Children's response to humor in translated poetry

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CHAPTER 8

Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an elaboration of some of the most important points concerning humor raised in the results and analysis chapter. These points are the impact of culture on humor enjoyment, the implications of reading practices for social relationships and the seemingly weak link between comprehensibility and funniness, the understanding of humor versus appreciation of it and the preference for content over rhyme as a determinant of humor. The impact of culture on humor enjoyment provides a concrete illustration of humor in a cultural context as discussed in Chapter 5 while the second point – the implications of reading practices for social relationships – introduces a plausible explanation to an unforeseen finding about comprehensibility and humor. The third point about understanding humor versus appreciating it makes a case for humor competence demanded in appreciating funny poems, and the last point, dealing with content and rhyme, offers an answer to one of the research questions.

8.2 Influence of culture on humor

As pointed out in Chapter 6, the poems by Dahl and Silverstein, which were used in the study, are widely recognized comic verses for English-speaking children. "The Dentist and the Crocodile" is featured on the website of The Poetry Foundation – the publisher of POETRY magazine – as one of two poems representing Dahl's poetry. "Sick," on the other hand, is one of the two poems chosen

by the Academy of American Poets as samples of Silverstein's poetry as shown on its website poets.org. The fact that poetry organizations have selected these two poems from the poets' many works suggests that they are representative of their best poetry as well as reflect the writers' styles the most. Both poems rely on humorous incongruity to create an element of surprise, making them typical examples of the two writers' oeuvres known for unexpected endings.

However, the analysis showed that the poems did not have the same degree of comic effect on the Filipino children involved in this study, compared to readers from other cultures. Most participants found the Filipino translations of the poems only "somewhat funny" and even "serious" to a certain extent. The reasons behind the children's response reveal how culture could have influenced their perception of humor. As the preceding chapter showed, the poems of Dahl and Silverstein promoted more sympathy than humor among Filipino readers, which hindered the readers from fully appreciating the comedic nature of the poems. They empathized with the characters of the dentist (who was frightened) and the child (whom they believed to be gravely ill rather than just pretending) and regarded them as real people facing difficult and undesirable circumstances.

8.2.1 The Filipino virtue of pakikipagkapwa-tao

The ability to recognize others as fellow humans is a core value in Filipino culture. Such regard for others is called "pakikipagkapwa-tao" in Filipino or interpersonalism in English, borrowing the term used by Aguas (2016). It is instilled from childhood, though the Filipino term is often not used and in its place referred to as "kindness", "sensitivity" or other similar terms which do not fully capture the essence of the Filipino value. Pakikipagkapwa-tao comes from the word "kapwa", the core value of Filipino personhood (De Guia 2005: 28), and which Reyes (2015: 149) maintains is "in a way untranslatable into English. . . . because it is embedded in an entirely different worldview and web of meanings unique to Philippine culture and history."

Kapwa, both a concept and value, suggests "a shared identity and combines or relates the self with the other" (Aguas 2016: 18). Virgilio Enriquez (1992: 52), founder of Sikolohiyang Filipino (Filipino Psychology), describes it as follows:

> When asked for the closest English equivalent of kapwa, one word that comes to mind is the English word 'others.' However, the Filipino word kapwa differs from the English word 'others.' In Filipino, kapwa is the unity of the 'self' and 'others.' The English 'others' is actually used in opposition to the 'self,' and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, kapwa is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others.

He adds (1992: 52): "This Filipino linguistic unity of the self and the other is unique and unlike in most modern languages. Why? Because implied in such inclusiveness is the moral obligation to treat one another as equal fellow human

beings." Enriquez (1979: 12) also said that "the ako (ego) and the iba-sa-akin (others) are one and the same in kapwa psychology: Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa (I am no different from others). Once ako starts thinking of himself as different from kapwa, the self, in effect, denies the status of kapwa to the other." This is the basis of many Filipino practices that portray collectivism rather than the Western value of individualism. One such example is bayanihan which is taught in school from an early age. From the word "bayan" which means town, community or nation, it refers to a spirit of civic unity and cooperation aimed at achieving a certain goal. For example, donating relief goods to victims of calamities is a form of bayanihan.

