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An Application of the General Theory of Verbal Humor to Two American Sitcoms

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Introduction

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), proposed by Attardo and Raskin (1991) and further developed by Attardo (1994, 1998, 2001) as an expansion of Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), has received a great deal of attention in the field of humor research. It has been applied, for example, to religious jokes (Hempelmann, 1998), Greek conversational data (Archakis & Tsakona, 2005) and jokes related to the vote-rigging scandal of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (Ancheta, 2005). The GTVH is a systematic and detailed means to analyzing humorous texts, and is particularly helpful in examining longer texts. However, some basic uncertainties remain as to how to put the methodology to use. In this paper, these difficulties will be discussed with reference to scenes from the NBC sitcoms "Frasier" and "Friends". Nonetheless, the usefulness of GVTH as a tool of analysis will be demonstrated.

The General Theory of Verbal Humor

The General Theory of Verbal Humor is intended as an extension and refinement of the Semantic Script Theory of Humor. In its essence the SSTH states:

> A text can be characterized as a single-joke text if the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts, and the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (Raskin, 1985, p.99).

This notion of script oppositeness will be explained below in more detail. The General Theory of Verbal Humor posits six Knowledge Resources (KR) that have to be "tapped into" (Attardo, 2001. p.22) in producing a joke. Analyzing a joke according to the GTVH consists of recording the information related to these six KRs. In essence, these KRs may be thought of as the "ingredients" of a joke (Hempelmann & Ruch, 2005, p.359). They are as follows:

1. Script Opposition (SO): Script oppositions can be classified as actual vs. non-actual, normal vs. abnormal, possible vs. impossible. All three classes are cases of a fundamental conflict between real and unreal situations in the text.

2. Logical Mechanism (LM): Logical mechanisms assume and encompass a "local" logic. Such mechanisms may include straightforward juxtaposition, false analogies, garden path phenomena, figure-ground reversals, and chiastic arrangements. This parameter may be empty in cases of nonsense and absurd humor.

3. Situation (SI): Situations are the context of the humorous text, and include related objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc.

4. Target (TA): The target is the "butt" of the joke. This parameter is empty for jokes that do not poke fun at someone or something. Ideological targets such as "marriage" are possible.

5. Narrative strategy (NS): The narrative strategy is the form of the narrative

organization, such as simple narrative, dialogue, etc.

6. Language (LA): The language parameter deals with all the information that is required for the expression of a humorous text.

Attardo (2001) asserts a hierarchy of KRs, so that the "higher" parameters, mentioned first in the list, determine the choices available to the parameters below them. In addition, Attardo identifies two types of humorous lines, "punch" lines, which occur at the end of a humorous text, and "jab" lines, which appear in non-final positions. Lines may be related, and Attardo refers to three or more lines that are associated with each other as "strands". Strands of strands are designated as "stacks". Lines in a concentrated area are a "comb" and two lines occurring at a distance are a "bridge".

Attardo (2001) further posits the idea of a "model" or "ideal" reader, stating, "This ideal reader is far from being a concrete individual or a group, it is rather the audience postulated by the text. Consider for example that roughly all the information that is explicitly stated is assumed to be unknown to the model reader, while all the information that is not explicitly stated is assumed to be available to the model reader or retrievable inferentially from what information is provided" (Attardo, 2001, p.31).

Potential limitations and ambiguities of the GVTH

Ritchie (2004) acknowledges that the SSTH/GTVH is "one of the few attempts to approach verbally expressed humor in a systematic and theoretical fashion" (Ritchie, 2004, p. 69). However, he notes several shortcomings, summarized below:

1. Regarding the notion of script opposition, Ritchie states that the term "script" is not clearly defined and could be replaced with "interpretation"; that it is uncertain which of the two opposing scripts should be understood as the dominant script; and most importantly that there is no theoretical

definition of the implications in scripts describing actual/non-actual, normal/abnormal, or possible/impossible scenarios.

2. The function of the logical mechanism is unclear. Moreover, while "juxtaposition" and "garden-path" are given as examples of logical mechanisms, the notion of script opposition implies that all humorous texts will possess these characteristics. Finally, it is ambiguous whether a humorous text requires a logical mechanism or conversely whether a non-humorous text may have one.

3. The GTVH suggests that the various knowledge resources work in tandem, contributing to some central mechanism, yet no explanation of the central mechanism is provided or how the KRs relate to it. It is further unclear how the hierarchy of KRs actually operates.

4. Non-humorous texts certainly have language, narrative structure, situations, and may even have targets. No comparison has been undertaken of texts that lack one KR with texts that have the KR to ascertain whether the KRs are necessary elements of humorous texts.

Wright (2000), on the other hand, asserts that the KR parameters appear to ensure that all verbal jokes will fall within their scope. Nonetheless, he notes that the argument may be made that the actual funniness is not evaluated. To this objection Wright posits that funniness is dependent upon the degree of oppositeness of the scripts in a given text.

However, Hempelmann (1998), who asked subjects to choose from "KR-based elements" to evaluate what was funny about various jokes, found that logical mechanism was the KR most frequently chosen as determining the jokes' funniness.

