

project *SprichWort* was given. This project concentrates the proverbial matter in five historically related languages – German, Slovenian, Slovakian, Czech and Hungarian – into one databank as a corpus and its main purpose is the use of such databank in language studies.

One of the dominant topics was the theoretic framework of proverb research, i.e. research methods that would be optimal to treat the proverbial expressions in a modified cultural environment. It also became evident that the term *proverb* may be treated considerably wider than commonly accustomed. For example, no big difference is made between the proverbs and proverbial bywords and rather the use situations of such sayings are focused on. Functions of proverbs have always been an interesting research topic and nowadays the topic is researched on the basis of the examples from the internet. According to the researchers of databases, the proverbial nature of the texts is the most problematic case. The problem is whether the text represents a variant of a well-known proverb or language game or casual construction. This provided a basis for a critical opinion that the press texts are not an enough reliable material for the proverb researches on the basis of language corpuses because such texts represent a creative approach of one person, i.e. journalist, and no tradition. The multilingual databases raised a question about matches. The matches there tend to be the texts that are actually no matches but rather variants of proverbial sayings.

As the researchers represent very different specialities such as linguistics, folkloristics, literature science, history, psychology and pedagogy, such large-scale events allow to bring forth the different approaches and to find out the issues under discussion and to find solutions to them.

The conference in Paris confirmed again that the proverb research is popular, and not merely for the specialists of one area but a lot wider. Although the proverbs may be taken for obsolete wisdoms because of the short wording, they contain something that keeps them in use. Thus, there may again be a reason to gather to discuss the proverb as a research object. The next paremiology conference will take place in two years also in Diderot University.

Anneli Baran

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL FOR HUMOUR RESEARCH (ISS11) AT THE ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM, ESTONIA

Back in 2001, Professor Willibald Ruch organised the first humour summer school at the Queen's University of Belfast, and since then every year another country has been given the honour of hosting the long-standing and increasingly popular academic event. The *11th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications* (ISS11) was held in Tartu, Estonia, from August 15–20, 2011 (see: <http://www.humoursummerschool.org/11/> for details). It was achieved by a joint effort of the Estonian Literary Museum and the University of Zurich.

The local organiser was Liisi Laineste from the Estonian Literary Museum, whereas the course director Professor Willibald Ruch from the University of Zurich, supported by the serving ISS advisory board, was responsible for bringing together a reputable group of lecturers. The course was intended to provide a basic introduction to humour studies as well as give a more detailed insight into the research of humour and laughter. The programme aimed to give an overview of the interdisciplinary nature of humour research. Throughout the week, the 28 lectures and workshops by thirteen speakers described current humour theory and empirical evidence, addressed special research issues and applications of the theories, and gave a special consideration to discussing methodology and evaluation of research findings during the daily methodology sessions. The fact of having an unprecedented number of thirteen speakers allowed for a greater diversity in the topics covered. Lectures were given by a number of internationally renowned researchers and professors, for example Professor Christie Davies (Department of Sociology, University of Reading, UK), Professor Holger Kersten (Amerikanistik, Universitet Magdeburg, Germany), Professor Arvo Krikmann (Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Professor Alexander Kozintsev (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St. Petersburg, Russia), Professor Willibald Ruch (Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Switzerland), to name just a few. As every year, a receiver of the Graduate Student Award from the International Society for Humour Research is invited to give a lecture at the humour summer school. This year it was Clare Watters (MA, Italian Studies, University of Birmingham, UK), who delivered a brilliant lecture on stand-up. The delegates also benefitted from the *Meet the Lecturer* sessions where the participants could sign up for a one-to-one discussion with a lecturer of his/her choice on two consecutive time-slots in the



“11th International Summer School for Humour Research: Theory, Research and Applications” opening reception was attended by all the ISS11 lecturers and delegates, as well as local academics interested in humour studies. Photo by Alar Madisson 2011.

mornings. Topics of the lectures ranged from rather general titles as “What is humour? Etymology and taxonomic studies” (W. Ruch) and “Funny business” (J. Morreall) to very specific ones like “Can laughter make us happier?” (A. Realo) and “Jokes about particular sets of women: Mothers in law (wife’s mother), blondes, Jewish women, female car drivers and lesbians” (C. Davies). Some more practical approaches were introduced during the two workshops, one about computational linguistics and the possibilities it opens in humour research (“Build your own jokes”, G. Ritchie), and the other about assessing facial muscular movements as evidence from judging stimuli as humorous (“How to measure smiling and laughter”, T. Platt and W. Ruch). All lectures received a lot of attention and thought from the participants, and discussions could be overheard at breaks and lunch hours, and even throughout the evenings’ social events.

