

Fecha de recepción: 4 agosto 2013
Fecha de aceptación: 11 octubre 2013
Fecha de publicación: 10 febrero 2014
URL: <http://oceanide.netne.net/articulos/art6-10.php>
Oceánide número 6, ISSN 1989-6328

Humour in *Pinocchio's* Liberating Discursive Practice

Alcina SOUSA
(University of Madeira, Portugal)

RESUMEN:

Aunque Pinocho pueda representar de algún modo a la figura del héroe romántico, varios pasajes de este cuento infantil exploran en realidad los diversos usos retóricos del humor. Localizaciones hilarantes, personajes y situaciones contribuyen a crear una figura picaresca hasta el momento en el que éste (Collodi, 1883, Chap. 36) "finalmente deja de ser una marioneta para convertirse en una chiquillo de carne y hueso". A pesar de apoyar esta investigación en un enfoque estilístico, el objetivo de este artículo consiste en debatir algunas técnicas lingüísticas frecuentes en la evocación del humor en este relato, fuente de comicidad manifiesta. En resumen, este relato retrata la emergencia de diversos significados que se difuminan entre sí, nuevos y antiguos, así percibidos a través de la interacción entre educación y poder, a la vez que narra un cuento que personifica temas tan relevantes como la identidad, la comicidad y la imaginación, la autenticidad o lo maravilloso. Para finalizar, la enriquecedora narración de *Las Aventuras de Pinocho*, a pesar de ser un texto muy popular entre los lectores más jóvenes, puede permitirse agradar a una audiencia más amplia, cruzando así los límites del tiempo, el espacio o la cultura.

Palabras clave: humor, estilo, literatura infantil, dimensión intercultural

ABSTRACT:

Although Pinocchio might be said to stand for a sort of romantic hero, there are several passages exploring the various rhetorical uses of humour in his adventures. Humorous settings, characters and situations contribute to his becoming a picaresque hero up to the moment he (Collodi, 1883, Chap. 36) "finally ceases to be a marionette and becomes a real boy". While drawing on a stylistic approach, this paper aims at discussing some of the frequent linguistic and stylistic techniques for evoking humour in the tale often used as the source of comic relief. Briefly put, the tale might be said to embody rising overlapping meanings as far as new and old ones are meaningfully perceived in the interaction of education and empowerment, portrayal with identity, laughter and imagination, authenticity with fancy. All in all, the enriching and empowering narratives in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, despite having turned into a popular text and written for children, allow for startlingly stirring pleasures in wider contexts, crossing the boundaries of time, place and culture.

Keywords: humour, style, children's literature, crosscultural dimension

In an interview with Rosa Lobato de Faria (in Nunes, 2008: 30), a Portuguese actress, fictional writer and poet, referred to the aspects to abide in her rewriting of canonical texts for children, particularly the famous Portuguese satirical texts by Gil Vicente, which date back to the 16th century, namely *Auto da Índia* (1509) and *Auto da Barca do Inferno* (1516), among other. Among the features, focused on in her interview, stand out humour, rhyming scheme and storyline, which make children both, and I translate, "laugh and think" about customs, ways of life, values as well as characters' descriptions and personalities at a certain period within the symbolic realm. At the same time these texts have a pedagogic aim. Yet, reiterates the novelist, archaic language and license have to be altered. Faria's words have offered a brief synopsis of common, as well as distinctive features, concerning the humour tradition perceived in a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, in texts read by, and by no means exclusive to, children whatever their linguistic code: images, aspects and languages.

Unlike very many constructions of childhood in literature in the 19th century, Collodi's *Pinocchio* is a selfish and rebellious boy, frequently enticing an informal but boldly direct dialogue with other characters. This might constitute a subversive way then when most literary depictions of adult and children conversations were featured by an authoritarian and formal tone. Hence, the sort of topics addressed at children, including ethic and aesthetic values, revolve around (Stroup, 2005) the most debated and important concepts in Romantic studies: nature, innocence, and individuality.

