでは、失礼します。お 姫さまに会う約束をしているので。」)、思いがけないことが起こり



ます。ある女の人(ドーラ)が空から降って来たのです。彼女は、家の二階でスズメバチの巣を燃やそうとしていましたが、ハチに指されてしまいパニックに陥って、窓の外にシャンプしました。彼女は窓の下に干し草の山があることを知っていたのでしょう。でも、その干し草の山のそばにグイードが立っているとは思いませんでした。そのため彼女はグイードの上に落ちて、二人とも転がってしまいます。グイードはドーラ

を見た瞬間驚き、「今日はお姫さま!」と挨拶しました。これも根拠のない挨拶ではありません。前の発言と結びついていて、グイードはこれから先ドーラに会う度に彼女を「お姫さま」と呼ぶことになります。これも「現実の美化」の一つの例です。次回は「現実の美化」は

どのように「マジック・レアリズム」に発展するのか、そのメカニズムを分析しましょう。

Buongiorno Principess こんにちは姫さま!



笑いとは何ですか?「不一致 (Incongruity)」と「スクリプト(Scripts)」という概念を学び、笑いのメカニズムを考えましょう。

偶然にも、上述した哲学者 アルトゥル・ショーペンハウアー は、『意志と表象としての世界』(1819年)という名著で、ユーモアのメカニズムについて語っています。笑いの原因を理解するために、よく知られている 彼の説明を見てみましょう。"笑いを決定するものはただ一つ。それは、あるアイデアとある実物・出来事の「不一致」である。アイデアと実際の物・出来事の不一致を突然に知覚すると、人は驚き、笑う。"(Attardo 1994: 48) これは、ユーモアの根本的なメカニズムだと考えられます。この不一致の感覚は、事実に関する新たな解釈を活性化します。そのためには、コンテキスト(文脈)と関わる情報をあらかじめ持っていることが前提となります。ショーペンハウアー はこの情報を「アイデア」と呼びましたが、これはまさに人間の頭の中に収められた「スクリプト」のようなものです。意味論的な観点から見れば、これらの「スクリプト」は"念頭にある世界についての紋切り型の知識"(Goatly 2012: 22)と定義されています。ある出来事が期待されたスクリプトと一致しないとき、滑稽な結果が生じるのです。ただし、不一致によって活性化された新しい解釈は、元のスクリプトとある程度適合する必要があります。そうでければ、それはもはやユーモアではなく、異なる結果(不愉快な驚きなど)になるかもしれません。では、この理論を適用して「王様に万歳!」というエピソードを分析してみましょう。

映画の見ている人のスクリプト → 集まった人が王様の車を待っている。 車は適度なスピードで到着するはずである。 車に王様に乗っているはずである。

↓ 映画の見ている人のスクリプト → グイードは危険を知らせるために腕を振る。

新たなスクリプト (^▽^) (^v^) (^▽^) 変わった車が現れる。 車は猛烈なスピードで到着して、去ってしまう。 車にグイードが乗っている。

新たなスクリプト

それはファシスト式の敬礼と捉えられてしまう。

↓ (° ⋄°)

(皮肉なことに、後ほどグイードがユダヤ人であることが明らかになる。)

人は色々な事で笑い、また笑いの原因も様々です。しかし、個人差や文化の違いはあるものの、ユーモアのメカニズム自体は変わりません。それは、世界共通なのです。

Attardo, S. (1994). Linguistic Theories of Humor. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Goatly, A. (2012). Meaning and Humor. Cambridge: CUP.

Appendix 2 The questionnaire

異文化入門・イタリア 2013年度前期

以下の質問にメールで答えてください。宛先は zamborlin@nua.ac.jp です。 件名に「異文化(名前、学籍番号)」を記入してください。例えば、名前が山田太郎で、学籍番号がITO12345だとします。件名に「異文化(山田太郎、ITO12545)」と記入すること。答えはメール本文に記入すること。ファイルなどを添付しないこと。質問をコピーする必要ありません。以下のように答えてください。

- ① 答え(200字以上~500字以内*)
- ② 答え (200字以上~500字以内*)
- *希望すれば、字数制限を超えてもかまいません。

受付期間は、7月24日(水)~8月8日(日)までです。では、質問をごらんください。

① ベニーニの映画の特徴の一つは深刻な状況をコミカルな状況のように扱うことです(Fig. 1、Fig. 2、Fig. 3を参考)。彼は深刻な状況でも我々を笑顔にしようとすることが多いです。彼のユーモアについてあなたはどう思いますか?



