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## PC acquires a sense of humour

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WASHINGTON: If experts have their way, then your personal computer may get in the habit of pulling your leg. This is because US researchers at the University of Cincinnati have equipped a computer with a sense of humour.

The scientists say the technology could lead to programmes that can solve problems that are informally stated, as well as to robots that are able to interact with humans more naturally.

"We rely on computers more and more, yet they don't seem to handle the way we communicate. I think it would be great for computers to understand natural language the way we use it," said Julia Taylor, a PhD candidate for computer science and engineering at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio. Taylor developed a programme with associate professor Lawrence Mazlack, coordinator of the university's Applied Artificial Intelligence Laboratory.

As programming a computer to have a total world knowledge seemed overwhelming, Taylor and Mazlack restricted the domain of humour to children's jokes that had similar sounding words, the way puns and knock-knock jokes often do.

According to Discovery News, the programme consists of two parts: a knowledge base derived from a children's dictionary and a collection of children's texts, and an algorithm that takes into account how the word sounds, how it's spelt, and what it means.

The knowledge base, called an ontology, represents an innovative, and more complex approach, said Christian Hemplemann, chief scientific officer at Hakia, an Internet search engine company.

Hakia conducts searches based on meaning, instead of popularity of key words or phrases. However, more popular approaches rely on statistics, which analyses millions of words in a text and looks at what words occur frequently around other words.

While words like 'bank' can mean a financial institution or land beside a river, words such as 'teller', 'check' and 'account' indicate financial institution, while 'fish', 'rapids' and 'water' indicate land beside a river.

The scientists said with an ontology in place, they are now trying to build a database that includes all of the things and events in a given world — in this case, the world of children's jokes — and how they relate to each other. The relationships are then categorised in a hierarchical structural from general to a more precise meaning, they said.