

**COMPUTER-ORIENTED HUMOR
(COHUM): "I GET IT."**

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ABSTRACT

All humor is to some extent cultural and, perhaps to that same extent, humor serves to define, explain and enhance our understanding of a particular culture. The computer industry, now over 50 years old, is a mature culture characterized by industriousness, creativity, energy, bureaucracy and wit. The computer itself has lately become something of a cultural icon or signpost. Yet the computer industry has always seemed to breed its own special brand of humor – intelligent, somewhat superior, slyly subversive – even from its very earliest days.

The purpose of the current paper is to explore computer-oriented humor (COHUM), to provide an overview, a framework, and a comprehensive categorization, and to place COHUM in the context of the much broader study of humor. COHUM is found to be related to culture-specific humor, in-group humor, and I-get-it humor. I-get-it humor is presented as a category of humor that includes elements of both culture-specific humor and in-group humor, and that may be characterized as eliciting an audience response of “I get it.”

Several broad categories of COHUM are presented with representative examples. Examples are also presented of various types of COHUM, e.g., anecdote, riddle, fable, parable, and magic trick. The authors conclude that context – what the audience brings to the comedic experience – is as important as the content of the humor itself.

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COMPUTER-ORIENTED HUMOR (COHUM): “I GET IT.”

Wit is the hallmark of intelligent beings. Human beings seem to naturally gravitate toward all forms of humor. Indeed, humor has been shown to be useful and effective in many different areas of human endeavor, including medicine, counseling, advertising and, of course, communication (see, *e.g.*, Holden 1993; Goldin & Bordan 1999; Witkin 1999; Weinberger & Gulas 1992; Honeycutt & Brown 1998).

All humor is to some extent cultural and, perhaps to that same extent, humor serves to define, explain and enhance our understanding of a particular culture. Even in antiquity it was believed that it is possible to learn a great deal about a person by what he finds funny (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65b). Much like the parable of the blind men and the elephant, humor is one of the ways with which we can grasp a level of understanding of a highly complex cultural environment.

The computer industry, now over 50 years old, is a mature culture characterized by industriousness, creativity, energy, bureaucracy and, yes, wit. The computer itself has lately become something of a cultural icon (Porter 2000) or signpost. Yet the computer industry has always seemed to breed its own special brand of humor – intelligent, somewhat superior, and slyly subversive – even from its very earliest days.

The purpose of the current paper is to explore *computer-oriented humor* (COHUM), to provide an overview, a framework, and a comprehensive categorization, and

to place COHUM in the context of the much broader study of humor.

HUMOR

There are many different types of humor, including puns, wordplays, riddles, jokes, satires, lampoons, sarcasm, irony, wit, black humor, comedy, slapstick, farce, burlesques, caricatures, and parody. The differences among these different humor types is not always great. In particular, burlesque, caricature, and parody are very much alike and refer to literary or dramatic works that mimic serious works in order to achieve a humorous or satiric effect. Likewise, the difference between satire and lampoonery is not that great. The bottom line is that humor has the ability to make people laugh, smile, or chuckle, at least inwardly.

Humor has many functions both positive and negative. Humor has been found to be an important de-stressing device, and it is hard to find a more stressful occupation than computer scientist. One current joke plays on this tension but, in truth, can be and has been reworked to poke fun at a variety of occupations (think lawyer):

A doctor, a civil engineer, and a computer scientist got to discussing which was the oldest profession. The doctor pointed out that according to Biblical tradition, God created Eve from Adam's rib. This obviously required complicated surgery, so therefore medicine was surely the oldest profession in the world. The engineer countered with an earlier passage in the Bible stating that God created order from chaos, and since this was most certainly the biggest example of civil engineering, it proved that his profession was the oldest profession. Smiling, the computer scientist responded: "Who do you think created chaos?"

Studies have shown that humor can decrease students' anxiety, boost their self-esteem, and actually reduce their heartbeats in a stressful situation (Berk 1998; Burkhart 1998). Brotherton (1996) found that humor boosted employee morale and thus led to improved productivity in the workplace. Humor serves many functions in a marriage such as allowing the couple to avoid conflict and end a discussion on a playful note instead. It also can be used to hurt the other partner and mask deeply felt hostility (Honeycutt and Brown 1998).

