The Self-deprecating Humor of George W. Bush
—Its Functions and Effects—

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the functions and effects of humor by clarifying the processes through which we attain the effects. Since the time of the Greek philosophers, various functions of humor have been presented. The functions presented so far are diverse and some seem to have contrary or contradicting effects. In this paper we will study examples of humor expressed by George W. Bush, with special focus on self-deprecating humor, in an attempt to find clear evidence of the functions and effects of this type.

We will attempt to analyze the processes of a humor act in the same way as Austin (1962) analyzed a speech act, or an action performed by an utterance. The analysis reveals that the function of humor is to raise laughter and the effect of humor is to moderate negative aspects of life, such as anger, aggressiveness, fear, tension, weariness and depression, while providing positive effects such as cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, sympathy and even love. These effects of humor make unsociable actions, such as aggressive verbal attacks or sexual talk, socially acceptable by modifying the malignant, harmful or unpleasant elements of these actions.

Keywords: Self-deprecating humor; functions of humor; Spencer (1860)'s
1. Introduction

This paper attempts to study the functions and effects of humor by clarifying the processes through which we attain the effects. From the age of the Greek philosophers, various functions of humor have been presented by numerous linguists, psychologists and philosophers. The functions presented so far are diverse and some seem to have contrary or contradicting effects. Yet, it seems to be a common concept among humorists that one of the main functions of humor is the initiation of laughter or a smile.

In this paper we will study the examples of humor expressed by George W. Bush in order to clarify the functions and effects of humor. We will attempt to analyze the processes of a humor act in the same way as Austin (1962) analyzed a speech act, or an action performed by an utterance. This is based on the idea that expressing humor can be regarded as a kind of action using verbal, visual and performative methods.

Section 2 reviews the functions of humor presented by Ziv (1984). Section 3 explains the Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962). In section 4, the functions of self-deprecating humor defined by Ziv (1984) are reviewed. In section 5, we shall study examples of self-deprecating humor by George W. Bush. Finally section 6 proposes a theory of “functions and effects of humor” which are comprehensive enough to explain various functions of humor summarized by Ziv (1984).
2. Functions of Humor (Ziv/1984)

First we will examine the various functions of humor presented by a number of scholars over two millennia, which are summarized by Ziv (1984: 1-80) into five main functions, as seen in (1).

(1) a. Aggressive function: e.g. folklore humor, ethnic humor, doctor humor, judge humor, psychiatrist humor, political humor, bureaucratic humor
b. Sexual function: e.g. sex joke
c. Social function: e.g. comedy, satire
d. Defense function: e.g. black humor (horror humor, sick humor, gallows humor and grim humor), self-deprecating humor
e. Intellectual function: e.g. absurd humor

The aggressive function of humor was first presented by Plato. Plato argued that laughter is an expression of a person’s feelings of superiority over other people. Aristotle agreed with Plato and said that too much laughter is incompatible with living a good life. Hobbes (1650) was concerned that laughter could be harmful to a person’s character. The aggressive function of humor is argued by Rapp (1949), Gruner (1978) and so on. The main idea commonly found in these arguments is that humor is a way to express aggressive feelings in a socially accepted way. Examples of this kind of humor are often found in folklore humor, ethnic humor, doctor humor, judge humor, psychiatrist humor,
political humor and bureaucratic humor.

The second function is the sexual function of humor. Freud (1905: 94-102) was the first to emphasize that one of the important functions of humor was to approach the subject of sex in a socially accepted way. Hasset and Houlihan (1979: 64-8) conducted a research using a questionnaire that asks the readers of Psychology Today to indicate their preferences from among 30 jokes. The result of the research shows that the sexual jokes are the most popular.

The social function was argued by Lorenz (1963)⁶, Radcliff-Brown (1949)⁷, Matineau (1972)⁸, and Bergson (1899)⁹. Humor can be used as a key for opening up interpersonal relations and it works as a social corrective by acting as a safety valve for the release of tensions and frustration. These functions are manifested in comedy and satire.

The defense mechanism of humor is clearly seen in black humor. It is used as a way of coping with death, the phenomenon that causes great tension and anxiety. Spencer (1860: 299) made a physiological explanation for laughter by proposing the Tension Relief Theory. He proposed that laughter is the organism’s way of freeing accumulated tension. Self-deprecating humor, which reveals the weakness of the speaker is explained as a way of the speaker defending himself by discharging any hostility towards him.

