

Seminar - Friday August 12th

Professor Michael Haugh (UQ) (12pm, 32-208)

Title: Jocular mockery, jocular abuse and the taking of offence

Abstract: Teasing and insulting are often associated with childhood, but they have been found to be ubiquitous, arising across a wide range of different interactional settings in different languages and cultures. While there are various forms of teasing and insulting, in this paper I focus on two types, jocular mockery and jocular abuse. The former refers to actions where the speaker somehow diminishes or ridicules something of relevance to self, other or a non-co-present third party within a non-serious, jocular or playful frame, while the latter refers to instances where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or as having undesirable attributes using a conventionally offensive expression within a non-serious, jocular or playful frame. In both cases, then, participants are invariably mixing elements of provocation and non-seriousness. Yet while they are construed as non-serious by participants, or at least ostensibly so, jocular mockery and abuse can nevertheless give rise to offence in some instances. Drawing from analyses of interactions amongst American, Australian and British speakers of English, I explore the circumstances in which offence may be registered, as well as the moral constraints on doing so, given the taking of offence at instances of jocular mockery and abuse is itself very often a sanctionable action amongst (Anglo) speakers of English.

Bionote: Professor Michael Haugh is currently Head of the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Queensland. His research interests lie within the fields of pragmatics, conversation analysis and intercultural communication.