Funny or French: how humor varies across cultures

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Abstract
This paper examines the works of four cartoonists (Saul Steinberg, Jean-Jacques Sempé, Roz Chast, and Claire Bretécher) in order to determine similarities and differences between French humor and American humor. It incorporates compiled data from each of the above artist's lifetime works, as well as knowledge from the fields of cartoons and comics, sociology, and cross-cultural psychology, to answer the question "What is funny?" in each of these two disparate cultures.

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Most humour, and certainly humour that involves greater cognitive effort, is deeply embedded in language and culture. It relies on a shared language or set of culturally based constructs to function. Puns and idioms are obvious examples. This can be seen across many countries. For example, the French tend to enjoy a joke about the Belgians while Swedes make fun of Norwegians. Indeed, most nations have a preferred country that serves as a traditional butt of their jokes. Sexist and racist humour are also examples of this sort of denigration. The types of jokes used can vary across cultures, but the phenomenon itself can boost social bonding. Knowledge of acceptable social boundaries is therefore crucial and reinforces social cohesion.

How You Can Use Humour to Break Cultural Boundaries.

Textappeal | CultureShocks Blog. Four years ago this November, I was on a date with a lovely Japanese businesswoman in downtown Shibuya, Tokyo. Desperate to impress, and wary about breaking some sort of cultural taboo, I started chatting about humour in different languages. I tried to explain how well-regarded English humour is around Europe. “Ok” she replied, “Tell me a joke”. That day I learned an important lesson about humour across cultures. So much of what we find funny is socially ingrained. Our sense of humour is deeply rooted in our nationhood, our shared view of the world, and the norms that are so familiar to us, but so foreign to others. We use humor to grease the wheels of social interaction, to influence others, to make others happy, to sell products, to alienate and mock out-groups and to feel a sense of belonging to our in-group (Martin, 2006). Humor also appears to be a universal phenomenon, playing an important role in contexts as varied as business negotiation, workplace interaction (Adelsward & Oberg, 1998; Vuorela, 2004), international media (Johnsen, 1999) and advertising (Weinberger & Gulax, 1992). However, although the use may be universal, there is some evidence that national and cultural differences exist How Humor Crosses Cultural Lines. Abstract The universality of humor has long been a point of contention; while appreciating humor is largely believed to be universal (all cultures can laugh), there also exists great diversity of humor types across cultures which are not directly transferrable. A major prevailing school of thought regarding why something is funny revolves around the notion of incongruity that something deviated from expectations. Incongruity Humor Across Uncertainty Avoidance. A culture's level of uncertainty avoidance is essentially their risk tolerance. Hofstede defines uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations (Hofstede, Minkov 167).