Fig. 1 La vita è bella 映画の背景

ファシスト時代のイタリアでの人種法の公布、 ユダヤ人の迫害と強制収容所への送還



映画の背景

成長プロセスの辛さ、悪の存在の問題



Fig. 3 La tigre e la neve 映画の背景 イラク戦争、人生のはかなさ

② ベニーニのユーモアと日本的なユーモアはどう違いますか?

あなたの考えを重視します。どうぞ自由に答えてください。

Appendix 3

The responses

Transcribed as in the original source, complete with eventual erroneous spelling or other non-standard representation

か。北野の作る映画は深刻なものや残酷なものが多いけれど、その中にもコメディー的な要素があります。人情はあまりないのかもしれませんが、結構人を馬鹿にしたりこき下ろしたりしながら残酷に人を実わせるのが得意なように思います。
◆8・①ペニーニのユーモアには非常に愛情を感じる。まず、ライフイズビューティフルで彼は息子と妻のために命をかける。息子に事実が伝わらないよう戦をつき続ける。爰に抜り向いてもらうために様々なトリックを考える。そのどもらとも暖かく愛を感じた。ソッキオでは同じ過ちを何度も繰り返すピノッキオのジェペットおじさんと妖情に対する愛が感じられた。彼らのためにピノッキオは良い子になりたいと語うところなどに特に強く感じた。また人生は奇跡の詩では、愛する人のために全てを尽くすこと。そうされば身跡は起こると言うことが描かれており、ヴェットーリアのために一生陰命なアッティーリオの姿がまぶしかった。このようにペニーニのユーモアは見ている人を笑顔にしたいというとても暖かい愛のあるものだと篆者は感じた。◆②ペニーニのユーモアはとてもイクリア人らしいと考える。ジョークを交え人を笑顔にしたいというをことで自分も楽しむというユーモアだ。つらいこともジョークで笑顔に変えてしまう。こういうユーモアは日本人には中々ないと考える。日本人のユーモアは大き安わせるとに力を入れずぎていて人を傷つけることすら、こういうユーモアは日本人には中々ないと考える。日本人のユーモアは大き大いなどでは自虐ネタが多いこと。体を張って笑いを取ること。それに比べてイクリア人のユーモアは相手と自分を同じ位置に置き、共有してきた時間の中で笑いを取るというまではいるという事に目的をおいた優しく温かいものだと感じた。 仕事を自分を同じ位置に置き、共有してきた時間の中で笑いを取るというよりも笑顔にするという事に目的をおいた疑しく温かいものだと感じた。
●0-0ペニーニの映画では、3 作品とも深刻すぎる内容はかりでした、ピノキオの映画では、騙されるのも誘惑に負けるのも自分自身なったので、コミカルな状況に扱うことも時間できます。しかし、残りの2 作品では、葉されるのも誘惑に負けるのも自分自身なったので、コミカルな状況に扱うことも時間できます。しかし、残りの2 作品では、またいるかめに、「現実を美化」していました。自分もすごくやいめに愛する人たちのために、深刻な状況をコミカルに変えていくのはすごいし尊敬します。でももし、自分を大きないるないと思いました。一つのような人が近になって、一つのような人が近になって、一つのような人が近になって、一つのような人が近になって、一つのような人が近にないた。一つのでは多ないないと思いました。ですが深刻な状況になってベニーニのような人が近くにいたら、逆にイライラしてしまうかもしれないと思いました。ですが深刻な状況と時ほど、ボジティブに頑張る気持ちを忘れないようにする事の人間さを学ぶことができました。◆②ペニーニのエーモアは、どんな全いことや差別をされても「現実を美化」して戦っていくようかもしれないと思いました。ですが深刻な状況と時ほど、ボジティブに頑張る気持ちを忘れないようにする事の人間さを学ぶことができました。◆②ペニーニとユーモアは、どんな全いことや発別をされても「現実を美化」して戦っていくないと、例えば震災などなみんないないから表した。人によって、一つのように対しないという風滅があるからです。日本人は大なっていことでは自己ないという風滅があるからです。日本人は大な中でしている人は、お父い近れないととという風滅があるからです。日本人は大ないかとないました。よいはしているようにかえている人は、お父の外のにもとても全いはずなのに思くにとも楽しんでいるように対しないといとないました。「はくないといる」といいよっないと思いますが、日本的とユーモアで記ないと思います。このようにそ、深刻では関連をユーモアで記ないと思いました。「深刻では関連をユーモアで記ないと思いま」」といと思っないと思いました。「深刻では関連をユーモアで記なと書」」といと思います。「日本人はは日いと思います。」といと思います。「本人はは日いと思います」」といと思います。「本のとさこそ笑顔だと思っています。彼らはいまました。年いとさころ笑顔だらればはいままだった。ことを表もれるよったいます。