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The humorous stylization of “new” women and men and conservative others

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1. Introduction

In this article I will discuss how a circle of middle-aged academics recreates its moral order of new gender standards by a consonant staging of the “others” and the “self” – “them” vs. “us”.

The progressive self as well as the conservative other with whom the self is confronted are exaggeratedly stylized in a similarly disjunctive way over the course of various stories.

Hyper-stylization sharpens a juxtaposition of social types which is humorously overdrawn.

The comical performance becomes a factor of amusement for the group.

Ever since G. H. Mead’s (1934) groundbreaking work on mind, self and society we have been aware of the symbolic relationship between “what I do” and “who I am”. He argued that the self is immanently social, a conversation between our experience (“me”) and our position at a particular moment (“I”). In this way the self is emergent; it is created out of social life. The assumption of mutuality makes social life moral. For Taylor (1989: 34) “we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good”. He sees identity as a web of connections, not only to others but to “moral or spiritual commitment as well” (1989: 27).

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by my commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand (ibid.).

The set of commitments and attachments that define the self are constitutive of what it means to be a self. Selves,¹ as Malone points out in discussing the moral nature of interaction (1989: 19), are not accidentally attached to values and beliefs and behaviors; they are constituted by those attachments.

According to Taylor (1989), individuals are not only self-interpreting entities, but this interpreting also involves others. The interpretation of the self and of the world is based on trans-utilitarian “strong evaluations” of the self’s goals and actions. It is only these that lead to direction and meaning in life, for they give us an idea of what is right and wrong, beautiful or

ugly, better or worse, higher or lower in value. Such evaluations help us to judge behavior and needs morally, and they are constitutive for the achievement of personal identity. In order to give life a direction, individuals need a “moral landscape” of the important and unimportant, relevant and irrelevant, which Taylor (1991) has called the “ethic frame.” Without way-signs, neither planned action nor self-experience is possible. Action, thinking and personality succeed only by reference to “hyper-goods” of a coherent life-plan (1989, 122ff., 175ff.). These possess a quasi-ontological status, and are therefore constitutive of the self.

In this regard there is little to be gained from post-modern attempts to constitute the self by liberating it from such hyper-goods and their frameworks. If that is supposed to be the empirical ground of the modern world, then we ought to observe the dissolution of social cohesion.

Social cohesion, however, does not dissolve even for those individuals who set new way-signs in the social world. In this article, I shall show that the new paths departing from traditional gender orders do not lead simply in random directions, but rather the in-group stamps out a common path with a shared orientation which is evoked, not debated. Within the face-to-face exchanges of a social network, co-constructed patterns of a positive self and of a caricatured typification of others arise.

I will analyze stories which thematically turn around the confrontation of old and new gender arrangements. The morality of gender order is relevant for the social circle of German academics living in border region of Switzerland and Germany (the Alemannic region), who, however, are not native to this region. They speak a colloquial language which moves between standard German and a shallow level of the dialect. In their stories, they attribute deeper dialect levels to certain characters, in order to assign them conservative stances. So linguistic variation takes part in stylizing the self and others. But the story performance is always influenced by the current context of talk. Dialect is by no means the only index of a stance the group finds odd. Formulaic phrases or a childish speech style might fulfill a similar function of indexing behavioral distinctions .

We will look at how the persons spoken about are cast into categories with associated characteristics or features. I see the narratively produced identity facets as “membership of some feature-rich category” (Antaki/Widdicombe 1998: 2). Special attention will be paid to reported speech (see also Günthner in this volume). The story tellers sometimes use South German dialects (Alemannic) and a marked prosody to stylize the “traditionalists” in quotations, citing their own speech mostly in standard colloquial German and in a relaxed manner of speaking. Of course, the content side of the stories is also important.

In modern society, explicit moralizing is dispreferred (Bergmann/Luckmann 1999). Implicit moralizing is all the more important, as it is achieved, for example, in narration by stylizing and hyper-stylizing personas. Comic hyperbole is a salient technique for implicit moralizing. It exploits well-known stylistic elements (see also Deppermann in this volume), among which belongs dialect with its linguistic connotations. Humor often works with hyper-typification, with the skillful exaggeration of the figures and their ways of speaking. By means of hyperbole, the narrator can stylize a figure as a caricature and position her- or himself in contradistinction to this figure.

Alfred Schutz' idea of the typicality of experience presumes a necessary concept for my study of humorous stories among progressive German intellectuals which I will present here. The less familiar another person is to us, the more they are treated as types. Our human "stock of knowledge" is composed of these "typifications," which reduce the complexity of the world to cognitively manageable proportions (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 7-8).² They also presume that interlocutors share a "system of relevances" (Schutz 1970: 204) so that intentions and motivations can be inferred. A self is positioned within a network of similar and different personas and has situation-transcendent relevance.

Style and typification are connected. Research on style has moved from a Labovian framework that identified it with the degree of use of certain linguistic variables by social groups, towards a more interactive framework in which style is seen as a strategy to present personas or groups (de Fina, this volume). Stylistic production is a terrain for the negotiation of social meaning and identity. Eckert (2000: 41) views identity

as one's "meaning in the world." A person's place in relation to other people, a person's perspective on the rest of the world, a person's understanding of his or her value to others - all of these are integral to the individual's experience of the self, and are constructed in collaboration with others as those others engage in the same construction for themselves. The individual's engagement in the world is a constant process of identity construction - one might most profitably think of identity as a process of engagement (and disengagement) - and the study of meaning in sociolinguistic variation is a study of the relation between variation and identity.

With these concepts in the background, I shall analyze here how this group of German academics creates its own progressive identity in regard to gender norms, differentiated from

a conservative type. In their conversations they often narratively evoke scenes in which they are confronted with backward, local people. The progressive self is positioned in contrast to the conservative “other” and elaborated by narrative fine tuning. Hyperbole always plays a role in the stereotypical stylizations, as well as in the labeling of some of the dramatis personae. The conservative figures, especially, are presented as exaggerated caricatures.³ The discourse of the locals is reproduced in Alemannic dialect if the auditors of the stories are able to comprehend this type of play with dialect ways of speaking.

