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Divided by a common language? Jocular quips and (non-)affiliative responses in initial interactions among American and Australian speakers of English

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Abstract: Studies of conversational humor in intercultural settings have focused largely on illustrating how participants can successfully draw on humor to build rapport. However, it is nevertheless clear that attempts at humor can also go awry in settings in which participants come from different cultural backgrounds. In this paper, we focus on the responses of American and Australian participants to playful or light-hearted comments on, or responses to, another speaker’s just prior serious talk, which are designed to initiate a non-serious side sequence, or what we term “jocular quips”. Drawing from a comparative analysis of thirty recordings of initial interactions involving participants from ostensibly the same (AmAm; AusAus) and different (AmAus) backgrounds, we report our finding that affiliative responses to jocular quips are more prevalent in the “intracultural” dyads (AmAm, AusAus), while non-affiliative responses are more frequent in the “intercultural” dyads (AmAus). We suggest this is due to troubles in accomplishing particularistic co-membership and shared critical, mocking attitudes that are attributed to, or directed at that category. We conclude that Americans and Australians are not “divided by a common language” as such, but rather that affiliating with jocular quips in initial interactions is contingent on the locally situated accomplishment of particular membership categories and predicates associated with these categories.

Keywords: quips, affiliation, initial interactions, conversational analysis, interactional pragmatics, American English, Australian English

1 Introduction

A key challenge for researchers studying humor in everyday conversation is the question of what counts as the object of interest. It is widely acknowledged that

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laughter or smiling is not a straightforward indicator of humor (Attardo 1994), given laughter can accomplish a whole range of different forms of interactional work aside from indicating that one thinks something is “funny” or “amusing” (Chafe 2007; Glenn 2003; Holt 2012; Jefferson 1984b). It is also frequently noted that attempts at humor may fall flat in conversational settings (Hay 1994; Bell 2015), or may arise inadvertently (Chovanec 2016). Moreover, while participants may recognize the potential for humor in conversation, they may nevertheless not appreciate it on some occasions (Hay 2000), or may even be unsure about what was really intended (Dynel 2011). The latter frequent ambivalence of conversational humor not only poses challenges for the analyst, it is also a very real problem for participants themselves, who can also face difficulties in figuring out whether something counts as jocular, playful, non-serious, and so on, and how to respond to such ambivalent invitations to play (Bateson 1955). Sequences of conversational humor thus need to be negotiated as such by those participants.

In the case of conversational humor in intercultural settings, this challenge is potentially even more pronounced, as participants are not necessarily familiar with each other’s backgrounds or styles of communication. Studies of humor in intercultural settings to date have focused largely on illustrating how participants can successfully draw on humor to build rapport in workplace settings (e.g. Cheng 2003; Marra and Holmes 2007; Rogerson-Revell 2007), and among language learners (e.g. Bell 2006, 2007; Davies 2003; Habib 2008). This has been, in part, in an effort to counter the common assumption that communication in intercultural settings inevitably gives rise to misunderstandings (Sarangi 1994). However, it is nonetheless clear that conversational humor can go awry in settings in which participants come from different cultural backgrounds, just as it can, indeed, go amiss in interactions where participants draw – ostensibly at least – from the same set of sociocultural resources (Bell 2015; Brône 2008).

In this paper, we focus on exploring the question of how participants who are from (ostensibly) the same or different cultural backgrounds interactionally accomplish a sequence as jocular or playful, as opposed to serious, in settings in which they are getting acquainted. We examine, in particular, the extent to which our American and Australian participants affiliate or not with a particular interactional practice through which “humor” can be accomplished, namely, “jocular quips”.

Quips can be broadly defined as witty, one-liners. More specifically, jocular quips can be defined as playful or light-hearted comments on, or responses to, another speaker’s just prior serious talk, which are designed to initiate a non-serious side sequence (Jefferson 1972), that is, a temporary break from the ongoing serious business of the current talk-in-progress. In the following

example, David has been talking about working in the oil business and how the price of oil inevitably goes up and down. Kerry quips that it is lucky his salary is not pegged to changes in oil prices.

(1) CAAT: AmAm30: 17:54

279 K: LONG as you:r salary isn't dependable on the ha th(h)e pri(h)ce
 280 [ha ha] >per litre< you're al[↑ri:ght.]
 281 D: [no:.] [>yeah<] yea:h it's no:t.
 282 ha ha ha it's not

In examining jocular quips in initial interactions among Americans and Australians, we interrogate the common assumption that, just as the Americans and British represent two groups that are “divided by a common language”¹, so too are Americans and Australians similarly divided in relation to the ways in which they accomplish and evaluate conversational forms of humor. Indeed, while we make reference to Americans and Australians in the course of this analysis we do so knowing full well that neither of these constitute homogeneous categories, and what counts as American or Australian “culture” is contested (Carbaugh 2012). Our aim is *interrogate* the commonly held assumption that there are inevitably cultural differences between Americans and Australians with respect to humor, and to *trouble* the traditional view of culture as a shared set of values.

We begin our paper, in the following section, by outlining the methodological framework underlying our comparative analysis, and the dataset we drew from in the course of that analysis. In section three, we then introduce the interactional practice, jocular quips, that emerged in the course of our analysis as one of the key ways by which humor is interactionally accomplished in that set of initial interactions. We next analyse, in section four, the extent to which responses to jocular quips were affiliative or non-affiliative across the dataset, paying particular attention to the relative proportion of these in settings oriented to by the participants as intracultural (i.e. American-American or Australian-Australian dyads), as opposed to intercultural (i.e. American-Australian). We conclude by briefly discussing the implications of our study for research about conversational humor across cultures.

¹ A quote variously attributed to George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde in relation to the (stereotypical) assumption that although the Americans and British share a common language, they are divided by different cultural practices that are masked by this common language (i.e. English).

2 Data and method

We elected to begin our analysis by examining our two datasets in a relatively open-ended manner, rather than starting with a pre-determined category of conversational humor already in mind. In order to make the subsequent comparative analysis of conversational humor in our set of initial interactions tractable, however, this initial parse of the data was guided, at least in part, by (Béal and Mullan's 2013, 2017) four-dimensional cross-cultural model of humor. According to Béal and Mullan (2013, 2017), cross-cultural studies of conversational humor can be enabled through first examining the relationship between conversational humor and (1) participant roles, (2) linguistic-discursive mechanisms, (3) pragmatic functions, and (4) interactional-sequential resources. Given our interest was, in particular, on the interactional dimension of conversational humor, that is, "its position and role in the turn-taking system" (Béal and Mullan 2017: 29), our subsequent analysis is grounded in interactional pragmatics, an approach informed by methods and research in ethnomethodological conversation analysis (Arundale 2010; Haugh 2012), but which also enables comparative analyses to be undertaken in line with Béal and Mullan's (2013, 2017) model.

