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Esperanto: the international language of humor; or, What's funny about Esperanto?¹

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Abstract

This article distinguishes four types of joking: language-free, language-dependent, culture-dependent, and interlanguage. Each of these is discussed for Esperanto, stressing certain features of the Esperanto speech community that lend each of them a special quality in Esperanto. These features are (1) that Esperanto is normally used (or is intended for use) between people who do not share a common language and therefore have some differences in cultural background as well; (2) that Esperanto is an agglutinative language with certain inherent linguistic possibilities for the construction of language-dependent jokes; (3) that Esperanto has an incipient culture of its own speech community; and (4) that few speakers of Esperanto are entirely fluent, and all are at least as fluent in one or more other languages.

Brief history of Esperanto

The author of Esperanto was one L. L. Zamenhof (1859–1917), a Polish optometrist (except that Poland was Russia in those days), who had been possessed from childhood with the idea of an international auxiliary language. He spent much of his boyhood and youth working on various early versions of what was to become Esperanto.² When it appeared in 1887 in a small pamphlet, Esperanto consisted of 16 “rules of grammar”, a brief vocabulary list, and a few examples,³ but it had had the benefit of a good deal of devoted effort on the part of its creator to make it a literary language.⁴ Zamenhof’s test to himself was to translate into various forms of proto-Esperanto works by Goethe, Shakespeare, Hans Christian Andersen, and others. If the translation did not seem as compelling as the

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original, he figured Esperanto was not finished yet. As a result, the simple brochure of 1887 was actually the tip of a very considerable linguistic iceberg. Not surprisingly, Esperanto is the only manmade language that has actually developed a substantial community of speakers⁵ and a considerable literature.⁶ And, to the best of our knowledge, it is the only artificial language regularly used to make jokes.⁷

Three kinds of humor

For present purposes, I shall be concerned with published works in Esperanto. For one thing, these are easier to examine. For another, the worldwide but very thin distribution of Esperantists means that writing, in comparison with speaking, is more important in Esperanto than in ethnic languages.

I shall distinguish three kinds of humor. The first kind is based on the content of the joke and may readily be translated from one language to another. It may be that the speakers of one language find such a joke funnier than the speakers of another language, but, at least as far as language is concerned, such a joke is translatable. I shall call this the "language-free" joke.

The second sort of joke makes use of the linguistic resources of the language in which it is told, and is very difficult to render into another language. Puns and near puns are a good example of this second sort of verbal clowning. Punning probably exists in all or nearly all languages, but any given pun is dependent upon a particular language. (A colleague speaks of writing articles on a "word possessor," for example. That is distinctly unfunny when translated into a language in which "processor" and "possessor" are unrelated.) But there are other linguistically based jokes as well; for example, the following:

1. turns of phrase that produce onomatopoeic combinations of sounds (such as "giggly wiggly children");
2. expressions that allude to proverbs (such as Archie Bunker's wonderful proverb, "One man's goose is another man's gander");
3. expressions that oddly concatenate levels of politeness or formality (such as, "Could you be so kind as to cram it?");
4. expressions that make new or unusual use of rules of morphology or syntax (such as speaking of spouses as "spice").

All of these types of verbal play can be lumped together under the title

"language-dependent" to contrast with our earlier category of "language-free."

There is, as well, a third type of humor, one which depends upon sharing the culture, rather than the language, of the joker. It may be language-dependent, but more importantly it is culture-dependent. An example would be allusions to local events, particular people, and so on. A recent event in American politics was referred to by television humorist Mark Russell as "Gippergate," an expression that makes sense only to Americans.

Finally, a fourth type of humor occurs through the interaction of Esperanto with other languages. This is common enough but occurs in most language-learning situations and is not of much theoretical interest.

Constraints on humor in Esperanto

So what happens in Esperanto? The answer is that all three types of verbal clowning exist, and all have their own particular flavor. I shall argue here that three significant facts about Esperanto provide constraints on joking in that language that are normally not as significant elsewhere.

The first is that Esperanto is designed for use across language-community boundaries, which almost by definition are also cultural boundaries. Constant attention must therefore be paid to the translatability of the cultural context of the joke.

