Exploitation of formulaic language for humorous purposes

Casual racism subverted
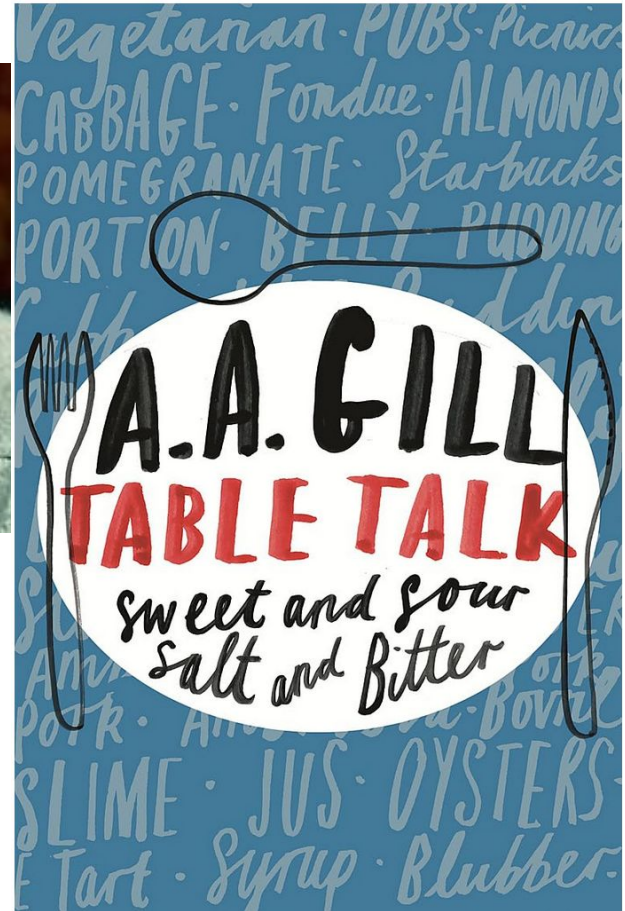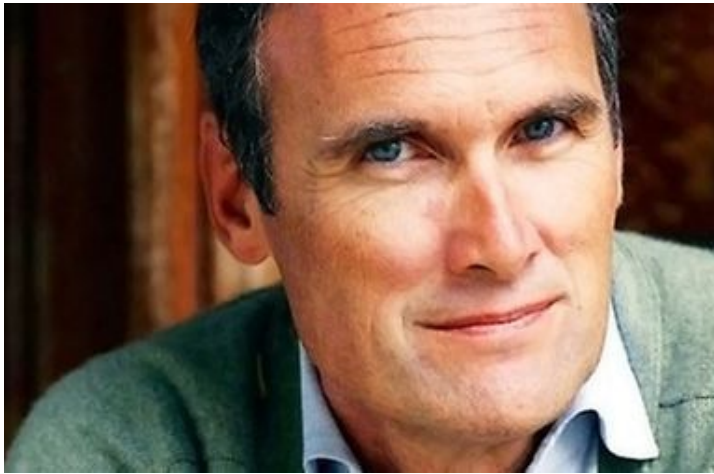
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Introduction

Introduction

Don't you just hate pandas? […]

For a start, it's their faces, that childish clown's make-up. And then there's the ingratitude. Panda should be a synonym for rudeness. After everything that has been done for them – the money, the diplomatic initiatives, the four-star reception centres – all we have asked in return is that they mate. Hardly onerous work. And will they? Will they heck. They just sit there turning their backs on us, begging, stuffing their mouths, occasionally relaxing on a car tyre. A tyre, may I remind you, that has been paid for by you and me. How many decent English families can afford to have a recreational tyre? Exactly. Pandas are just taking advantage.

This country has an unparalleled record in offering a home to persecuted pandas. We've been welcoming them since before *Blue Peter*. And, heavens, nobody's suggesting that pandas with a real cause – pregnant pandas – should be refused entry. But in all the years, how many babies have they given in return for our soft-touch liberal largesse? None. Zilch. Zero. I think I speak for all decent, right-minded people when I say enough is enough. No more pandas.