2.1 Dataset

We began our study by first assembling a broadly comparable sample of data from a common discourse context, namely, initial interactions in which participants who have not previously met are getting acquainted. These initial encounters were all collected using essentially the same protocol implemented by Svennevig (1999). It was explained to voluntary participants that they were being recorded for the purposes of studying communication, but no instructions were given to participants about what they should talk about.² We drew from a number of different corpora of initial interactions, including the Corpus of Australians and Americans Talking (CAAT), a collection of 49 audio-visual recordings and transcripts of initial interactions among American and Australian speakers of English (approximately 1,230 minutes) (Haugh and Carbaugh 2015), the Australians Getting Acquainted (AGA) corpus, a collection of 18 audio-recordings and transcripts of initial interactions among Australian

² Apart from in the case of initial interactions taken from the UTCL in which participants were given a list of topics to refer to if they ran out of things to talk about, although participants referred to this list only occasionally in the recordings which we examined.

speakers of English (approximately 300 minutes) (Haugh 2011a), and a set of 14 audio-recordings of initial interactions among American speakers of English accessed through the University of Texas Conversation Library (UTCL) (approximately 360 minutes), which were collected in the course of a project on compliment sequences (Sims 1989). We then assembled our comparative dataset of 30 interactions, which consisted of 10 American-American (Am-Am), 10 Australian-Australian (Aus-Aus) and 10 American-Australian (Am-Aus) recordings and associated transcripts. The 10 interactions in each subset consisted of the same sets of gender pairings (4 same-gender: 2 female-female, 2 male-male; 6 different gender pairings), and the same sets of age pairings (7 similar age; 3 different ages), which broadly reflect the relative proportions of same/different gender and age pairings in the larger assembled dataset from which these matched subsets were sourced. Given the recordings in our comparative dataset varied in length from 20 minutes through to nearly two hours, we only examined the first 20 minutes of each interaction to ensure comparability in our frequency counts of the phenomenon in question. The comparative dataset thus consists of 10 hours of interactional data in total out of a larger source dataset of approximately 30 hours of initial interactions.

2.2 Analytical method

Our initial analytical parse of the comparative dataset focused on the interactional dimension of conversational humor identified in (Béal and Mullan's 2013, 2017) model. Previous work has found that conversational humor may emerge in initial encounters through various different interactional practices, including jocular teases (Haugh 2011a; Haugh and Pillet-Shore 2018) and other forms of (self-directed) jocular mockery (Haugh 2014, 2017a; Haugh and Carbaugh 2016), as well as joint fantasizing sequences and other forms of jocular language play (Haugh 2017b). However, in our first parse of the dataset, we noted there appeared to be variability in the *responses* of participants to what are variously called witticisms (Norrick 1984; Dynel 2009), retorts (Norrick 1993), quips (Holmes and Marra 2002), or wisecracks (Jefferson 1972; Sacks 1992), which are themselves designed as responsive in some manner to a prior turn or action (Béal and Mullan 2013, 2017). In particular, we observed that while laughter frequently occurred in response to these brief (potentially) humorous digressions, the laughter of the participant initiating it was not always reciprocated or shared by the other participant.

We then undertook a second analytical parse in which we explored this initial finding further through closely examining the sequential environments

and trajectories of action within which these brief non-serious digressions occurred, and how participants responded to them. This was aided through repeated viewings of the recordings and careful examination of detailed transcriptions of the candidate sequences in which these non-serious digressions occurred using conventions from conversation analysis (Jefferson 2004a). Through this sequential analysis we were able to characterize these (potentially) humorous digressions as a recurrent interactional practice, which we here term “jocular quips”, and to code responses to these quips as either affiliative (Stivers 2008; Stivers et al. 2011) or non-affiliative (Flint et al. Forthcoming). This yielded a collection of 58 instances of jocular quips across the set of 30 initial interactions we examined. The statistically robust tendencies that emerged through coding responses to jocular quips across the same background and mixed background dyads then motivated a further round of qualitative analysis (Robinson 2007; Stivers 2015).

In the following section, we explain in more detail what constitutes an instance of a jocular quip. We then report on the results of our comparative analysis of responses to jocular quips in initial interactions in section four.

3 Jocular quips in initial interactions

A quip is broadly defined as a “clever, witty, or humorous remark” (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2017) or “a witty or funny observation or response usually made on the spur of the moment” (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online 2017), although originally it was used to refer to “a sharp, cutting, or sarcastic remark”, and is thought to be derived from ironic uses of Latin *quippe* (‘indeed’, ‘to be sure’) (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2017). The term *quip* has for the most part been used in passing by humor researchers, and defined with respect to other related phenomena, such as witticisms, retorts or wisecracks (Norrick 1993). Norrick (1984), for instance, proposes that a quip is a type of witticism, a “humorous utterance or turn of phrase...which causes laughter” (p.195), which can occur in both humorous and non-humorous conversational settings. Retorts “occur only in response to other utterances” (Norrick 1984: 196), and in that sense invariably form an adjacency pair with the preceding turn (Norrick 1993). For that reason, retorts can in fact overlap with witticisms (including quips) that are produced in response to a preceding utterance as opposed to the situation more generally (Norrick 1984, 1986, 1993, 2003). Holmes and Marra (2002), in contrast, do not define quips with respect to these related phenomena, but rather simply propose that “[q]uips are short, sometimes witty, and often ironic

comments about the on-going action, or the topic under discussion” (p.75). Notably, they also suggest that quips are “concise and subtle ways of criticizing or challenging others” (Holmes and Marra 2002: 76). In short, while we cannot do justice here to the complex semantics of these terms (in English), a quip is broadly conceptualized in studies of conversational humor as a playful or witty ‘one-liner’ response to a prior turn or behavior that may also constitute a vehicle for criticizing or challenging others.