Second, most speakers of Esperanto speak it as a second language, usually quite imperfectly.⁸ This means that many see a freshness in rather simple jests that would seem hackneyed in other languages, but that many of them also fail to appreciate some attempts at humor because they do not understand them. At the same time, there is a considerable range of mastery of Esperanto, and those who know it well sometimes enjoy involuted linguistic byplay simply because it is involuted and thus demonstrates mastery of the language. Although there is probably some of this motivation among verbally oriented people speaking any language, it seems to me to be particularly prominent in Esperanto, where the range of adult mastery is so very wide.

Third, the community of Esperanto-speaking people shares certain experiences which outsiders do not share, just as does any group of communicating people. These experiences can become the subject matter of joking, providing in-culture jokes just as native to Esperanto as jokes

about the Knesset are native to Israel or jokes about Ma Bell are native to Americans.

All three of these constraints — intercultural use, imperfect mastery by many speakers, and the development of a certain amount of indigenous Esperanto culture — must be kept in mind as I discuss the language-free, language-dependent, culture-dependent, and interlanguage kinds of verbal play.

Humor type I: language-free humor

Zamenhof himself was not much of a jokester,⁹ but facetious “anecdotes,” often translated, make up one 30-page section of an early compendium of Esperanto texts by various writers that Zamenhof edited to serve as a model of good Esperanto style (Zamenhof 1903: section 3). Many of these seem to us today especially to reflect the ethos of eastern Europe at the end of the last century. Here is an example:

I understand, said someone, that they can make instruments and explore the stars and planets with them; this is manageable. But how do the scientists know the name of each star? This I have never been able to understand! (1903: 64).

A man visited a barber to have a haircut and a shave. As he sat in the barber chair, he noticed that the barber's dog was sitting looking at him especially intently. He remarked on this to the barber, who explained, “Yesterday I cut off a man's ear, and he is hoping I will do it again.”

Esperanto literature has, of course, produced much more sophisticated works of language-free humor, however. One such writer was Sándor Szathmári (1897–1974), whose *Voyage to Kazohinia* (1958) is designed as a sequel to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.¹⁰ Written in surprisingly Swiftlike prose, the book pursues Gulliver as he visits Kazohinia, a land where everything is annoyingly rational. When he decides he cannot put up with all this rationality any more, he flees to the land of the Beohins, who are entirely irrational, which is just as maddening. Another satirical novel is an autobiographical work by a Swiss–English salesman, Cesare Rossetti, called *Believe Me, Madame* (Rossetti 1949). The translatability of such works is attested in both these cases by the subsequent publication of translations into Hungarian.¹¹

An important problem with this sort of humor is, of course, that something funny, be it a novel or a joke, if it is in Esperanto, is directed at

a multinational audience, and what some audiences find amusing is simply dull to others. Japanese Esperantists in particular often complain about allusions to classical mythology, fragments of schoolboy Latin, and the like in Western Esperanto writing.¹²

Humor type II: language-dependent humor

More interesting in many ways are language-dependent types of humor. Here again satire rears its head, as one writer or speaker does a sendup of another, based on idiosyncratic traits of style.¹³ But other possibilities have also been exploited.¹⁴

Puns through resegmentation

Ask any reasonably educated Esperantist who is a funny writer and the name that immediately comes to the fore is that of Raymond Schwartz. Schwartz (1894–1973), a French bank director who edited a humor magazine from 1933, was founder and manager of the famous literary cabaret, the “Green Cat” in Paris,¹⁵ and contributed to a major Esperanto magazine of the inter-War period a regular humor column called *El Mia Ridpunkto* (From my point of laugh). His enthusiasm for wordplay is reflected in the names of some of his works, such as *Kun Siaspeca Spico*, ‘With its own kind of spice’ (1971a), or *Vole ... Novele*, ‘Willingly in novelle’ (1971b) (an unexpected reformation of the expression *vole nevole*, ‘willy nilly’).