Understanding "Vegetarians"

- "Vegetarians" is a humorous and strongly ironic text that carries multiple messages; A.A. Gill adopts a range of strategies to ensure that the text is read indirectly, i.e. not seriously or "truthfully"
  - The main structural strategies are
    1. **Text-initial question design** ("Don't you just hate pandas?")
    2. **Hyperbolic use of lists**
  - The main cognitive strategies are
    1. **Topic shift**
    2. **Adoption of a metaphorical frame**
    3. **Ambiguity**
  - The phraseological strategies involve
    1. **Co-opted discourse**
    2. **Exploitation of formulaic phraseology**
- "The sarcastic, ironic or hyperbolic implicature of what is said takes place at the clause level, not at the lexical level." (Hanks 2013: 236)

Understanding "Vegetarians"

Don't you just hate pandas? [...]
For a start, it's their faces, that childish clown's make-up. And then there's the **ingratitude.**
[RASIM] **should be a synonym for** [INGRATITUDE]**. After everything that has been done for them** – [MONEY]**,** [EFFORT]**,** [HOSPITALITY] – **all we have asked in return is** [WORK]. And will they? Will they heck. **They just** [LAZY]**,** occasionally [ENJOYING LUXURY GOODS] **paid for by** [people like us]**.**
How many [people like us] can **afford** [LUXURY GOODS]? Exactly. [RASIM] **are just taking advantage**.
This country [GENEROSITY] in offering **a home to persecuted** [RASIM]. We've been **welcoming them** since [post-war era] . And, heavens, **nobody's suggesting that** [RASIM] **with a real cause** – [VULNERABLE] – **should be refused entry**. But in all the years**,** [what] **have they given in return for our** [GENEROSITY] **?** [Nothing]. I think **I speak for** [people like us] when I **say enough is enough**. **No more** [RASIM].
It's not just their [INGRATITUDE] – **they're not like us**. **Barely human, barely** [ANIMAL]. … **If my daughter ever** fell for those big black eyes **and came home with** [RASIM] [VIOLENT RESPONSE] … **If they've got problems at home, well I'm sorry. We've got problems of our own**. The truth is, [RASIM] are just [voluntary visitors]. **They've brought it on themselves.**

On resonance, exploitation, and echoic utterance

- In pragmatic accounts of irony there are several competing views, the most prominent being Clark& Gerrig's "pretense" theory (1984) , and Sperber & Wilson's "echoic" view (1981 and ff.)
  - In the "pretence" view, the ironist **imitates the speech of others**, usually to ridicule or belittle them (Clark & Gerrig 1984)
  - In the echoic view, the ironic utterance is an **echoic mention** (Sperber & Wilson 1981)**, or utterances transmitting echoic thoughts** (Sperber 1984)**, or indirect / free indirect reports** (Noh 2000)
- An echo *resonates*
- Hanks considers irony as a class of *exploitation* (2013: 153)

On resonance, exploitation, and echoic utterance

"Intertextuality […] is one of two main sources of resonance in language, the other being metaphor. […]
Word patterns do not just appear out of thin air, suddenly, in a puff of smoke. They are inherited from previous generations of language users, molded and shaped over centuries. They shift and change slightly in each new generation, but not by much. […] All of us, as writers and speakers, rely on the existence of a set of normal words and meanings and normal patterns of word use to get our meaning across; these are our raw materials. But writers then take these words and norms, exploit them, put them together in new ways, and pass them back to the community." (Hanks 2013: 252)

From ironic echo/ resonance to norm

- If we can perceive an echo, we must have heard it somewhere
- In corpus linguistic accounts of irony, ironic utterances are contrasted with baseline phraseological norms, in KWIC concordances (Louw 1993, 2000; Partington 2007, 2011)
- This makes it possible to demonstrate how the utterance deviates from what is expected, what our reference norm is, considering "the (type of) person who the ironist pretends to be" (Sperber 1984: 132)
  - i.e., anti-immigrant sentiment; middle-aged -> conservative / right-wing

