

On mechanisms of folk humour in Vietnamese colloquial language

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This paper investigates various ways in which Vietnamese speakers create humour through manipulations of everyday language. The mono-syllabic structure characteristic of Vietnamese contributes to the easy separation, merging, and permutation parts of adjacent words, whereas the tones - which are distinctive features of the standard language - and the non-standard pronunciation in various regions can be employed as efficient measures. Much of the paper presents an analysis of the ways in which humour is expressed and provides numerous examples, including television programmes, childrens' games and informal conversations. A general message from this study is that the encoding and decoding of linguistic humour should be treated as reciprocal, harmonious processes. Encoding requires confident manipulation of linguistic features, an understanding of the participants' psychology, and a thorough knowledge of social-cultural conventions. On the other hand, decoding demands quick recognition either of classical cultural references or contemporary social and linguistic events. For the learner and the non-native speaker the use of these humorous manipulations might present substantial difficulties, especially where the line between what is humourous and what is offensive is difficult to see. Insights into mechanisms of folk humour, therefore, can help them to understand what often seems to be incomprehensible language formulations.