Schwartz was master of the mis-segmentation of Esperanto words to produce surprising puns. This device is central to much language-dependent Esperanto humor, and it is well to take a look at it. That involves a brief excursus on how Esperanto words are built.

Esperanto words are usually made up of roots plus suffixes that modify them, plus grammatical endings. For example, *literaturo* means ‘literature’. The *-o* on the end of it is common to all Esperanto nouns. The *literatur-* part is the root, shared with many Western languages. There are two other roots, *liter-* and *tur-*, that are, by chance, entirely contained within *literaturo*. *Litero* means a letter of the alphabet. A *turo* is a tower. A final *-a* is an adjective marker, just as *-o* is a noun marker. Thus *literaturo* (one word) means ‘literature’, but *litera turo* (two words) means ‘tower of

letters'. That is not too bad a definition of literature, perhaps, but it is accidental: a pun.

Before the final *-o* (for nouns) or *-a* (for adjectives) or other endings (for other things), Esperanto often adds to the root one or more suffixes that change its meaning to produce a derived concept.¹⁶ Thus *-aj-* refers to a concrete manifestation of something. (Hence *literaturaĵo* means a work of literature.) Similarly *-er-* is a suffix meaning a part. Therefore a *litero* may mean a letter of the alphabet (*liter-o*), but alternatively it may be taken as a compound of *lit-er-o*, hence, 'part of a bed'. Understood this way, *litera turo* can mean 'tower of bed parts'!

In addition to the use of affixes, Esperanto shows great flexibility, as German and Chinese do, in creating compounds by the simple linking of roots. 'Simultaneous', for example, is *sam-temp-a*, from *sam-* 'same' plus *temp-* 'time' (plus the terminal *-a* to make it an adjective).¹⁷

Schwartz saw and made use of such ambiguities to create marvelously sprightly verses. Here is the most famous of them. It discusses the seven ages of man, naming each with a word that can be read either as a full root, in one appropriate sense, or as a shorter root with the attached root *aĝ-* meaning 'age'. The puns have been hyphenated to show the divisions.

En supra ĉambro, lulo ... lulo; Anĝele dormas la etulo: Et-aĝo.	In an upper room, rock-a-bye Angelically the little one sleeps: Second-story/Little age.
Sed baldaŭ li el dorm' sin ŝiras	But soon he tears himself from sleep
Kaj pri la bela mondo miras: Mir-aĝo.	And wonders at the world: Mirage/Age of wonder.
Jam ne plu side li tamburas, Sed tra la dom' explore kuras: Kur-aĝo.	No longer does he sit and drum, But runs exploring through the house Courage/Running age.
Kun vundoj li (kaj sen rubandoj)	Now with wounds (without his ribbons)
Revenas el stratbubaj bandoj: Band-aĝo.	He comes home from his street gangs: Bandage/Gang age.
Kaj baldaŭ sekvas li kun ĝojo Knabinon ĉien sur la vojo: Voj-aĝo.	And soon he follows with joy A girl everywhere on the street Voyage/Street age.

Al ŝi li donas sian nomon
Por fondi kune novan domon:
Dom-aĝo.

To her he gives his name
To found a new home:
A shame/Home age.

Li tiam estas tre utila
Fortika viro, kvankam vila:
Vil-aĝo.

He is very productive then,
A strong man, if hirsute:
Village/Hairy age.

Kaj post rapida tempopaso
Postrestas nur senviva maso:
Mas-aĝo.

And as time rapidly passes,
Only a lifeless lump remains:
Massage/Lump age.

P.S.
Ni ne apliku al Virino
Ĉi tiun viv- kaj rimo-saĝon,
Ĉar de l'komenco ĝis la fino
Ŝi ĉiam havas saman aĝon:
Avant-aĝo.