From ironic echo/ resonance to norm

"The first task of a computational linguistic program attempting to extract meaning from documents must surely be to attempt to match each clause in a document against an inventory of the normal patterns of usage for the words involved, in order to arrive at the meanings through patterns rather than through concatenation of isolated words. This is problematic because […[no satisfactory inventory of such normal patterns with their meanings exists" (Hanks 2013: 239)

- This is complicated further when we recognise a norm as belonging to a particular discourse community rather than to the language as a whole

Corpus compilation

- How can we capture casually-expressed prejudice?
  - Transcripts of right-wing politicians' Twitter feeds / speeches, etc.
  - Social media
  - Online newspaper reader comments
- *Daily Mail* reader comments
  - Right-wing, most widely-read UK internet news (Smith/ YouGov 2017)
  - Publicly visible (no copyright issues); moderated/ filtered (no hate speech); large number of users (variety); users interact with text and with each other (discourse community)
- Compilation criteria
  - Relevance: article deals with topics alluded to in text and documented in the previous literature (Allen 2016, Ekman 2019, Emes & Chib 2022, Lutz & Bitschnau 2023, Musolff 2022, Paprota 2017) :
    - hospitality for migrants/asylum seekers;
    - right to work/stay;
    - demographic impact of immigration
  - Coverage/ representativeness: min. 400 comments in thread
  - Target corpus size: around half a million tokens

Corpus compilation

Short title	#comments	#threads	#running words	#unique userIDs
Asylum Claims	431	421	6255	405
Calais Escapees	774	420	97666	423
Census – Religion - Ethnicity	4684	2327	65950	2508
Cruise ship Housing	673	421	12256	486
Food for Asylum Seekers	2618	2142	43303	2193
Homes for Ukraine	2255	1646	71354	1819
Immigration Harms Communities	491	383	12493	428
Inactive EU Nationals	1237	585	31636	657
Manston Immigration Centre	2590	1818	44643	1949
Migrant Hotels	4744	3669	101558	3558
No speak English	802	499	12983	667
Non-EU Visas	373	272	6705	311
Nurses Paying Price	467	287	8617	338
	22139	**14890**	**515419**	**15742**

Structural strategies: *Don't you just hate…*

```
echnodrome ·get ·run ·down. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·a ·sloppy ·housekeeper?¶
ng ·Around ·gossiping? ·Oh, ·don't ·you ·just ·Hate ·'em? ·They ·have ·nothin¶
d ·you ·hate ·him ·for ·that. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·him, ·Doctor? ·Yes. ·I ·h¶
·That's ·a ·good ·question. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·paramilitary ·organiza¶
d-tempered ·and ·mean. ·Mm. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·those ·people? ·SUSAN: ·¶
re ·you ·getting ·anything? ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·that? ·How ·can ·you ·res¶
aims ·Alfina. ·Alfina? ·Oh, ·don't ·you ·just ·hate ·that ·name? ·What ·a ·goo¶
t ·of ·luck. ·Bye-bye. ·Boy, ·don't ·you ·just ·hate ·when ·that ·happens? ·Wa¶
. ·Oh, ·and ·you're ·nicked. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·that ·happens?¶
e ·door ·still ·won't ·open! ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·that ·happens?¶
·sakes! ·Left ·boot! ·Yeah, ·don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·that ·happens?¶
g ·the ·ropes ·around ·here. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·his ·mouth ·run¶
n, ·things ·to ·talk ·about. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·it's ·the ·last¶
re ·is, ·April. ·I ·can ·run! ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·people ·can't ·¶
ood ·rat ·catcher. ·Baxter? ·don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·people ·drop ·i¶
usting ·me. ·What ·a ·freak. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·somebody ·does¶
! ·Ow! ·Ow! ·That's ·better. ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·it ·when ·you ·get ·a ·sto¶
e ·my ·lawyer ·right ·now. ·– ·Don't ·you ·just ·hate ·to ·see ·a ·grown ·man ·cry¶
```