However, while such definitions provide a starting point, our interest here is in analyzing an interactional practice, and thus what is being *accomplished* through these kinds of playful responses and their *sequential* characteristics. How we might label such practices using ordinary language terms has important moral implications (and thus interactional consequences) (Haugh 2016), but is arguably not constitutive of them as practices per se. We thus propose that jocular quips can be characterised sequentially as non-serious or playful comments on, or responses to, another speaker’s just prior serious talk. They thus involve the accomplishment of non-serious criticisms, that is, teases (other-criticism), self-deprecations (self-criticism), or the mocking of others (third-party criticism). However, in the context of initial interactions, non-serious criticisms arguably invite intimacy (Haugh and Pillet-Shore 2018), as they are designed to occasion laughter and/or retorts from that speaker. What underlies our characterization of these non-serious criticisms as instances of jocular quips, then, is their local sequential environment: they are invariably preceded by serious talk, and are subsequently followed by a return to that prior serious talk from which they represent a brief digression. Jocular quips are thus accomplished through side sequences (Jefferson 1972), that is, brief digressions or “breaks” from the on-going accomplishment of the serious *interactional* activity in question, in this case, getting acquainted.³ In other words, to count as a quip it must be accomplished through a side sequence, which is initiated and closed as such by the participants themselves. As Jefferson (1972: 307) noted in her seminal analysis of this sequential practice, side sequences can be initiated through what she terms “wisecracks”, among other things, which set up laughter and retorts as sequentially relevant next actions. The closing of side sequences, in contrast, is accomplished through sequence closing thirds (e.g. “okay”), or resumptions of the prior on-going activity that “signal, for example, that something has been going on will now be re-attended” (Jefferson 1972: 319). The quips themselves are recurrently followed by post-positioned laughter from

3 As one reviewer points out, the fact that jocular quips can be treated interactionally as side sequences to serious talk is not to say that jocular quips do not play an important pragmatic role in getting acquainted.

the producer of the quip, either in the same turn or in third position (i.e., following a response from another participant), which invites laughter from another speaker (Jefferson 1979). It is through this shared laughter, and the incongruous proposal or suggestion made through the quip itself, that they are interactionally accomplished as jocular.

In the following excerpt, for instance, a jocular quip arises in the course of an initial interaction between Emily and Eva, two Americans in their early twenties. Prior to this excerpt, Emily has launched an unprompted self-disclosure sequence (Haugh and Carbaugh 2015) in which she is detailing her interest in learning different languages, and the difficulties she faces in doing so compared to a co-worker who can (apparently) speak four languages.

(2) CAAT: AmAm04: 6:56–7:19

- 297 Eva: =um: no I ↑think that >I was like< you know
 298 in lea:rning ↓Spanish realise like (.) this
 299 has (.) been taking me li:ke you know (.) ten
 300 years since I started in high school? like to
 301 like I- I mean I haven't been actively
 302 pursuing it but .hhh I feel like I'm a one
 303 language (0.3) other than English type person
 304 Emi: yeah.
 305 (.)
 306 Eva: ↑maybe once I'm no you know
 307 Emi:-> °you're a plus one hh ha°=
 308 Eva: =I'm ↑just a plus ↓one hh ha=
 309 Emi: =yeah hh=
 310 Eva: =maybe once I like fee:l (.) more fluent in
 311 it? (.) I'll be like oh: well it's ↑pretty
 312 close to Portuguese or it's ↑pretty close to
 313 French

Subsequent to Eva claiming to be a “one language other than English type of person” (lines 302–303), Emily teases Eva in line 307 that she is “a plus one”, a tease that is perhaps occasioned by Eva’s apparent troubles in formulating her utterance in line 306. That this suggestion constitutes an instance of a jocular quip is evident from the incongruity of Emily’s suggestion, given “plus one” normally refers to a guest one brings to a function one has been invited to, the post-positioned laughter that invites laughter in response to this suggestion (Jefferson 1979), as well as Eva’s subsequent display of appreciation through

repeating the quip and laughter (line 308). Following an agreement token (“yeah”), which here functions as a sequence-closing third (line 309), Eva resumes her prior line of talk about learning another language through a turn-initial repeat (“maybe once”) in line 310. In short, then, what we can see illustrated through this example is that jocular quips can be accomplished through non-serious comments on prior serious talk that invite (shared) laughter, followed by a return to serious talk. They thus represent brief non-serious digressions that are subsidiary to the serious business of the current talk-in-progress.

While in the excerpt above, the jocular quip is accomplished through a non-serious *comment* on the prior speaker’s serious talk that has not been mobilized by that talk as such (Stivers and Rossano 2010), jocular quips may also be accomplished through a non-serious *response* to the prior speaker’s talk, that is, prior talk that has made a response from the other party sequentially relevant in next turn (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Participants often draw from the “joke first” practice, first noted by Schegloff (1987), as a sequential resource in accomplishing these latter forms of jocular quips.

Prior to the following excerpt, for instance, Lisa and Charles, two Australians in their early thirties, have been talking about working and studying at a local university in Brisbane (QUT). Lisa has previously joked that she has been there “too long” after being asked how long she has worked there. The question from Charles in lines 362–363 thus probes this prior (ostensibly) non-serious self-disclosure from Lisa.

(3) CAAT: AusAus07: 10:55–11:12

- 362 C: yeah but ah: (0.3) ↑YEah >are you- are you
 363 gonna stay at Q U ↑T or:
 364 (0.3)
 365 L: probably.
 366 (0.2)
 367 L: -> I think I’m a (.) I’m a li:fer=
 368 C: -> =[ha ha ha ha ha ha ha]
 369 L: =[as (hh) the(hh)y sa(hh)y ha] .hh um
 370 C: =° yeah °.
 371 (0.3)
 372 L: YEa:h I really like my job at the moment
 373 it’s- I mean it’s not (0.6) particularly
 374 well-paid but it’s (0.3) I really (.)
 375 enjɔ:y it [so:]
 376 C: [mhm]

The question that prompts this self-disclosure is formatted with a trailing-off disjunctive, through which Charles orients to potential sensitivity in seeking such information from Lisa (Haugh 2011b; Walker 2012). Lisa initially responds with hedged confirmation (line 365), followed by an account as to why she expects to stay working at that university (line 367). Charles treats this account from Lisa as non-serious through laughter (line 368), which overlaps with a continuation of talk by Lisa with an idiomatic phrase (“as (hh) the(hh)ysa(hh)y”) that is interpolated with “bubbling” laughter (line 369). Following an acknowledgement token (°yeah°) from Charles, which here functions as a sequence-closing third (line 370), Lisa resumes a serious response to the initial question from Charles with a confirmation (YEa:h), followed by a seemingly genuine account that she really likes her job (lines 372–375). Lisa’s initial self-deprecatory account is thus interactionally accomplished as *jocular* through both its turn design, namely, the recourse to idiomatic phrases (“I’m a lifer”, “as they say”) (Straehle 1993) and bubbling laughter (Jefferson 2004b), and the laughing response from Charles (Glenn 2003; Jefferson et al. 1987). It is accomplished as a *quip* through its sequential design as a side sequence (Jefferson 1972), namely, that this initial account from Lisa initiates a non-serious break or digression from the on-going accomplishment of the self-disclosure sequence currently in progress, and to which it subsequently returns.