The last function is the intellectual function. Ziv (1984: 70-80) explains that the intellectual aspect of humor grants us a temporary release from the bonds of rational thought, an escape to the absurd. In addition, the intellectual activity that leads to understanding the message in this type of humor causes enjoyment and satisfaction.

Having listed the functions of humor, we come up with two ques-
tionable points. The first point is that there are contrary and contradicting functions of humor in the list shown above. While aggressive humor listed in (1a) intends to achieve superiority over others, self-deprecating humor in (1d) makes the speaker inferior to others by revealing his or her own weakness. What is the intention of the speaker of self-disparaging humor and how does the speaker enjoy this kind of humor? The second question is if there is an element comprehensive enough to be commonly found in various (sometimes contradictory) functions of humor? Is humor such a complicated entity that it is difficult to find a general rule of how humor works and how it affects us?

In an attempt to find an answer to these questions, we will investigate the humor expressed by George W. Bush. It is based on the idea that examples of humor by the U.S. president can give us clear evidence of the functions and effects of humor in that the effects of his humor are so important that many newspaper articles and internet news tend to describe the effects of his humorous remarks and actions.


In order to understand the way in which humor works, we will analyze the act of humor in the same way as Austin (1962) analyzed the act of utterance in his book, How to do Things with Words, since expressing humor can also be regarded as a kind of action using verbal, visual and performative methods. Austin proposed that in attempting to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances, they perform ac-
tions by producing those utterances. The action is called “a speech act” and consists of three related acts, as seen in (2).

(2) Austin (1962: 94-107) *How to do Things with Words*

Speech Acts (actions performed via utterances)

a. locutionary act: uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference

b. illocutionary act: an act performed via a communicative force

c. perlocutionary act: what we bring about or achieve

There is first “a locutionary act”, which is the basic act of uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference. Generally speaking, we form an utterance with some kind of function in mind. We might utter to make an offer, an apology, or for some other communicative purpose. This is the second dimension or “the illocutionary act”. Sometimes the speaker utters on the assumption that the hearer will recognize the effects the speaker intended. This is the third dimension, called “perlocutionary act”. In this paper, I propose that expressing humor should be regarded as an act with special communicative purpose and effects in mind.

Humor Acts (the first letters of both words are capital letters for distinction from a subcategory), or actions performed by humor can be analyzed into three dimensions.

(3) How to do Things with Humor

Humor Acts (actions performed via humor)

a. humor act: expressing humor with an utterance, a cartoon,
Humor act is an act of expressing humor with an utterance, a cartoon, an image, a graphological device, an action and so on. Inhumor act is the intention of a humorist or an act of arousing laughter by creating, expressing and conveying humor to a hearer. It is based on the common view among humorists that one of the main functions of humor is the occurrence of laughter or a smile. This paper calls this communicative purpose of humor, the “function” of humor.

After the occurrence of laughter we feel the relieving of tension and the venting of nervous energy, as described by Spencer (1860: 298-309) and Freud (1905: 140-158), who pointed out the physiological aspect of laughter. This is included in the third act called “perhumor act”. It is an act of bringing out some “effects” of humor. (Please note that the term “effects” is used here.)

4. Effects of Self-deprecating Humor (Ziv/1984)

Before going into the analysis of examples of humor by President Bush, let us review the effects of self-deprecating humor. Ziv (1984: 58-65) defined self-deprecating humor as a kind of humor which presents one’s own weakness, as seen in (4).
(4) Self-deprecating humor

Definition: humor which presents one’s own weakness

Purpose: a. to deter aggressiveness
    b. to achieve appreciation, sympathy and even love
    c. to enable a person to grapple actively with the fear that his weakness arouses in him.

Ziv presented three main purposes for a person’s use of self-disparaging humor. The first motive is to deter aggressiveness. If a person can laugh at his own weaknesses, he can deter aggressiveness. The second purpose is to achieve appreciation, sympathy and even love. Self-deprecating humor allows the listener to see that human beings have similar weaknesses as the speaker and facilitate the listener to identify himself with the speaker. This identification can win sympathy and empathy. The third motive is to enable a person to grapple actively with the fear that his weakness arouses in him. He can encourage himself by the very fact that he can present the weakness for show and can then laugh at it.