Children's involvement with the texts might be explained by their ability to experience humour, or their natural sense of humour, to be promoted from birth. Indeed, Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883), though written in the 19th century, and being rewritten, adapted and abridged in several languages goes on igniting particular cognitive experiences in young readers and, simultaneously, causing laughter, as well as fun, while passing on values to children in a meaningful way. When children read, are read or watch *Pinocchio's* adventures, they are invited to imagine the unusual, accept as true the impossible and experience situations and characters' doings or wrongdoings as if their own.

Drawing on previous studies on Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* within a

cross-linguistic, discursive and stylistic perspective (Sousa, 2008, 2009, 2011) as well as the writer's strategies to address children of different age ranges (2009) in several versions, from a psycholinguistic approach, it is my purpose, now, to discuss some of the frequent linguistic and stylistic techniques to evoke humour in *Pinocchio's* liberating discursive practice. The narrator's resource to puns and verbal play in otherwise serious scenes is often used as the source of comic relief to be perceived as learning in a positive way within the symbolic dimension.

The transformation of a wooden puppet into a young boy who, from its conception by a wood carver, has been perceived with human traits, with virtues and vices, seems to warn children against giving in to the evil ways of avoiding a formal education and disobeying parents. Young readers may find some of the wooden puppet's patterns of behaviour familiar to their own, ranging from verbal to non-verbal modes of communication, like "staring eyes" as if challenging Geppetto, who could not follow the reason for the puppet "beg[in] to laugh and poke fun at him" (Collodi, 2004: 7) or even "st[ick] out a long tongue". Non-verbal language lays the ground to *Pinocchio's* liberating discursive practices and unexpected turnings in his course of action with other characters in the diegetic world, till he finally learns to abide to the ethical dimension. The puppet becomes more and more reliable as it is given the chance to vindicate his own voice.

All these figure as ways in to young readers' meaning-making, while also enhancing imaginative and creative skills. At this point it is worth referring that children's ability to process verbal humour, for instance conveyed by lexical puns, can only occur "once the capacity for the recognition of ambiguity in language has been achieved", notably not until the age of six years, so contends Simpson (2003: 21), borrowing from several studies (Fry, 1963: 13; Keith-Speigel, 1972; Raskin, 1985; McGhee, 1983: 111; Norrick, 1993: 15).

Having briefly presented some of the striking features leading to the selection of Collodi's text, I shall proceed with the discussion of some of the frequent linguistic and stylistic techniques for evoking humour in the tale, and sometimes extend it to, and citing Simpson, (2003: 15) "how research in "linguistic humorology", can be used to model the broad mechanics of humour production and delivery" [author's emphasis].

Collodi seems to know readers' idiosyncrasies and his narrative has been and still is an appeal to the readers' senses: sight, taste, hearing, the feeling and smell. He also resorts to dynamic narratives punctuated by enumeration, repetition, synaesthesia, and comic aspects, thus contributing to schema refreshment/reinforcement (Bartlett, 1932; Semino, 1997).

The following passage taken from the online English version of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, from the first translation into English, published in 1892, by Carol Della Chiesa (1931), highlights the way the narrator meaningfully activates children's background knowledge, while resorting to familiar language and everyday situations. In the process, Collodi shows (McRae, 1991: 31) "how words need not remain on the merely referential level", to borrow from McRae's contentions, "but can take on new identities for a multiplicity of purposes - and, in their new guises, help [the readers] see familiar things in a new light" [adapted Mine].

"Fine fish, these bass!"
 "Very tasty, these whitefish!"
 "Delicious flounders, these!"
 "What splendid crabs!"
 "And these dear little anchovies, with their heads still on!"
 As you can well imagine, the bass, the flounders, the whitefish, and even the little anchovies all went together into the tub to keep the mullets company. The last to come out of the net was Pinocchio.
 As soon as the Fisherman pulled him out, his green eyes opened wide with surprise, and he cried out in fear:
 "What kind of fish is this? I don't remember ever eating anything like it." (Chapter 28: 96)