The social circle whose stories I will analyze gave my co-workers and myself a sort of general permission to make occasional recordings of their gatherings; the circle consists of men and women in the ‘thirty-something to forty-something’ age group. The majority of the 52 persons are employed in academic professions or have an academic training background: journalists, psychologists, economists, book dealers, teachers, university literature and linguistics teachers, a tour guide, a physician, a social pedagogue, a designer, a speech therapist, etc. There are couples and (temporarily) singles, lesbians/homosexuals and heterosexuals, parents of children and childless persons. All are at least open to the goals of the women’s movement, if not strongly identifying with it. They agree more with the politics of the Social Democrats and the Green party than with that of the Christian Democrats. Men in this group belong to the five percent in Germany who temporarily take over the tasks of child-rearing and for a short time give up their professions (they take advantage of the so-called “baby-year”). There is no housewife in the group. Women’s and men’s professional careers are similar. Homosexual relationships are not regarded as something unusual. They have a global orientation and do not originally stem from the region at the German-Swiss-border. This progressive milieu is thus not that of the German societal majority, but in terms of professional status and lifestyles it does not represent a marginalized group, either. In Bourdieuan terminology one can say that the group has much “cultural capital” and to this extent plays an accepted role in society (Kotthoff 1998).

In the region of southern Baden and eastern Switzerland High Alemannic is spoken. The dialect is highly accepted as the spoken language; in Switzerland it is even the rule. On the German side of the border, we can differentiate a scale of levels from deep dialect up to the standard of High German, which can be used as a contextualization device. On the Swiss side, the scale is restricted to dialect and “Schriftdeutsch” (Standard German). There is no colloquial level in between. Speaking in the dialect is highly obligatory among the Swiss locals; the standard is only spoken to non-natives and in special media contexts (news presentations, for example) (Barbour/Stevenson 1999, Siebenhaar 2005).

Socio-economic class has an influence on linguistic choice, but not in a strong sense.

The study adheres to the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, which is interested in the culture-creating potential of conversations and the dialogic creation of meaning (Gumperz 1982, 1996). I will focus on how progressive and conservative stances are made accountable, how “doing being progressive” (in ethnomethodological terms) is acted out in a humorous way in dinner conversations. This involves “styling the other and styling the self” (Rampton 1999). We can witness the formation of “identities in interaction” (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). Methodologically, I will be using conversational data which were recorded during 20 dinners among friends. All gatherings were of mixed sex and took place in German circles either in a German city close to the Swiss border or in a Swiss city close to the German border. I see the analysis of conversations as a means of learning a) how social relations and social identities are created, affirmed and changed, b) how communication practices and life styles are evaluated, c) how individuals practice humor to implicitly negotiate moral orders, and d) how the connotations of linguistic variation are used to position identities in relation to one another. Interactional sociolinguists observe how symbolic distinctions between social groups are fought out on quite different activity levels, one being communicative forms, variants and styles (Kallmeyer 1994).

2. Comical stylization of the self and the other

Social distinction (“othering”) is practiced in everyday life along many lines, for example generation lines, socio-economic lines, ethnic lines, gender lines and so on. Social distinction often draws on material resources which one either has access to or not. Not everyone, for example, can perform herself as being rich, because such a performance needs a material basis. While some performances strongly rest on a material basis, others do less and are therefore more open to discursive negotiation.

Progressiveness vs. conservatism is one type of line that can be drawn in discourse. However, this is not only a matter of explicit, content oriented discourse but also implicitly enacted, for example in stories that recount how the narrator was confronted with a person from the camp on the other side of the line. In the stories discussed below, conservatives are exaggeratedly typified and stylized through labeling, categorization devices, positioning and reported speech. In the episodes presented below, social distinction has to do with arrangements between the sexes. The conservatives are morally devalued as sticking to outdated norms or prejudices.

The group members cohere in the stylization of the self as courageous, energetic and initiative – and focus others as prejudiced, aggressive, childish, authoritarian, embarrassed or astonished about new standards. They concoct an “anti-type” through which we can also infer the intended self. Some of the conservatives are performed as hopelessly bad characters, some others as quite nice, even cute, maintaining strange attitudes but willing to learn a lesson. The unidirectionality of the social stylizations and the contrastive positioning of the figures (the progressive self in confrontation with a conservative other) are carnevalesque in a Bakhtinian (Bakhtin 1969 [1985]) sense. Performance is always at stake.

Humor permits implicit moralization; especially since, in a humorist keying, narrators can implicitly assure themselves that others share their frame of mind, perspective, or behavior. Funny labels, the selection of tellable scenes, and reported speech play together to create conversational caricatures of the conservatives who are mocked in similar ways. Also, the self is portrayed with a touch of comical distance so as to invite reception with amusement. Co-alignment in the design of the confrontation stories communicates solidarity and rapport within the group of friends. The implicit adjustment of moral norms in humorous communication especially suits members of a society who are establishing new behavioral standards in regard to gender among themselves. In Western societies, social milieus today differ in regard to gender politics. The analysis of humorous self and other typification helps to reconstruct categorical work, such as ascription, display and positioning.⁴

Sociological humor theorists have pointed out that those who laugh together build an in-group which unites in joint amusement about some incongruity, some playful breaking of contextual assumptions (Dupréel 1924; Mulkay 1988). The group indulges in removing normality from the normal contextual assumptions.

3. Stylizing conservative women and men using the Alemannic dialect

3. 1. The stingy millionaire

Example 1 is taken from an informal evening conversation among friends who either live in the same neighborhood or are friends and colleagues and meet regularly. Rudolph is a 35 year old physician. David owns a book shop where all the people who play a role in the transcripts of this article are regular customers. David and Katharina, who is six years older than he and teaches psychology at the university, are an unmarried couple. Johannes and Maria are a married couple of thirty-eight years. He teaches psychology at the university and is a colleague of Katharina's. Maria works at a cultural center in a bordering Swiss town. All of them have lived for more than 12 years in the border region and know many people there,

among them “the millionaire,” who owns many houses and extracts as much rent as he can. The latter is single and not considered a pleasant person. Since Maria once lived in one of his houses, she had occasionally ridiculed him in his absence, so that “the millionaire” need not be named, as would be normal. The selection of the label “millionaire” points to caricature and highlights one his attributes: he is rich.

The background of Example 1 is that Rudolph, the main narrator, has unexpectedly married a Czech woman whom he only has known for a few months. In the course of an evening, the conversation among friends turns around what was being said about this in his circle of acquaintances. Here, Rudolph presents the warnings against the marriage of a man whom the group labels “the millionaire”.