5. Self-deprecating Humor of George W. Bush

Let us now study some examples of self-deprecating humor expressed by George W. Bush to see what he said or did and what is the situation before and after the humorous utterances and actions. (5) is a typical example of self-deprecating humor by George W. Bush when he was given an award at a graduation ceremony of Yale University.
“Bush Embraces Yale in Graduation Speech

“NEW HAVEN, Conn., May 21—Today, for the first time since George W. Bush entered the national stage — really for the first time since he graduated in 1968 — he let his old Yale ties show. “I’m a better man because of Yale,” Bush told several thousand new graduates as he received an honorary degree at Yale’s 300th commencement. “Yale for me is a source of great pride. I hope that there will come a time for you to return to Yale to say that, and feel as I do today. And I hope you won’t wait as long.”

For the man from Midland, who suppressed his Eastern Establishment origins when he went into politics, it was a gesture of reconciliation. But as Bush made peace with his Ivy League roots, many graduates were not so gracious. As Bush, in blue academic robes, accepted his award and rose to speak, the graduates raised a sea of yellow protest signs with slogans such as “Conservation, not Consumption.”, and “Execute Justice, not People.” Student’s booed, hissed and heckled the president, and some turned their backs on him, made gagging sounds or shouted “Go away!” Students from the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies wore miniature power plants on their mortar boards, burning incense through tiny smokestacks. Scott Hedges, whose power-plant graduation cap even had a toy coal car, joked that “emissions requirements were waived” for his polluting cap under Bush’s new energy policy.

More than 170 Yale professors boycotted the ceremony because they said Bush was not worthy of his honorary degree. Students wore stickers declaring “Got Arsenic?” and “5-4” a reference to the Supreme Court decision that essentially handed Bush the presidency A

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banner flying from a dorm room window portrayed Bush as Mad magazine’s Alfred E. Neuman wearing a pin that said “Worry.”

Bush disarmed his critics; or a few of them, with a self-deprecating speech about his lazy college years. “To those of you who received honors, awards and distinctions, I say well done,” went the president’s set-up line. “And to the C students, I say, you, too, can be president of the United States.” In a reference to Vice President Cheney, a Yale dropout, Bush continued: “So now we know: If you graduate from Yale, you become president. If you drop out, you get to be vice president.”

The president joked about studying in the library with his Yale classmate, Richard Brodhead, now dean of Yale College. “We had a mutual understanding — Dick wouldn’t read aloud, and I wouldn’t snore,” Bush said. As for his partying, Bush told the graduates: “If you’re like me, you won’t remember everything you did here.”

He also made mirth of his oft-noted struggles with spoken English. When he enrolled in a Japanese haiku course, Bush recalled that an adviser said I should focus on English. I still hear that quite often. But my critics don’t realize I don’t make verbal gaffes. I’m speaking in the perfect forms and rhythms of ancient haiku.” Lest Yalies pillory their president’s linguistics, Bush added: “I want the entire world to know this — everything I know about the spoken word, I learned right here at Yale.”

Some students heckled and laughed as Levin praised the Bush family and spoke of the president’s “inclusiveness.”

But Bush softened the hostility with his brief speech, balanced between humor and reflection. “When I left here, I didn’t have much in the way of a life plan,” he acknowledged. “Life takes its own turns and
makes its own demands, writes its own story. And along the way, we start to realize we are not the author,” he added. “We begin to understand that life is ours to live, but not to waste.”

“There were still boos and yellow protest signs when Bush finished—but not as many. Yale junior Jacob Remes, one of the protest organizers, pronounced the speech “depressing.” But he admitted that Bush won over some critics. “I think people were sort of tickled,” Remes said.” (Dana Milbank, The Washington Post, May 22, 2001). (Note: Dotted underlines explain the situation before the humorous speech, single underlines describe humor by President Bush and double underlines indicate the effects of the president’s speech.)

Sentences marked by ② show the wild protests of Yale students and sentences ③ describe the cold attitude of professors and students. President Bush joked about his low grades at Yale as shown in ⑤. Sentences ⑥ quote the president’s joke about studying in the library with his Yale classmate to describe his idleness in school days. In sentences ⑦, he also made mirth of his oft-noted struggles with spoken English when he enrolled in a Japanese haiku course.

Through the self-deprecating humor, he succeeded in achieving sympathy or even love, as shown in the title sentence ①, “Bush embraces Yale” and sentence ⑩, “Bush won over some critics.” The effects are classified as “effect b” (classified as “purpose b” in ④), or “to achieve appreciation, sympathy and even love”. He was also successful in deterring aggressiveness as shown in the descriptions, “Bush disarmed his critics” (④), “softened the hostility” (⑧) and “there were still boos and yellow protest signs when Bush finished — but not so
many” (9). The effect can be listed as “effect a”, or “to deter aggressiveness” (classified as “purpose a” in (4)).