Thus, the children could have viewed the situations in the poems and whether they were appropriate for laughter through the lens of the concepts of kapwa and pakikipagkapwa-tao. It felt natural to them to get emotionally involved with the fictional characters as if they were "concrete, acting, relating individual[s]" (Aguas 2016: 17) whose well-being should be regarded as such affective disposition is allowed and encouraged in Filipino society. Sympathy toward the characters was evident even with the proposed alternative endings. Some children stressed that the suggested harsh or tragic endings were merely "pretend" and would "not happen in real life." Others proposed "mild" situations to close the poems. For instance, the crocodile swallows – but not chews and kills – the dentist or the lady and he/they is/are alive and "just in the tummy."

8.2.2 Filipino humor

This is not to say that Filipinos do not possess a sense of humor. Referring to humor as one of the "strengths of Filipino character", social psychologist Patricia Licuanan (1994: 36) states:

> Filipinos have a cheerful and fun-loving approach to life and its ups and downs. We have a pleasant disposition, a sense of humor, and a propensity for happiness that contribute not only to the Filipino's charm but also to the indomitability of the Filipino spirit. Laughing at ourselves and our troubles is an important coping mechanism. Often playful, sometimes cynical, sometimes disrespectful, we laugh at those we love and at those we hate, and make jokes about our fortune, good and bad.

However, the current study also shows that Filipino primary-aged children tend to prefer non-hostile, non-aggressive forms of humor over one that is made at the expense of others with little regard, if any, for their feelings. Reyes (2015: 159) argues that "jokes, laughing and teasing are a huge part of Filipino culture, especially around the dinner table or during feasts and celebrations." But such joking is reserved only to those who are close to someone. Citing Maggay (2002: 87), he adds: "Joking/teasing is also a measure of our closeness or level of comfort with others. We do not joke or tease other people."

8.2.3 Value preferences in humor appreciation

Although the children did not describe the humor in the poems using the good-bad or acceptable-unacceptable dichotomies, their responses reveal their value preferences in evaluating situations. As Aguas (2016: 21) explains, "the Filipino psyche also puts emphasis on concrete situations; Filipino[s] are situation centered and their behaviors are clearly influenced by [the] present situation." In other words, Filipinos respond to the world depending on actual circumstances. Aguas, for example, notes that Filipinos can be "hardworking or lazy", or "friendly or rude" depending on the situation. The Filipino relationship-oriented virtue ethics (Reyes 2015) combined with the tendency to focus on the situation could have affected the way the children in the study perceived the humor in the poems' narrative events where sympathy for the characters took precedence, thereby prompting them to respond with restraint to the intended humor. Hay (2001) writes that "full support of humor" entails four implicatures: "*recognition* of a humorous frame, *understanding* the humor, *appreciating* the humor, and *agreeing* with any message associated with it" (italics in the original). Although Hay applied this framework to verbal joking, it can also be used to analyze responses to written humorous literature. In the case of the children whose appreciation of the humor in the poems may have been affected by cultural factors, there appears to be no agreement with the message associated with the humor. Whether or not the children only answered what is socially desirable still points to the influence of culture in their response to the materials.

8.3 Effects of reading humorous materials

8.3.1 Reading widely for pleasure

The study shows that by the time children reach the ages 8 and 9, they are likely to be more motivated, independent readers: there were slightly more participants who said that they prefer reading on their own – and enjoy it – than being read to by adults. While their love for reading can be supported by giving them texts of their own choosing, this is also an excellent period to introduce them to other materials to develop their reading skills as well as their interest to read widely. For example, the study found that children in this age group are open to reading poems, not just stories, for pleasure. Furthermore, although they preferred poems that tell stories, there is also an indication that informational poems appeal to them, which could mean that they can also develop a liking for nonfiction texts such as essays. This observation contradicts the popular notion that children at this age like only narratives and no other genres. Because children tend to read works by familiar authors, adults can take advantage of this behavior by letting children explore the authors' less famous works. For example, the novellas of Roald Dahl for children are widely popular among Filipino children and their parents. But this cannot be said of

his comic poetry which remains inaccessible and largely ignored: in fact, not one of the children in the study has encountered the poem by Dahl used in the reading sessions, even though it is very popular in other cultures, and none of them knew he wrote poetry.