The conceptual words within the same lexical and semantic fields of "fish", namely "whitefish", and readers' repeated exposure to similar entities, in a creative way, enables children to "make predictions and draw inferences" (Semino, 1997 : 124) about expected occurrences like "crabs", "anchovies" and "mulletts". In the process of interpretation of deviation, featuring the literary text, fun and amusement come along with the dynamic picture of "the bass, the flounders, the whitefish, and even the little anchovies" going "together into the tub to keep the mullets company". Quite unexpectedly, the young reader "sees" Pinocchio coming out of the net. This challenges / disrupts

readers' schemata and result in schema-refreshment. According to Cook (1994: 9), "a new experience is understood in comparison with a stereotypical version of similar experience held in memory. The new experience is then processed in terms of its deviation from the stereotypical version, or conformity to it". Again, and in the light of the concept of "carnivalization" by Bakhtin, children's genuine laughter or smile owes to the inversion of facts, rather than on language complexity. This entails some of the ways devised by Collodi to disrupt pre-established patterns so that readers might perceive the real meaning of learning, of formal education, and grasp the ethic dimension of the human being, from the outset all through the narrative, to be inferred from the following dialogue (chapter 29: 102):

"Is the Fairy home?" asked the Marionette.
 "The Fairy is asleep and does not wish to be disturbed. Who are you?"
 "It is I."
 "Who's I?"
 "Pinocchio."

In Pinocchio's discursive practice, stand out short answers, play on words, sometimes incomplete sentences which are close to children's language output and make "the Marionette" a reliable character with whom readers may identify. The visual representation of the sorts of fish and their semantic associations can be evidenced in the following pun, or play on words, connoting sarcasm (chapter 28: 97):

"Are you fooling? Do you think that I want to lose the opportunity to taste such a rare fish? A Marionette fish does not come very often to these seas. Leave it to me. I'll fry you in the pan with the others. I know you'll like it. It's always a comfort to find oneself in good company."

The narrator's resource to puns in otherwise serious scenes is often used as the source of comic relief, evidenced, for example in: "Mindful of what the Fisherman had said, Pinocchio knew that all hope of being saved had gone. He closed his eyes and waited for the final moment. Suddenly, a large Dog, (...) And as usual Pinocchio got escaped being fried. (...) The Fisherman, angry at seeing his meal snatched from under his nose, ran after the Dog, but a bad fit of coughing made him stop and turn back." (chapter 28: 99) Hence, through accumulation and visual metaphor readers may interact with the abstract concept of lying, explicit in the

utterance (chapter 17: 53): "Lies, my boy, are known in a moment. There are two kinds of lies, lies with short legs and lies with long noses. Yours, just now, happen to have long noses." Once again, the reader is offered a hilarious outcome to one of the interlocutor's reproach, in as much as, and to transcribe the narrator's words, "not knowing where to hide his shame, tried to escape from the room, but his nose had become so long that he could not get it out of the door."

Hyperbole, associated with the visual metaphor, may trigger readers' laughter and amusement. Further on in another narrative sequence, it is Pinocchio who speaks about himself as if speaking about another person, so as to get his nose back. His self-defensive attitude ends up in a comic situation (chapter 29: 101):

As he was telling all these enormous lies about himself, Pinocchio touched his nose and found it twice as long as it should be. Scared out of his wits, he cried out:

"Don't listen to me, good man! All the wonderful things I have said are not true at all. I know Pinocchio well and he is indeed a very wicked fellow, lazy and disobedient, who instead of going to school, runs away with his playmates to have a good time."

At this speech, his nose returned to its natural size.

"Why are you so pale?" the old man asked suddenly.

While visualising Pinocchio's nose becoming longer, or, on the contrary, shrinking to its initial size, young readers may realize whether the protagonist is lying or not. Actually, the image of the nose, being associated with lying might be found in many Latin literary texts, like those by Horace, Persius and Pliny the Elder (Telmo, 2009). It was then associated with loathe and mockery.