It is important to ask why self-deprecating humor exerted such an effect on the Yale students. If George W. Bush had deprecated himself by merely revealing his low grades at Yale, his snoring in the library and his struggle with spoken English without humor, they would not have brought the effects as seen in “Bush embraces Yale” and “Bush won over some critics”. It is his ability of creating humor out of his own faults that embraced Yale and won over some critics. In short, self-deprecating humor involves two acts as a communicative purpose, an act of raising laughter by creating humor and self-deprecation, and consequently it has effects coming from both an inhumor act and an illocutionary act. Self-deprecating humor in (5) involves two actions: “Humor Acts” and “Speech Acts”, each consisting of three related acts in three dimensions, as seen in (6).


a. humor act and locutionary act: making a verbal speech (5, 6, 7)

b. inhumor act: arousing laughter by creating humor (5, 6, 7)
   illocutionary act: self-deprecation devaluing himself (5, 6, 7)

c. perhumor act and perlocutionary act:
   Bush embraced Yale (1) (effect b)
   Bush won over some critics (10) (effect b)
   People were sort of tickled (11) (effect b)
   Bush disarmed his critics (4) (effect a)
   Bush softened the hostility (8) (effect a)
but not so many (boos and yellow protest signs) (⑨) (effect a)

The first dimension involves “a humor act” and “a locutionary act”, which, in the cases of ⑤, ⑥ and ⑦, are expressed verbally. The President is uttering self-deprecating humor with two communicative purposes: arousing laughter by making his own weaknesses a joke (inhumor act) and self-deprecation which devalues himself (illocutionary act). The effects that Bush intended are realized as shown in “perhumor act and perlocutionary act”.

The perhumor act of self-deprecating humor involves two effects: recognition of the speaker’s ability to create humor out of his own weaknesses and the effects of laughter. In order to recognize the effects of laughter, we have to look into the physiological aspect of laughter. Spencer (1860) proposed a physiological explanation for laughter known as the “Tension Relief Theory”: Laughter is the organism’s way of freeing accumulated tensions. We have all experienced our tensions being relieved after we laugh.

The perlocutionary act is the effects of self-deprecation, which lowers the assessment of the speaker, while it gives a superiority feeling to the hearer. However, the devaluation is moderated by the effects of laughter and minimized when the content of weakness is an already known fact with little informational value, as seen in the results of the president’s speech.

Next let us turn our attention to other kinds of humor. Example (7) is an article that describes how Bush acted after the pretzel incident, in which a pretzel he was eating went down the wrong way as he watched
a football game in his bedroom.

(7) “Bush brushes off scrape with pretzel, defends tax cuts for weak economy”

Laughing off a pretzel-induced fainting spell with jokes and pranks, President George W. Bush pushed tax cuts and trade Monday as cures for recession, calling his prescription “economics 101.”

Less than 24 hours after choking on a pretzel, blacking out and falling off a couch in the White House family quarters, Bush began a two-day, three-state trip to the American heartland, saying he felt “great” but sporting a vivid reminder — a nasty scrape on his left cheek.

The episode, Bush’s first health scare as president, failed to dull his humor or dampen his spirits.

En route Bush had a gift and some advice for reporters aboard Air Force One. Scrawled on a jumbo bag of pretzels the president sent back to the press cabin were the words, “From POTUS (President of the United States) . . . Chew slowly.” (The Japan Times, January 16, 2002)

(Note: Dotted underlines explain the situation before humor, single underlines express humor and double underlines indicate the effects of humor.)

The news of the President’s pretzel-induced incident, choking on a pretzel, blacking out and falling off a couch in the White House family quarters, brought about his first health scare as president, as seen in (3) and (4). Soon after the incident, Bush began a trip to the American heartland. En route Bush sent back a jumbo bag of pretzels to the press cabin with the words, “From POTUS . . . Chew slowly.” (5, 6)
this self-deprecating humor, he brushed off the scrape and laughed off the health scare.

Suppose the President had tried to explain in detail what happened, the health scare of the American people would not have been brushed off so easily. Bush went on the scheduled trip less than 24 hours after the incident to certify his health. Bush also used this humor to laugh off the scare, because people thought that their president is healthy enough to make his own incident a joke and the laughter worked as a moderator of the scare and the fear of American people. The humor and pranks of Bush also worked as a force to grapple actively (effect c), as seen in ④.