In some cases, jocular quips are accomplished through joint productions (Lerner 1991; Sacks 1992), that is, where one participant completes or extends the talk of prior speakers to produce an ostensibly semantically coherent syntactic unit.⁴ These types of jocular quips thus arise through participants treating sequential increments (Schegloff 2016) as a resource to be exploited through redirecting or altering the projected trajectory of the prior speaker’s talk as a type of “wisecrack” (Lerner 1996: 311), or what are variously called transformative continuations (Haugh and Obana 2015) or disaligning extensions (Reddington and Waring 2015).

Prior to the following excerpt, for instance, between Connor, an American in his late fifties, and Mary, an Australian student in her mid-twenties, Mary has been talking about her part-time job as an administrator in a dental clinic. At the point the excerpt begins, Connor is proposing a stepwise topic transition (Jefferson 1984a) to the question of where Mary lives, given it has been established that she is working part-time in a (presumably) well-paying job, yet is also a student.

⁴ Approximately 5/58 instances of jocular quips in our collection were accomplished in this way.

(4) CAAT: AmAus01: 8:12–8:35

- 253 C: do you st- (.) do you still live at ↑ho:me
 254 ↓o:r
 255 M: no: >I don't< I:'ve been out of home for
 256 abou::t ss::: (ooh) s:ix: yea:rs now=
 257 C: = °mhm °=
 258 M: =five to six years?=
 259 C: = °you don't look ° that ↑o:ld (.) °huh °
 260 M: eh HEH heh
 261 C: °heh heh (.) [heh heh °]
 262 M: [.hh well] I moved ↑out
 263 C: [(wh-)]
 264 M: [when] I eh heh=
 265 C: -> =when you was ↑te:n [heh heh heh heh]=
 266 M: [eh heh no: no-]=
 267 C: =[heh heh heh]
 268 M: =[huh huh oh]
 269 (0.5)
 270 C: .hh heh heh [heh]
 271 M: [I'm] twenty ↓fou:r. >eh huh huh<
 272 C: eh heh heh .hh=
 273 M: =I moved out when I was abou::t (0.4) °o:h
 274 seventeen?°
 275 C: yeah.

Connor's question in lines 253–254 is formatted with a trailing-off disjunctive that orients to the candidate answer embedded within it (Pomerantz 1988) as a potential sensitive or delicate one (Haugh 2011b; Walker 2012), an orientation that appears warranted in light of Mary's subsequent response in line 255, which disconfirms that candidate answer. Mary then goes on to elaborate that she moved out of home some time ago (lines 255–256, 258), in response to which Connor quips that Mary does not look as one might have otherwise presumed (line 259). This occasions laughter from both (lines 260–261), followed by what is projected to be an account from Mary as to why she does “not look that old” given she moved out five or six years ago (line 262), with the *well*-prefacing here indicating that the following account is projected to be somehow non-straightforward (Heritage 2015; Schegloff and Lerner 2009). Connor initially appears to launch a pre-emptive completion (Lerner 1991) in line 263, and thereby accomplish Mary's account as a joint production, but this is abandoned as Mary continues her account (line 264). Perhaps anticipating a

non-serious completion by Connor, Mary breaks down into laughter, which furnishes interactional floor such that Connor is able to then pre-emptively complete Mary's account (line 265). Given the incongruity of the suggestion (i.e., that she moved out when she was ten), and the post-positioned laughter that follows, it is evident this tease is designed as a jocular quip. While both Connor and Mary laugh at this teasing suggestion (lines 266–270), Mary nevertheless responds in line 266 by laughingly rejecting the tease (Drew 1987), clarifying her current age (line 271), and then resuming her prior serious account through a restart in line 273 that recycles the antecedent of the joint production from line 262 (i.e. "I moved out"). The tease is thus accomplished as part of a non-serious side sequence, that is, a brief digression from the ongoing serious talk about where Mary lives and when she moved out of her parent's home.

Finally, the way in which jocular quips are recurrently designed to occasion laughter becomes apparent in the following excerpt in which a redoing of an initially serious response to the quip is prompted by laughter from the initial speaker who produced what turns out to be a quip. Prior to this excerpt between Lisa and Paula, two Australians in their early thirties, Paula has been talking about her children, the existence of whom was established in the course of an unprompted self-disclosure (Haugh and Carbaugh 2015), which arose following a question from Lisa about Paula's occupation. Paula here initiates a stepwise topic-transition (Jefferson 1984a) to the question of whether Lisa has children.

(5) CAAT: AusAus06: 2:08–2:18

- 91 P: [so:] (.) ↑yeah [d'you] have any=
 92 L: [°ni:ce°]
 93 P: =children?
 94 L: .hh NO:.=
 95 P: =no? ha [ha ha ha]
 96 L: -> [no:>↑I have a] ↓ca:t.=
 97 P: =.hh ni [ce.]
 98 L: [eh HEH] HEH [HEH hmhmhm °<she's] my=
 99 P: [ha ha ha ha ha ha]
 100 L: =#ba:by#. >°=
 101 P: =.hh yea:h ha[ha ha]
 102 L: [°yeah um°] (0.3) °yeah no kids°
 103 P: [.hh]
 104 L: [°↑mm°]>HOw many kids do you ↑have

Paula's question in line 91 is, notably, prefaced with a turn-initial "so" that treats the question as addressing an incipient matter (Bolden 2009), and the question itself is

formulated as a polar question that favors a “yes-response” as a type-conforming response (Pomerantz 1988; Raymond 2003). Lisa responds, however, emphatically in the negative (line 94). This occasions a repeat of Lisa’s response by Paula in line 95 seeking confirmation, followed by laughter that orients to this question as one that has turned out to be potentially sensitive (Holt 2013). It is this apparent momentary interactional trouble that Lisa addresses through the unprompted self-disclosure that follows, in which she confirms that while she does not have children she does “have a ↓ca:t” (line 96). Paula initially responds in line 97 with a positive assessment, as perhaps might be expected (Haugh and Carbaugh 2015), but Lisa’s subsequent laughter in line 98 construes her prior unprompted self-disclosure as (ostensibly) non-serious, and Paula redoes her prior response through joining in with laughter (line 99). Lisa elaborates on the idea that her cat is like a child (lines 98, 100), which occasions appreciation and further laughter from Paula (line 101), before returning to confirm seriously that she does not have children (line 102), and then asking Paula how many children she has (line 104), thereby closing this non-serious digression. Notably, Lisa’s delayed laughter here prompts Paula to redo her initial response to Lisa’s unprompted self-disclosure, and proffer laughter instead, thereby interactionally accomplishing it as a self-deprecatory jocular quip. This offers sequence-internal evidence that the preferred response to a jocular quip is indeed laughter, and in some cases reciprocation or elaboration of the quip, followed by return to serious talk, a point to which we will consider in more detail in the following section.