8.3.2 Stronger social relationships

The current study found that although children in this age group choose to read independently, this does not mean they do not want to read along with others especially when reading humorous texts. On the contrary, reading together with family members or other children makes funny works even more enjoyable for them. Thus, reading for humor is not only a private activity for independent readers; it can also form and strengthen bonds of relationships. When done together with other children, they are able to benefit from shared experiences and knowledge and the freedom from the hierarchy that can be found, for example, in teacher-student interaction. Filipino children's perceptions of roles likewise came into light in connection with reading humorous material and the exchange that comes after. The children in the study recognize that when adults engage with them in reading, their role is to guide them in understanding complex content and vocabulary especially when the work is in a language in which the children lack fluency. Although comprehensibility can be increased when they share texts with other children and talk about them, for the children in the study, it is mainly the role of adults to explain what does not make sense to them which aids humor appreciation. For most children in this study, reading humorous material, whether for personal reasons (e.g., out of curiosity) or socially motivated (e.g., required in class), has implications for social relationships. After all, children develop humor through experience and social interaction which gives them an understanding of how others respond to various types of humor.

8.3.3 Creative responses to literature

Interaction with adults and other children affects humor appreciation insofar as it aids comprehension. However, it seems that the material's comprehensibility does not always impact on its funniness. That is, for a number of children in the study, the text was still (somewhat) funny even if not entirely comprehensible – a surprising finding. Why comprehensibility and funniness appear to be loosely connected in humorous poems for these children is perhaps paralleled by how creatively children respond to literature. For one, a humorous poem that tells a story consists of different textual features (plot, characters, words, etc.) that separately can be pleasurable or enjoyable for children. Similarly, the text evokes "mental images and ideas" (Nodelman 1992) and allows children to visualize and use their imagination and creativity. Thus, when faced with a text that they do not fully understand due to difficulty with language, children seem to "fill in the gaps" through logical deduction based on existing knowledge

and experience. In other words, they may resort to creative solutions to make the encounter with the humorous text still satisfying for them.

This interpretation could be applied to Silverstein's poem, which the children found more challenging to understand than Dahl's poem. Although they could not understand all the sicknesses listed, they could perhaps guess or predict by connecting the parts of the overall situation that what they did not understand were also exaggerations. Mednick (1962: 222) calls this particular way of arriving at a creative solution "similarity" – "the requisite associative elements may be evoked in contiguity as a result of the similarity of the associative elements or the similarity of the stimuli eliciting these associative elements." Mednick adds: "This mode of creative solution may be encountered in creative writing which exploits homonymity, rhyme, and similarities in the structure and rhythm of words or similarities in the objects which they designate." By relying on their creativity, the children were still able to respond positively to the humor in the text even if reading comprehension was not fully achieved. This assumption can be further explored in a follow-up study.

8.4 Humor recognition and appreciation

8.4.1 Intervention in identifying humor

Connecting logical gaps forms the basis for humor in incongruous relationships, as discussed in Chapter 5. The results of the current study confirm that 8- to 9-year-old children can identify and resolve logical gaps when the humorous text has a universal theme with which most children can identify. When they receive help in making these connections, the results show that this does not make the poems less humorous for the children. On the contrary, this makes the poem even funnier. For instance, when the humor in Silverstein's poem was explained to a few of the children who initially struggled with it, their reception of the poem changed, increasing their experienced funniness from "not funny" to "somewhat funny." This contradicts earlier notions that when there is a need to make humor clear, the humor itself tends to disappear. According to E.B. White: "Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind" (in Deneire 1995: 291). Raskin (1985 in Deneire 1995: 291) also notes that laughter is lost "when we focus our intellect on it and try to understand it" because "one gets a joke or does not get it."

Although the humor in Silverstein's poem eluded some participants at the outset, they responded favorably to the poem once the humor was explained to them. One of them laughed and said that he "found [the situation] funny." Another participant laughed as well, having found the character funny when it was explained to her what the protagonist in the poem did. The fact that such elaboration led to an increased rating of funniness can prove that a humorous poem can be as amusing for children who receive help understanding it as those

who do not.

8.4.2 Two levels of humor competence

Another point worth mentioning has to do with humor competence. Carrell (1997 in Bell 2015: 27) posits two levels of humor competence that are based on jokes, but can nevertheless be applied to humorous texts. The first level is joke competence – the ability to recognize that a text is meant to be humorous. The second level is humor competence – the ability to judge whether or not the text is humorous. Bell (2015) summarizes these two stages of processing as "recognition" and "appreciation", respectively. The study suggests that the humor competence demanded from the participants to understand a funny poem is greater than the humor competence required to understand a joke. Jokes come in a particular format or structure which signals an attempt at humor and makes the readers or hearers more certain about their response. For example, jokes can begin with a question such as in riddles or introduced by words such as "Knock-knock!" to which the audience replies "Who's there?" Lightbulb jokes ("how many people does it take to change a lightbulb?") and bar jokes ("a man walks into a bar...") are also easily recognizable.