With the self-deprecating humor seen in ⑤ and ⑥, Bush is performing actions. The actions involve “Humor Acts” and “Speech Acts” each consisting of three related acts, in three dimensions, as seen in (8).


a. humor act: actions (⑤) and words (⑥)
   locutionary act: words (⑥)

b. inhumor act: arousing laughter by creating humor (⑤, ⑥)
   illocutionary act: self-deprecation devaluing himself (⑤, ⑥)

c. perhumor act and perlocutionary act:
   Bush brushes off scrape with pretzel (①) (effect d)
   Laughing off a pretzel-induced fainting spell (②) (effects c and d)

Humor acts in sentences ⑤ and ⑥ are performed by actions and words: sending back a jumbo bag of pretzels and his words “From POTUS
(President of the United States). . . . Chew slowly." The inhumor act here is arousing laughter by creating humor. The illocutionary act is self-deprecation devaluating the speaker, while it gives the superiority feeling to the hearer. The effect attained through this humor is to dispel the fear of American people, as shown in sentence ①, "Bush brushes off scrape with pretzel", and sentence ②, "Laughing off a pretzel-induced fainting spell with jokes and pranks". By making the hearers laugh with humor, the President tried to dispel the scares and fears of the American people. This will add another effect (d) "to dispel the fear of others" to the already-cited three effects of self-deprecating humor. This effect differs from "effect c", "to enable a person to grapple actively with the fear that his weakness arouses in him" in that "effect d" attempts to raise the spirits of the hearer, while "effect c" tries to cheer himself up. "Effect c" means that a speaker encourages himself by the very fact that he can present the weakness for show and can laugh at it. "Effect d", on the other hand, encourages a hearer by giving him/her a laugh. The U.S. President successfully used his sense of humor to cope with the incident and the following health scare.

Next let us study how President Bush utilizes humor to build up relations with others. Example (9) is an Internet news item which features a conversation between Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger and President Bush who visited California.

(9) "Schwarzenegger calls Bush an ‘Ally’ of Calif."
Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger met with President Bush on Thursday and said later that the White House will be sympathetic when he requests aid for California’s budget and economic problems.
The two Republicans with the highest profiles in the nation chatted for 45 minutes in what Schwarzenegger described as a “really terrific” and “relationship-building” session. The incoming governor said he presented no “laundry list” requesting federal bailouts to fill a multibillion-dollar budget gap. “But I will,” Schwarzenegger said. “Remember, this is just the beginning. The president made it very clear that he loves California, and he wants to help. He believes in California, and I believe in him.”

Schwarzenegger told the group that after speaking with Bush, “I can tell you one thing that there is no greater ally this Golden State has in Washington than our president.”

Bush, capping a two-day trip in the state before heading to Asia, was equally supportive as he joked about what the two men have in common. “We both married well,” Bush said. “Some accuse us both of not being able to speak the language. We both have big biceps. Well, two out of three isn’t bad.”

Both Schwarzenegger and White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the private talks focus on improving education. They also discussed bringing more jobs to California. And “we had some laughs,” Schwarzenegger said. They discussed “sports and our families, and how lucky we are that we have married the right wives.”

Bush joked about what the two men have in common: a happy marriage, love of sports and linguistic inability, as shown in and . The
recognition of common characteristics including the weak points contributed to create sympathy and love among the two leaders. Schwarzenegger mentioned about the laughs they had during the meeting and called Bush "an ally of California", (1). He described their 45 minute talk as a really terrific and relationship-building session (2) and commented that there is no greater ally that California has in Washington than the president (3). The impressions and comments by Schwarzenegger reflect the effects of the humor by the president.

Humor acts and Speech Acts here involve three dimensions as seen in (10).

(10) Humor Acts and Speech Acts of self-deprecating humor in (9)
   a. humor act and locutionary act: uttering sentences (4, 5)
   b. inhumor act: arousing laughter by creating humor (4, 5)
      illocutionary act: self-deprecation devaluing himself (4, 5)
   c. perhumor act and perlocutionary act:
      Schwarzenegger calls Bush an ‘Ally’ of Calif. (1) (effect b)
      Schwarzenegger described as a “really terrific” “relationship-building” session (2) (effect b)
      “I can tell you one thing that there is no greater ally this Golden State has in Washington than our president.” (3)
      (effect b)

The first dimension, the humor act and locutionary act, in (10) is performed verbally and the second dimension involves two acts, inhumor act and illocutionary act. Inhumor act is arousing laughter by creating humor, while the illocutionary act is self-deprecation. The third dimen-
sion, perhumor act and perlocutionary act, is manifested clearly in Schwarzenegger’s comment shown in ①, ② and ③. These statements have the effects classified as “effect b”, or “to achieve appreciation, sympathy and love.”