In this section, we have proposed that jocular quips are interactionally accomplished as such through side sequences, and thus represent a brief digression that is subsidiary to the ongoing serious talk-in-progress. We also noted that these jocular quips regularly occasion laughter that displays appreciation for these non-serious digressions. However, as we briefly noted at the beginning of this paper, instances of jocular quips in our collection did not always occasion laughing appreciation. In the following section, we thus move to analyse in more detail responses to jocular quips in these initial interactions, focusing, in particular, on whether these responses were affiliative or non-affiliative.

4 Responding to jocular quips in initial interactions

4.1 Affiliative and non-affiliative responses to jocular quips

It has been tacitly presupposed thus far that jocular quips regularly occasion laughter, and through these laughing responses, participants display an orientation to the quip as jocular. In other words, through laughter, participants

affiliate with the non-serious stance implemented through the jocular quip in question. More specifically, an affiliative response involves the recipient aligning with the quip as initiating a side sequence, as well as displaying acceptance and support of the non-serious affective stance implemented by the quip, through laughter, and in some cases through a retort or escalation of the quip. In proffering an affiliative response, participants are thereby able to interactionally accomplish a moment of relational intimacy or connection (Arundale 2010; Haugh 2010; Haugh and Pillet-Shore 2018) in the course of that initial interaction. One might expect, of course, that affiliative responses constitute the preferred response in initial interactions, given the more general preference for “agreeability” in such contexts (Haugh 2015; Schneider 1988; Svennevig 1999). Indeed, we did not identify any instances in our collection of jocular quips in which responses to these quips were disaffiliative per se. However, we did observe a number of cases in which responses to jocular quips were non-affiliative (Flint et al. Forthcoming; cf. Stivers 2008; Stivers et al. 2011). A non-affiliative response is one that does not align with the quip as initiating a side sequence, and does not display acceptance or support for the prior speaker’s non-serious affective stance. It is accomplished through proffering only a minimal acknowledgement of the quip (e.g. “yeah”) that *continues* the prior serious talk rather than resumes it (Jefferson 1972), thereby tacitly resisting the quip as a move to initiate a non-serious digression.

The distinction we are making between affiliative and non-affiliative responses to jocular quips is illustrated through a comparison of the two examples below. In each case, a continuer question, “what do you want to do with that”, following talk about the person in question’s chosen field of study, makes available the inference (through an implicated premise) that the field of study may not lead anywhere productive. In other words, the question is interpretable as implementing a teasing challenge. In both cases, the recipient deals with potential delicacy of making such a challenge in the context of an initial interaction through a joke-first response (Schegloff 1987) that appears to be designed to initiate a non-serious side sequence. That these initial responses to the question are designed to be heard as jocular quips is evident from their subsequent redoing of a serious response to the question in order to close the side sequence. However, the response of the recipient in each case is somewhat different. In example (6), the response to the quip is affiliative, while in the case of example (7), it is non-affiliative.

Example (6) is taken from an initial interaction between two Americans: Sarah who is in her early sixties, and Cole who is in his early forties. Cole is responding to an earlier question from Sarah about what he’d like to do once he finishes the MBA program in which he is currently enrolled.

(6) CAAT: AmAm08: 1:03–1:23

- 48 C: but I'm thinking uh: (.) .hhh (0.2) uh
 49 m:aybe:::: >if the MBA works out< an- (1.6)
 50 >I feel good about it maybe working on<a: a
 51 PhD in economics.
 52 (0.5)
 53 S: and then what you [wanna] do with ↑that
 54 C: [° ° so ° °]
 55 (0.6)
 56 C: -> OH: reti:re (.) you know like [m-]
 57 S: [hHA]
 58 C: I don't know. (.) wri:te f=
 59 S: =hm=
 60 C: =s- (0.3) tea:ch I don't know whatever
 61 > ° like ° < =
 62 S: = ° mhm ° =
 63 C: =[(go)]
 64 S: =[THAT'S WHAT I'm hoping that my son] does
 65 I'm hoping he: ends up in academia

Sarah's question in line 53 about Cole plans to do with a PhD thus recycles her earlier question (data not shown) about what he wants to do with an MBA. Given it has been already established that Cole is only in his early forties, his proposal in line 56 that he will retire after finishing a PhD is apparently ironic as that is clearly not what he is planning to do, and so implements a tacitly mocking stance towards Sarah's line of questioning. Sarah affiliates with this mock proposal as non-serious through laughter (line 57), following which Cole proffers a serious response, namely, that he is not yet sure but appears to be aiming to enter academia (lines 58, 60–61). Sarah subsequently reveals that the underlying agenda of her line of questioning is she is genuinely supportive of such a career choice rather than critical (lines 64–65), despite Cole's initial ironic quip orienting to a tacitly critical stance on Sarah's part.

In example (7), taken from an interaction between Sophia, an American in her mid-twenties, and Gina, an Australian who is nearly twenty, the same question type occasions a jocular quip, but in this case the recipient does not respond with laughter. The excerpt begins with Sophia returning to the question of what Gina is currently studying.

