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The first GRISU Symposium
Gruppo di Ricerca Italiano di Studi sull'Umore
(Italian Humour Studies Research Group)

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Letter to Editors

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October 14th, 2025, marks the official launch of GRISU (Gruppo Italiano di Studi sull' Umore -- Italian Humour Studies Research Group) with a daylong symposium held in the magnificent Sala del Camino, a great hall in the 12th century Palazzo del Broletto, home to IUSS, Pavia's University School for Advanced Studies. Surrounded by the hall's beautiful mosaics, scholars from around Italy and from diverse disciplinary backgrounds who share a common interest in humor as a cultural, social, and cognitive phenomenon convened (both in person and online) to present themselves and their research. The event organized by young neurolinguist Luca Bischetti was entitled *“Pavia capitale dell'umorismo per un giorno”* – ‘Pavia the capital of humour for one day’ – was not merely ceremonial or simply a space to exchange ideas; it functioned above all as a declaration of intent. GRISU positions itself as a national platform dedicated to fostering research, dialogue, and collaboration between humour scholars within Italy, while also connecting Italian scholarship in humour to international research networks.

Although one would be hard put to find an intellectual mind past or present, who has not engaged in humour, it is equally true that for decades the subject was relegated to the margins of academia. A concept linked to fun, to joy and to positivity was in stark contrast with the rigor of the academy and the gravitas of those involved. Fortunately matters have since changed and in today's 21st century the subject of humour has finally been recognized as a serious discipline worthy of academic enquiry. No longer is it perceived as being too light and ephemeral, instead it has gained its long due recognition as a powerful lens through which to understand culture, language, politics, psychology, and social interaction. Within a broader international context, the inauguration of GRISU represents a significant and timely milestone.

GRISU is not the first association comprising scholars with a common interest in humour studies, in fact, there are several academic humour groups around the world. First and foremost, we have ISHS the International Society for Humor Studies founded by Don and Alleen Nilsen in the mid-1970s. This

is by far the largest organization involving several hundred humour scholars worldwide and most leading academics in the field are members. ISHS boasts a prestigious journal *HUMOR - International Journal of Humor Research* published by De Gruyter and yearly conferences. Other, smaller national or regional groups include ASHN (the Australasian Humour Network), the French association Corhum (*Association pour le développement des recherches sur le Comique, le Rire et l'Humour*), and ISLH/HS (the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies). As their names indicate, these groups attract scholars working within specific geographic and linguistic areas as well as those with a particular interest in the humour traditions of those areas.

The issue of language is significant. Scholarship in English dominates Humour Studies, much as it does most other academic disciplines. As the global *lingua franca*, publishing in English naturally ensures an international audience. However, the existence of smaller, language-specific humour societies suggests a distinct need to examine humour through the lens of languages and cultures beyond English speaking ones alone—such as French, Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese.

GRISU follows this precedent, becoming the latest "lingua-culture" group dedicated to connecting humour scholars working in Italy. By doing so, it fosters a local network while simultaneously reaching out to the international community, sparking global interest in the unique scholarly landscape of the Italian peninsula.

English humour is often considered to be a benchmark against which the humour of other cultures is implicitly measured, frequently creating the impression that it is uniquely refined or inherently superior. This perception is reinforced not only by cultural prestige but also by academic practice. It is certainly true that the amount of research devoted to humorous content expressed in the English language vastly exceeds that dedicated to humour in other languages. English-language humour—particularly British and American—dominates scholarly publications, conference panels, and teaching materials in fields such as linguistics, cultural studies, media studies, and translation. This imbalance is also evident in academic supervision. Over the years, I have supervised scores of graduation theses focusing on US sitcoms, films, and stand-up comedians. By contrast, despite working in Italy, I have overseen only a mere handful of theses devoted to Italian humorous traditions, comedians, or audiovisual comedy. This disparity cannot be explained by a lack of rich or sophisticated humour in Italian culture. Rather, it reflects the broader dominance of English as an academic (and indeed global) *lingua franca* and the universal circulation of English language (mainly US) media, which makes English humour more visible, more easily accessible, and more readily legitimized as an object of scholarly inquiry. Humour in other languages is by no means secondary, derivative, or less worthy of systematic analysis. Its distinctiveness arises not merely from its intrinsic qualities, but from the fact that it operates outside the dominant linguistic and cultural frameworks through which humour is typically studied and evaluated.

The inauguration of GRISU during the October study day marks a foundational moment for humor studies in Italy. It represents the culmination of years of individual research efforts and the beginning of a collective endeavor. This issue contains written versions of the talks given by the numerous established and less established scholars present that day. In the context of contemporary Italian humour scholarship, two prominent scholars were present: psychologist Giovannantonio Forabosco and linguist Salvatore Attardo.

Giovannantonio Forabosco founded *RISU (Rivista Italiana di Studi sull'Umore)* — the Italian Journal of Humour Studies—and catalyzed the formation of GRISU with an inaugural meeting in Ravenna in the spring of 2024. Salvatore Attardo requires little introduction; he is globally recognized for the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), developed alongside Victor Raskin, as well as his extensive contributions to various facets of the field.

Building upon this rich heritage, the future of Italian Humour Studies now rests in the hands of a vibrant new generation of researchers. Under the coordination of scholars like Luca Bischetti, whose work in neuropragmatics and the cognitive architecture of humor exemplifies the field's modern direction, GRISU serves as a vital breeding place for young talent. By fostering an environment where early-career academics can collaborate with international veterans, the group ensures that the study of Italian humour becomes and remains cutting-edge. As these young scholars explore the intersections of humour with technology, mental health, and social media, they are not just following a tradition—they are expanding the boundaries of how we understand the human experience through the lens of non-seriousness.

Bionote

Delia Chiaro

Delia Chiaro is Professor Emerita at the University of Bologna and a leading humour scholar. She has published numerous books, over 100 articles and chapters, and regularly speaks at global conferences. Recent works include *Playing with Food: Language, Humor and Disgust* (with Debra Aarons, Routledge, 2026) and *Comedy in Political Language: How Politicians Use Humour* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). Delia served as President of the International Society of Humor Studies (2016–17), sits on HUMOR's editorial board, and is affiliated with Brunel University's Centre for Comedy Studies Research.