Now let us look at examples of humor that other presidents have used for relation-building. Example ① describes an amusing conversation at a ranch summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President George W. Bush.

(1) “Bonhomie marks Putin’s visit to Texas despite thorny talks” President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to bridge the gaps over a key arms control treaty Thursday, but did not let that stop them from backslapping and wisecracking as they ended a rain-soaked summit.

(2) In an extraordinary display of friendship for two men who only met in June, Bush and Putin were in playful moods during a student news conference at Crawford High School despite the steady rain and booming thunder outside.

(3) Putin showed that behind his stony face is a dry wit. “No math questions, please,” he told the students. He had them cheering at the end when he told them, at the count of three, to raise their hands if they wanted Bush to visit Russia. “One... two...,” he said dramatically. “Yes!” they yelled.

(4) They slapped each other on the back and joked, at one point teasing each other about whether it is better to visit Texas in the heat of August or Siberia in winter. “He invited me to join a plus-40 (years of age) club who jog when it is 110 (degrees F, 43.3 C) and more. Well,
I’ll think about it,” Putin deadpanned.

“He said when he complimented Bush on the steak and catfish meal they had at the ranch, Bush told him that “indeed, this cannot be done except for in Texas.” Bush said the U.S. and Russia “were enemies of a long period of time,” but now were friends and that he wanted the relationship to outlive their presidencies.

Putin, asked what he liked most about Texas, drew laughter and applause by calling it “the most important state in the United States,” and one familiar to Russians because of its oil production and the home for NASA. “We in Russia somehow tend to know about Texas rather better than about the rest of the United States somehow — except maybe for Alaska, which we sold to you,” he quipped. (The Japan Times, November 17, 2001)

(Note: Dotted underlines explain the situation before humor, single underlines express humor and double underlines indicate the effects of humor.)

The situation they are in is rough, both in terms of weather and political climate, as shown in the expressions such as “despite thorny talks” (2), “failed to bridge the gaps over a key arms control treaty” (3) and “rain-soaked summit” (5). However, they attempted to build a bonhomie atmosphere deterring an aggressive mood (effect a) by wisecracking and backslapping.

Putin started showing his self-deprecating humor as shown in sentences 8. Making humor with his weakness contributed to dispel the fear of the students (effect d) facing a stony faced Russian President. In sentence 10, Bush and Putin teased each other by presenting the
harsh climates in their own countries (summer heat of Texas and bitter winter of Siberia). Sentence (11) shows Bush’s self-deprecating humor and Putin’s playful answer to the absurd invitation to a plus-40 (years of age) club of people who jog when it is 110 degrees F. In sentence (13), Bush made fun of both Putin and himself by amusingly implying the vulnerability of their presidencies. Equating the weaknesses in climate and presidencies, strengthened sympathy and friendship between the two leaders (effect b). In addition to the self-deprecating humor, Putin and Bush made an effort to cheer up the spirits of the audience by staging a playful performance and using incongruous humor, as shown in (9), (12), (14) and (15).

The laughter raised by the self-deprecating humor as well as the humorous remarks and performances with elements of incongruity led to the deterring of an aggressive mood (effect a), the achievement of appreciation, sympathy and affection as seen in the title of the article, “Bonhomie marks Putin’s visit to Texas” (1). It should also be noted that both leaders, who are well aware of the effects of humor in cheering others’ spirits, intentionally used humor, as seen in “did not let that stop them from backslapping and wisecracking” (4) and “In an extraordinary display of friendship for two men who only met in June, Bush and Putin were in playful moods” (5). This will add another effect (e) “to cheer up others” to the already-cited four effects of self-deprecating humor.

The humor acts and Speech Acts of (11) can be analyzed in (12).


a. humor act and locutionary act: utterances and actions (8-11)
b. inhumor act:

arousing laughter by creating humor \(^8\), \(^9\), \(^{10}\), \(^{11}\) performance and humorous remarks incongruous to the situation causing laughter explained by the incongruity theory \(^9\), \(^{12}\), \(^{11}\)

illocutionary act: self-deprecation devaluing himself \(^8\), \(^9\), \(^{11}\), \(^{13}\)

c. perhumor act and perlocutionary act:

Bonhomie marks Putin’s visit to Texas \(^{11}\) (effect a, b, d, e)

In an extraordinary display of friendship \(^{10}\) (effect a, b, d, e)

“Cheering up others” is regarded as an important job of a leader and that’s why President Bush visited U.S. troops in Iraq, as seen in example \(^{13}\).