- (7) CAAT: AmAus05: 9:58–10:12
- 372 S: so you're studying I↓talian.
- 373 G: yep. (.) it's a: (.)>double major so it's
374 Itlian and linguistics.<
375 (.)
- 376 S: oh: ↑cool.
377 (.)
- 378 G: so I just [s-]
- 379 S: [w:]hat do you wanna ↑#do with
380 that#
381 (0.3)
- 382 G: -> um: (0.7) £I ↑didn't really think very far
383 -> a↓head when I picked the cou↑rse£ hh=
384 -> =[hhuh]
- 385 S: =[yea:h.]
- 386 G: .hh it was more just (.) wha:t do I enjoy
387 what am I good at?
388 (.)
- 389 S: yeah

Through so-prefacing her question, Sophia treats it as orienting to an incipient matter that has already been touched upon previously (Bolden 2009). Gina's response that she is combining Italian with linguistics occasions a positive assessment (line 376), followed by a continuer question, which orients to Gina's plans for her career (lines 379–380), which, as in example (6) above, makes available the inference that Sophia disapproves of this choice as not leading anywhere (or at least alludes to the fact that some people may disapprove of it). While Gina does not hold Sophia accountable for this embedded inferable (Haugh 2017c), she nevertheless orients to the question as raising a sensitive or delicate manner through a subsequent self-deprecatory quip in which she admits she hasn't thought about where the degree might head career-wise (lines 382–383). However, the quip is framed as jocular through its delivery with smile voice (Jefferson 2004b; Holt 2010), and post-positioned laughter (line 384). Sophia does not, however, laugh in response, but rather simply acknowledges this response with a continuer (line 385), and Gina subsequently goes on to proffer an account for her choice, namely, choosing what she's "good at" (lines 386–387). The fact that Sophia's response in line 385 overlaps with the delivery of the turn-final laughter in line 384 does not mean that she did not have the opportunity to orient to the prior self-deprecatory remark as a jocular quip, as responsive laughter could have been appended following the continuer.

Sophia thus arguably *withholds* laughter at this point. In this case, then, while Sophia does not disaffiliate with the jocular quip as such, she does not align with it as initiating a side-sequence nor does she display acceptance or support for the non-serious affective stance implemented through the quip. In short, her response is non-affiliative.

In the following sub-section, we go on to report the tendency for jocular quips to more frequently occasion non-affiliative responses in *mixed* background compared to same country pairings of participants in these initial interactions. We then detail interactional evidence, in Section 4.3, for our claim that these interactional troubles in responding to jocular quips in the “intercultural” initial interactions were not a result of “cultural differences”, that is, due to the participants being American as opposed to Australian, or vice versa. Instead, we suggest that they stem from troubles the participants experienced in accomplishing particularistic co-membership in particular nominated categories, or in affiliating with the shared critical, mocking attitudes attributed to, or directed at that category.

4.2 Comparative analysis of responses to jocular quips

We double-coded responses to the 58 instances of jocular quips in our collection with respect to whether the recipient in question laughed or elaborated or escalated the quip through a retort (an *affiliative* response), or, alternatively, responded with a minimal acknowledgement or continuer token that neither aligned with the quip as initiating a digression nor supported the non-serious affective stance of the speaker producing the quip (a *non-affiliative* response). The respective counts of affiliative and non-affiliative responses to jocular quips are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Frequency of affiliative and non-affiliative responses to jocular quips in same country and mixed country background pairings.

	Affiliative	Non-affiliative	Total
Am-Am	11 (73%)	4 (27%)	15
Aus-Aus	15 (79%)	4 (21%)	19
Am-Aus	7 (28%)	17 (68%)	24
Total	33	25	58

It is immediately apparent that the highest frequency of non-affiliative responses were found in the mixed-country initial interactions between Americans and Australians (68%), while the rate of occurrence of non-affiliative responses was

much lower in the same-country interactions in which Americans were getting acquainted with Americans (27%), and Australians were getting acquainted with Australians (21%). The relative frequency of affiliative responses was, conversely, much higher in the same-country initial interactions (73% and 79%, respectively), as opposed to the much lower relative frequency in the mixed-country initial interactions (28%). This difference was statistically significant at the 0.001 level according to a chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 12.94$; $p = 0.0015$). The results above clearly indicate that both American and Australian participants produce jocular quips, and overwhelmingly affiliate with these quips in the same-country initial interactions.

In order to rule out the possibility that it was either the American or Australian participants who had troubles with jocular quips in the mixed-country initial interactions, we report in Table 2 below, the number of affiliative and non-affiliative responses produced by the American and Australian participants in the mixed-country interactions.

Table 2: Frequency of affiliative and non-affiliative responses to jocular quips in the mixed background dyads.

	American	Australian	Total
Affiliative	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	7
Non-affiliative	8 (47%)	9 (53%)	17
Total	13	11	24

Non-affiliative responses to jocular quips were evenly distributed across the American and Australian participants, and there was a slightly higher rate of affiliative responses to jocular quips among the American participants. The small differences above were found to not be statistically significant according to a chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 0.41$; $p = 0.522$). It is apparent, then, that it is not being American or Australian per se that results in a higher rate of non-affiliative responses to jocular quips in the mixed-country initial interactions.

It appears from our analysis, then, that responses to jocular quips are more frequently non-affiliative in mixed background (“intercultural”) settings in which Americans and Australians are getting acquainted, as opposed to same background (“intracultural”) settings (in which Americans are getting acquainted with Americans, and Australians are getting acquainted with Australians).⁵ However,

⁵ Although this was not the primary focus of our study, we also investigated whether the higher rate of non-affiliative responses correlated with differences in gender or age. No significant differences in relative frequencies were observed with respect to these variables, although the

we suggest that this is not due to the participants being American or Australian *per se*. Whether the jocular quip was produced or responded to by an American or Australian participant did not in itself appear to motivate the higher rate of non-affiliative responses in the mixed background initial interactions. This begs the question as to what might have caused the higher rate of non-affiliative responses to jocular quips in the “intercultural” initial interactions.

In the following sub-section, we suggest that the higher rate of non-affiliative responses in initial interactions oriented to by the participants as intercultural can be traced to troubles with respect to accomplishing particularistic co-membership, and shared critical, mocking attitudes with respect to those categories.

4.3 Non-affiliative responses and particularistic co-membership

While in a small number of instances, non-affiliative responses occasioned a repair sequence in which the non-affiliative response was exposed (Jefferson 1987) as inapposite, in most cases any potential interactional troubles remained embedded, as the recipient of the jocular quip simply passed on or opted out of responding to the jocular quip as such. The relatively small number of instances in which participants exposed the non-affiliative responses in mixed background dyads as inapposite (3/17 cases) can be attributed, we presume, to the general preference for progressivity in interaction (Stivers and Robinson 2006), and for the sake of maintaining at least a veneer of “agreeability” in the case of initial interactions specifically (Haugh 2015; Schneider 1988; Svennevig 1999). Of the remaining 14 instances, closer analysis revealed these troubles in affiliating with the jocular quip in question could be largely attributed to difficulties in accomplishing particularistic co-membership (Erickson and Shultz 1982; Pillet-Shore 2016), and, consequently, troubles affiliating with critical or mocking attitudes attributed to, or directed at that particularistic category.

In the following excerpt, for instance, from an initial interaction between Chad, an American in his late twenties, and Patrick, an Australian in his mid-thirties, Patrick discloses that his experience with Americans has been mostly through ones he met when he was living in Taiwan.

number of mixed and same gender/age pairings are too small to draw any definitive conclusions.

