The Semiotics of Humor

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GUEST EDITORS: **Villy Tsakona** & **Jan Chovanec**

ARISTOTLE
UNIVERSITY OF
THESSALONIKI

HELLENIC
SEMIOTIC SOCIETY

Instances of modern humor increasingly exist as multimodal signs, which is most evident in the recent new format of digital memes, image macros, funny videos, and other forms of humor widely circulated on social media and online. However, the meaning-potential of humor – whatever traditional or modern forms it takes – is inseparably linked to the social context, which not only provides the background for the un/successful deployment of humor but also ends up being shaped by the humor used. From a semiotic perspective, humor involves both the handling of complex socially embedded and publicly shared meanings as well as individualized personal motivations that underlie the interlocutors' intentions and the eventual communicative effects.

This special issue aims to collect studies on the semiotics of humor in various genres, including (but not limited to) internet memes, online videos and websites, online chat, TV shows, sitcoms, films, animation, cartoons, sociopolitical satire, and graphic novels. In this collection, we are interested in a broad range of topics, which may address such issues as multimodality and the ensuing ambiguity of discourse intended as humorous, as well as the above-mentioned social embedding of humor and the related ideologies of humor (see, e.g., Kramer 2011, Tsakona 2017). Concerning the ambiguity of humor, it is by now common knowledge among humor scholars that despite the variety of contextualization cues signaling humorous intent, recipients' reactions exhibit significant variation depending on the recipients' sociocultural background, ideologies, and identities. Humor can thus be considered a floating signifier since it manifests "results from the unfixity introduced by a plurality of discourses interrupting each other" (Laclau 2000: 305). Concerning the social dimension, according to Wiggins (2019: 33, 25), humor harbors "a semiotic meaning which is itself tethered to an ideological practice," namely, it "expresses a view that is critical (even in an overtly humorous way) of the political, social, economic, cultural, etc. spheres."

Proposals are invited for papers exploring the semiotic resources exploited for producing humor and the multiple interpretations these may engender, the relationship between humor and semiosis, semiotic signification, and the broader semiopragmatics of humor. We look for papers that engage with the existing theories of humor while approaching a diverse range of humor-related semiotic phenomena and adopting various analytical perspectives, e.g., pragmatics, discourse analysis, social semiotics, and critical multimodal studies. We welcome research papers addressing issues such as the following:

- Humor and intertextuality
- Humor and ideology
- Sociocultural assumptions about the meanings and uses of humor
- Reactions to humorous discourse
- Internet memes as signs
- Verbal/visual/aural/figural/multimodal signifiers of humor
- Construction and indexing of social and national identities through humor

Prospective authors are invited to submit an abstract of 250-300 words (not counting the references) by email to the guest editors Villy Tsakona (villytsa@otenet.gr) and Jan Chovanec (chovanec@phil.muni.cz), including their institutional affiliation and contact information. Acceptance of the abstract does not guarantee publication, given that all research articles will undergo peer review. After the approval of the abstract, the papers for submission should be around 6,000-7,000 words.