

Intelligent Avatars

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Can you make your computer laugh?

Can a computer have a sense of humor? Physicist Igor Suslov at the Kapitza Institute for Physical Problems in Moscow suggests a computer program based on his mathematical model, could actually tell amusing jokes.

Suslov says that a computer model which he has designed explains the evolution of humor. Our ability to experience humor, he suggests, ultimately depends on quirks in how the brain handles information. The physicist explains that verbal jokes work by drawing the mind into error. It first settles on one meaning, and then has to correct itself and see another, like in this joke: *Father (reprovingly): "Do you know what happens to liars when they die?" Johnny: "Yes sir, they lie still"*. The wit here rests on how the brain flips between two meanings of "lie". In general, such verbal joke play work by making the mind of the observer settle on to one meaning, then spot an error and correct itself. Suslov's goal is to create a brain-like computer, called a neural net, that can mimic this process - along with the errors - to behave the same way. It may not laugh, but it would react to simple jokes in which there are ambiguous words and meanings as well as tell them.

Jokes produced by computer programs are mostly primitive, but sometimes can be surprisingly funny. Here are two jokes generated by a computer program developed at the University of Edinburgh by Graeme Ritchie and Kim Binsted:

*What do you call a ferocious nude?
A grizzly bare.*

*What kind of murderer has fibre?
A cereal killer.*

Now, are your jokes as funny?

Posted by IW at [10:50 AM](#)

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