Humor can be used to deride others (*e.g.*, racist jokes, lawyer jokes) but it can also be used to enhance the image of a group. Of course, one joke can sometimes do both jobs at the same time: mock one group while at the same time making another group appear smarter than everyone else. The jokes of victims and oppressed groups very often have this dual purpose. Lowe (1986) makes this observation about certain kinds of ethnic humor: "it produces simultaneously a strong fellow-feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders." Koller (1988, p. 11) notes, "to share a laugh together is a major social bond," *i.e.*, humor builds rapport. This bond can be used for positive and negative purposes. Since humor has the power to have such profound effects on society and can, according to LaFollette and Shanks (1993), "maintain or transform the *status quo*," it is important to understand it.

While many hypotheses as to why people laugh have been postulated, there are three major theories of humor: incongruity, relief/release, and superiority. According to Keith-Spiegel (1972), incongruity theory posits that humor results from a contrast between what is logically expected and what actually takes place or what is said. Gerard (1759) and Beattie (1776) first proposed this theory (some claim that it was actually presented first by

Blaise Pascal in the 17th century) but it is usually associated with Kant (1790) and Schopenhauer (1819).

The relief/release theory of humor focuses on the fact that laughter is a socially acceptable way to release pent-up tension and nervous energy, and relieve stress. This theory was first developed by Spencer (1860) but was made famous by Freud (1960). Many people may be afraid or find it difficult or uncomfortable to talk about certain subjects, for example, such topics as rape, impotence, homosexuality, violence, racism, and incest. Humor is a socially acceptable way of relieving one's tension about these sensitive areas. Laughter can be used as a substitute for violent behavior and thus help people avoid conflict. Relief/release theory might explain why people often need to tell jokes at funerals or why teenagers enjoy sexual humor. Freud (1960, p. 103) made the following observation regarding hostile jokes which he believed served the purpose of aggressiveness or defense: "By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him." Dirty jokes, according to Freud (1960, p. 97), are a substitute for sexual aggression. Lipman (1991) showed how victims of the holocaust used humor to deal with the horrors of the Nazis. It is interesting to note that the relief/release theory may best explain the importance of humor in healing. Indeed, many hospitals are using clown visits and various other techniques to enhance the healing process (McGhee, 1999).

Superiority theory suggests that the purpose of humor is to demonstrate one's superiority, dominance, or power over others. Mocking humor that belittles the stupidity, infirmities, or weaknesses of other groups would certainly be a way of demonstrating the "superiority" of one's own reference group and thus boosting one's ego. Certainly, racist

and sexist humor is often used for the purpose of perpetuating stereotypes about women and minorities and thus keep them “in their place.” Superiority theory is associated with Hobbes (1651) but was also discussed by many others including Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero. Not all proponents of the superiority theory of humor see it as belittling and denigrating others. Some assert that this type of humor may also be sympathetic, empathetic, and congenial (Keith-Spiegel, 1972). A variation of superiority theory is that of Gruner (1997) who believes that humor should be seen as a type of game in which there is a winner and a loser. The winners are the parties doing the laughing and the losers are the ones being laughed about or at.

CULTURE-SPECIFIC HUMOR

One of the underpinnings of humor and humor research is that all humor will not necessarily be funny to all people. In other words, there is really no such thing as pure humor (Cohen 1999, p. 12). Veatch (1998) posits that the way in which people from diverse cultures are offended, amused, or unaffected by different sets of events reflects different subjective moral systems. LaFollette and Shanks (1993) also note that all humor is context-dependent, some depending on the listeners’ beliefs. Duncan, Smeltzer, and Leap (1990) assert that the humor used in the workplace partially defines the organizational culture.

Cohen (1999, pp.12-32) uses the term *conditional* for jokes that will work only with certain audiences and *hermetic* for those jokes that presume particular knowledge or belief. Some of the most strongly conditional, hermetic jokes are those that make

references to the jargon or knowledge of a particular profession, and the profession with arguably the most arcane knowledge base is probably the computer profession.

The humor of certain cultural groups has been and continues to be studied in the scholarly literature. Why certain groups and not others? Presumably because they have in some way incorporated humor into their language, rituals, and everyday life. Pollio and Edgerly (1996), referring to Erikson (1951) and Levine (1961), describe the culturally specific humor of several American Indian cultures, the Yurok, the Sioux, and the Zunis. Much has been written on Jewish humor (see, *e.g.*, Telushkin 1992; Friedman 1998, 2000; Friedman & Lipman 1999). In Ziv (1988), each of a collection of papers investigates the humor of a different “Western” culture, including Australia, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, the United States, and Yugoslavia. Dodge (1996) examines the use of classical Japanese humor in the 1925 autobiography of the daughter of a Samurai.