Weaknesses of Attardo's case studies

Methodologically, Attardo's (2001) own examples of application of the GTVH to humorous texts raise further questions. Attardo analyzes six texts: a scene from a 1970s TV sitcom, a poem by Anne Sexton published in 1981, a section of a 16th-century English picaresque novel, Umberto Eco's 1980 novel "The Name of the Rose", a 19th-century French short story, and the 19th-century Oscar Wilde short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime". Examination of the GTVH notation for the first two follows.

"Chuckles Bites the Dust"

Attardo's (2001) analysis of the opening of the "Chuckles Bites the Dust" episode of the Mary Tyler Moore show is difficult to investigate fully because the complete text is not available to the reader. Because of this, it is necessary to rely on Attardo's summaries. According to Attardo's analysis, the opening consists of a sequence of one punch line followed by eight jabs, a second punch line, and another eight jabs. There are also two lines embedded around the fifth jab in the second set of jabs. (It is not clear from Attardo's analysis why these lines were not counted as proper jabs.)

Figure 1 shows a summary of Attardo's categorization according to the six KRs. Because there are a total of 20 humorous lines, there are 20 notations of KR allocations. Of the total 20 script oppositions, Attardo labels only one (line 11) as "normal/abnormal" and only three (lines 13, 17, and 20) as "actual/non-actual". The other SOs are various, for example, "president/criminal"; "art/trash"; "high/low status"; "human/object". None of these SOs are the same.

While Attardo's basic explanation of logical mechanisms includes general techniques, such as "juxtaposition, false analogies, garden path phenomena, figure-ground reversals, and chiastic arrangements" as stated above, the LMs recorded for "Chuckles Bites the Dust" seem simply to explain how the humor works in the specific instance, such as "Sue Ann is superficial",

"Mary's sex life is not as rich (as Sue Ann's)", or "Ted is prone to errors". One is labeled "pun" and another "antecedent reference assignment error".

Seven of the slots for narrative statements are marked "irrelevant". Language is also pegged as "irrelevant" in 12 lines and as "visual" in line 4. While lines 15 and 20 that have LMs marked as "pun" and "antecedent reference assignment error" have similar LA notations, LA notations of "prag-

Fig. 1. Summary of Attardo's (2001) analysis of CBTD opening sequence

Line	SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
1	president/ criminal	situation-specific	hold-up	technology (?), Pres. Ford	joke	irr
2	ugly/beautiful; surprise/shame	situation-specific	cotextual	character, women in general	request adjacency pair	irr
3	young/old; smart/stupid	situation-specific	cotextual	character	statement	irr
4	art/trash	unresolved	cotextual	none	visual	visual
5	overreaction/ normal reaction	situation-specific	cotextual	mobile and owner (character)	question	irr
6	food/art	situation-specific	cotextual	mobile, character	second half of adjacency pair	irr
7	high/low status	situation-specific	cotextual	character	title	"fuss"/"famine" divergence
8	true/false; polite/impolite	situation-specific	cotextual	character	second half of adjacency pair	pragmatic pun
9	decoration/food	situation-specific	cotextual	character	irr	irr
10	sex/no sex; conventional vs. erotic sex	situation-specific	contextual	character	irr	irr
11	normal/abnormal	situation-specific	greeting	character	greeting	irr
12	human/object	situation-specific	cotextual	character	greeting	irr
13	actual/ non-actual	self-defeating statement; situation-specific	cotextual	character	irr	quotation
14	excrement/no excrement	situation-specific	circus	character	question	irr
15	figurative/literal	pun	parade	none	second half of adjacency pair	idiom
16	big/small; control/loss of control	situation-specific	parade	basketball player	irr	irr
17	actual/ non-actual	none (?)	irr	character	irr	under-statement
18	good/bad	situation-specific	cotextual	character	irr	idiom
19	likely/unlikely	coincidence	cotextual	character	irr	irr
20	actual/ non-actual; human/monkey	antecedent reference assignment error	cotextual	character	Q&A	ambiguous antecedent

matic pun" and "understatement" in lines 8 and 17 are teamed with LMs that say "mobile is ugly" in the first case, and "none (?)" in the second case. It is unclear why these salient language features in lines 8 and 17 have no correspondence with the LMs associated with the same lines, when the earlier two lines showed such a matching.

"Cinderella"

Next, Attardo (2001) analyzes Anne Sexton's poem "Cinderella" and finds 26 "lines" within the text. Figure 2 shows a summary of Attardo's analysis. Unlike "Chuckles Bite the Dust", in Attardo's analysis of "Cinderella" there are many recurring script oppositions. Ten of the script oppositions are "reality/myth", five are "novelty/familiarity", five are "narrative/metanarrative", four are "excrement/non-excrement", and the rest are "serious/glib", "domesticity/non-domesticity", "attractive/ unattractive", "reality/fairy tale" (one each). Seven of the SO slots are marked with two or more SOs. Specifically, "reality/myth" is teamed with "high/low stature" seven times and "excrement/non-excrement" is added to these multiple taggings twice.

