Elaine Vaughan
Mary Immaculate College
elaine.vaughan@mic.ul.ie

***Got a date or something?*: A Corpus analysis of the role of humour and laughter in the workplace meetings of English language teachers.**

Humour and laughter are recurrent phenomena in the meetings in general, often at strategic points and particularly in the openings as an icebreaker. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) give considerable space to the discussion of humour in the workplace as an important index of solidarity. Adelswärd and Öberg (1998: 412) echo this in their consideration of the complex interactional goals that laughter accomplishes in talk, and state that mutual or collective laughter is a sign of rapport. However, the nature of the context i.e. the workplace adds a more complex dimension to the purpose and function of humour. Holmes (1998) adumbrates the functions of humour in the workplace context thus: 1) as a positive politeness strategy e.g. emphasising collegiality and cohesion 2) as a negative politeness strategy e.g. attenuating the face threat of a directive 3) repressive i.e. indexical of power relationships and the exercise of power and 4) contestive i.e. for subordinates in an institution to covertly challenge the power structure. This paper brings instances from these categories into relief using a corpus of the authentic institutional interaction of English language teachers in the context of school staff meetings. It is shown that humour is used within the meetings as a means of being mutually supportive, and any contestive humour is directed at the institution as a whole rather than within the department itself. Identifying humour in the data is not a simple case of finding instances of laughter or assuming that this not unambiguous indication of amusement signifies either a) the intention of the speaker to elicit laughter or b) the interpretation of an utterance by the listeners as intended to provoke laughter. This poses the methodological issue of identifying humour in the corpus. This issue will be discussed, and other insights into transcribing, coding and identifying humour within a corpus will be addressed.

Adelswärd, V. and B-M. Öberg. (1998). 'The function of laughter and joking in negotiation activities.' *Humor*, 11(4): 411-429.

Holmes, J. and M. Stubbe. (2003). *Power and Politeness in the Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Talk at Work.* Harlow: Pearson Education.

Holmes, J. (1998). 'No joking matter! The functions of humour in the workplace.' *Proceedings of the Australian Linguistic Society 1998.* http://www.cltr.uq.edu.au/als98/holme358.html (date accessed: 14/12/04).