Schutz (1995) feels that ethnic humor plays an important social function by helping in-groups bond and reinforce their values. Jones and Liverpool (1996) studied the humor of Trinidad, relating it to the culture and themes of calypso. They demonstrate that calypso humor is used by the lower classes to express hostility toward members of out-groups such as the ruling class and the police.

HUMOR OF THE IN-GROUP

Culture-specific humor may be considered a type of in-group humor and, vice versa, in-group humor may be thought of as a subset of culture-specific humor. Regardless, there is certainly a great deal of overlap between the two.

Martineau (1972) developed a model to describe the different functions of humor in social settings. Some of Martineau's theorems regarding an intragroup situation — *i.e.*, where both the actor (the party initiating the humor) and the audience are from the same group — may be summarized as follows: (A) When humor lauds the in-group, it functions to strengthen the group. (B) When the humor belittles the in-group, it has one of four purposes: to control the behavior of the in-group, *i.e.*, using humor to gently rebuke a member for not going along with group norms; to strengthen the in-group, *i.e.*, using self-disparaging humor to laughingly talk of one's own group's weaknesses but in a congenial way that strengthens the rapport of the group, for instance, Jewish people talking about how guilt is used by Jewish mothers; to introduce or encourage conflict that is already present; and to encourage the break-up of the group. (C) When humor lauds an out-group, it functions to strengthen the group. The out-group may be seen as a reference group and the humor demonstrates that the two groups have much in common. (D) When humor belittles an out-group, it has one of two purposes: it enhances the morale of the in-group; and it introduces or encourages a negative attitude towards the out-group.

Wolff, Smith, and Murray (1934), testing Hobbes' (1651) superiority theory of humor, found, as they predicted, that Gentiles found jokes deriding Jews to be funnier than did Jews. Contrary to their expectations, however, they found that Jews found anti-Scottish jokes to be less funny than did Gentiles. According to Hobbes' theory, there should have been no difference between Jews and Gentiles with respect to jokes about Scottish people (the jokes dealt with their alleged stinginess). Their explanation that Jews may have felt sympathy for Scots since the same type of jokes about stinginess are also told about Jews is not consistent with Hobbes (La Fave, Haddad, and Maesen, 1996). La

Fave, Haddad, and Maesen (1996) developed and tested a theory of humor that is consistent with Martineau (1972). They believe that the focus should not be on superiority but on enhanced self-esteem of a positive identification class (similar to a positive reference group). Thus, humor that esteems one's positive identification class while denigrating one's negative identification class will be evaluated as being funnier than humor which esteems one's negative identification class and denigrates one's positive identification class.

In-group humor can be used to help new recruits or trainees develop a feeling of belonging. In general, this type of humor tends to bond together members of the profession. This type of bonding humor helps people find common ground (Holden 1993, p. 67). Married couples often have "in" jokes that only they understand. (This can often make them very annoying at dinner parties.) Ziv and Gadish (1989) found that inside/private jokes, phrases, sayings, and expressions constitute a kind of "secret language" for couples and serve to strengthen "feelings of belongingness and intracouple cohesiveness."

I-GET-IT HUMOR

In examining the nature of the overlap between culture-specific humor and in-group humor, it appears that both can be included under the rubric of "I get it." I-get-it humor is a category of humor that includes elements of conditional, culture-specific humor, and in-group humor. I-get-it humor is hermetic, that is, the listener must bring some kind of specialized knowledge to the joke-telling enterprise or the joke is

meaningless, or, at least, not funny. This phenomenon can occur in tightly knit groups or groups that share similar experience or knowledge, for example, musicians. The in-group jokes of married couples belong in this category. Families have their own in-jokes too; outsiders do not have the requisite intimate knowledge to “get it.” In sum, this type of humor can be characterized by a mental audience response of “I get it.”

Some jokes do not even sound funny unless you have the necessary knowledge to understand them. In fact, the following classic Jewish joke may sound to the uninitiated like a tragic bit of storytelling:

In a small village in the Ukraine, a terrifying rumor was spreading: a Christian girl had been found murdered.

Realizing the dire consequences of such an event, and fearing a pogrom, the Jewish community instinctively gathered in the synagogue to plan whatever defensive actions were possible under these circumstances.

Just as the emergency meeting was being called to order, in ran the president of the synagogue, out of breath and all excited. “Brothers,” he cried out, “I have wonderful news! The murdered girl is Jewish!” (Novak and Waldoks, 1981, p.73)

There is at least one such joke – some say the only one – in the field of philosophy:

Descartes walks into a bar, asks for a beer. The bartender inquires, “Would you like some nuts with that?” Descartes replies, “I think not.” And – poof! – he disappears.

