



## **CIVIS Blended Intensive Programmes (MAX 20 Sapienza students)**

Title of the course: *Reading between the humorous lines*

Email – Contact: [margherita.dore@uniroma1.it](mailto:margherita.dore@uniroma1.it)

Link: <https://civis.eu/en/learn/civis-courses/reading-between-the-humorous-lines>

### **Content**

The programme aims to teach students to unpack the messages conveyed by humorous genres, thus fostering their critical literacy. It is important to note that humour serves various purposes. While it can entertain through light-hearted subjects or jokes, it is not always just about amusement. Humour can also be a tool for social critique, cultural awareness, and promoting social activism. However, beside what is typically seen as harmless humour, it is crucial to acknowledge that humour can also perpetuate, spread, or uphold forms of social discrimination such as racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, bullying, etc. in different contexts.

Recent (socio)linguistic analyses of humour have clearly shown that speakers often employ humour to mitigate verbal attacks on minority and other underprivileged groups and/or to disguise aggressive intentions and hate speech into socially acceptable forms of discourse. In this sense, people exposed to such humour should be able to read the discriminatory and hostile meanings between the humorous lines and to be capable of resisting and refuting them. Furthermore, it is important that recipients and/or targets of such humour realize the significance of resisting its use either in public or in private communicative settings, thus developing resilience skills in situations where aggressive and discriminatory behaviours are attested. In the approach developed within the proposed programme, critical literacy in humour is a form of social and political engagement and not a skill developed individually through solitary activities (e.g. reading, studying).

In order to cultivate students' critical skills in interpreting humour, the proposed program will, first, familiarise them with what humour is, how it functions in social interaction and various communicative contexts, and what are its main advantages and disadvantages as a communicative resource. Then, the courses will focus on specific kinds of humour which may reproduce social inequalities, such as racist, sexist, ableist humour, etc., whether overtly or covertly. Simultaneously, our aim is to familiarise students with current trends and findings in the (socio)linguistic analysis of humour. In this context, emphasis will be placed on training students to analyse humour in a critical manner, namely to render them

capable of detecting the discriminatory messages put forward by humorous discourse, as well as of exploring ways of creating humorous texts which will promote social inequality and justice. To this end, we consider it important to work with students in the analysis of humorous materials from their own sociocultural realities, a practice which is expected to increase their engagement with the course and to boost their analytical skills. They will be also encouraged students to analyse texts in their native language(s) as well as in their L2, namely English.

### **Main topics addressed**

- Main theories of humour, functions of humour, advantages and disadvantages of humour as a communicative resource
- Humour as a means to convey overt and covert social inequalities (racist, sexist, ableist humour, etc.)
- Analysing humour in a critical manner (detecting the discriminatory messages put forward by humorous discourse, exploring ways of creating humorous texts which will promote social inequality and justice)

### **Learning outcomes**

- 6 ECTS
- Developing one's critical literacy in humour not only for humorous inputs from one's own country, but on a larger European scale, considering how it travels across cultures and languages (and when it may not)
- Appreciating differences in the way humour is constructed linguistically and culturally, especially when it is concerned with sensitive topics such as gender differences, racial discrimination, religious beliefs, as so forth

### **Professors:**

- **Vasiliki (Villy) Tsakona**, Associate Professor at the Department of Early Childhood Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.
- **Margherita Dore**, Associate Professor at the Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies, Sapienza University of Rome.
- **Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu**, Associate Professor at the Department of Linguistics, University of Bucharest.
- **Marsha de Salvatore**, stand-up comedian and school counselor. She has performed her stand-up routines in Italy, USA and UK.
- **Michela Rossi**, a freelance cartoonist working for Italian national and international newspapers.
- **Giovanni Raffa**, a scholar in Humour Studies and Audiovisual Translation (Italian subtitling of broadcast stand-up comedy).

### **Practical information**

Dates: 3 March to 9 May 2025

Total workload: 160 hours

Format: Blended      ECTS: 6  
Location: Rome, Italy    Language: English (B2)  
Contact: margherita.dore@uniroma1.it

**3 March – 1 May 2025** – virtual classes

**5-9 May 2025** – physical mobility

**10 May – 10 June 2025** – preparing the task/projects for assessment

**11 June – 30 June 2025** – assessment of the projects

**1-10 July 2025** - feedback from the students, overall assessment of the BIP

### **Physical mobility: 5 to 9 May 2025**

The courses during the physical component will focus on specific kinds of humour which may reproduce social inequalities. Students will be asked to collect memes, cartoons, video clips, videos etc., on the topics of racist humour, ethnic humour, aggressive humour, humour and trauma, humour and healing, etc. and bring them into the classroom. Students will be trained to analyse humour in a critical manner, detecting the discriminatory messages, the messages promoting social inequality and injustice, and simultaneously to explore ways or actions of social engagement and activism. These courses are meant to increase the students' engagement and to boost their analytical skills. They will also be able to compare how humour works transculturally and across different languages. Hence, we plan to invite humour professionals to share their experience with the students:

1. Stand-up comedy show performed by a professional Italian American comedian, Marsha De Salvatore. This one-woman show talks about her chronic illness (i.e., Beta-Thalassemia Major). Activism is contributing to fighting ableism. The show will be followed by a discussion with the comedian who will elaborate on the rationale behind this show and the reasons that motivated it.
2. Meet the Cartoonist, Michela Rossi. Students will have the opportunity to meet and engage in discussion with Michela Rossi, a cartoonist and graphic designer, who will talk about her daily activities, the sources of her inspiration and the ethical and ideological concerns that her work implies.

### **Virtual part**

#### **3 March to 11 June 2025**

Students will be familiarised with the main linguistic and non-linguistic theories of humour (starting from March 3rd, 2025) – 14 hours of online classes.

1. Kick-off meeting presenting in detail the aims of the project, the topics, the approaches. – 2 h – **6 March from 18:00 CET.**
2. Courses (introducing the main concepts and theoretical and methodological approaches; commenting on the relevant theories, approaches and methods):
  1. social and psychoanalytical theories of humour; General Theory of Verbal

- Humour 2 h - **13 or 14 March from 18:00 CET.**
2. conversational humour approaches 2h – **20 March from 18:00 CET.**
  3. humour translation; 2h – **27 March from 18:00 CET.**
  4. humorous mechanisms, multimodality included, social and communicative functions. 4 h – **3 April and 10 April from 18:00 CET.**
3. Presenting the tasks and the criteria for assessment, offering feedback on students' proposals for research projects (e.g. the adequacy of the topic, the pertinence of the research methods, etc.). 2 h – **24 April from 18:00 CET.**

Virtual part after the physical component: 6 hours – tutoring for the projects (**10 May – 10 June 2025**), on discriminatory humorous texts as well as discussing ways of cultivating other people's critical literacy on such humour in education, the workplace, in peer groups, etc.

### **Requirements**

This course is open to Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD students at [CIVIS member universities](#) studying Linguistics, Sociology, Philosophy, Education Sciences, Political Sciences, Languages, or Translation.

Participants should have a good level of written and spoken English (B2).

### **Application process (by 31 October 2024)**

You must apply using the dedicated webpage: <https://civis.eu/en/learn/civis-courses/reading-between-the-humorous-lines>

You will be asked a **Motivation letter**, indicating your expectations from attending the course, and **your level of English according to the CEFR** to [margherita.dore@uniroma1.it](mailto:margherita.dore@uniroma1.it)

All applications will be evaluated based on the students' motivation letter (in English) and on the relevance of the BIP for the students' past or present research interest (topics including humour translation, pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, critical literacy).