

RESEARCH

Main Research Projects

Interdisciplinary Spoof Studies

by Prof Gerard Dunn O'Moynes

The Centre of British Studies has secured funding for an ambitious research project which will place it at the forefront of the cutting edge of interdisciplinary area studies. We have scooped the prestigious Excellence in Science Innovation prize awarded annually by the Porsche Foundation for the most outstanding contribution to the art of writing research funding applications.

Interdisciplinary Spoof Studies combine the best of the Centre's renowned expertise in English linguistics, comparative history of ideas, British codification and black letter law, and classical theoretical economics into a fascinating showpiece of state of the art innovation in anticipating applied research output which is embedded in a large-scale project environment.

While the first recorded appearance of spoof as a word to denounce a "hoax, humbug, an instance of this" in 1889 (Oxford English Dictionary) is very recent in the eyes of our historians, the notion of a spoof can be traced back to the proverbial Trojan horse, with its known long-lasting, sustainable impact on European and Middle Eastern politics, economy, history, and, indeed, literature. Interdisciplinary Spoof Studies will link this phenomenon to British path dependencies which have developed from an antagonism between a wicked sense of humour on the one hand, and the indignant seriousness on the other which is appropriate for defending the birth right of every true born Englishman (and, needless to add, Englishwoman) (which applies *mutatis mutandis* to Scots and Welsh) (and Northern Irish) to scornful jingoism against everybody who lives outside the Home Counties (with appropriate modifications for everyone British who lives outside the Home Counties).

Our team of distinguished linguistic experts will cross several disciplinary boundaries in their groundbreaking study on the influence of umlauts (or lack thereof) on the development of a sense of humour (or lack thereof). Their case study was sparked by a short BBC report (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/895503.stm>, last visited on 12 June 2008) which, under the heading "Vowels to blame for German grumpiness" stated:

Prof David Myers believes that the facial contortions needed to pronounce vowels modified by the umlaut may be getting the Germans down in the mouth.

"This could be a good reason why German people have got a reputation for being humourless and grumpy," said Professor Myers, who heads Psychology at Hope College, Michigan.

Aided by highly distinguished experts from our network of excellence involving our partner institutions for French, German, Italian and Spanish area studies, our research team will proceed to test this hypothesis in a comparison of five major European languages and their cultures, histories, economies and legal systems. It is of course much too early to predict the outcome, but our sponsors were swayed by our hypothetical Linguistically Determined Humour List (LDHL):

1. Excellent sense of humour: Spanish speakers, not a single umlaut.
2. Good sense of humour: Italian speakers, one umlaut (as in "bällissima").
3. Poor sense of humour: English speakers, two umlauts (as in "börthdäy").
4. No sense of humour: German and French speakers, three umlauts (the latter as in "ö mäam" and "Victor Ügo").

Our international team of economists will develop a highly complex mathematical formula which represents the impact of this insight on the creative industries, with the prospective medium term economic benefit of unearthing goldmines of Spanish standup comedy waiting to be tapped for export across Europe, which our team of sociologists will analyse as cultural transfer.

Our team of lawyers will scrutinise statutes and judgments for spoof remedies, notably in intellectual property and tort law, making the research directly relevant to spoof victims, and will liaise with the economists for an economic analysis of those remedies.

Speaking of spoof victims, this is what Professor Myers reported on his alleged findings (<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language/og/archives/003374.html>, last visited on 12 June 2008):

This story, which I see is still recycling through the media, is perhaps the most bizarre incident of my career. The journalist who originally wrote it did interview me. But I never reported doing any such research (and haven't). (The finding attributed to me was then republished by various people and media worldwide, leading to dozens of letters. . . . some from angry Germans!)

Our team of philosophers will deal with the arising final issue of self-fulfilling spoofs, with the case study of a spoof report on humourless Germans which causes Germans to react in a humourless way.