In the first two lines Rudolph tells about the millionaire’s blunt and outspoken warnings against his marriage plans: his future wife will only be interested in Rudolph’s money. He uses a colloquial phrase (‘has me by the purse’). The phrase points to a stereotype of East European women common in Germany in the late nineties: They want to marry Western men just for reasons of money.

Example (1) (Conversation 14)

Everyone (a), David (D), Ernst (E), Inge (I), Johannes (J), Katharina (K), Maria (M), several (m), Rudolph (R).

- 1 R: *und dann hat, der der der der millionÄr hat halt gemeint,*
‘and then the the the the millionaire simply commented,’
- 2 *eh, die frau geht mir annen gEldbeutel.*
‘uh, the woman has me by the purse.’
- 3 M: *ach jA?*
‘really?’
- 4 R: *hehe[hehehehe*
- 5 K: *[hehe*
- 6 M: *dEr. dEr.*
‘he himself.’
- 7 R: *es war der hAmmer. <((gepresst))°bisich wAhnsinnig?*
‘it was the last straw. <((tight pronunciation))°are you crazy?’
- 8 *kansch net mAche. mEnschenkinder,*
‘you can’t do that. good god,’
- 9 *die fraU dU:, ha wensch dere lAngweilig isch,*
‘the woman, when she is bored,’
- 10 *got die EI[kaufe, dann hot die schUh dU für tausend mark.°>*
‘she’ll go shopping, then she will have shoes for a thousand marks’°>
- 11 m: *hahahahaha[hahahahahahaha*
- 12 M: *[IS DAS TO::LL hehe*
[‘IS THAT GREA::T hehe’

“The woman” instead of “my wife” mimics the millionaire’s wording and gives the phrase an element of citation. It is a typical formulation in Alemannic German. Maria is astonished, two people laugh. In line 7 Rudolph begins to stage the millionaire’s words directly. The quotation is introduced with a strong evaluation of ‘it was the last straw’ (*es war der Hammer*).⁵ Then Rudolph modifies his voice and switches to the Alemannic dialect (*bisch wahnsinnig?*). He renders the entire speech of the millionaire somewhat more softly and with tense articulation (*kannsch net mache*), an iconization of the millionaire’s stinginess. Through this alone the millionaire makes a disagreeable impression. He approaches Rudolph with strong warnings (*bisch wahnsinnig? kannsch net mache. wensch dere langweilig isch, got die eikaufe, dann hot die schuh für tausend mark*) rendered in Alemannic dialect. Remarkable are the two verbs in the second person and the contraction of the conjunction *wenn* ‘if’ with the pronoun *es* ‘it’, which stand syntactically in the first position and which result in a repetitive final SH, a salient pronunciation feature of integral /st/ and /sp/ and of some final /s/ in the Alemannic dialects, such as “*bisch (7) ... kannsch (8) ... wensch (9)*” .

Interjections like *Menschenskinder* (good god) (8) and *ha* (9) and the very colloquial, familiar form of address *Du* (“you” in line 9 and 10; this is hard to translate into English) are used. He makes the millionaire’s warnings sound very urgent and not very sophisticated. The interjection *ha* is typical for the Alemannic dialect.

Alemannic dialect serves here as a marker of backward attitudes. For Bakhtin (1986: 89), such stylizations are important evidence for his often cited dictum that “our speech... is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’, varying degrees of awareness and detachment”. Here the varying assignment of dialect and standard language participates in authorizing social distinctions. Rudolf himself speaks standard German. Contrasting stylizations of social types play an important role here in lending comical twists to situations, as they often do in our everyday conversations.

Details are put in the mouth of the millionaire, e.g. that Rudolph’s wife will buy thousand-mark shoes at Rudolph’s expense. Together with the ironical designation *millionaire*, these procedures help to create a conversational caricature of him as hopelessly prejudiced against women from Eastern Europe, maybe against women as such – and as stingy. With Tannen (1989), Couper-Kuhlen (1998) and Günthner (1996, 1999, this volume), I see reported dialogue as a play with double voicing in the sense of Bakhtin.

The persons and situations spoken about are stylized and typified like the characters in a joke. The dialogues are reported with a claim to authenticity but nonetheless extend into the realm of fictitious dramatization (Günthner 1999; Kotthoff 1998, 2002). These implicit typifications

of the dramatis personae are easily identifiable for the group members because they are based on shared knowledge about typical speech styles, which is confirmed in this manner. The prejudiced man is not sophisticated and so is his speech style. The shared morals of what the group considers to be a good or bad attitude are also confirmed. The group is very amused by Rudolph's stylization. There is a long laughter in line 11. In this little narrated scene, the self remains in the background, but we can infer its attitude. A discourse of indignation does not result and is not aimed at. The attitude that the story-teller and his audience communicate with respect to prejudiced people such as the millionaire is one of amused distance. Indeed, the presentation is even judged by Maria in line 12 as "great". This reception makes it evident that the quality of the performance is appreciated immediately and that it is essential for the shared amusement.

In the next story the central figure is also introduced by a label.

3.2. The rapist

In Example 2 Maria parodies the way of speaking of the Swiss owner of a bakery. This person is introduced as "the rapist," without any explanation. In the course of the narrative it becomes obvious that this labeling simply serves as a very negative characterization of a shop owner who is seen very critically by the group. Line 1 already violates normal expectations, since we normally do not associate rapists with cooking recipes. The labeling creates interest in the man introduced so negatively. Only David, Johannes, Ulf and Maria know the man.

The example stems from another evening with the two couples David and Katharina and Johannes and Maria. Ulf, a German journalist of 36 years, invited them to his house on the Swiss side of the border, including his friends Anni and Bernada, two Sinologists from Berlin. Johannes and Maria also know Anni and Bernada quite well. Johannes until recently shared the house with Ulf.