Certain groups seem to produce a large amount of I-get-it humor; others do not. Not all Jewish humor is in this category, but a lot of it is. A large portion of the assimilation-related Jewish humor is especially meaningful, poignant, and, yes, humorous to the wandering Jew who periodically is forced to lay down roots in a new and alien land.

Telephone rings. "Hello."
"Hello. May I please speak to Moshe?"
"There is no Moshe here."
"Really? There is no one called Moshe there?"
"No Moshe here." Hangs up.
Ring. "Hello."
"Hello. Is Mischa there?"
"Just a moment." Calls out, "Moshe! It's for you!"

There are a number of statistics jokes and jokes about statisticians that require some expertise in statistics. Mathematicians also tell many jokes about mathematics and mathematicians. For example,

A physicist, a scientist, and a mathematician watched a building with only a single entrance, until they were certain there was no one inside the building. However, as they continued to watch, two people left the building. The physicist scratched his head and said, "This is an impossible occurrence." The scientist said, "Our premise must be wrong." The mathematician said, "Let's wait a little more. Perhaps two people will enter and the building will be empty again."

In addition, mathematicians relish riddles, games, and mathematical puzzles. In fact the very discipline of mathematics is considered by Paulos (1980) to be similar to the study of humor.

Some individuals may relate a strongly hermetic joke to someone who cannot possibly get it – say, an older child telling a "dirty" joke to a young child. This sort of nasty jokester preys upon people's desire to "get it." Some humor is tailor-made specifically not to be understood. The payoff is not a shared laugh; rather, it is intended to belittle the listener. This is not I-get-it humor, it is only masquerading as such. The classic in this genre is resurrected in every generation:

Two elephants are taking a bath. One asks, “Can you please pass the soap?” The other responds, “No soap, radio.”

This is no joke. The teller and a confederate laugh as if it is hysterically funny. The listener is baffled but may laugh as if he “gets it.”

COMPUTER-ORIENTED HUMOR

There is arguably no other group that produces as much humor as computer professionals. This is a field that has produced email emoticons; high- and low-brow Internet humor; satirical dictionaries; a serious April Fool’s Day conference on computational humor (HAHAcronym Project 2002); and a rating scale to measure an individual characteristic called microcomputer playfulness (Webster & Martocchio 1992). Much computer-oriented *humor* (COHUM) is definitely of the I-get-it variety, requiring specialized knowledge or common shared experience.

There are very few jokes centered around any other product – electrical or otherwise. Before the computer “revolution,” there was a railroad “revolution,” a telephone “revolution,” automobile, radio, television, *etcetera*. These all changed the world, but produced little humor. It may seem at first blush that light bulb jokes are an example of product-centered humor, but light bulb jokes are actually the polar opposite of COHUM. Light bulb jokes are funny precisely because the light bulb is such a simple device and so easy to manipulate; computer jokes arise in part because computers are difficult to master and require knowledge and training.

Why is it that the computer industry has generated so much humor? It is instructive first to examine the diverse types of COHUM, employing examples of each. The examples used in this paper have been chosen because they are well known, repeated frequently, and represent their respective classes. In addition, they have the distinction of being hermetic to a greater or lesser degree. There are several broad categories of COHUM:

- The computer against the world: This category includes anthropomorphic representations of computers as mighty, powerful and omniscient. The computer in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* comes to mind. In fact, that computer, named HAL, was a sly dig at the all-mighty IBM: Each letter of the name HAL is one less than the corresponding letter in IBM. The computer depicted in the following joke has very high aspirations. This joke is based on a short story “Answer” by Fredric Brown (1954); the computer wins.

A team of the world’s most accomplished computer scientists and engineers have just completed the world’s most powerful computer. It takes up the entire laboratory. The leader of the team plugs in the power cord and turns the computer on. There is an explosion of flashing colored lights and whirring disks. The scientist stands in front of the computer and speaks directly into the microphone, asking the one question that has plagued mankind since the beginning of time: “Is there a God?” The lights flash, the disks whirl, and various mechanisms chug back and forth as the computer contemplates this problem. Finally, a mechanical voice booms forth from the giant speakers on top of the machine: “NOW there is.”