Also the image connected to Pinocchio's ears becoming "as long as shoe brushes", rendered by simile and hyperbole, is related to Pinocchio's transformation into a donkey in the Land of Toys. Long ears have been also associated with poor learning in the formal context of education (chapter 32: 118):

You must know that the Marionette, even from his birth, had very small ears, so small indeed that to the naked eye they could hardly be seen. Fancy how he felt when he noticed that overnight those two

dainty organs had become as long as shoe brushes!

Pinocchio's wrongdoings end up being metaphorically represented by the image of a donkey in the narrator's understatement (chapter 33: 129): "The poor little Donkey stuck out a long tongue and licked his nose for a long time in an effort to take away the pain." The visual representation of Pinocchio's transformation into a donkey for being led by greed, disobedience, pride, lying and vice, is punctuated by the protagonist's degradation by changing his register into that of animal language (onomatopoeic sounds) (chapter 33: 125):

Pinocchio screamed with pain and as he screamed he brayed:

"Haw! Haw! Haw! I can't digest straw!"

"Then eat the hay!" answered his master, who understood the Donkey perfectly.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Hay gives me a headache!"

"Do you pretend, by any chance, that I should feed you duck or chicken?" asked the man again, and, angrier than ever, he gave poor Pinocchio another lashing.

Likewise, blending repetition and sarcasm entails another linguistic and stylistic strategy to account for the consequences of upturning ethic values (chapter 32: 124):

This horrid little being, whose face shone with kindness, went about the world looking for boys. Lazy boys, boys who hated books, boys who wanted to run away from home, boys who were tired of school--all these were his joy and his fortune. He took them with him to the Land of Toys and let them enjoy themselves to their heart's content. When, after months of all play and no work, they became little donkeys, he sold them on the market place. In a few years, he had become a millionaire.

The hitherto mentioned illustrations are but some of the examples of Collodi's peculiar way of instantiating and developing meaning at the level of discourse (Nascicione, 2005: 72), extended via "new associations or their chains" over longer stretches of the text, "resulting in the creation of successive sub-images, coupled with the visual development of metaphorical meaning". According to Nascicione, metaphorical meaning (op.

cit., 73) "arises in a particular instance of a unique stylistic application", and "results in significant changes in its form and meaning determined by the thought expressed".

Innocence, natural instinct and vice underpin the child protagonist's way of repeatedly breaking his promises of going to school and abiding to his creator, the wood carver, Geppetto. Yet, Collodi resorts sometimes to irony in comic situations for a pedagogic purpose, likely to be inferred in the following passages:

"Good day, Mastro Antonio," said Geppetto. "What are you doing on the floor?"

"I am teaching the ants their A B C's."

"Good luck to you!"
(Chapter 2: 4)

"Really? Really?" cried the Marionette, jumping around with joy. "Then the wound was not serious?"

"But it might have been--and even mortal," answered the old man, "for a heavy book was thrown at his head."

"And who threw it?"

"A schoolmate of his, a certain Pinocchio."
(Chapter 29: 100)

Moreover, most of the situations in which there is some kind of conflict, with hilarious underpinnings, end up in a compromise. Characters always come to an agreement by shaking hands, thus reinforcing the values of gentility in late 19th century. The sort of offensive turn-takings and swearing fall upon well-bred children's register and lexical competence, such as "polendina" [cornmeal mush], "donkey", "idiot", "liar" (chapter 2: 6) unlike most satirical texts addressed do adults.

Although Pinocchio might be said to stand for a sort of romantic hero, reminding the (Levi, 2002) "Prodigal Son", in the biblical parable, the several passages tackled in this paper have come to explore the various rhetorical uses of humour in his adventures. Humorous settings, a wide array of characters, otherwise met in fables and fairy tales, creatively reconstructed, as well as a wide array of situations, contribute to his becoming a sort of picaresque hero up to the moment he (Collodi, 1883: Chap. 36) "finally ceases to be a marionette and becomes a real boy". After all, readers are given the chance to interact with the protagonist's individuality and learn with

fun with Pinocchio's haps and mishaps.