Example (2) (Conversation 6)

Anni (A), Bernada (B), David (D), Johannes (J), Katharina (K), Maria (M), several (m), Ulf (U)

- 1 M: *die rezepte gibts beim vergewAltiger.*
'the recipes are from the rapist.'
- 2 *Ihr könntet die mitbringen. (- -)°die (? ?)*
'you could bring them with you. (- -) °they- (? ?)'
- 3 *der anni schick ich immer vom vergewaltiger diese*
'i always send anni these cheesecake recipes from the rapist.'
- 4 *kÄsküchlirezepte.*
- 4
- 5 A: *wer is denn der vergewAltiger?*

würd ich sagen ‘for good reasons, I would say’), but does not answer the question either (12). In lines 14-15 Maria characterizes the shop owner as a greasy type. The harsh term and negative characterization evoke a critical “well” (*na*) from Johannes. Then Maria intensifies the negative characterization still more (17). David reveals that he suddenly recognizes the person (Old Bocksberger). Maria then performs a scene in his shop with a direct quotation. She uses the generalized personal address form *du*. She portrays herself trying to speak Swiss German to him by tagging the Swiss diminutive *li* to a Bavarian word for buns (producing *Semmeli*). Herr Bocksberger is cited without introduction (merely a phatically spoken *und*), uttering a pretentious correction (20); he wants the term for bread rolls to be correct in Swiss-German dialect: *Gipfeli*. The words of the fascist (*Faschist*) are spoken louder to iconize Bocksberger’s excitement. Maria, who is a native speaker of Alemannic dialect, is playing here with linguistic knowledge, presenting herself as naïvely mixing Bavarian and Swiss German lexemes like a recent immigrant to the South. For speakers familiar with these dialects, there is a witty effect in attaching a Swiss diminutive ending to a Bavarian word and then pretending to offer it as Swiss German. The diminutive *li* is one of the most characteristic morphemes in Swiss German.

Anni, a guest from Berlin, does not react to this staging, but in line 21 she offers an additional comment on the recipes. In line 22 Ulf repeats and dramatizes the Bocksberger quotation in a better Swiss German (*bi ü::s heiße die ↑Gipfeli::*). He elongates two vowels and produces with *Gipfeli* the typical Swiss-German intonation contour with high onset. He laughs at this himself, which also elicits responsive laughter from others present. David offers more information about Herr Bocksberger (24): he snaps at his wife in front of people. Maria uses this to further negatively characterize him (25, he bitches at her), which David affirms with a further specification. In line 27 Maria utters an interjection of indignation.

Herr Bocksberger is characterized as totally disagreeable. His correction activities are parodied as simply aggressive. In the co-constructed narrative the group agrees on a shared moral attitude towards him and people like him. Husbands who ‘bitch at’ their wives (*zammenscheißen*) are vehemently condemned.

The parody in Example 2 is embedded in a characterization which works with exaggerated categorizations of a man (‘fascist’, ‘xenophobic’) and his activities (*zammenscheißen*). The person is staged in quotations which do not correspond to the categories used for him but help to create a distinction. For the group members it is clear that he never raped anyone, and that uttering harsh words is not enough to qualify someone as a fascist. It seems to be obvious to everybody that realistic characterizations are not at stake here. From the start, the choice of

wildly exaggerated characterizations eliminates any claim to realism in the restaging and prepares the audience for a fictitious dramatization. Again, the performance as such is pushed into the foreground, along with subtle irony in regard to the exaggerated moralizing of progressives. The presentation relies on the background knowledge that in certain left-oriented milieus labels like fascist and rapist are used in an inflationary manner. Speakers distance themselves even from their own voices via comic exaggeration. In conclusion, speakers' high knowledge of typical formulations is exemplified once again.

In the example, the narrator Maria uses some dialect features (*hingange* in line 7 instead of *hingehen*). She presents herself as accepting and speaking the Alemannic dialect and striving even to manage Swiss German. But Bocksberger's tolerance is too small to estimate her endeavor.

In southwestern Germany the Alemannic dialect is accepted, but most educated persons with a global professional orientation speak a colloquial language quite close to the standard. This is true for many members of the network of acquaintances, including Ulf and Maria, who are from the Southwest.

In Switzerland, however, we have a diglossic situation (Siebenhaar 2004). The switch to standard is made mainly in conversation with foreigners. Bocksberger is portrayed as someone who is unable to perform stylistic variants. The episode around his wife is meant to further discredit him. In Example 3 the dialect is also associated with a kind of social backwardness.

3.3. The kitchen appliance demonstrater

The scene talked about in Example 3 takes place in Germany; in conversation 7 nearly the same round of people is having dinner together as in conversation 6. Instead of Johannes and Maria, the two 38 year old linguists Juergen and Erika take part. Ulf tells how he once attended a kitchen appliance demonstration and how he took part in the demonstrator's presentation. He staged himself as a modern man interested in kitchen appliances and the saleswomen as being astonished about this.

A: Anni, B: Bernarda, D: David, E: Erika, J: Juergen, K: Katharina, U: Ulf, s: some of them

Example 3 (Conversation 7)

- 1 U: *ich war AUch mal bei so ner küchenvorführung für*
'I, too, was once at such a cooking demonstration for'
- 2 *heimische küchenmaschinen,*
'home kitchen appliances,'
- 3 K: *ja*
'yes'
- 4 U: *bei hUber auf der klosterstätte.*
'at Huber on Klosterstätte.'

5 A: (? ?)

6 U: *und dann hat die frau so frAgen gestellt,*
 'and then the woman asked questions,'

7 *und dann hab Ich gesagt, also ich find ja beim RÜHRteig,*
 'and then i said, well i find with batter,'

8 *hat er ja ne gewisse schwÄche.*
 'it really has a certain weakness.'

9 D: *hahahaha*

10 U: *und die frau °ja woher wisset sIE des?°*
 'and the woman °well how do you know that?°'

11 *ich, ja denken sie ich mach kEIne kuchen?*
 'I, well do you think I do not make cakes?'

12 *und und dann hab ich mit der rumgefachsimpelt über*
 'and and then I talked shop with her about'

13 *über rÜblitorte und was ich fürn rezept hätte,*
 'about carrot cake and what sort of recipe I have'

14 E: *und da dachtense nIcht, du bist professioneller kondit(h)or?*
 'and didn't they think you are a professional p(h)astery cook?'

15 U: *nein °und dann hat se gemeint,° °ja wIsset sie,°*
 'no °and then she said, well, you know°'

16 *weil am Anfang ham se gelacht, ne?*
 'because at the start they laughed, didn't they?'