- The computer professional versus the novice user: To techies, users are incredibly naïve individuals who forget simple things like plugging in the power cord; do not have a clue about the technology on their desktops; and want the job done yesterday; and, when a job is completed to the user's specifications, it is not what he or she wanted anymore. The definitive joke in this category is the anecdote, told as if it had really happened, about the technical support specialist who fields a call from a user about a defective cup holder at the front of the computer: it was the CD-ROM drive.
- The user versus the computer professional: This kind of humor arises out of common shared experience of having to deal with supercilious know-it-alls who think all users are morons. This seems to be similar in tone to the ubiquitous lawyer jokes.

You know you are a computer nerd if:

1. You think that when people around you yawn, it is because they did not get enough sleep.
2. You know what http:// stands for.
3. When the radio traffic reporter talks about a backup caused by a crash, you correct him that a backup is good protection in case of a crash.

- The computer professional versus clueless management: When COHUM targets managers, they are just as dumb as users, but exceedingly more arrogant. The following is a very abridged version of a very long digression usually entitled, "The Evolution of a Programmer."

High School: 10 PRINT "HELLO WORLD"
 20 END

First year College: program Hello(input, output)
 begin
 writeln('Hello World')
 end.

Senior year College: (defun hello
(print
(cons 'Hello (list 'World))))

New professional: #include <stdio.h>
void main(void) {
 char *message[] =
 {"Hello ", "World"};
 int i;
 for (i = 0; i < 2; ++i)
 printf ("%s", message[i]);
 printf ("\n");
}

Seasoned professional: ... 43 lines of code ...

Master Programmer: ... 179 lines of code ...

New Manager: 10 PRINT "HELLO WORLD"
20 END

Middle Manager: mail -s "Hello, world." bob@b12
Bob, could you please write me a
program that prints "Hello, world."?
I need it by tomorrow.
^D

Beside the payoff at the expense of management, this joke is hermetically funny to programmers because the long programs, even the longer ones that are elided here, actually do work: they all display the simple message "Hello World".

- Anti-establishment jokes: This category started with early anti-IBM jokes and seems to have transmuted into the current crop of anti-Microsoft jokes (Bill Gates does not come off too well either), mocking the current self-appointed king of technology that, in truth, everyone is beholden to. This might be slightly related to the humor of the oppressed.

The End of the World: God decided to end all life on Earth. He also decided to call three leaders to Him and tell them about it. So, He called to His chambers George W. Bush, Vladimir Putin and Bill Gates.

After greeting them, He informed them that he had had it with the situation on Earth, and was going to destroy it. They were to tell people to prepare for the end, which would be that Friday.

Each returned to his governing board.

Bush stood before his cabinet and said, “I have some good news, and some bad news. The good news is that there IS a God. The bad news is that He is unhappy with Earth, and will destroy it on Friday.”

Putin stood before his cabinet and said, “I have some bad news and some worse news. The bad news is that there IS a God. The worse news is that He is unhappy with Earth and plans to destroy it this Friday.”

Bill Gates stood before his board and said, “I have some great news and some FANTASTIC news. The great news is that God thinks I am one of the three most powerful men in the world. The FANTASTIC news is that we don't have to fix WINDOWS 2003.”

In explaining the information technology concepts of real vs. virtual, the following diagram is sometimes found helpful:

Is It There?		Do I See It?	
		Yes	No
	Yes	REAL	TRANSPARENT
	No	VIRTUAL	IBM VAPORWARE

The last category was directed at IBM about 40 years ago, but would be targeted at Microsoft today.

- Classical COHUM: These are true insider jokes, that only a “real” computer person will understand. This type of joke is conditional and hermetic, and may be used to establish who is an insider and who is an outsider. We use the term jokes broadly;

COHUM may also include such humorous forms as satire, maxims, parables, magic tricks, wordplay and shorthand. This category best fits the description of I-get-it humor. The jokes in this category require a great deal of knowledge on the part of the listener. It may have developed from the fact that the first computer people were mathematicians and engineers. They were the “high priests” of the industry.

Strongly conditional, hermetic, computer-oriented humor serves many purposes today, just as it did in the early days of the profession. When used in the classroom, for example, it brings students into the community of professionals, by making them feel like part of the in-crowd. After all, if you don't get the joke, you're not a computer professional.