\(^{13}\) “Bush surprises U.S. troops with Iraq trip”

President Bush flew to Iraq under extraordinary secrecy and security Thursday to spend Thanksgiving with U.S. troops and thank them for “defending the American people from danger.” The unannounced visit brought wild cheers from battle-worn soldiers, stunned the nation and even surprised the president’s parents, who had been expecting him at the Thanksgiving table at his Crawford, Texas ranch.

The troops had been told only that they were gathered for Thanksgiving dinner with a VIP guest in the mess hall at Baghdad International Airport. L.Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator in Iraq, added his own drama to the surprise. Billed as the special guest along with coalition forces commander Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, Bremer opened the
program by telling the soldiers it was time to read the president’s Thanksgiving proclamation.

He asked if there was “anybody back there more senior than us” to read the president’s words. Bush emerged from behind a curtain as cheering soldiers climbed on chairs and tables to yell their approval. The president shed a few tears. “I was just looking for a warm meal somewhere,” he joked, fresh from an 11-hour overseas flight. “Thanks for inviting me to dinner.” Wearing an exercise jacket with a 1st Armored Division patch, Bush then worked the entire room and dished out — but did not sit down to eat — sweet potatoes and corn from the chow line. (Associated Press, November 27, 2003) (Note: Dotted underlines explain the situation before humor, single underlines express humor and double underlines indicate the effects of humor.)

The soldiers were worn out by the exhausting battle, as seen in sentence ②. The surprising appearance of the president from behind a curtain brought wild cheers and approval from the soldiers, as seen in sentences ① and ④. They appreciated the fact that their president who visited them in Iraq was risking his life. The appreciation was enhanced by the unexpectedness of the visit and the performance of his sudden appearance from behind the curtain. That is why the soldiers gave wild cheers and yelled their approval by climbing on chairs and tables. The unexpected performance with humor with incongruous elements deterred irritation (effect a), gained approval (effect b), dispelled the fear (effect d) and invited cheers from the soldiers (effect e).

Bush’s self-deprecating joke in sentence ⑤, “I was just looking for a warm meal somewhere, Thanks for inviting me to dinner.” was suc-
cessful in cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, too. His at-
titude did not have any pompous air of a VIP. Rather he joked as if he
were a hungry man looking for a meal, although he flew to Iraq under
extraordinary secrecy and security. The incongruity as well as the supe-
riority feeling caused by the self-deprecating humor brought out the ap-
preciation (effect b), dispelled the fear (effect d) and gained cheers of
approval from the soldiers (effect e).

The Humor Acts and Speech Acts of (13) are analyzed in (14).

(14) Humor Acts and Speech Acts of self-deprecating humor in (13)
a. humor act and locutionary act: actions and utterances (3, 5)
b. inhumor act:
   an unexpected action gives soldiers laughter explained by
   the incongruity theory (3)
   arousing laughter by creating humor (5)
   illocutionary act: self-deprecation devaluing himself (5)
c. perhumor act and perlocutionary act:
   wild cheers from battle-worn soldiers (1, 2) (effect d, e)
   cheering soldiers climbed on chairs and tables to yell their
   approval. (4) (effect b)

The Humor Acts and Speech Acts of (13) are performed by actions and
words: an unexpected appearance from behind the curtain (3) and his
utterance (5). These gave the soldiers the laughter explained by the
incongruity theory and the self-deprecation gave them the superiority
feeling. The effects attained through the humor are manifested in wild
cheers from battle-worn soldiers (effect e) and yells of approval (ef-
6. How to do things with humor

We have examined self-deprecating humor of world leaders as well as humor which can be explained by the incongruity theory. The detailed study of examples (5), (7), (9), (11) and (13) has revealed the processes through which self-deprecating humor is expressed, arouses laughter and produces effects. It has also clarified various effects of self-deprecating humor, as seen in (15).

(15) Perhumor acts of self-deprecating humor
   a. to deter aggressiveness
   b. to achieve appreciation, sympathy and even love
   c. to enable a person to grapple actively with the fear that his weakness arouses in him.
   d. to dispel the fear of others
   e. to cheer others

The list of effects can be summarized into (16).