17 ?: *mhm*
 'uh-huh'

18 U: *und ham gedacht, was will denn der DEPP da?*
 'and they thought, what does that dope want?'

19 E: *hehe*

20 U: *der mAnn, der k(h)ennt sich doch überhaupt nich aus,*
 'the man he kno(he)ws nothing at all ab(h)out it,'

21 E: *ja(haha)*
 'yes(haha)'

22 U: *wenns um küchenmaschinen geht. und dann wurde mir*
 'when we are talking about kitchen appliances.'

23 *also verspätet zugegeben*
 'and then it was admitted belatedly'

24 *°ja die mÄnner heute, die brauchen auch sowas.°*
 '°well the men today, they also need such things.°'

25 E: *hehehehe*

26 U: *ham se sich da(ha) also(he) allgemein AUset(h)auscht.*
 'they generally excha(he)nged opinions.'

27 *hehe dass die z(h)eit(h)en sich geÄndert haben.*
 'hehe that t(h)im(h)es have changed.'

28 E: *hehehehe*

29 U: *fand ich sEhr schön irgendwie.*
 'I found that really nice somehow.'

In lines 7 and 8 he animates a commentary he made in the manner of an expert and in a rather stilted language (*beim Rührteig hat er ja ne gewisse Schwäch* 'with batter it really has a certain weakness'). David immediately laughs. The kitchen appliance demonstrator is animated as very astonished in direct speech, speaking in Alemannic dialect (*woher wisset sie des?*). After that, in line 11, the narrator renders himself in standard language. He presents himself as being astonished about the woman's question. Then a metalinguistic orientation is

given to the further course of the conversation's topics in the shop. Erika asks a question in regard to the impression he made on the kitchen appliance saleswoman (14), which Ulf answers in the negative. In line 15, Ulf commences a further, not consistently maintained, animation of the saleswoman, again using Alemannic dialect (*wisset, des*). Then he goes back in time to the beginning of the dialogue and acts out the reservations of the women present (18, 20, 22). Erika laughs.

In conclusion, the women are quoted as persons who have learned their lesson about the new men: *°ja die Männer heute, die brauchen auch sowas°*. Ulf summarizes the consciousness expanding impression of the women in Standard German and in conclusion makes a positive evaluation of the whole exchange: times have changed and he finds it "really nice somehow". In Example 3 Ulf approaches conservative women in an everyday scene to make clear to them that the old division of labor between the sexes is no longer self-evident. Modern men also want to be addressed with questions of kitchen appliances. The contours of a progressive identity emerge in the course of the conversation. The favorite emotion of this self is by no means outrage at the environment's inappropriate gender categories but rather an amused superiority. Again a play with typified ways of speaking is involved. This parodistic sort of intertextual humor allows the teller to demonstrate and test for shared social knowledge and authenticates a self that is well-placed in the social cosmos.

3.4. The Social Democrat

In Example 4 the group talks about a Swiss couple that is of opposed political opinions. Ulf and Maria jointly recount an episode which they experienced with Herr and Frau Vroner at a reception they participated in for professional reasons. Herr Dr. Vroner is one of Maria's superiors in a cultural center in a Swiss border town. He is conservative, whereas his wife had just campaigned for the Social Democrats. In line 18 Maria characterizes his wife as 'a very very nice woman'. The journalist Ulf then informs the group about her husband, the director of a cultural center. For the majority of the others present, the Vroners are simply casual acquaintances. Absent bosses and higher-placed persons often serve as objects of mocking humor in intimate groups. In the story-telling we recognize a similar configuration of personalities as in Examples 1, 2, and 3. The conservative Dr. Vroner is most strongly caricatured by a childish way of speaking, not by quoting him in an Alemannic speech variety.

Datum 4 (Conversation 6 Episode 4)

Everyone (a), Anni (A), Bernada (B), David (D), Johannes (J), Katharina (K), Maria (M), several (m), Ulf (U).

- 19 U: *des is AUch so nett, also ihr mann ist*
'that is also so nice, well her husband is'
- 20 *kultUramtsleiter und schreibt für die zürcher,*
'director of the cultural center and writes for the zürcher⁷,
- 21 *eigentlich auch n ganz LIEber, aber doch eher e bissle kOnservativ.*
'actually also a darling, but still a bit conservative.'
- 22 *und dann eh ich hab dann eh ich hab dann mich nur mit*
'and then uh I have uh I have only chatted with'
- 23 *der frau vroner über die eff a Achtzehn bomber unterhalten,*
'mrs. vroner about the eff a eighteen bombers,'
- 24 M: *ja*
'yes'
- 25 U: *und warum man die NICHT beschaffen soll,*
'and why one should NOT buy them,'
- 26 J: *nei:n.*
'no:.'
- 27 D: *mhm*
'mhm'
- 28 U: *un da hatter °ja.° hat gesagt, °also°*
'an then he said °well.° °then°'
- 29 *des hAb ich dir doch jetzt schon so: Oft gesagt.*
'I have told you that already so: often.'
- 30 (-) *wir WOLLEN ↑NICHT mehr über die*
(-) 'we do ↑NOT WANT to talk about'
- 31 *bomberbeschaffung reden.*
'buying the bombers any more.'
- 32 m: *hehehehehehehehehehe[he*
- 33 J: [aja:
['I see:']
- 34 M: *ja ja. und zum Ulf hat sie auch gesagt beim essen, ja,*
'yeah yeah. and she also said during the meal to Ulf,'
- 35 *ich bin ↑schO:n eine sozialdemokratin.*
'well, I ↑am after all a social democrat.'
- 36 *°und er immer°, psch:::t, psch:::t*
36 '°and he was like° <((puts a finger on her mouth))psh:::t,
psh:::t >'
- 37 a: *hahahahahahahahahahahahaha*
- 38 A: [ha:::~:]
- 39 M: [sü:::ß:
['cu:::te']
- 40 m: *hahahahaha [hehehehehe*
- 41 M: [und jetzt war er wohl auch nich so GANZ
['and now he probably was not so ENTIRELY'
- 42 *einverstanden, dass seine frau kandidiert,*
'pleased that his wife was going to campaign for office,'
- 43 *hat peter dObendorfer gesagt,*
'Peter Dobendorfer said,'
- 44 <((acc)) *un gleichzeitig aber auch stOlz*>.
< ((acc)) 'and at the same time also proud, however.' >

The sentence *des ist auch so nett* ('that is also so nice') functions as an evaluative introduction. Mr. Vroner is characterized in terms of profession, character and political attitude, whereby *n ganz lieber* ('a darling') in line 21 and *konservativ* ('conservative') are

presented as almost contrasting by the adverb *doch* (*still*). The conversational topic *F A 18 bombers* contains a certain tension, since it was being heatedly debated between conservatives and progressives at the time of the recording (1995). Herr Dr. Vroner's attitude is conservative, i.e., he favors continuing to arm the Swiss army with fighter jets. His wife and the circle whose evening chats make up the subject of this article are against a further armament of the Swiss army.