However, in the current study, the poems were presented to most participants without any hint they were meant to be humorous.[32] As shown in the results chapter, the children had different ideas about poetry: they can be dark, informative or tell a story. That the poems presented to them were of the humorous type had to be discovered by the children in the process of reading them, which proved challenging for some. It was therefore not surprising that there were participants who misunderstood the humor in the poems the first time, thus failing at the first level, recognition. When the humor was explained to them, they were relieved of the recognition task and could move on to the second stage of appreciation. Failed humor can occur at either of the two stages. In the first stage, it can be unsuccessful when the reader or hearer fails to interpret the text as a humorous one, which was what happened with this small group of children.[33] In the second stage, it can be unsuccessful when, despite recognizing that the text is supposed to be funny, the reader or hearer does not judge it amusing. Thus, before humor can be appreciated, the attempt at humor must be recognized first before a reader can judge its funniness.

[32] Except for seven children (one session with one child, one session with three children and another with three children), the participants were not told beforehand that the poems were meant to be funny. However, even within this small group, knowing that the poems were supposed to be humorous did not affect their judgment: some still regarded the poems "not funny."

[33] Failure at joke competence could have been due to the child's abilities and limits, personality or culture. The first refers to limitations in how children make connections between ideas, affecting their understanding of incongruities. The second reason acknowledges that some children, by nature, tend to be more serious than others. The last reason links culture and the social environment to what is an acceptable way of expressing and appreciating humor.

Similarly, when humor fails to trigger laughter or some related response, it does not necessarily convey that the audience failed at the first stage as it could signify the lack of acceptance of the text as humorous. This was not the case with the small group of children in the study. Humor played out successfully at the second attempt when they eventually understood the humor in the poem, and processed and appreciated it (as "somewhat funny"). The idea of having two stages of humor competence is related to the concept presented in Chapter 5 in which humor is perceived as a negotiation. Humor happens when the intent of the producer of humor is clear to the recipient, which he or she may accept or reject, and the message is clear, which he or she may or may not interpret correctly. When the intent is accepted, the recipient becomes a collaborator and when it is not, the recipient becomes either an unwilling or a hesitant party.

8.5 Impact of form on humor creation and the preference for content

8.5.1 Effects of deviations from "good" verse making

Rhyme has many uses. Aside from helping children read (Goswami 1991: 1110) and helping them with retention and retrieval of verbal information (Rubin 1995 in Tillman and Dowling 2007: 636)[34], as mentioned in section 4.3.1, rhyme and meter are also prominent features of humorous verses for children. Limericks, for instance, which together with narratives are most liked among school-age children (Fisher and Natarella 1982: 346), have five lines, often with anapestic trimeter and with a strict rhyme scheme of AABBA. But according to Menninghaus et al. (2014: 71), rhyme and meter do not help produce humorous effects in just any text; it is only possible with "humoristic poetry." This is because rhyme and meter not only support the humorous content, but they are also funny as poetic features when they deviate from what is considered "'good' verse making." The first deviation occurs when they "disregard both the word class and the semantic weight constraints using... words such as "that," "what," or "too" in the conspicuous rhyme word position." The second deviation happens when funny verses "violate [the] ideal of a metrically "good" verse by routinely imposing a *hyper-regular* [italics in the original] alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, with the resulting tendency to sound "clattering."‴

Their experiment found that "rhyme and meter enhanced funniness ratings, confirming that purely phonological and prosodic properties of a sentence can

[34]It helps children learn to read which suggests that reading is not purely visual for children but that they also resort to phonological factors to process and analyze written words (Goswami 1991: 1110). It creates a song-like pattern that aids the retention and retrieval of verbal information. This makes poetry easier to remember than prose stories: the "rhythmic structures and their associated rhymes" act as memory aids, providing "global organization and useful cues" (Rubin 1995 in Tillman and Dowling 2007: 636) which prose texts lack (Tillman and Dowling 2007: 636).

boost its humorous qualities" (Menninghaus et al. 2014: 74). Rhyme and meter increased the funniness ratings separately but the funniness ratings were highest when both rhyme and meter were present. They noted that this happened because the meter and rhyme used in the funny couplets differed from the "culturally acquired schema of what a good rhymed and metered verse should be" and because it is clear that the mismatch was a "willful mockery of popular lyrical diction." The subjects were adults with a mean age of 26 years. The main assumption of the researchers then is that the participants in the study were aware of the rules of "good verse making" and had enough experience with adult poetry canon and understanding of poetic traditions to be able to contrast a "good" verse from one that was not. But this also suggests that the reception of humor in poetry is not intuitive and instinctive, and instead requires a formal approach to understanding it.

