

UNDERSTANDING LAUGHTER: A COMMUNICATIVE PARADIGM

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Abstract

Discussion of the so-called The "riddles of laughter" associated with attempts to identify the nature of a person's laughter reaction, its essential features and features of functioning in the sociocultural space, has a long history and rich bibliography, but has not yet received universally recognized final completion. The current situation within the framework of the study of the phenomenon of laughter makes the intention to return to the problems of laughter and, based on the latest data on the sciences of man, relevant and justified, try to deepen his understanding. Assistance in solving this kind of problem is the subject of this article.

The article analyzes and critically discusses the available approaches to the phenomenon of laughter, identifies their insufficiency and proposes a new conceptual vision of laughter interpreted as an involuntary reaction that occurs in the case of an unexpected but justified decrease in the "degree" of the situation and acts as a communicative signal (and therefore is fixed as stereotypical) in the system of intersubject human relations.

Keywords: laughter, laughter reaction, comic, sociocultural functions of laughter, communicative paradigm of understanding laughter.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1900, the famous French philosopher A. Bergson publishes his famous work "Laughter: An Essay on the Importance of the Comic". Touching the so-called "Riddles of laughter," Bergson writes: "The greatest thinkers, starting with Aristotle, took up this small task, but it still does not allow itself to be mastered, it slips in the hands, breaks out and again arises, like a daring challenge to philosophical thought." [Cit. by: 1, p.12]

More than 100 years after Bergson, in 2006 already a modern researcher, also noting the rich history of the study of laughter, is forced to admit: "... laughter, the reasons for its occurrence and ways to incorporate into culture, despite the intellectual efforts of scientists of different eras and directions, in many ways continue to remain today "things in themselves", mysterious, mysterious phenomena that cannot be rigorously explained and do not fit completely into any of the theories proposed and offered by experts." [2, p. 5] (See also [3] on this topic)

It must be said, however, that today socio-humanitarian knowledge is entering a new stage in the integration of philosophy and the real sciences of man, when the so-called synthetic problems of man are used and the

level of intellectual reflection characteristic of philosophy and all the experimental material are provided by the real sciences of man. [4]

It is important to note that the so-called «Riddle of laughter» is related to this type of synthetic problems of man. This article is precisely designed to demonstrate the possibilities of modern integration of scientific and philosophical knowledge to advance in solving this synthetic problem - the problem of laughter.

II. METHODOLOGY

In methodological terms, this article focuses on the use of the latest data of modern human sciences to clarify the so-called "Riddles of laughter." The article applies the findings of ethology, evolutionary psychology, cognitology, communication, shedding additional light on the phenomenon of laughter: its evolutionary historical origin and functioning in modern society.

III. DISCUSSION

After the authoritative statement of Aristotle: "Of all living beings, only man has laughter" [5, p. 118], for a long time it was generally accepted that smile and laughter are inherent only in man [6, p. 28]. However, ethology indicates that in their infancy they are already manifested in higher mammals. As K. Lorenz convincingly showed, the smile by its nature goes back to the predatory barking of the mouth (fangs demonstration), which many higher mammals (from wolves to monkeys) use to intimidate their adversary [7] Exfoliation (along with ruffling to give itself a visually larger size) , characteristic gestures that mark aggression and a number of other communicative scare signals) is a stereotypical behavioral reaction widely used by animals in any situation fraught with danger.

It is important to emphasize that all such frightening signals are "set" by animals "in advance", at the very beginning of the situation, which the beast assesses as threatening. The beast anticipates a meeting with a possible adversary and reacts to it ahead of schedule. In the domestic scientific literature, such a reaction is defined as "an anticipatory reflection of reality" [8]

The anticipatory response triggers not only external - behavioral - actions, but also internal processes that mobilize the animal's body to repulse the enemy. A specific field of excitation occurs in the animal's brain, the so-called the dominant that inhibits all "irrelevant" information signals, focusing the animal's body to perform the most (sometimes deadly) task that is important for it at the moment - to fight the enemy. [9]

However, there are times when an alarming situation is suddenly resolved successfully. A dangerous enemy is only, for example, with a terrible noise a fallen tree branch. The situation triggers topple over, discharge begins. In this kind of situation, a kind of "dominant scrapping" occurs, which, as a rule, is accompanied by a certain "irrelevant" and an involuntary, as if "breaking out" behavioral effect, for example, one or another sound signal. [10] In ethological literature, such behavioral effects have been named and described as "displaced activity" [11; 12] or "displaced action". [13]

It is shown that under certain conditions — for example, under the conditions of a directed experiment — it is possible to achieve a stable correlative link between the "breaking of the dominant" and the corresponding behavioral effect. [14, chapter "Braking dominant"] From the point of view of evolutionary logic, this kind of correlation between "breaking the dominant" and a certain (randomly occurring) behavioral effect can become stable if the corresponding behavioral effect is functionally loaded and begins to play a role in terms of increasing biological fitness of this type of animals. This mechanism works in the situation of "public animals" (in particular, primates) with respect to sound signals arising as involuntary correlates of "breaking the dominant". The sound signal caused by the "dominance breaking" in the case of public animals can be used as a communicative signal. Thus receiving a functional load, it is fixed, becoming a unified element in the composition of the behavioral repertoire of this animal species.