In line 25 Ulf attributes self-evidence to his position and performs for himself a cool daredevil attitude. He talked shop. Johannes utters an astonished *nein* ('no'), presumably in comprehending the touchy, conflict-laden situation. Ulf presents himself as self-assertive. He doesn't attempt to hide his opinion. In line 28 he starts to parody Herr Vroner with a direct quote. He reproduces Herr Vroner's speech with a typical conversational introduction, *ja, also* ('well, then'), which is spoken much more softly. A strongly stereotypical parental statement follows (I have told you that already so often), directed at his wife (who thinks like Ulf), with the paternalistic "we" (she was talking about purchasing the bombers, while he was not involved) and an elongation of the *so:*, which signals emphasis. Mr. Vroner starts softly and increases volume in line 30. Everyone laughs. The culture office director is parodied as old-fashioned and avuncular. He forbids his wife, who thinks differently, to continue talking about controversial topics.

The avuncular manner of speaking attributed to him violates the usual conception of a formal and distinguished culture office director (and men in similar positions). The amusingly hyperbolic stylizing of the protagonists through quotation procedures again holds the center here.

Maria continues the story of the meal with the Vroners from line 34 onwards. She also quotes Frau Vroner in direct speech. The sentence *ich bin [↑]SCHO:N EINE Sozialdemokratin* ('I am after all a Social Democrat') is clearly articulated, as is typical for Swiss who speak Standard High German. Maria imitates the Swiss-German sentence intonation with the strong rise on *schon* ('after all') and the following fall. The German modal particle *schon* translated here as 'after all' is also interesting because Frau Vroner's statement is thereby shaped as a concession. The modestly progressive self-identification of the culture office director's wife is thereby presented as an act of courage.

Maria parodies Dr. Vroner as being shocked about his wife's political commitment and tells his wife to be silent. In an extremely paternalistic manner, Frau Vroner's self-identification as a Social Democrat is declared taboo by Herr Vroner. This is particularly implausible, because she has just campaigned for this party in the community council elections (the group knows

that). The interjections “pscht” in line 36 are accompanied by the appropriate childish gesture of laying a finger on the mouth. Herr Vroner, known as an authority figure with a high office, is turned into a caricature thereof in Ulf’s and Maria’s dialogue construction. His authority is undermined. Speakers can increase intimacy among friends through shared amusement at the expense of people who, due to their power, are potentially threatening. The mocking has a releasing function, but also communicates distinction from social circles like those of the Vroners. Maria hyperstylizes Herr Vroner’s shock at his wife’s confession. He is presented as though for him Social Democrats were something quite monstrous. Everyone laughs. Maria rates Herr Vroner’s speech as *cute* which also presupposes “not dangerous”. Starting in line 41 she explains Herr Vroner’s contradictory attitude toward his wife’s political candidacy. In line 47 she iconizes his being torn back and forth by a non-fluent way of speaking (thinking, to be exact).

The image of the self which is carried out in episodes like Example 4 could be paraphrased as: we know these funny conservatives and amuse ourselves about them. They are mocked. Mocking humor always integrates a grain of indignation (Christmann 1996). This indignation is not proclaimed in a straight manner but evoked in dialogue parody and sometimes in exaggerated labelings of the *dramatis personae*.

4. Other means of stylization

4.1. The pan-seller in the street

In Example 5 a chat is recounted which three of the women present at the dinner table had that day with a Swiss saleswoman trying to sell teflon pans in the street. In this chat, Erika portrayed herself as though she had a husband who did everything in the kitchen. This is not the actual state of affairs, but it created astonishment on the part of the saleswoman and amusement on the part of the listeners. In the story, many voices intermingle. Example 5 is hard to follow because the narrators Erika, Anni and Bernarda restage the chat in the street without explicitly indicating from moment to moment with whose voice they are speaking. We hear an intermingling of voices even in one turn.

Exaggerated typification is again an important element in the directly reported speech (Brünner 1991; Kotthoff 1998). However, the saleswoman is not cited in Alemannic dialect. As a reason for this I see that Anni and Bernada who participated in the scene and also in the narration are from Berlin and not able to join the play with variation. The group is amused by the little talk show with the saleswoman, which is now being recreated at the table.

Datum 5 (Conversation 7)

K: Katharina, E: Erika, A: Anni, U: Ulf, B: Bernarda, D: David, J: Juergen, s: some of them

- 1 E: *ich hab heut schon mit dir Angegeben. mein mann kOcht.*
`i already bragged about you today. my husband cooks.'
2 *hehe[hehehe*
- 3 B: [ja(ha) (? [?)
[`ye(he)s' (? [?)
- 4 A: [mit bU(h)tter. ha[hahahahahahaha
[`with bu(h)tter. ha[hahahahahahahaha'
- 5 s: [hahahahahahahahaha
- 6 B: [naI:v
[`nai:ve'
- 7 s: [hahahahahahahahahahaha
- 8 J: [aber gesU:nd. hehe
[`but hea:lthy. Hehe'
- 9 s: [hehehehehe [hehehehehe
- 10 E: [ja er kocht SE::HR gesund und bewusst.
[`yes he cooks ve::ry health consciously.'
- 11 K: WAS?
`WHAT?'
- 12 B: *wir wurden gefragt auf der straÙe, und da hat-*
`we were asked on the street, and then-'
- 13 E: *über unsere Essgewohnheiten. von einer schweIzerin.*
`about our eating habits. by a swiss lady.'
- 14 B: *wer kOcht. mein mann. (-)[sagt sie.*
`who cooks. my husband (-) she says.'
- 15 E: [ich wollt n tOpf für meinen mann.
`I wanted a pot for my husband.'
- 16 B: *wie oft? jEden tag. (-) [was für tÖpfe haben sie.*
`how often? every day. (-) what sort of pots do you have.'
- 17 E: [_wI:rklich? wie die mich
`really? [how she looked at me.'
- 18 *Angeguckt [hat.*
- 18
- 19 B: [(? geschirr?) aluminium, tEflon,
[`(?)utensils?) aluminium, teflon,'
- 20 °wEIS ich nicht. mein MANN kocht.° [na und dann
hab ich gesagt,
`°I don't know. my husband cooks.° [well and then I said,'
- 21 A: [hehehehe
- 22 B: *ihr habt Alles. ver[schIEdenes.*
`you have everything. var[ious things.'
- 23 A: [hehehehehehe[hehehe
- 24 E: [und dann hat se noch
[`and then she'
- 25 *gfragt, (- -) wo[mIt er kocht.*
`asked, (- -) with [what he cooks.'
- 26 B: [womIt kocht er.
[`with what does he cook.'
- 27 E: *hamma gsagt, manchmal mit Ö::l, aber natürlich mit BUTTER.*
`we said, sometimes with oi::l, but of course with BUTTER.'
- 28 B: *und da gesagt WA:::S?*
`and then she said, WHA:::T?'
- 29 E: *und DAS nennen sie gesundes essen? ja SEHR.*
`and you call that healthy food? yes VERY.'
- 30 s: hahahahahahaha
- 31 E: *die wollte uns nämlich nur so was verkaufen, wo du gar*