In order to understand the protagonist's conflict, Collodi sets up a wide array of situations which are conveyed by topic, turn-taking and participant roles. These challenge the child / reader (a meaning-taker and a meaning-maker) with different perspectives conveyed by Pinocchio's peculiar way of envisaging reality and shaping the communicative event.

Unlike Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the construction of the puppet by Geppetto and his skilful turning into a moving character, "a wooden marionette", draw on young readers' imaginative skills, yet with humorous underpinnings, given the grotesque contours, from the outset of the narrative: "It must be wonderful, one that will be able to dance, fence, and turn somersaults. With it I intend to go around the world, to earn my crust of bread and cup of wine" (Chapter 2: 4), states Geppetto. Nonetheless, he acknowledges Pinocchio as a "wicked boy!", since he was not yet finished but started out "by being impudent to him", so blamed his father.

The language in which he expressed wrongdoing stands out in the narrative sometimes with mocking contours because he gives in to temptation, to instinctive clines again and again (chapter 13: 36), standing out in the following sequence: "What good people," thought Pinocchio to himself. And forgetting his father, the new coat, the A-B-C book, and all his good resolutions, he said to the Fox and to the Cat: "Let us go. I am with you."

Like the "Prodigal Son" Pinocchio had the chance to repent and go back to his father and to school. In the course of error-trial, of being given the chance to assert his voice in the diegetic world, young readers grasp for themselves the real meaning of repenting, till he finally realizes that (chapter 12: 34):

"No, I don't want to go. Home is near, and I'm going where Father is waiting for me. How unhappy he must be that I have not yet returned! I have been a bad son, and the Talking Cricket was right when he said that a disobedient boy cannot be happy in this world. I have learned this at my own expense. Even last night in the theatre, when Fire Eater. . . Brrrr!!!! . . . The shivers run up and down my back at the mere thought of it."

All these linguistic and stylistic choices briefly touched upon figure as ways in to

young readers' meaning-making, while also enhancing imaginative and creative skills. Owing to an (McRae, 1991: 31) "identification transfer" working on a similar principle as do Aesop's fables, or the use of cartoon and puppet characters, to borrow from McRae's words, the reader / child (*Op. cit., Ibidem*) "identifies the fictional character, and transfers the character's role from that of a character viewed for entertainment to that of a character along with whom a finding out / learning process can be engaged in". In the process, the young reader and characters take on new roles vis-à-vis the characters' original function. After all, all is well that ends well and the protagonist has the chance to acknowledge his own mistakes and restore the logical order of the universe: "After a long, long look, Pinocchio said to himself with great content: "How ridiculous I was as a Marionette! And how happy I am, now that I have become a real boy!" (chapter 36: 152). With Pinocchio's narrative, Collodi managed to pass on to children the freedom and possibilities offered in childhood.

To conclude, Carlo Collodi's narrative subverts the biased view concerning humour, as a minor aspect in literary genres, to it keep up with a trustworthy status. His writing constitutes a change in the dominant literary representation of the child, focusing on images and linguistic choices which still work cross-culturally. Several aspects concur to this: firstly, because of being addressed not only at a large readership but also involving the little readers; secondly, because it challenges readers with different perspectives, by confronting lively narratives and focalisations by animals (such as in fables) or fairies which are recreated in a humorous and satirical way. Collodi resorts to a series of conceptual associations within young readers' socio-cognitive development; thirdly, because the unfamiliar turnings are gradually grasped by children in their constant interaction with images, familiar language and rhetorical aspects always with fun and amusement without being trivial, thereby intertwining smile, irony and comic without malice inherent to children's innocence. In short, Pinocchio's comic stances may be perceived, in the manner of Sydney (1595), not as "scornful matters as stir laughter only, but mixed with it, that delightful teaching" which is particularly afforded in comedy.

WORKS CITED:

BARTLETT, F. (1995). *Remembering [1932]*. Cambridge: CUP.

BAKHTIN, M. M. [1930s] (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.

LEVI, I. (2002). *Pinocchio. The Puberty Rite of a Puppet*. <http://mondodomani.org/dialegesthai/il02.htm> (Last access 03-08-2013).