COHUM: SOME EXEMPLARS

Classical COHUM, of the conditional, hermetic type, is usually (but not always) intelligent, and often extremely subtle. Some examples of this category include:

PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE NAMES. The history and names of our myriad programming languages often are accidentally funny. For example, PL/1 (Programming Language ONE, often cited as the epitome, or nadir, of IBM's arrogance) and APL (What kind of name is “A Programming Language”?). Then, of course, there were the developers of SNOBOL, slyly poking fun at the fledgling industry's penchant for acronyms by naming their language with the most intricate acronym they could think up, StrNg Oriented

symBolic Language. This was their second attempt at naming the language; the first was String Expression Interpreter (SEXI), but was deemed too risqué for what was quickly becoming a very popular piece of software (Friedman 1992). Later on, there was David Gelernter's sly poke at the Ada language (named after Lady Ada Lovelace, the "first" programmer) when he named his parallel processing language Linda (after a well-known porn star of the time, Linda Lovelace).

WORDPLAY. This is a field whose jargon can be serious and humorous at the same time, *e.g.*, a nibble is half a byte, or four bits. (Really.)

ART. Computers and the people who work with them are the subject of a vast number of cartoons, on a wide array of subjects. There are animated avatars and email emoticons. The classical example of this category, however, may be the cover art on Jean Samet's (1969) text on programming languages showing a tower of 'Babel' (read babble) of the ever-proliferating varieties and species of programming languages.

ANECDOTE. The history of computing has generated books, articles, and conferences. One of the best known historical anecdotes concerns the individual who came to be known as "Grandma COBOL," Grace Murray Hopper's 1947 notation in her logbook:

The expression "getting the bugs out" of a new machine was commonplace, but Captain Hopper, working on the MARK II, did indeed fix a problem by extracting a moth that had gotten stuck in the machinery. She pasted it in her logbook with the accompanying notation: the first recorded case of an *actual* debugging.

KNOCK-KNOCK JOKE. Probably the only computer-oriented knock-knock joke in existence (some would say it is one too many):

“Knock knock.”
“Who’s there?”
“Knock.”
“Knock who?”
“Knock knock.”
Infinite loop continues until the audience gets it.

ONE-LINER.

It’s as easy as 01 10 11

JOKE. Some jokes capitalize on variations in programming languages or operating systems and are thus more or less hermetic. The following, by contrast, has a relatively wide potential audience – anyone who has battled to resurrect a frozen Windows-based computer system.

Three engineers: There are three engineers in a car: an electrical engineer, a chemical engineer and a Microsoft engineer. Suddenly, the car just stops by the side of the road, and the three engineers look at each other wondering what could be wrong. The electrical engineer suggests stripping down the electronics of the car and trying to trace where a fault might have occurred. The chemical engineer, not knowing much about cars, suggests that maybe the fuel is becoming emulsified and getting blocked somewhere. Then, the Microsoft engineer, not knowing much about anything, comes up with a suggestion, “Why don’t we close all the windows, get out, get back in, open the windows again, and maybe it’ll work!?”

MAXIM.

“There are two ways to write error-free programs. Only the third one works.” -- Anonymous

MAGIC TRICK. The following card trick made the rounds in programming circles years before it appeared on the back of a children’s cereal box.

Give a member of the audience the five cards pictured below. Ask him or her to think of a number between 1 and 31, then to return to you only the cards that contain the number in question. Quickly (and mentally!) add up the first number on each card, and “guess” the number. Amaze your family and friends. This card trick is based on binary arithmetic: each card represents one binary digit, either on or off.

1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15
17	19	21	23	25	27	29	31

2	3	6	7	10	11	14	15
18	19	22	23	26	27	30	31

4	5	6	7	12	13	14	15
20	21	22	23	28	29	30	31

8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

RIDDLES.

How do you keep a programmer in the shower all day?
Answer: Give him (her) a bottle of shampoo that says “Lather, rinse, repeat.”

Why do programmers always get Christmas and Halloween mixed up?
Answer: Because DEC 25 = OCT 31.

What would you call the object-oriented version of COBOL?

Answer: ADD ONE TO COBOL.

FABLE. Touretzky (1984, pp. 198-199) used the “Dragon’s Dream” fable to successfully illustrate the elements of recursion in a non-threatening, humorous way.

PARABLE. A classic of computer science, “The Emperor’s Old Clothes” (Hoare 1981) is a brilliant reworking of the well-known parable “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

CONCLUSION

Computer-oriented *humor* (COHUM) is to a large degree culturally-specific, conditional, and hermetic. In fact, it is one of the best examples of I-get-it humor. Context – what the audience brings to the comedic experience – is as important as the content of the humor itself.

What make this area of study so fascinating is that the advent of the computer, and the technical and social revolutions that followed, have spawned such a vast quantity of humor in all its manifestations. And humor, as we know, is ultimately a most *human* enterprise.

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