

Investigation of Perception of Humor in Older Adults

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Abstract : Humor plays a pivotal role in our interaction with people. According to the age-related positivity effect, older adults (OA) demonstrate more positive emotions and are better able to modulate negative emotional states than younger adults (YA), suggesting an increase in humor appreciation with age. However, different types of humor might show different patterns of change in appreciation with age (e.g., incongruity-resolution humor, aggressive humor, self-vs.-other-deprecating humor). Thus, we aim to explore age-related effects in the perception of different types of humor in a single study, including the impact of local slang in humor appreciation. Twenty OA aged 60-and-above and 24 YA aged 13-20 were watched four short videos (i.e., benign, violent, satire+local slang, and others-deprecating humor) and rated how funny the videos were (from a scale of 1-not funny-at-all to 5-very funny). Participants were also asked to rank the videos in the order of most- to least-entertaining. Repeated measures of ANOVA found significant main effects of age, $F(3,39)=12.88$, $p < .001$, where OA gave higher ratings than YA ($M=3.20$ vs. 2.63), and humor type, $F(3,123)=19.66$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses revealed a significant linear contrast where benign and violent humor had the lowest ratings while others-deprecating humor had the highest ratings. No significant interaction effect was found. The distribution of ranking ratings also differed between OA and YA (e.g., preferred satire+local slang and others-deprecating humor vs. overwhelmingly preferred other-deprecating humor, respectively). Overall, OA displayed a greater appreciation across various types of humor than YA. Humor perception will be discussed in the larger context of cognitive, societal, and cultural implications.

Keywords : humor, older adults, perception, age differences

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