When the massed ranks of robots have

Oliver Moody

the times

humanity, at least our new silicon mas-

subjugated the last free remnants of

computer scientists who ha

nounced breakthroughs this week in

the delicate art of teachi

real stinker of a pun.

mas cracker to shame. They inclu

“Two fish are in a tank. One say

thing?”

fall flatter than amyxomatosis gag at a

rabbit breeders’ convention, puns have

require more shared background

it, whereas puns are a lowerform of hu-

A

your hair

a mess of

it, so make

DIY look. The French

carefully styled faux-

championed the

Suki Waterhouse have

£90 for a fashionably

customers are paying up

Mayfair salons, however, and

by yourself at home

That minor consolation will largely

One program developed at Stanford

Justine Kao, a PhD student in cogni-

“It is possible that the most sophisti-
cated jokes are often less obvious and
require more shared background
knowledge between the joke and the
listener in order for the listener to ‘get’ it, whereas puns are a lower form of hu

double meaning of certain words — is

laid bare,” said Luke

Hersherson, whose chain of

Hersherson's blow dry bars charges £28 for a 30-

minute appointment.

“Two years ago, our

most requested style was big and brushed, a full-

on groomed ‘do’, he said. “Now our number

one look is a low-key

wave. We use hairdryers to functionally dry the

hair and then we use our hands and tongs.”

America’s biggest

blow-dry chain, Blo, is

part-owned by Gwyneth

Paltrow and opened a

branch in Covent

Garden, London, earlier

this year. Its toused

“pillow talk” style for

L28 is among the most

popular. It even

describes it as “messy”

on their menu.

“We encourage our

clients to go for a more

worn-in look,” said

Louise Prett, of the

Myla

salons. “That

tidy ‘done’ isn’t cool

anymore. Even the

wedding hair that we do

than 5,000 responses

Don’t be too hard,

Kao said. “However, making a program

their own jokes any time soon.

ing to pick the “funnier

templates, shouldn’t be too hard,

Kao’s that identified “clusters

of objects displayed in the cartoon with

engineers at Microsoft, decided to try

to lighten his workload by building a

computer program that could sort the

wheat from the chaff.

It was a tough gig for a bundle of

microchips. One cartoon features a car

salesman trying to fog a vehicle with

lungs and hairy legs. Suggestions from

readers include: “Belated it just smells the

other car on you”; “The spare leg is in the

trunk”; “The spare leg is in the

trunk”, and “Comfortably eats six.”

Speaking at a conference in Australia

yesterday, the Microsoft scientists said

they had built a model similar to Ms

Kao’s that identified “clusters” of

humour in the submissions and in

the objects displayed in the cartoon with

help from human judges.

Gradually, it learnt to pick out incon-

gruous words and phrases and to com-

pare them for funniness. The model is

as yet some way off perfection, manag-

ing to pick the “funnier” of any given

pair of cartoons about two thirds of the

time. Nor will computers be making up

their own jokes any time soon.

“I would say that having a program

modify and improve existing puns, or

generate puns using simple, predefined

templates, shouldn’t be too hard,” Ms

Kao said “However, making a program

that creates pun sentences from

scratch... is still very challenging.”