(8) CAAT: AmAus04: 3:42–4:00

- 157 P: and ↑that's probably where I- .hh I know most
 158 of (0.3) m:ost of my: (0.3) A↑merican
 159 edu↑cation>if you wanna call i-< or [about]=
 160 C: [yea:h]=
 161 P: =America has come from Taipei ci↑ty because
 162 °we had a lot of Americans° .hh[h]
 163 C: [↑o]↓kay
 164 (.)
 165 P: in: [in:]
 166 C: -> [hope]fully they weren't too crazy
 167 [uh HUH huh] .hh
 168 P: [a h: : .hh]
 169 (0.4)
 170 P: my: experience is um: (0.8) East (.) Coast
 171 (.) Americans?
 172 (.)
 173 C: mmhh
 174 P: tend to be more down to earth?
 175 (0.4)
 176 C: °tsk oh yeah.°

However, before Patrick finishes what he appears to be about to go on to say about there being a lot of Americans in Taipei (line 165), Chad chimes in with a seemingly negative assessment of Americans, anticipating that Patrick may have had problems with them (line 166). This is followed by post-positioned laughter in line 167 that construes this as a jocular quip. However, the referent of “they” remains open to some interpretation as to which Americans Chad is talking about, and so whether this is an other-directed or self-directed (albeit non-serious) criticism remains ambivalent. Patrick only minimally acknowledges Chad’s quip (line 168), and then moves to tacitly clarify which Americans Chad is referring to by claiming to have only had experience with “East Coast Americans” (lines 170–171), who he found to “more down to earth” (line 174), perhaps in contrast to common stereotypes about “West Coast Americans” (particularly those from LA and surrounding areas). Chad responds to this latter claim with (ostensible) agreement in line 176. In this case, then, it appears that Patrick does not affiliate with Chad’s jocular quip as it is not entirely clear whether Chad considers himself to be a part of nominated group of “crazy” Americans, and thus whether affiliating with it would amount to agreeing to a self-directed or other-directed criticism.

Indeed, in talk that follows, Chad goes on to suggest that the group of Americans towards which the jocular quip was directed was not meant to include himself, given it has already been established that Chad is from the South East region of the US.

(9) CAAT: AmAus04: 4:00–4:08

- 176 C: °tsk oh yeah.°
 177 (.)
 178 P: does that make sense
 179 (.)
 180 C: .hh ↑I would agree with tha:t is- (.) well hh
 181 (.) the South East=
 182 P: =[the Sou(h)th East ha ha]
 183 C: =[eh HA ha .ha YEA:H] the North East
 184 they °seem to be kinda full of themselves

Following ostensible agreement from Chad (in line 176), Patrick prompts an elaborated response from Chad about his position on Americans who are “down to earth” as opposed to “crazy” (line 178). Chad modifies his prior agreement by claiming that Americans from the South East are “down to earth” (lines 180–181), in response to which Patrick displays appreciation through repetition and laughter (line 182). This laughter is shared by Chad (line 183), who then goes on to clarify that only Americans from the South East are “down to earth”, while those from the North East are not, and instead are rather “full of themselves” (lines 183–184).

We can observe similar problems with respect to accomplishing particularistic co-membership, and in affiliating with the mocking, critical stance towards that group, in the following excerpt from an interaction between Mary and Connor (cf. example 4). The sequence in question begins with a presentation-eliciting question from Mary about which area in the US Connor comes from.

(10) CAAT: AmAus01: 11:20–11:38

- 349 M: ↑whereabouts in the States are you from?
 350 C: from Ohio.
 351 (0.2)
 352 M: °Ohio o [k a y°]
 353 C: [are you] familiar with the:
 354 States at all?

- 355 M: tsk °.hh°
 356 (1.2)
 357 M: -> um: not as familiar as you
 358 eh HEH heh [heh]
 359 C: [.hh] >well<(.) if- if
 360 this was the United States
 361 (.)
 362 M: [yeah]
 363 C: [and] this: (0.3) would be:: ah: (.)
 364 th- this would be the- (0.4) the east coast
 365 New York (0.5) you know

Subsequent to Connor responding he is (originally) from Ohio (line 350), Mary does not proceed with what might be expected, namely, a continuer question (Svennevig 1999), but simply acknowledges understanding (line 352). This repetition is what perhaps occasions Connor's question about whether Mary is familiar with different parts of the US, including Ohio (lines 353–354). However, rather than proffering a type-conforming response (Raymond 2003), that is, “yes” or “no”, Mary responds, after a significant pause (line 356) that her knowledge of the US is evidently less than would be expected of Connor (line 357), followed by post-positioned laughter (line 358) that invites a treatment of her response as a non-serious quip. Connor, however, disattends this jocular quip as he immediately starts to explain where Ohio is located in the US (lines 359–360, 363–365). In this case, then, while Mary invites Connor to affiliate with a mocking, critical attitude towards persons who are not well-informed about basic geographical knowledge, and at the same time, takes a somewhat ironic stance with respect to Connor's prior question about her geographical knowledge through format tying (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987; Sacks 1992), Connor appears unwilling to position himself with respect to this proposed particularistic category. His non-affiliative response to Mary's jocular quip can thus arguably be traced to troubles in accomplishing particularistic co-membership with respect to persons whose geographical knowledge is limited.⁶

Epistemic issues, that is, issues of who is expected to know what, were also frequently tied in with non-affiliative responses to jocular quips, as we can see in the following example from an initial interaction between Alice, an American in her mid-thirties, and Richard, an Australian in his mid-twenties. The excerpt begins with Richard's account as to how he knows the research assistant

⁶ It is interesting to note, in passing, Haugh and Carbaugh's (2016) finding that American participants in initial interactions frequently orient to a perceived lack of geographical knowledge in interactionally accomplishing jocular self-deprecations.

organising the conversations, namely, that he got to know her when she was his tutor when he was studying linguistics as an undergraduate. Richard then proffers an unprompted self-disclosure when he tells Alice that he is now studying “honors” at a local university in Brisbane (UQ).