P.S.:
Let us not apply to a woman
This rhyming wisdom about life,
For from beginning to end
She has the same age:
Advantage/Advanced age.¹⁸

Construction of unexpected and novel compounds

The fact that Esperanto is so heavily dependent upon (or tolerant of) compounding leaves room for more and less usual compounds. It is perfectly normal for a fluent Esperantist to read a novel in which the pages are full of words he has never seen before, all of them compounds of familiar elements, and all of them therefore intelligible.¹⁹ Still, some compounds are more startling than others, and the unexpected compound, particularly if it is unusually long or unusually compact, can bring a smile. Here are a couple of examples that strike me as amusing, although they naturally lose their punch in translation. They show the general structures that are put to work in this way. You have to take my word for it that the results are both unusual and funny. You might also note, at the same time, that for the result to be either unusual or funny requires a certain level of fluency in Esperanto, and accordingly these are jokes that, as mentioned earlier, bring with their understanding a smug sense that one has got the language down pretty well.

Ekjubileu! = *ek-* 'begin' *jubile-* 'jubilee' *-u* (imperative marker) = 'Let the celebration begin!'
Savu Malsamideanojn! = 'save' + *mal-* 'opposite' *sam-* 'same' *ide-* 'idea' *-an* 'member' *-ojn* (plural accusative noun) = 'Save the unconverted!'²⁰

Ne F(i)umu! = *ne* 'not' + *fi-* (prefix denoting immorality) -*um-* (wildcard suffix used for idiosyncratic formulations)²¹ -*u* (imperative marker)
 OR *fum-* 'smoke' -*u* (imperative suffix) = EITHER 'No smoking!'
 OR 'No immoral behavior' (with the consequent implication that smoking is immoral).

Humor type III: culture-dependent humor

Finally, let us turn to jests that depend upon the "culture" of the Esperanto-speaking community itself. By "culture" I mean the shared understandings of the community, or of many members of it. Knowing about Raymond Schwartz, or even about Zamenhof, is an idiosyncrasy of Esperantists. It follows that jokes about them are necessarily "in-jokes." In-jokes are much appreciated by all sorts of groups, perhaps partly because the ability to understand them shows that one is master of a body of lore unknown to outsiders. Indeed in Esperanto in-jokes that require a very thorough knowledge both of the language and of the organizations and individuals who use it are regarded by some as especially delicious for exactly that reason. One work (MacGill 1986), with the improbable name of *Streĉ' eĉ, Steĉj-skeĉ'* (approximately "Even winding up: skits by Stefan MacGill") is filled with verbal play unintelligible to those whose mastery of Esperanto does not include a mastery of Esperanto culture. Interestingly, the work won critical praise for exactly this reason.²²

Esperanto has developed certain expressions that derive entirely from its own history or the daily lives of its members qua Esperantists. Three clear examples of such words, not necessarily jokes, are the words *krokodilo*, *sovaĝulo*, and *kabei*. These respectively mean 'crocodile', 'savage', and nothing at all. But they have taken on much broader connotations:

Krokodilo: a crocodile puppet was used in a famous direct-method Esperanto course by way of comic relief. The crocodile always spoke languages other than Esperanto, and people who speak languages other than Esperanto in Esperanto meetings are now called "crocodiles"; indeed, there is even a verb: *krokodili* 'to crocodile'.

Sovaĝulo: A "savage" is a person who does not make a reservation for an Esperanto convention but appears at the last minute expecting to be accommodated.

Kabei: Kabe (Kazimierz Bein, 1872–1959) was a talented early Esperanto stylist, who became discouraged with the movement for Esperanto and abruptly abandoned it. To be a *kabeo* is to be an apostate, and the verb *kabei* came to mean 'to apostacize'.

All three terms are closely linked to Esperanto life. All of them began as slight jests. All three have become entrenched.

In-jokes do not always become entrenched, of course; nor do they necessarily reflect on such more or less general problems in Esperanto life as apostasy, using the wrong language, or failing to make a reservation. In the early 1960s a pseudonymous booklet appeared called "How to (Un-)Defeat Esperanto" (*Kiel (Mal)Venkigi Esperanton*), reprinting a series of articles satirizing the shortsightedness of Esperantists trying to promote their cause. One chapter dealt with a mining company discovering the world's most unyielding substance, of a hardness much exceeding diamonds, called *lapenito*. Although the suffix *-ito* properly names minerals in Esperanto (as does its cognate *-ite* in English), the root of the name of this imaginary mineral comes from the name of Ivo Lapenna, then president of the Universal Esperanto Association, and much criticized for his unyielding manner. Thus *lapenito* had for Esperantists of that era something of the same implication as a mineral named "Nixonite" might have had for some Americans a few years later. An underground satirical poem about the same individual was called *La Penado*, 'The Striving'.