Bernarda cites the question of the saleswoman (who cooks?) and then Erika's answer (my husband); then Erika continues to explain what she wanted from the Swiss saleswoman: a pot for her husband. In line 16 Bernarda again recounts the dialogue between Erika and the pot-seller; she first takes on the voice of the Swiss saleswoman, then switches to Erika's voice (every day), and back again to the saleswoman's question (what sort of pots do you have). Erika's questioning *wirklich* 'really' in line 17 is staged as if taken from the saleswoman's lips. She portrays her as astonished.

In line 19, Bernarda presumably first restages the saleswoman's questions about their cooking utensils in order to reply suddenly with Erika's voice (in line 20): '°I don't know. my husband cooks. °' Then she cites her own contribution ('well and then I said, you have everything. various things'). In lines 24 and 25, Erika adopts indirect speech to recount the saleswoman's further questions. Bernarda repeats it transformed into a direct question. Erika quotes the group's answer in the street.

The three women have tried to shock the saleswoman not only by having a husband who does all the cooking but also by not favoring fatfree ways of preparing food. In line 28 Bernarda repeats the saleswoman's cry of astonishment ('wha::::t?'). Again, Erika continues the cry of astonishment ('and you call that healthy food?'). She then quotes her own reply ('yes very'). A few hearers laugh. Then Erika explains what the woman was selling ('special pots for which no fat is needed'). Ulf knows the manufacturer of the pots (33). Katharina rejects such products in line 34, thereby joining her friends' attitude concerning cooking without fat. Ulf also shows his sudden understanding of the narrated scene in line 35. Katharina summarizes the event in regard to German and Swiss statistics about the division of household labor (37). Namely, it has invalidated the statistics which for decades have said that in Germany and Switzerland women do a greater share of homework. In line 39 she speaks with Erika's voice in the dialogue with the kitchen utensil saleswoman. Bernarda continues the speech in the same role ('I know nothi(H)ng at all'). The audience laughs. Two performances are intertwined here, the one on the street and the one at the table. On the street, the three provoked the saleswoman and taught her that her expectations about normality are out of date. At the table they present themselves as being able to use an everyday situation for a little stand up comedy.

The saleswoman is portrayed as simply taken aback by Erika's revelation. The progressive customer replies quite matter-of-factly, with a manner of speaking suggesting that it is a foregone conclusion. Erika presents her norm-violating marital relationship with the greatest matter-of-factness. This modality of certainty is used here to obtain a double effect: first, in

contact with the saleswoman, as a means of stylizing herself as a “new woman” with a “new man”. Second, it is offered to the group as a successful portrayal of “pulling the saleswoman’s leg.” The listeners laugh at the special stylizations in this “mimetic satire” (Auerbach 1971, Schwitalla 1994; Jaffe 1998).

Those present know that Erika has greatly exaggerated in portraying her husband as a house husband. She plays with gender norms. The group’s presentation at the dinner table serves, for one thing, as an amusing way to tell about provoking the saleswoman in the street, second, reproduces a distinction in regard to life styles (the saleswoman embodies the little-valued normalcy), and, third, helps to characterize the narrators as persons capable of exploiting the comic potential inherent in everyday situations, thus as active and go-ahead fellows.

At the end, Katharina evaluates the performance as such, recapitulating a few of the key punch lines. The play with “others’” voices was evidently made accessible to all. That may be the reason that the pot seller was not mimed in Swiss German, since the participants Bernarda and Anna, from Berlin, can’t speak a word of it.

In Example 3 we witnessed a very similar content, with a similar constellation of dramatis personae and performance. Ulf’s self-stylization in Example 3 is very close to that of the three women in Example 5 (Erika, Anni, and Bernada) who told their story first and later enjoyed Ulf’s story. However, the three women do not use dialect features to portray those whom they confronted with their different life style. Anni and Bernada are unable to play with Alemannic dialects.

Thus, in Example 3 and in Example 5 the self is staged as confronting the world with new standards of behavior. Voices are rendered in a very similar way, and the ideological relations confirm those in the other stories being told in the group. The narrator Ulf affiliates himself with Erika, Anni and Bernada.

4.2. The young gentleman

In the next Example dialect again plays no role in the citation. The cited mother is from Northern Germany. Nevertheless, a specific speech style can be attributed to her. Martin, a homosexual journalist, shows his friends around his new flat. The group arrives in the kitchen.

Datum 6 (Conversation 12 Episode 4)

Friederike (F), Annette (A), Martin (M), Lars (L), Bernd (B)

1 F: *hier hats ja nur ein fEnster.*

- 'there is only one window.'
- 2 L: *is aber doch schön fürn jungen herrn. weischt.*
'but it is really nice for a young gentleman. you know.'
- 3 A: *ja das rEI(hhh)cht fürn jungen mann.*
'yes, it suffi(hhh)ces for a young man.'
- 4 L: *fürn jungen hErrn, sagt deine mutter immer.*
'for a young gentleman, your mother always says.'