This effect underlies the phenomenon of laughter. (We note that the idea of laughter as a certain form of "biased activity" - but without reference to the communicative load of laughter - was also voiced by other scientists, in particular V. Schmidt [15], P. Leyhausen [16], R. Russell [17] - see 18, p. 120)

The fact that laughter carries, first of all, the communicative component is well known today. As the psychologist R. Provine found, people in a company laugh 30 times more often than in a situation of loneliness. [19, p. 42] And if a person laughs, being alone, he usually imagines the reaction of other people or the corresponding kind of communicative action.

The thesis about the communicative nature of laughter is reinforced by the long-established fact of laughter infectiousness. [20; 21] Just because laughter is contagious, modern comedy shows use already recorded

laughter. [22, p. 597]

Laugh shows its main functions as a communicative action already at the level of primates, which, according to primatologists, make sounds functionally identical to laughter. In particular, according to the sociobiologist I. Aible-Eibesfeldt, the so-called "Shouting" - characteristic sounds made by monkeys gathering in a group in order to attack or intimidate their enemy. [23]

There is another type of "laugh." For example, chimpanzees "laugh" by tickling each other. This kind of tickling is that the monkeys touch the vulnerabilities of their partner, simulating an attack. It's like a make-believe fight, accompanied by chimpanzees with rhythmic aspirating sounds, which, according to experts, are a specific laugh complex.

Summarizing all of the above and trying to find a "common denominator" of the established facts, we can give the following definition of laughter: laughter is an involuntary reaction that occurs in the case of an unexpected but justified decrease in the "degree" of the situation and fulfills the functions of a communicative signal (and therefore is fixed as stereotyped) in the system of intersubject human relations.

Various – naturally arising or artificially created - options for "lowering the degree" of the situation and will define the space of typical laughable situations.

One of the most common scenarios of a laughing situation can be called "leveling the threat."

The presence of a threat, obviously, cannot but strain. Moreover, the more serious the threat, the greater the corresponding tension and the less clear is the option to eliminate it. That is why the "debunking of the villain", if it is really (at least plausible) is achieved, it is achieved through the use of non-trivial processes and / or creative actions, which usually gives a comic effect.

A more disguised (potential) version of "villainy" is the presence of a certain subject with a high status, which allows this subject (at least potentially) to carry out acts of dominance, domination, with no such status. The presence of such, albeit only potential, threat from a high-status individual also causes corresponding tension in other people (the stronger, the more ambitious a high-status individual and the more often he emphasizes his status). Accordingly, in the case of an unexpected "loss of face" by a high-status individual, a comical situation cannot but arise.

The most ancient and primitive way of leveling the status is physical influences, indicating the bodily weakness of any - even the most senior - representative of homo sapiens, as well as paying attention to physiological features, including physiological functions, which, again, no one can even avoid extremely individual status. The two indicated ways of leveling the status are the essence of the so-called. rude and "toilet" humor.

A special type of tension causes people to be afraid to step over rigidly established social prohibitions and / or various kinds of taboos. Such a fear is justified, since violation of important (seeming important) social prohibitions, as a rule, entails serious punishment (high costs for the offender).

In addition, one cannot but take into account that the existing (fixed in this society) disposition of the tabooed significantly limits the freedom of action and behavior of members of this society. The immanent focus on a person to increase personal freedom comes into conflict with the existing social prohibitions, which creates the corresponding tension. That is why a creative, clever, somehow "justified" (which, at least theoretically allows avoiding punishment) violation of this kind of social prohibitions (taboos), being, in fact, a successful attempt to defuse the dispositionally fixed within the framework of this culture (or subcultures) tension, implicates a laughable situation and causes, at least, a smile.

As a rule, only fairly marginalized persons can allow themselves to break the taboo accepted in this culture: children, foreigners, holy fools, note jesters and comedians. They are usually allowed to make attempts to "level the taboo": from making greasy jokes and pronouncing (behavioral manifestations) obscenities to literally sacrilege.

Not always such attempts cause laughter. As a rule, being taboo in society is seriously determined. The implementation of the rules adopted in society, including social prohibitions and taboos, plays an important role in ensuring the cohesion of this society, determining the high legitimacy of the latter. In cases where social cohesion is extremely significant (for example, the situation of military conflicts), the degree of legitimacy of the corresponding taboos can increase to the level of sacredness.

Attempts to level out legitimate taboos, even those made by marginalized personalities, usually cause not so much laughter as, at least, irritation, but, as a maximum, righteous indignation. But if the degree of legitimacy

of taboos (with all the legality of the latter) is weakened, then “successful” (which seems successful) attempts to level the taboos begin to be considered in a mode of comic nature and produce a laughable reaction.