COLLODI, C. (1883). *Le Avventure di Pinocchio: Storia di un Buratino* (illustrations by E. Mazzanti). Florence: Felice Paggi Libraio-Editore.

COLLODI, C. (2004). *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Trans. English, Page by Page Books. http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/C_Collodi/The_Adventures_of_Pinocchio/index.html. (last access 1-10-2010).

COOK, G. (1994). *Discourse and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FARIA, R. (2008). *Auto da Índia: adaptado para os mais novos*. Famacião: Quasi.

FRY, W. F. (1963). *Sweet Madness: A Study of Humor*. Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books.

KEITH-SPEIGEL, P. (1972). "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues". In Goldstein, J. and McGee, P. (eds), *Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*. New York: Academic Press, 4-36.

McGHEE, P. E. (1983). "Humor Development: Toward a Lifespan Approach". In McGee, P. & Goldstein, J. *Handbook of Humor Research Volume 1: Basic Issues*. New York: Springer Verlag, 109-134.

McRAE, J. (1991). *Literature with a small 'l'*. London: McMillan Publishers Limited.

NACISCIONE, A. (2005) "Visual Representation of Phraseological Metaphor in Discourse: A Cognitive Approach". *The Writer's Craft, the Culture's Technology* (eds. C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Toolan). Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 71-83.

NORRICK, N. (1993). *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talking*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

NUNES, V. (2008). "Suave Picante". *Sol 24 / 28th June*: 30.

ROBERTS, P. (1997). *Taking Humour Seriously in Children's Literature: Literature-based Mini-Units and Humorous Books for Children, Ages 5-12*. Lanham & London: Scarecrow Press.

RASKIN, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

REIS, T. (2009). "Jerónimo Cardoso e o humor dos humanistas". *JoLIE 2:2 / 2009*: 67-75. Alba Iulia, Romania: Editura AEternitas.

SEMINO, E. (1997). *Language and World Creation in Poems and other Texts*. London: Longman.

SIMPSON, P. (2003). *On the Discourse of*

- Satire*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
SYDNEY [1595]. *Defense of Poesie*.
<http://sidney.classicauthors.net/DefenseOfPoesy/DefenseOfPoesy5.html>.
(Last access 4-08-2013)
- SOUSA, A. (2008). "Palavra e Ilustração em Diálogo: Desambiguando deícticos no espaço enunciativo de *As Aventuras de Pinóquio*, de Carlo Collodi". In Proceedings of the 7th National (5th International) Conference on *Research in Reading, Children's Literature and Illustration*. Braga: University of Minho, www.casadaleitura.org, ABZ da Leitura | Orientações Teóricas, 21pp. http://195.23.38.178/casadaleitura/portalbeta/bo/documentos/ot_palavra_e_ilustracao_em_dialogo_b.pdf.
- SOUSA, A. (2009). "How Literacy Begins: Disambiguating Deictic References in *Pinocchio's* Simplified Versions". International Conference, "Children's Books from 0 to 3: Where Literacy Begins". Troisdorf: Picture Book Museum Burg Wissem, 20th March 2009.
- SOUSA, A. (2009). "Humour in *Pinocchio's* Liberating Discursive Practice". II International Conference on Intercultural Humour: "Images, Aspects and Languages". Lucca: Fondazione Nazionale Carlo Collodi and the Museo Nazionale del Fumetto, 7th April 2009.
- SOUSA, A. (2011). "Deictic References in Simplified Illustrated Versions of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Port. - Eng.)". *JoLIE* 4/2011:181-203. Alba Iulia, Romania: Editura AEternitas. http://www.uab.ro/cercetare/ciel/jolie/JoLIE%202011/pdfs/13.sousa_alcina.pdf.
- STROUP, W. (2005). "The Romantic Child". *Literature Compass*, 1/1, Wiley, online library.

Título: El sentido del humor y su discurso liberador en *Pinocho*.

Contact: <ninita@netmadeira.com>