A new approach to making overseas lecturers available in the summer school traditionally taking place in Europe was introducing three video lectures, delivered by Professor John Morreall from the College of William and Mary, USA. His first lecture “Funny business: The benefits of humor at work” touched upon the ways the humour finds use in all kinds of professional settings like private companies, educational groups ranging from pre-schools to medical schools, hospitals and other places, using a lot of examples. The video was pre-recorded to ensure a smooth presentation (but it can be accessed also post-summerville on Youtube, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3rqPfuKt1A&feature=related>). Individual Skype consultations were scheduled to take place after the video lectures so that students could engage in discussions with the lecturer just as after regular talks. His lecture was based on three main points that his research has led him to conclude: humour fosters physical and mental health, especially by reducing stress, secondly, it promotes mental flexibility: the ability to cope with change, handle mistakes in a constructive way, and solve problems creatively, and thirdly, humor works as a social lubricant, creating rapport and team spirit, and smoothing out potential rough spots with colleagues and with clients. With a number of amusing examples from his past experience as a teacher, humour consultant and workshop instructor, he claimed that certain distance is needed to allow the mind to perceive the funniness of real-life events or other stimuli. There is a parallel research in progress that develops on the same idea (Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren 2011, ISHS conference in Boston, Massachusetts, USA), and it shows good potential to solve some of the problems that scholars trying to formulate a general theory of humour have been facing. Its basic tenet is that for something to be funny, it has to be experienced simultaneously as wrong (a violation that threatens our understanding of a proper world) and not wrong (benign or somehow acceptable). The mental or physical distance that is needed to perceive a stimulus as benign is controllable to a certain extent. The disposition to do that can be enhanced through training. John Morreall also listed a number of research results, stating that there can be differences there between women’s and men’s reactions, men’s humour being more competitive, inclusive of sarcasm and practical jokes. Criticism and sarcasm, on the other hand, may interfere with the beneficial potential of humour. Distance from one’s own actions and experiences, the art of taking oneself not too seriously, is the key to leading a stress-free life, is Morreall’s message in a nutshell.

An example of a more theoretical lecture although not void of colourful examples was that by Professor Holger Kersten from the University of Magdeburg, Germany, who gave an overview of his meta-study about the meaning of the concept “national humour”. Building on the statements of J. Berg Esenwein (1904) and Elliott Oring (2003), a century apart from each other, Professor Kersten framed his lecture “National humour: A critical perspective” with three facts about the phenomena under surveillance: it is the body of humorous material that exists in a given nation, it refers to the humorous themes, motifs, and techniques that are often present in the comedic acts prevalent in one specific country, and it applies to the cultural conventions and rules that govern them. He continued with giving examples of national humour styles (or, rather, beliefs about their existence in academic literature) in Great Britain, France and the United States. Presenting a case study that compared scholarly views of Canadian and American (US) humour, he drew attention to the fact that manifestations of humor have been regarded by literary and cultural critics as significant components in the cultural self-definition even if the listed truly essential features of a nation’s sense of humour do not always overlap. Humor has served as an important factor providing group cohesion and a larger sense of cultural or national unity. At the same time, it has been one way of distinguishing one nation from another. In this sense, discourses on humour provide one way of imagining a large group of unrelated people as members of one “imagined community” as Benedict Anderson described it in 1983.

The six days full of lectures at ISS11 were attended by 28 participants. The student body consisted of undergraduates, postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers, and university faculty members, as well as professionals. The participants came from 17 countries from all over the world, including Australia, Asia, America, and of course Europe. Academic disciplines represented included Psychology, Anthropology, Italian Studies, Linguistics, Sociology, Folkloristics, American Studies, Communication Studies, etc. The variety of participants’ experiences was reflected in the debates engendered by many of the sessions. A big event for the participants was the Summer School Symposium which featured presentations of the participants’ planned or finished research, or ideas on how to implement and use humour in applied settings. The presentations comprised of oral presentations and scientific poster presentations. Student prizes put forth by the Mouton de Gruyter publication house were received by Piret Voolaid for her presentation “On the Relations between Joking Questions and Paremiology – Proverbs in the Service of Humour Creation” (Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Tracey Platt received the prize book for “Differences of Duchenne smiles for those with fear of being laughed at” (Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Switzerland), Maria Goeth talked about “Humour in Music” (Department of Musicology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany), and a poster presentation by Bastian Mayerhofer titled “Cognitive processes during belief revision in garden-path jokes: An ERP study” (Department of Experimental Psycholinguistics, Georg August University of Göttingen, Germany) won him a book by Graeme Ritchie, *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes* (2003).

The scarce time after lectures and discussions was left for social events. The social program included an opening reception on Monday evening the 15th of August, which included lectures from Professor Peeter Tulviste (Department of Psychology, University of Tartu) and Professor Willibald Ruch as well as a singing performance by the Setu folk group *Liinatsuraq*. A stand-up comedy night on Tuesday evening with local stand-up artists as well as Summer School participants on the stage attracted a considerable audience and got big laughs, especially towards the end of the event when future and established humour scholars stepped on the stage. On Wednesday, the participants went on a guided tour in Tartu and then continued to a beer-tasting event in the German Culture Institute. The Friday evening the closing dinner was held in the Botanical gardens, culminating with an improvised stargazing boat trip on the river barge *Jõmmu*.

The summer school was supported by Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Cultural Endowment, Tartu Cultural Endowment, German Embassy in Estonia, Tartu City Council, among others.

The next summer school is going to be in Finland, Savonlinna campus, organised by Professors Pirjo Nuutinen and Seppo Knuuttila. Details will be announced at the Summer School website (<http://www.humoursummerschool.org/12>), and registration will be open from February 2012.

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