However, an involuntary laughter reaction arising from the unexpectedly successful discharge of a tense situation is only one component of the phenomenon of laughter. The second - its equally significant component - is due to the pragmatic use of laughter for both natural and transformative, and - especially - for communicative purposes.

It acts as if the reverse logic. If a quick and successful decrease in the “degree” of the situation causes laughter, then perhaps the presence (as an option - artificial inducing) of laughter can provide a corresponding discharge (relief) of the stressful situation.

IV. RESULTS

Within the framework of the corresponding types of communication, the production of laughter (often artificial) is intended, first of all, to mark the inequality of statuses and / or capabilities of communicants and, thereby, induce in the minds of the latter a certain psycho-state corresponding to this inequality.

This particular task performs the so-called mockery. In the most severe and aggressive form, the ridicule procedure is carried out in relation to the enemy, the enemy, whom should be destroyed. The laughter used in the practice of ridicule, being a marker of reducing the “degree” of the situation, is aimed at demonstrating to both (the actor producing laughter) and the opponent (the addressee of laughter) that the latter is shallow and insignificant, does not constitute a real threat, it has no chance to win confrontation.

The sinister, sardonic laugh that they laugh — as is often described in the corresponding literary texts — the “villains” confident in their strength and power, aimed at destroying their own, who is represented (and represented by them) as a miserable and harmless adversary, owes its appearance to the solution of this particular problem.

In a milder form of this kind, the tasks of discrediting an opponent in the communication process are solved by sarcastic and ironic laughter. If, as already mentioned, the unexpected “leveling of status” of a high-ranking person can cause an involuntary laughter reaction, then it seems justified (and this actually works) to try to purposefully lower the status (to worsen the image) of a certain person, in one way or another inducing laughter in relation to this person. However, for such induction of laughter (in the soft version - a sarcastic grin or an ironic smile), one must find (in an extreme case, come up with) an appropriate reason.

If it is impossible to physically put the person to be ridiculed or ridiculed into a comic situation (for example, giving a bandwagon, or dropping a cake in the face), one has to look for “weak spots” in the behavioral manifestations of the person, which should not be manifested by people claiming this status (corresponding image). Finding out (sometimes very subtle, requiring high observation) such places in a certain character and emphasizing them (sometimes very elegant, creatively using rhetorical methods of hyperbolization (strong hyperbole), assimilation (unexpectedly justified comparison), indirect speech act (subtle hint)), etc.) is the essence of such sarcastic (ironic) types of activity as parody, cartooning, caricaturization.

It is characteristic that all of the above techniques are used to “test the strength” of cultural taboos and prohibitions existing in this society. Laughing (pretending to be laughter) - and in this sense, as if frivolous - attempts to touch the tabooed area often serve as “Overton windows”, probing how serious (legitimate) the corresponding cultural prohibitions are. If legitimacy, that is, the deep recognition of such prohibitions begins to be lost (even if legality is retained as formal, legally recognized legitimacy), then attempts to actually discredit them will begin to bring corresponding dividends.

However, the decrease in “degree” of the situation caused by laughter can be used not only for confrontational purposes. It can also be aimed at leveling possible aggression as a whole. In this case, laughter will mark the seriousness of the potential threat.

It is this function that laughter performs in a situation of “fussing” parents with their kids. According to ethologists, accompanied by laughter (more correctly, apparently, it is necessary to say proto-laughter), the pretended aggressive games of parents with children are already present in higher mammals and are especially characteristic of monkeys. Laughter arranging such games (proto-laughter) appears in this case as a “metacommunicative signal, meaning aggressive behavior in form is just a game, while the true intentions of the “aggressor” are friendly” [18, p. 98]

Growing up and socializing, people get used to using laughter to defuse the situation. It has long been noticed that in friendly companies, laughter and jokes sound constantly. Moreover, the level of pungency in this case, as a rule, is low, more important is the very mood for a laughable reaction. It is also characteristic

that in this situation the speakers (unlike the pop performances of the comedians) laugh even more often than the listeners.

Finally, one cannot fail to note the kind of anesthetic function of laughter. You can talk about it in the literal sense of the word (there is evidence that laughter (accompanied by the release of endorphins) does raise the threshold of pain sensitivity [24]), and more generally. It has been noticed that in a situational landscape characterized by a high level of stress and psychological tension (staying in a hospital, a difficult and risky camping trip, front-line weekdays, etc.), laughter often provokes constantly provoked jokes, "jokes" widespread use of irony, including self-irony. Inducing and maintaining a humorous, "frivolous" atmosphere in such extremely serious circumstances uses (more or less consciously) the ability of laughter to lower the "degree" of a situation to reduce the psychological agonizingness of an existing situation, and therefore it is highly demanded.

V. CONCLUSION

Within the framework of the modern scientific approach to the study of the phenomenon of man and his behavior, conditions have developed for a deeper, more accurate understanding of the nature of human laughter, as well as the specificity and role of laughter in various kinds of communicative processes. Consideration of the phenomenon of laughter in the future, the so-called communicative paradigm - to which the present is dedicated - allows significant progress in resolving laughter problems.

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