(16) Effects of self-deprecating humor
The laughter caused by self-deprecating humor relieves negative aspects of life, such as anger, aggressiveness, fear, tension, weariness and depression, while it gives positive effects such as cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, sympathy and even love.
The detailed study of (11) and (13) has shown that the humor explained by the incongruity theory provides the same effects as self-deprecating humor. Here a question will arise: why does self-deprecating humor have the same effects as humor with an element of incongruity? In order to investigate into this, we have to look into the physiological aspect of laughter. Spencer proposed a physiological explanation for laughter known as “tension relief theory” : “Laughter is the organism’s way of freeing accumulated tension”. We have all experienced our tension relieved after we laugh. Looking from this physiological perspective, it can be safely assumed that laughter caused by humor, whether it is self-deprecating humor or humor with incongruous elements, relieves our tension, and consequently relieves negative aspects of life, such as anger, aggressiveness, fear, weariness and depression, while it gives positive effects such as cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, sympathy and even love.

To summarize, humor act can be analyzed into three dimensions, humor act, inhumor act and perhumor act, as shown in (17).

(17) Humor Acts (actions performed via humor)

a. humor act: expressing humor with an utterance, an action, a cartoon and so on
b. inhumor act: arousing laughter by creating (expressing) humor
c. perhumor act: moderating negative aspects of life, such as anger, aggressiveness, fear, tension, weariness and depression, while producing positive effects such as cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, sympathy and even love.
We can further reexamine the various effects of humor listed in (1), which is repeated here as (18).

(18) Effects of humor

a. Aggressive effects
   “in a socially accepted way” → relieving the malignant element of an aggression

b. Sexual effects
   “in a socially accepted way” → relieving the unpleasant element of a sexual talk

c. Social effects  “the release of tension and frustration”

d. Defensive effects  “freeing accumulated tension”

e. Intellectual effects  “A release from reason”

Aggressive function and sexual function of humor have a common element in that these are regarded as taboos or unfavorable behaviors, if they are directly expressed without humor. Humor makes these socially unaccepted acts into “socially acceptable actions” and it will be assumed that this effect owes very much to the physiological aspect of laughter or relieving tension. Laughter, by relieving tension, moderates negative aspects of life, while it produces positive effects.

The relief of tension and frustration serves as a key for opening up interpersonal relations, because people love these pleasant feelings accompanying laughter. In this way laughter fulfills the social effects. Laughter also enables us to cope with the phenomena that cause us tension and anxiety, as is seen in black humor. Thus laughter produces “defense effects”.
The intellectual effects can be classified into two types: one that accompanies laughter and another that accompanies satisfaction. Laughter often occurs when we enjoy incongruous humor, which grants us temporary freedom from the bonds of rational thought. The latter that does not necessarily accompany laughter is fulfilled when we understand the message of humor. It provides us a sense of mastery.

7. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to study the functions and effects of humor and the processes through which we attain the effects. The analysis has revealed that there are three dimensions in actions performed by humor: humor act, inhumor act and perhumor act. Humor act is an act of expressing humor with an utterance, a cartoon, an image, a graphological device, an action and so on. Inhumor act is an act of arousing laughter by creating and expressing humor. Perhumor act is an act of giving effects of laughter, Physiologically laughter can be defined as an action of relieving tension and venting nervous energy. The relieving of tension and the expenditure of nervous energy moderate negative aspects of life, such as anger, aggressiveness, fear, tension, weariness and depression, while they produce positive effects such as cheering up the spirits and achieving appreciation, sympathy and even love. These effects of laughter, in turn, make unsociable actions, such as aggressive verbal attack and a sexual talk, socially acceptable by modifying the malignant, harmful or unpleasant elements of these actions.
Notes
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1. See Plato, Philebus, 48-50 and Republic, V, 452.
2. See Aristotle, Poetics 5 and Nicomachean Ethics, IV, 8 for details.
4. Rapp (1949) suggests that all laughter has developed from one primitive behavior, "the roar of triumph in an ancient jungle duel", See Rapp (1951) p.21.
6. Lorenz (1963) argues that laughter has denoted a situation of security for group members.
8. Martineau (1972) emphasizes the tasks of humor as raising the morale of group members.
9. Bergson (1899/1975) writes, "Laughter is a social reaction which punishes and puts down deviant elements in man's behavior and in various events". p. 76.

Reference
Martineau, W. H. (1972) A Model of the Social Functions of Humor. In J. H. Gold-