- (11) CAAT: AmAus08: 0:29–1:01
- 39 R: so I’m currently doing my honours in
40 linguistics at UQ.
- 41 A: oka:y? and wha:t (.) you’re doing your
42 honours in linguistics? [so] what does=
43 R: [yep.]
- 44 A: =↓that mean [li:ke]
- 45 R: [oh:] okay. so it’s like
46 an: um: like a f- additional yea:r?
- 47 A: ↑o:[↓ka:y]
- 48 R: [of:] just researching? and writing
49 an honours thesis?
- 50 A: >is it< ↑oh: a ↓thesis [>okay] so you doing=
51 R: [so:]
- 52 A: =Masters? or: PhD.
53 (1.0)
- 54 R: um: so:>no it’s it’s (0.9) it’s (.) yea:h.
55 like it’s: (.) be[↓fo:re a PhD] yea:h.=
- 56 A: [↑oh: o↓ka:y?]
- 57 R: =[yeah so:]
- 58 A: =[°okay°]
59 (.)
- 60 R: how it works ↓here is you ha:ve like you=
61 =[do: your und-]
- 62 A:-> =[°yeah° PLEASE] expla(h)in ha ha [ha ha]=
63 R: [yeah.]=
64 so you [do: you] do like your degree:
- 65 A: [ha ha ha]
- 66 A: o:kay?
- 67 R: tsk and then: (.) some degree:s (.) include
68 honours as part of: the degree

It becomes apparent, however, that Alice is not familiar with what “honors” refers to (lines 42, 44). Richard then goes on to explain that it is one extra year and involves writing a thesis (lines 45–46, 48–49), but this prompts a further

clarification question from Alice as to whether Richard is doing a Masters or a PhD (lines 50, 52). The repair sequence that is launched here by Alice appears to be occasioned by a lack of knowledge on her part about the “honors degree” system that is particular to Australia, namely, an additional year of study subsequent to being awarded an undergraduate degree, which qualifies one to enter a PhD program. Indeed, Richard starts to explain just that, although he initially only notes that it is “before a PhD” (lines 54–55), and prompts Alice to display the upshot of this (line 57). However, Alice does not furnish any such upshot. Instead, she indicates this is new information for her (“oh”) (Heritage 1984), and displays, ostensibly at least, understanding of Richard’s account (“okay”) (Schegloff 2007), and proposes closing this sequence (Beach 1995) (lines 56, 58). Richard subsequently treats his prior explanation as incomplete in restarting his answer to her prior question with an explicit orientation to “honors” as something done “here”, with the intonational emphasis on the later orienting to it as something specific to Australia as opposed to the US (line 60). Through this, then, Richard tacitly positions himself as knowing something that Alice doesn’t, that is, as having epistemic authority (Heritage and Raymond 2005) to speak on this matter as a member of the academic community in Australia. Alice orients to this claim to epistemic authority with a mock request that Richard “please explain” followed by post positioned laughter, thereby gently teasing him for this tacit claim to epistemic authority (and thus his attribution of her epistemic subordination to him). In so doing, she also tacitly resists Richard’s claim to particularistic co-membership, given she herself is also studying in Australia. Richard’s subsequent response, however, is non-affiliative, as he disattends this mock request as a jocular quip by only proffering a minimal acknowledgement token (“yeah”) in line 63, before continuing on with his explanation about “honors” (lines 64, 67–68). Once again, it appears troubles in accomplishing particularistic co-membership and a shared mocking, critical stance associated with that co-membership is what occasions a non-affiliative response to a jocular quip.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed that one way in which conversational humor can be accomplished in initial interactions among (American and Australian) speakers of English is through jocular quips. This interactional practice is accomplished through a brief non-serious digression from the on-going activity of getting acquainted, and is a vehicle for a jocular criticism, which in the context of an initial interaction, proffers an opportunity for a momentary display of relational connection or intimacy between the participants. While jocular quips recurrently occasion

affiliative responses, that is, laughter and/or further retorts, a key finding to emerge from an examination of responses to jocular quips in dyads in which participants from the same country were paired compared to those who were from different countries, is that there was a significantly greater number of non-affiliative responses in the latter.

While this would, at first glance, seem to lend support to the oft made claim that while Americans and Australians share a common language, they are divided by different cultures, we have argued that the greater frequency of non-affiliative responses to jocular quips in the “intercultural” initial interactions involving Americans getting to know Australians cannot be straightforwardly traced to supposed cultural differences. Instead, we have suggested that non-affiliative responses arise when participants have troubles in accomplishing particularistic co-membership and shared critical, mocking attitudes with respect to the category in question. We would note that tracing the non-affiliative responses to jocular quips to participant troubles in accomplishing particularistic co-membership in the mixed background dyads, also allows us to explain instances in which non-affiliative responses to jocular quips arose in the same background dyads. In the case of jocular quips in initial interactions, then, it appears that Americans and Australians are not “divided by a common language” as such, but rather that affiliating with jocular quips in such contexts is contingent on the locally situated accomplishment of particular membership categories and predicates associated with these.

Given the relatively small sample size of this study it is not possible to offer a definitive account of why these participants sometimes experienced troubles in accomplishing particular co-membership and associated predicates in the mixed background dyads. We would suggest, however, two possibilities that have implications for the way in which culture and cultural differences are conceptualized with respect to conversational humor. The first is that many of these jocular quips were premised on the participants having access to particular knowledge and associated discourses. We make quips presuming the other participant has access to the necessary knowledge to make sense of that quip as a quip. This aligns with a conceptualization of culture as a set of interpretive resources that are invariably differentially distributed across members who identify themselves with that cultural group (Sperber 1996). A second, related possibility is that the participants in the mixed backgrounds initial interactions were orienting to them as *intercultural* interactions in which they took a more cautious approach to humor given the potential for it to inadvertently cause offence.⁷ This suggests that orienting to an interaction as an intergroup or intercultural one can influence participants’ responses to others’ attempts at

7 We would like to thank one of the reviewers for nicely articulating this possibility.

humor. More specifically, presuming access to particular knowledge or membership involves making claims to particular epistemic rights and epistemic territories (Bolden 2014), claims that participants may orient to as potentially more sensitive in interactions that they orient to as intercultural. This aligns with a conceptualization of culture as something which participants can, at particular moments, orient to as relevant to the interactional business in hand. It appears, then, that in spite of (well grounded) claims that culture itself is a highly contested notion, the distinction between “intracultural” and “intercultural” interactions is one towards which participants may themselves orient. In other words, such categories are not mere analytic fictions.

It remains to be seen, of course, whether such findings can be replicated with larger samples or with speakers of other varieties of English. It would also be well worth exploring, in our view, whether this interactional practice contributes to the accomplishment of conversational humor in other languages or varieties of those languages. In so doing, we can further explore the extent to which conversational humor varies across different cultures, a research program that offers us further insights into larger questions about the ways in which humor both unites and divides humanity.

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