These planetwide localisms of the Esperanto-speaking community suffer in translation the way all in-jokes do. They exist because Esperantists are a corporate group, and corporate groups have common experiences that provide the raw materials for jokes about common experiences. Two forces work in opposite directions to encourage this tendency. On the one hand, the sense of group membership brought by having a common language, particularly when it is not widely shared, encourages the development of symbols of that membership. The in-joke is one such symbol. On the other hand, however, the relatively small number of Esperantists, of whom many are not fluent, and who spread across nations with different traditions and expectations about humor (and different flashpoints for taking offence) militates against the elaboration of these kinds of jokes. Still, they exist.

Humor type IV: nationalisms

A common, but almost by definition minor, type of humor in Esperanto involves jokes that play Esperanto off against some other language. To 'fare' or 'get on' is *farti* in Esperanto, and 'How are you?' is normally expressed *Kiel vi fartas?* It is a rare American learner that does not experience this as asking, quite literally, 'How do you fart?' and jokes, circumspection, or shock are unavoidable results in beginning classes. I once heard one American Esperantist ask another *Kiel vi fartas?* The reply was, "Well. Loud and well." Similarly, it is amusing to some to portmanteau idioms into Esperanto from other languages. Thus the maladroit literal translation of 'He gets my goat' into *Li havigas mian kapron* may draw a smile if it is not proposed seriously. Interlanguage humor of this kind is common to language-learning situations in general, however, and is hardly peculiar to Esperanto. If anything may distinguish it in Esperanto from its occurrence in other languages, it would perhaps be that in Esperanto nearly all noninternational Esperanto contacts are language-learning situations, and hence there are more opportunities for the creative use and exploitation of interlanguage phenomena.

Conclusion

If humor is the international language, Esperanto (which really is the international language) can be humorous, too. I hope I have left you with the firm impression that Esperanto shares with other languages several basic ways of being funny. I have also tried to underline some of the constraints that shape Esperanto humor precisely because Esperanto is still a language with a very high proportion of subcompetent speakers and no geographically contiguous population. Now by way of conclusion let me tell an Esperanto joke:

Three guys go into a bar, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew. One is Polish, one English, and one Chinese. All have mothers-in-law. The Pole, who is also the Catholic, says to the bartender, "*Ekjubileju!* Give me a beer!" The Englishman, who is also the Protestant, says to the bartender, "*Savu Malsamideanojn!* Give me a beer!" The remaining Esperantist (who is the Chinese Jew), after listening to the other two, looks the bartender in the eye and says, "I'm a Kabc; give me champagne!"