Nevertheless, there is value in their study being one of the few that empirically investigated the relationship between humor and rhyme. In Chapter 4 on translating poems, Tsur's assertion on the effect of rhyme on tone has been discussed but it was purely conceptual and has not been backed by an experiment. If the findings of Menninghaus et al. are indeed accurate, despite the issue of spontaneity in humor perception, then this could explain in part why in this study with children, rhyme and meter did not influence the funniness of humorous verses the way content did. There were no deliberate deviations imposed on the translated texts that could have added to their funniness. The poems relied on the rules of good rhyme-making in Filipino poetry. Nonetheless it can also be said that, unlike with adults, such deviations[35] would have been challenging for children to detect. Children at this age have little varied experiences with poetry, hence, lacking the ability to identify the deviations that have been found to make a humorous poem funny.[36] At this stage, they do not know the "authoritative schema of "good" poetic rhyming and meter" (Menninghaus et al. 2014: 74) and how a departure from it can be amusing. Coates (2010: 122), for example, cites some examples of "playful deviations of the limerick form"[37], the "anti-limerick", which requires "some level of familiar-

[35]The deviation on stress does not apply to Filipino poetry which, instead of stress, depends on the number of syllables per line. But placing unconventional words in visible rhyme positions can be done deliberately. In the translation of Silverstein's "Sick", the word "ano" (what) was placed at the end of the line to rhyme with "maglaro" (play).

[36]That is not to say that children have little prior knowledge of poetry. From their early years, children are introduced to poetry through nursery rhymes and songs. However, even though these possess sound qualities similar to poetry, they do not have depth of imagination and emotion that make up real poetry (Huck et al. 1994).

[37]Coats used the following anonymous limerick as an example and noted that the "surprise [was] based on violating the expected rhythm of a familiar form":

> There was a young man from Japan
> Whose limericks never would scan.
> When asked why this was,
> He replied, 'It's because I always try to fit as many syllables into the last line
> as ever I possibly can.'

ity with the original... to get the joke." Thus, to those who are not familiar enough with the limerick form to find the pattern, "the effect is likely to be confusion rather than humor."

8.5.2 Effects of joint reading and listening

Although none of the children pertained to rhyme and rhythm as contributors to the funniness of the poems, it does not mean that they lack awareness of how these formal elements function. For instance, one child (C6) said that rhymes "entertain" children and adults alike but did not say why and whether this was the case with the funny poems presented to them. This is quite understandable for children at this age; though they can understand riddles, for instance, they do not yet have the skills to say why a riddle is funny (Zimmermann 2014). That the poems were recited to them should have helped make sound and rhyme become more prominent and provoke a humorous effect. In a study by Fisher and Natarella (1982: 352) with first, second and third graders, they observed that "children's preference for rhymed, humorous story poems... may also reflect the methodology which involved listening to the poems rather than reading them. It seems likely that the rhyme and the story format of the rhymed verse and narratives and the broad humor of limericks may carry better to a listener, evoking an immediate positive response, while one's response to lyric poetry or to haiku might be facilitated by seeing the poem and having time to re-read or reflect on it."

However, even if the children in this study could listen to the poems (aside from reading them on the screen), this did not necessarily elicit the "immediate positive response" observed in Fisher and Natarella's study. The form-centered translation of Dahl's poem, in particular, was perceived to be "not funny" by eight out of 14 participants.[38] To reiterate, the children could read the poems on the screen while being recited to them but whether or not this mode of presentation that combined reading and listening had any effect on their response could not be determined from the study. Future studies can examine whether this makes a difference.[39] It could be the case that even if the poems could be heard, the children would focus more on reading the texts particularly the information in them to be prepared for the discussion. Rosenblatt (1994: 24) calls this "efferent reading" where the goal is to search for information. On the other end of the spectrum is "aesthetic reading" where the reader's main concern is "what happens *during* the actual reading event" [italics in the original] or the experience. One of the reasons children were more focused on reading for information is that children are more used to efferent reading as this is the approach taught in schools (Rosenblatt 1994: 79). This is the case even in classes where they study literature.

[38]Of the 14 children, nine reported greater fluency in English over Filipino.

[39]In Chapter 7, one of the assumptions made was that written input (i.e., the written text) could have supplemented the auditory input for children who were more proficient in English than in Filipino, although this could be true only of Silverstein's poem.