Structural strategies: *Don't you just hate…*

Text-initial question design

- This exploits a formulaic rhetorical question: *don't you (just) love/hate…*
- This question design – a negative polar interrogative with mitigating 'just' – simultaneously expresses opinion and emotion (Quirk et al. 1985: 809); and is conducive (coercing the reader into agreement: ibid. p. 808)
- "*Don't you just **hate***" is rare (only 18 in the 325-million-word *TV corpus* [englishcorpora.org]), and formulaic
  - Usually "*don't you just hate (it) [when x happens]*" (10/18)
- Gill here subverts the expected pattern, completing it with a noun
  - Which is – incidentally – typical of "*don't you just **love**…*" (53/63)

- There is therefore an unexpected noun ('pandas', in the context of a text on 'vegetarians'), and a pattern used with *hate* which is normally associated with its antonym, *love*; all within a conducive question which invites the reader to agree.

- These features establish the ironic tone from the very first sentence.

Structural strategies: lists

- Lists – as a structural feature – also obey norms
  - Lists normally consist of 3 items (Jefferson 1990)
    - Shorter lists tend to be 'completed', i.e. brought to a total of three, with a 'generalised list completer', e.g. 'or something' (ibid.);
    - Longer lists are considered to be marked
  - Hyperbole is present in 'Vegetarians' in two ways (sometimes together)
    1. Syntactically, through the use of excessively-long lists, e.g.
       - "They just sit there [1]**turning their backs on us**, [2]**begging**, [3]**stuffing their mouths**, [4]**occasionally relaxing on a car tyre**."
    2. Semantically, via exaggerated/ridiculous final items
       - "*Their brinking extinction is nothing to do with* [1]***predators**, [2]**human encroachment**, [3]**ozone**, [4]**motor cars** or [5]**online banking**. It's because they won't eat their bloody dinners.*"
  - Hyperbole is another form of exploitation discussed by Hanks (2013: 233-5)

Phraseological strategies: cooptation

- Co-opted discourse is the incorporation of discourses from other spheres, ostensibly to validate or give voice to others' points of view, although it is manipulative and cancels agency (Selznick 1949)
  - Here, the formulaic phraseology of casual racist discourse is easily identifiable
    - *"After everything that has been done for them […] all we have asked in return is …"*
    - *"I think I speak for all decent, right-minded people when I say enough is enough."*
    - *"If they've got problems at home, well I'm sorry. We've got problems of our own."*
  - This prejudicial and sometimes violent discourse is tempered by being framed by the structural and cognitive devices previously listed, i.e. hyperbolic irony, metaphor, ambiguity, and trivialisation

After everything that has been done for them

expect the homeowner to change everything for you. [U00465] Just give them all a
behaved as if she was paid to do everything for her including taxi duties [U00062]
earn if we're stupid enough to do everything for them. [U06369] 'Big issue sir, Big
is why they keep coming as we do everything for them [U01720] This makes me so angr
They haven't paid tax and get everything for nothing. MPs should be ashamed of
yet these illegal immigrants get everything for free. [U09028] Make them pay. The
or don't come! you are getting everything for free! [U07109] They are laughing
get here and are housed and given everything for free what they gonna do... contact
while these free loaders are given everything for free paid by us. Makes me sick [U
about be GRATEFUL for being given everything for free [U04211] I'd eat all of that
soft touch because you give them everything for nothing so of course they are goi
They can always go home. They get everything for nothing and are still not gratefu
it has to be 4 star hotels and everything free on tap? [U06058] I've warned ti
it! Bunch of ingrates - getting everything free - far more than citizens of this
put up illegals in 5 star hotels everything free... it's more than scandalous the
NO medical, NO hotels, NO to everything free. This then makes the attraction
o wonder people want to come here, everything is paid for. It's all wrong [MigrantH
they coming over because they get everything on a golden plate. What about our peo
get screwed over and spongers get everything on a plate and then moan about. Good
Hey come to Britain, where we lay everything on for you and don't worry, we'll pay
behaviour and expectation that everything should be done for them. There's alwa
absolutely nothing come and get everything their hearts desire. Time for us to m
own country that we would provide everything they could possibly need. We could gi