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Notes

1. This article originated as a paper for the 1987 International WHIM Humor Conference. The theme in 1987 was "Humor: The World's Common Language." Since 1987 was by chance also the centennial of the publication of Esperanto, intended for use as a world-wide auxiliary language, the concurrence of the two events proved irresistible, especially to my colleague Ralph A. Lewin (famed for his Esperanto translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh*), who bullied me into writing this article and offered all sorts of comments, some of which I accepted. It would be unfair to blame the article's shortcomings on Lewin, but he is responsible for its inception and for at least some of its strengths.
2. The most readily available biography of Zamenhof in English is Boulton (1960).
3. In 1888 the "Second book" included "exercises" to provide further examples. The rules, the vocabulary, the exercises, and an introduction to a later reprint of the "First book" came to constitute the *Fundamento*, or the canonical basis defined by the first Universal Congress of Esperanto in 1905 as the "unchangeable" linguistic basis of the language (Zamenhof 1963). The issue of authority for usage is an important one in language planning and gives birth to language academies — Esperanto has one — language committees in ministries of education, and so on. For a study of problems of authority and evolution in the linguistic details of Esperanto, see Lo Jacomo 1981.
4. The appearance of the initial brochure was deceptive in its simplicity. A thorough exploration of the grammar of any language requires more than 16 rules, as analytically inclined Esperantists were eventually to discover. Such "modern" issues as the relation between semanticity and grammaticality had become questions of hot debate by the turn of the century and were to remain important (and only partially resolved) to the present time. The most extensive analysis of Esperanto grammar so far is the 599-page effort of K. Kalocsay and G. Waringhien (fourth edition, 1980). (As a matter of interest we might note that this edition was authored by a Hungarian and a Frenchman, edited in Holland, typeset in Brazil, and printed in China. It was revised from an incomplete third edition, published in Italy.)
5. Estimates of the number of Esperantists in the world, like estimates of the number of bridge players in the world, are difficult to make and harder yet to defend. Numbers between a million and several million are bandied about.
6. Zamenhof's own interest in literature inspired him to continue translating works of world literature after Esperanto was published. In addition, Esperantists from earliest days have both translated and composed in Esperanto. Like counting Esperantists, counting Esperanto publications is an impossible task. Certainly the number would be several tens of thousands. For a brief (three-volume) anthology of original Esperanto literature, see Szerdahelyi (1979). For an anthology of poetry from 1887 to 1981 see Auld (1984). Brief histories of Esperanto literature are those of Auld (1979) and Pechan (1966). A useful work in English is by Hagler (1971). A compendium of Zamenhof's writings and closely associated documents from the time Esperanto appeared until his death is in preparation in Japan. (The first 14 volumes have appeared so far. See Zamenhof 1973-.) An English bibliographic guide to scholarly writing about Esperanto and the Esperanto movement, now sadly outdated, is by Tonkin (1977). Several histories of the Esperanto movement are available. The early period is chronicled by Privat (1912) and Drezen (1931), and the history to 1960 is covered in a three-volume collection of documents and commentary by Courtinat (n.d.). More recent is an encyclopaedic summary edited by Lapenna et al. (1974). In English, the most extensive work is an interesting sociological study by Forster (1982). Jordan (1987) discusses other