8.5.3 Preference for free verse

Kutiper and Wilson (1993) summarized the results of some poetry preference studies, including that of Fisher and Nateralla. They noted that free verse was among the most disliked forms by young students. However, in this study, it was found that the free-verse translations which lacked rhyme and rhythm were preferred by children over the rhyming verses. This shows that our understanding of what is funny for children can vary significantly from the children's own definitions of it. As Fisher and Natarella (1982: 339) noted: "A consistent finding in studies of children's preferences for poetry is that adults cannot accurately predict which poems children will like; their choices of poems for children seldom match the children's own choices. This suggests the importance of examining children's preferences directly." For the children in this study, the plot, story or narrative is a powerful driver of humor, perhaps because, as they admitted, they are more used to reading prose stories than poetry and therefore look for the "story" in a text above all. The situation determined humor to a large extent, with character far behind and language situated even further.[40] This finding could mean that with a different set of children, one who is more exposed to and inclined toward poetry, the results could be different.[41] It must be noted, however, that the findings do not suggest that the formal elements of poetry do not appeal to children. Fisher and Natarella's observation of children in primary grades is most likely true even for the children in this study: "Of the poetic elements that are used in poetry, rhyme is by far the most important in children's preferences. Children also enjoy sound as a device. No rhymed poems were on the least liked list, and none of the unrhymed poems not using sound were on the most liked list" (1982: 353). They added: "The children's preference for rhymed poetry over unrhymed is very clear. Many of the children's comments indicated that they not only liked rhyme, but that they believed a poem must have rhyme" (349). What the findings of this study only show is that, for a humorous poem to appeal to children in this study, content is more important than form. Even without the formal elements, a humorous verse can still be funny. This has implications for translators trying to decide which to prioritize when the goal is to preserve humor in verse for children. In terms of preference for content, the study's findings are consistent with the results of early preference studies that children most enjoy poetry about familiar experiences (Kutiper and Wilson 1993: 29), those that capture the spirit of childhood. Children also like poems about other children (Fisher and Natarella 1982: 340). These could explain why the children in this study found Silverstein's poem funnier than Dahl's poem: the topic covers school, which they routinely encounter, and the protagonist is a child.

[40] These findings are not unique to Filipino children. As early as the 1920s, preference studies involving American children showed that children liked poems that told a story (King 1922 and Mackintosh 1924 in Fisher and Natarella 1982: 340).

[41] It is important to be aware that different children have unique ways of thinking, including appreciating humor, and the only way to understand them is by directly engaging with them.

8.6 Conclusions

Cultural values can influence humor enjoyment. This is perhaps why the children in the study, who grew up in a society that valued "pakikipagkapwa-tao" (or roughly "oneness with others"), responded with restraint to the poems which used the misfortune of others to generate humor. Because children at this age are open to reading materials other than prose stories, adults can expose them to more materials that can enhance their reading skills and interest to read widely. When faced with a text they do not fully understand, children seem to resort to "creative solutions" (Mednick 1962) through logical deduction, thereby making the encounter with the text still gratifying. This confirms that 8- and 9-year-old children can identify and resolve logical gaps in a humorous text. When they receive help in solving these gaps, they do not find the humorous material any less funny. On the contrary, discussing humorous poems with others can make the poems even funnier for the children. The fact that the poems were not entirely easy for the children suggests that poems demand greater humor competence from readers or listeners than jokes. Unlike jokes, funny poems do not possess a particular structure and format that signal humor.

Humor comes in two stages: the attempt at humor must be recognized first before humor can be appreciated. When humor is not successfully conveyed, it could be attributed to failure at either the recognition or appreciation stage. For some of the children in the study, failure at the first stage affected the funniness of the poems. The study of Menninghaus et al. (2014) could partly explain why the poems were less funny or not funny at all for the children: the poems contained no deviations from established rules of "good verse-making" which by themselves can serve as humoristic devices. A study by Fisher and Natarella (1982) postulates that listening to poems can evoke an "immediate positive response" from listeners which was not observed from most children during the poetry reading sessions. Although the children in the present study heard the poems, they also had access to visual input (i.e., the texts and illustrations shown in the videos) which could have affected their response. In terms of humor, content than form was more pleasurable to the children in this study. This does not mean, however, that the formal elements of a poem were not appealing to them. According to preference studies, poems about familiar experiences and other children are most enjoyable for children which was also what the current study found.