Enough is enough

ay·for·their·accommodation.·Enough·is·enough!··[221111MH_0613]·[U02645]·
e·fleeing·from·conflict·but·enough·is·enough·!!!··[221031MIP_0503]·[U065
_1322]·[U09465]·Disgusting-·enough·is·enough·-·we·are·a·broken·country·[
s·are·falling·on·deaf·ears,·Enough·is·enough.··[221111MH_3219]·[U07292]·
g·from·a·safe·country·ffs·.·Enough·is·enough··[221031MIP_1360]·[U09834]·
[U00227]·Don't·let·them·IN.·Enough·is·enough.·Let·the·humanitarians·go·t
using·cannot·cope·as·it·is.·Enough·is·enough!!··[221111MH_0044]·[U06618]
there·myself.·FGS·sort·it!!·Enough·is·enough,·sick·to·the·back·teeth·202
nyone,·say...·"No·More"·...·Enough·is·enough?!··[221111MH_2154]·[U00361]
e·housing·and·free·NHS.·NO!·Enough·is·enough.·Send·everyone·back·and·foc
·them·on·a·plane·to·Rwanda.·Enough·is·enough·now.·NHS·under·pressure,·fo
2]·[U02689]·Very·well·said.·Enough·is·enough·and·has·been·for·a·2022-08-
do·even·the·good·doer's·say·enough·is·enough,·how·high·does·the·number·2
·on·our·tiny·island·and·say·enough·is·enough·.··[220825HU_0851_002]·[U05
·someone·in·authority·say·,·enough·is·enough.··[221104NPP_147]·[U04290]·
ifficulties·and·we·must·say·enough·is·enough!!··[221111MH_0707]·[U06427]
ve·no·plan.·This·must·STOP!·Enough·IS·enough.··[221111MH_3086]·[U07892]·
e·grow·a·pair·and·say·stop,·enough·is·enough.·UK·first.·How·can·it·2022-
ck·to·France·simple·as·that·enough·is·enough··[221031MIP_0738]·[U06307]·
ng·the·tax·to·pay·for·them.·Enough·is·enough.··[221031MIP_0466_015]·[U11
·each·an·every·one·of·them.·Enough·is·enough·the·public·has·been·pushed·
·them·in·the·boat·back·then·Enough·is·enough··[230213FAS_0455]·[U02426]·
··[221031MIP_1150]·[U08793]·Enough·is·enough,·we·will·have·nothing·left·
··[221031MIP_1637]·[U07042]·Enough·Is·enough.·The·UK·is·the·only·2022-03
.··[220825HU_0539]·[U06306]·Enough·is·enough·sort·us·out·English·citizen
.··[221111MH_1006]·[U05130]·Enough·is·enough!··[221111MH_1007]·[U03046]·
t·enough·support·and·votes.·Enough·is·enough.··[221111MH_2588_001]·[U078

…*problems of our own*

```
ht·out·to·Rwanda.·We·have·enough·problems·of·our·own.··[221031MIP_089
put·up·with·this,·we·have·enough·problems·for·our·own·people·,·what·a
1602]·[U10372]·Sorry·we·have·own·problems·Ukraine·has·cost·us·a·fortu
·problems·but·believe·me·we·have·problems·of·our·own·mainly·created·b
there·will·always·be·immigration·problems.··[180530IHC_131]·[U01396]·
r·home·will·always·bring·its·own·problems.··[220825HU_1330]·[U04488]·
·true.·We·have·enough·of·our·own·problems.·I·sent·pet·food·and·baby·m
·tears.·We·got·enough·of·our·own·problems·in·this·country·without·bri
he·bloody·Ukraine·we·got·our·own·problems·here··[220825HU_1426]·[U068
t·of·the·UK·NOW,·we·have·our·own·problems··[221111MH_2763]·[U08187]·I
tart·sorting·out·some·of·our·own·problems.··[230111CSH_164]·[U10060]·
·care·more·about·everyone·else's·problems·and·not·our·own·citizens...
p·and·concentrate·at·sorting·the·problems·in·your·own·country·first,·
ies·need·to·be·sorting·their·own·problems·out·before·sending·millions
```