- aspects of the sociology of the language and analyzes its success relative to Volapük and Ido, two early competitors.
7. For present purposes, joking and wit (or jokes and witticisms) are taken as interchangeable. A deeper study would, of course, need to differentiate them.
 8. There *are* native speakers of Esperanto. That's what comes of letting people talk to each other who have no other language in common. But natively Esperanto-speaking children rapidly become more fluent in the language of the community around them as they grow up, reserving Esperanto for use as a home language. It is not at all uncommon for adult "native speakers" to have a poorer command of Esperanto than the more fluent of its second-language speakers.
 9. In the original brochure of 1887, the exercises included an entire section (section 7) dealing with lions: *leono estas forta* 'a lion is strong'; *resti kun leono estas danĝere* 'to remain with a lion is dangerous'; etc. Leon was also the name of Zamenhof's kid brother, and it is told that this passage was created after a series of annoying interruptions by his cadet sibling. If this is the case, then it is Esperanto's first pun. It is not very funny, I concede, but he had the right idea. For a recent treatment of Zamenhof's sense of humor, see Rossetti 1988.
 10. Completed in 1938, the novel was a victim of Hungarian censorship of the period and finally appeared only in 1958, when it created a sensation in the Esperanto-speaking world. It was followed in 1977 by *Kain kaj Abel*, a postmortal collection of short stories, also satirical in style, and by other works.
 11. Similarly, satirical or farcical pieces have been successfully translated from other languages into Esperanto. Most well-read Esperantists are familiar with Karel Havlíček Borovský's irreverent "Baptism of Czar Vladimír" through the charming translation into Esperanto by Tomáš Pumpr (1953). A brilliant translation of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* was presented at the 1979 British Esperanto convention in Cheltenham to honor the hundredth anniversary of the operetta's first performance, and the cassette, despite often-inept singing, has enjoyed wide circulation (Gilbert 1979a, 1979b).
 12. Ralph Lewin pointed out to me that it is difficult to explain 'Ma Bello Gallico' to a "non-Francophone Japanese." More seriously, however, there are two separate problems. One is the cultural background that an ethnic language easily and naturally assumes, which is limited in Esperanto. Part of this involves canons of what is funny, just as part of it is whether or not Latin phrases or Roman myths turn up in widely popular contexts, and thoughtful Esperanto writers and readers alike worry sometimes quite publicly about this. The other is expectations about what writing is all about, and how serious or frivolous it can acceptably be. This is a less widely appreciated point. I know of no original humor in Esperanto composed in Asia (although there may be some). Chinese publishing houses have issued some lighthearted children's literature in Esperanto (especially retellings of parts of the "Monkey" saga), but little Asian writing in Esperanto has been intended to make anybody laugh. One wonders whether humor as a literary genre is as common in Asian literatures as in the Western ones.
 13. The best known example of this is Henri Beupierre's *Specimene* 'as an example', a series of verses and prose bits elaborately mocking the stylistic excesses of 41 major Esperanto literary figures.
 14. Genteel comic pornography has become respectable in recent years, beginning with the publication of two works by Louis Beaucair (1970, 1974) set in the mythical land of Bervalo, a place of pun and debauchery. It is difficult to imagine translating these works because of their reliance on verbal games and in-jokes (to be discussed below). For example, the first chapter of the 1970 book introduces a prostitute whose routines are named after famous events in Esperanto history or puns on them. In the same vein, a writer known for murder mysteries published under his pseudonym Johán Valano (= 'man of the valley') satirized himself with an obscene underground novel written under the name Johán Balano (= 'glans penis') (Balano 1982).
 15. '*La Verda Kato*' was its name at the beginning, in 1920. After the Second World War Schwartz revived the cabaret under the name "Three Imps" (*Tri Koboldoj*). For a study of Schwartz's plays on words, see Lloancy 1987.
 16. Technically, Esperanto, like Hungarian and Turkish, is an agglutinative language for this reason. The system of affixation is particularly developed in Esperanto — ten derivative compounds per root is sometimes cited as the average figure. It is the basic device Zamenhof adopted to minimize vocabulary learning. Like the noun-class system of Bantu languages, the verb-class system of Indonesian languages, the classifiers of Sinitic languages, and other seemingly regularizing semantic markers, particular compounds tend to evolve into special-purpose words slightly different from the theoretical sum of their parts. However, this perhaps inevitable historical process is as yet only incipient in Esperanto, where the derivations are still largely predictable in meaning.
 17. Compare German *gleich-zeit-ig*, Chinese *tóng-shi-de*. In all of these cases, the roots that go to make up the compound are unmodified by their combination, so that the structure is entirely visible.
 18. In America today this is considered a sexist remark. It was a sexist remark in Paris when the poem was written too, but sexist remarks were considered funny at the time. The poem is here reproduced from its reprinting in Auld (1984: 230), but it has appeared in numerous anthologies.
 19. The implications of this for reading speed are interesting but unstudied. Our experience is that speed reading in Esperanto is more difficult than it is in other languages we know equally well, but this is a superficial impression and may be quite wrong. Suitability for speed reading is an important aspect of written language, one that receives too little consideration when the merits of various writing systems or written languages are compared.
 20. *Samideano* is sometimes translated inaccurately as 'comrade' or ungracefully as 'fellow-thinker'. It refers to someone who shares one's philosophy and is used as an affectionate, if slightly old-fashioned, term by which one Esperantist refers to another. The compound *malsamideano* is necessarily the contrasting category of people who have opposing philosophies (or more particularly, of those who actively oppose Esperanto), but the term does not normally occur, which is part of what makes it comic. (Naturally the idea that what such people need is "salvation" is also part of the jest.)
 21. For example, *vent-o* 'wind' gives *vent-um-i* 'ventilate'.
 22. Such works are not to everyone's taste, and some Esperantists argue that, since Esperanto is a second language to nearly all of its speakers, anything written in it ought to be kept as simple as possible so as to be within the range of learners. My impression is that this position is most vigorously defended by people with weaker Esperanto.

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