Friederike (a lecturer of about the same age)) notes that Bernd's kitchen has only one window and will accordingly be dimly lit during the daytime. Thereupon Lars delivers a phrase from the repertoire of elderly women: *is aber doch schön fürn jungen Herrn*. Annette agrees with her boyfriend and raises the level of playful impoliteness. Bernd, the forty year old journalist, is defined as a 'young gentleman' who needs no brightly illuminated kitchen. This activity integrates dimensions of a mock challenge. In line 4 Lars makes the source of the flowery phrase explicit, Annette's mother. The attribution of domains and objects to gentlemen and ladies is found equally absurd in this circle. Lars also corrects Annette's utterance 'young man' to 'young gentleman'. The correct wording is important for the stylization. It is unclear whether 'really nice for a young gentleman' should be understood as a compliment or just as being ironic.⁸

This scene, too, lives on knowledge about typical ways of speaking. These, inserted in the manner of unintroduced quotation-like speech, suggest the attitudes of those from which the self is differentiated. Categories like 'young gentleman' appear from the beginning as if in quotation marks. Both 'you know' as well as the laugh particles and the correction in line 4 point to these symbolically.

7. Humorous distance

All six dialogs that I have grouped together here for the analysis of identity deal with normative encounters in the life of the sexes. They deal with marriage candidates, division of labor in the kitchen, couple's differences of opinion, patterns of behavior of married men, and generally with gender attributes. The narrators present themselves in confrontation with persons from whom they differentiate themselves in the story world and in the narrative situation. They do this with humorous keying⁹, in which, however, the degree of exaggeration of the staged persons varies. The conservative figures are made to appear conservative by placing highly formulaic phrases in their mouths, by letting them speak on stage in dialect, react inflexibly and unsophisticated and get excited. Likewise, in confrontation the self shapes itself on the levels of the story world and the current, real situation. In mutual, complementary orientation to one another, common facets of identification can thus be created. Humorous

keying inhibits the appearance of arrogance. The self in the story world takes the initiative, but without stress. It does not hesitate to introduce its own view of things to the locals. In this way, the self's standpoint as well as its brashness are displayed as morally correct. The congruency of the stories confirms this model of the self in the current situation. Working with exaggerated categorization and deconstruction, the story-tellers also create distance from their own selves. In all of the stories, the performance is accountable and as such is enjoyed. As already mentioned before, explicit moralization has a bad reputation in the Western world (Bergmann/Luckmann 1999), but people try to give their identities a moral underpinning. Attributing superiority to one's own attitude and behavior is also a delicate undertaking. As Coupland (2001) put it: Straightforward formulation might be too obvious and stark a claim to succeed in the late-modern climate.

Humorous stylizing of ingroup and outgroup seems to be a successful symbolic practice that can achieve a distanced validation of speakers' social identities. The humorous keying allows the members of the network to play with distanced validation: the conservatives are more strongly typified and distanced, but also for their own social image a certain distance remains. Also, the orientation to gender remains indirect in these episodes but accountable. In humorous discourses this issue is dealt with in a playful frame. Attitudes are transmitted mainly by evocation.

Stylization is thus a subversive form of multi-voiced utterance, one that can discredit a voice and a person by reworking them into the local purpose of a playful realization of the superiority of the speaker's own attitude.

In direct or mediated contact the group processes the constant changes in political, economic and ecological developments in a similar manner; the members show each other what is normal, what knowledge and what attitude one disposes of – and by doing this they simultaneously constitute features of their social identity.

Gender relations have in the meantime become milieu-specific in the Western world (Koppetsch/Burkart 2000). We face a range of masculinities and femininities (Connell 1995; Baron/Kotthoff 2002), integrating a variety of different lifestyles and behavioral standards, among them the traditional ones. As in the past, traditional masculinity is, for example, still symbolized in certain professions and types of sport (Connell 1995, 2002; Behnke and Meuser 2002). Clear power relations with male dominance continue to exist in the higher spheres of politics, economy, religion and the sciences. Traditional femininity still centers around home, beauty and body care. Alongside these, there are varied deviations from traditional roles and norms. Even if we must start from the fact that milieus with symmetrical

gender relationships constitute a minority in the German-speaking countries, it is nevertheless (or precisely for this reason) interesting to observe how these groups create normality for their social identity, which diverges from traditional societal standards.

Transcription conventions

(-)	one hyphen indicates a short pause
(- -)	two hyphens indicate a longer pause (less than half a second)
(0.5)	pause of half a second; long pauses are counted in half seconds
(? what ?)	indicates uncertain transcription
(? ?)	indicates an incomprehensible utterance
..[...]	
..[....]	indicates overlap or interruption
=	latching of an utterance of one person; no interruption
hahaha	laughter
hehehe	slight laughter
goo(h)d	integrated laughter
(h)	audible exhalation
('h)	audible inhalation
,	slightly rising intonation
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
,	ongoing intonation
:	indicates elongated sound
° blabla°	lower amplitude and pitch
COME ON	emphatic stress (pitch and volume shift)
come On	accent syllable (only in the German original)
↑_	high onset of pitch
↓	pitch goes down
<↓blabla>	low pitch register within the brackets
<((smiling)) >	comments
((sits down))	nonverbal actions or comments

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Keywords: Staging identities in interaction, humorous stories among progressive academics, comical stylization in reported dialogues, positioning, conversational caricature, gender morals.

¹ Mummendey (1995) discusses various sociological and psychological concepts of the self and of identity. He concludes that the concept of self overlaps with that of identity, with the exception of a few special traditions. An individual performs various social and situational

identities, but is also identical with her- or himself. For him it seems justified to translate self to identity and to see the two concepts as semantically equivalent.

² Davies (2006) analyzes the humor of movie characters in connection with typification.

³ In this article I am not concerned with humor theory; see Kotthoff 1998 on that matter. When I speak of conversational caricatures, I mean the exaggeration of character traits, created by linguistic rather than visual effects.

⁴ I have also data from other social milieus. Mocking humor which relates to gender norms I only found among the academics of this age group.

⁵ Such introductions are typical for humorous stories.

⁶ In German that is a stylistically elevated expression.

⁷ The Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

⁸ See Kotthoff 2002 on conversational irony and its relation to citation-like footing.

⁹ The term keying is used in the sense of Hymes 1974.