Phraseological strategies: exploitation

- The co-opted discourse is exploited to fit the PANDAS ARE IMMIGRANTS frame
  - *"A **tyre**, may I remind you, that has been paid for by you and me. How many decent English families can afford to have **a recreational tyre**?"*
  - *"But in all the years, how many **babies** have they given in return for our soft-touch liberal largesse?"*
- The co-opted utterances undergo lexical substitution which causes cracks to appear in the phraseological priming (Hoey 2005)
  - The metaphorical frame of PANDAS determines the choice of lexis: the echoic statements become patently **untrue** and **incongruous**
  - **Untruth/incongruity** combine with **hyperbole** to generate ridicule

How many decent English families can afford…

```
ation [U00465] How many brits can afford a one night stay in some of those [...]
er food than our OWN citizens can afford. [U02499] They can always float bacl
eople in full time employment can afford. [U02406] I feel these people shoul[...]
r more than a lot of families can afford these days in this country. [Food]
an hard working UK tax payers can afford. [U04799] If you don't like it... [U[...]
ee. It's more than pensioners can afford. [U09468] Hear hear [U04008] They c[...]
than what some British people can afford. [U00494] Surely the money would be
rces your own poor people can ill afford. [U00094] Don't worry, we're an isl[...]
 not right. Some people can never afford a hotel for a getaway yet here they
 taxes in hotels we can no longer afford. [U09451] When will the Government [...]
ousands of British people can not afford. This government has totally lost t[...]
5842] Can skint tax payers really afford over 2 billion a year on this [U095[...]
es prioritising heating and can't afford to eat. This is frankly insulting t[...]
 are relying on food banks, can't afford bills, going without to feed their [...]
while most of us Brits can't even afford to go camping! [U07637] What is the
 food. Some actual citizens can't afford food. And they complain. [U00401] W[...]
le supporting this country, can't afford to eat, heat their homes and pay th[...]
on the streets, our elderly can't afford to heat their homes, and our women [...]
e NEVER stayed in an hotel. Can't afford it. Yet I pay for others to do so. [...]
 this country whose parents can't afford basics, let alone a stay in a count[...]
 hey! Some of us tax payers can't afford to keep the heating on, have to wall
e. [U12576] Ordinary people can't afford to stay at these places. Send them [...]
anwhile many British people can't afford to eat and heat or, in some cases, [...]
lenty of working Brits that can't afford takeaway food like that and they do[...]
 Some people in the UK can't even afford a staycation and yet again taxpayer[...]
```

A tyre, may I remind you, that has been paid for by you and me.

- They should be grateful for free heating, free food and free accommodation whilst lounging around watching free TV. All paid for by the apathetic British taxpayer. [FoodForMigrants]

- Never thought I'd live to see what is happening, veterans living on the streets, hard working people and pensioners struggling to make ends meet whilst these opportunistic scroungers are being looked after in luxury 4&5 star accommodation, given clothes, iPhones, money for shopping, now even mountain bikes at a lot of the hotels. [Manston]

