

## **Language and Humor**

ENGL 39600 = LING 39800

Spring 2021, TTh 4:30-5:45

Professor Victor Raskin ([vraskin@purdue.edu](mailto:vraskin@purdue.edu))

The course will review and analyze multiple samples of verbal humor and introduce a global linguistic theory of how humor is created and managed. I developed the theory in the course of my research in linguistic semantics, and it quickly gained the status of dominance in humor research (see my *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, Boston: Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985—available to you on Brightspace).

Humor is a universal and popular part of national and international culture. It is created by professional writers and stand-up comedians as well as by regular people in the course of their everyday life. National humor cultures have their specific features, also easily identified by the theory, but there is a lot in humor that is shared throughout the world.

We will watch and read (and hear) a lot of examples of verbal humor, including those contributed by the students, looking to understand how the theory works. We will also continue my 40-year search for counterexamples and probably (and hopefully) fail again. We will probably want to review various attacks on the theory as well as attempts to modify it.

The course will not teach you how to write comedy but it will make the nature and mechanism of every joke transparent to you, and former students report better success in understanding and producing humor. We will also look briefly at non-verbal humor and probably figure out an extension of the theory to account for that.