And then there's the ingratitude.

```
ave food and shelter, they should be grateful to us the taxpayers.
 be better than that. You should be grateful, if not go home. Simple.
in from war zone countries should be grateful to this kingdom and to all
  shouldn't complain, they should be grateful they're safe
 of complaints. Maybe they should be grateful they actually have a roof
ally agree. [U06884] They should be grateful they have a roof over thei
's embarrassing. [U06483] Should be grateful they are getting anything.
he French give them? They should be grateful for anything that the hard
spitals and schools, they should be grateful they even get fed.
 that daft. [U03533] They should be grateful. Our own citizens are goin
   Who cares [U00902] They should be grateful they are being fed and hou
 eat as well as this. They should be grateful.
 heating, hot water, they should be grateful [U01354] Let me think what
he French give them. They should be grateful they are being fed.
meless veterans. [U10158] Should be grateful. We all have to pay for th
to see here. [U01243] They should be grateful for all the freebies they
 own first. [U09312] They should be grateful for what they are getting.
nd many other people. You should be grateful for what you have, this is
d them to come here. They should be grateful they've got a bed to sleep
         So what? They should be grateful for all this free stuff
ey can do!  [U04753] They should be grateful!!!!!! [U00860] They know w
         [U07749] They should be grateful they have a roof over thei
de schools? [U01009] They should be grateful for getting food and free
 time in months. [U03058] Should be grateful they have food and lodging
 them and top up [U07691] Should be grateful they are being fed whilst
days. [U03463] Maybe they should be grateful, stop raping and murdering
```

Corpus pattern analysis via n-gram analysis

```
if they don't like                                          [193]
if they don't like it                                       [162]
    they don't like it they                                 [54]
        don't like it they can                              [35]
                  they can always go                        [84]
                      can always go back                    [50]
                  they can always go back                   [45]
                  they can always go home                   [37]
                  they could always go                      [22]
        don't like it they can always                       [17]
        don't like it go                                    [34]
              like it go home                               [23]
if they don't like it then                                  [19]
if they don't like it go                                    [16]
        don't like it go back                               [14]
        don't like it they can go                           [10]
              like it they can go back                      [10]
    they don't like it they know                            [13]
                  they know what they can do [10]
```

Corpus pattern analysis via n-gram analysis

```
they have no right to be here [6]
     have no right to be [12]
            no right to be here [12]
     have no right to be here [11]
they have no right to be [7]
they have no right to be here [6]

they should not be here [4]
they shouldn't have come here [5]

they didn't have to come [6]
     didn't have to come here [4]

          ask them to come here [5]
   didn't ask them to come [4]

          asked them to come [25]
          asked them to come here [16]
no one asked them to [15]
no one asked them to come [14]
no one asked them to come here [9]
nobody asked them to come [8]
nobody asked them to come here [5]
```

```
          forced them to come here [9]
nobody forced them [11]
nobody forced them to come here [7]
nobody forced them to come [8]
no one forced them to [4]
nobody is forcing [3]
          is forcing them to stay [4]

nobody is stopping [3]
          invite them here [4]
          invited them here [4]
nobody invited them [4]

they  want to come here [6]
they chose to come here [7]
```

Corpus pattern analysis via n-gram analysis

```
          a roof over their [33]
            roof over their heads [29]
          a roof over their heads [22]
     have a roof over their heads [10]
they have a roof over their [10]
          a roof over their head [10]
     have a roof over their head [7]
they have a roof over their heads [7]
          a roof over their heads and [5]
          a roof over your head [5]
          a roof over my head [4]


     was always going to end [9]
this was always going to [7]
                going to end in tears [6]
     was always going to end in [5]
     was always going to end in tears [4]


          to feel sorry for them [8]
   meant to feel sorry for them [4]
supposed to feel sorry for [4]
```

Discussion

- In evoking the concept of co-opted discourses, the irony in this text can be matched against norms
  - The language of casual racism is formulaic and repetitive (and nasty)
  - Gill's subversion of this language is achieved via exploitations of discourse-typical phraseology
  - The irony also facilitates evaluative reversal (Partington 2007)
- "Getting the joke" in this complex text relies on the recognition of exploited norms in order to …
  - Appreciate that the text is *not* about pandas,
  - Understand that the author is *anti-racist*…
  - Work out a connection between pandas, immigrants and vegetarians
    - (n.b. this is evaluative, not metaphorical: metaphor is not necessary in satire [Ritchie, personal communication])

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