Two of the "excrement/non-excrement" labelings appear problematic and one would likely be considered erroneous by many a reader. Use of the word "diaper" seems to receive an automatic pegging of "excrement/non-excrement", yet given the greater context of the story of Cinderella and the specific context within the poem, "diaper" seems associated as a script with domesticity, particularly child-rearing obligations:

(1) Or the nursemaid,
Some luscious sweet from Denmark
Who captures the oldest son's heart.
From diapers to Dior.

(2) Cinderella and the prince
Lived, they say, happily ever after,
Like two dolls in a museum case

Never bothered by diapers or dust,
Never arguing over the timing of an egg,

In (2), especially, the following line, "Never arguing over the timing of an egg" is pegged by Attardo as "domesticity/non-domesticity", which adds weight to the argument that "diapers" (and "dust") are similarly domestic-related items.

Attardo also marks the following line "excrement/non-excrement":

(3) Or a milkman who serves the wealthy,
Eggs, cream, butter, yogurt, milk,
The white truck like an ambulance
Who goes into real estate
And makes a pile.

It is unclear why the "excrement" script should be activated. As Attardo (2001, p.15) notes, Grice's (1989) maxim of relevance limits the potential meanings of lexical items or other information that follow, so it does not seem likely that "real estate" would trigger "excrement".

The logical mechanism designations are much more technical than in the analysis of "Cinderella", yet the meaning of these terms is not obvious. The LMs of eight lines are marked "parallelization": "That story" (occurring in three lines); "never bothered by dust or diapers"; "never arguing over the timing of an egg"; "never telling the same story twice"; and "never getting a middle-aged spread". Attardo's explanation (Attardo: 2001, p.136) suggests that recurring material is its own logical raison d'etre, yet repetition is a typical poetic device and given that the SOs for the lines other than "That story" are weak, the argument for humor is unconvincing. Attardo (2001, p.86) states that "...repetition for humorous purposes repeats units that are (or have been at some point in the text) involved in a jab line (or, less frequently, a punch line" and notes the necessity of employment of the same SO. However, taken as a group the "never..." lines all appear to be related as SOs of

Fig. 2. Summary of Attardo's (2001) analysis of Anne Sexton's "Cinderella"

Line	SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
1	reality/myth; high/low stature	none	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
2	reality/myth; high/low stature; excrement/non-excrement	pun	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
3	novelty/familiarity	parallelization	narration	fairytale	framing device	irr
4	reality/myth; high/low stature; excrement/non-excrement	pun	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
5	novelty/familiarity	parallelization	narration	fairytale	framing device	irr
6	reality/myth	none	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
7	excrement/non-excrement	none	sudden wealth	class	none	idiomatic
8	reality/myth; high/low stature	pun	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
9	reality/myth; high/low stature	pun	sudden wealth	class	none	irr
10	novelty/familiarity	parallelization	narration	fairytale	framing device	irr
11	reality/myth	analogy; anachronistic juxtaposition	cotextual	Cinderella	simile	irr
12	narrative/metanarrative	none	narration	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
13	narrative/metanarrative	none	narration	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
14	reality/myth; high/low stature	none	cotextual	marriage/class	none	alliterative/idiomatic
15	narrative/metanarrative	none	narration	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
16	reality/myth	analogy; anachronistic juxtaposition	cotextual	Cinderella	simile	evangelistic register
17	narrative/metanarrative	reasoning from false premises	none	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
18	narrative/metanarrative	none	narration	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
19	serious/glib	none	narration	fairytale	metanarrative commentary	irr
20	reality/myth; high/low stature	analogy; anachronistic juxtaposition	cotextual	Prince	simile	alliterative
21	excrement/non-excrement	parallelization	cotextual	marriage	framing device	alliterative
22	domesticity/non-domesticity	parallelization	cotextual	marriage	framing device	irr
23	novelty/familiarity	parallelization	cotextual	marriage	framing device	irr
24	attractive/unattractive	parallelization	cotextual	marriage	framing device	colloquial
25	reality/fairytale	anachronistic juxtaposition	cotextual	marriage	none	idiomatic
26	novelty/familiarity	parallelization	cotextual	fairytale	framing device	irr

"reality/fairy tale" rather than "excrement/non-excrement"; domesticity/non-domesticity"; novelty/familiarity" and "attractive/unattractive" as designated by Attardo, which might add weight to Attardo's parallelization label. However, Attardo has assigned them these diverging SOs.

Additionally, four LMs are marked "pun": "From toilets to riches"; "From diapers to Dior"; "From homogenized to Martinis at lunch"; and "From mops to Bonwit Teller". Strangely, the language slot for all these "lines" has been marked "irrelevant", yet it is only possible to envision these lines as (weak) puns with reference to their assonance and/or alliteration, and in the line "from toilets to riches" the substitution of "rags" from the phrase "rags to riches" for "toilets". Because the SOs of these "lines" are all marked as "reality/myth"; "high/low stature" they have equal if not stronger grounds for designation as "parallelization". The remaining five LMs, four of which are "analogy/anachronistic juxtaposition" and one "reasoning from false premises" are clearer. Eight of the logical mechanism slots are marked "none".

Language is considered "irrelevant" in 18 lines. It is "idiomatic" in two lines, "alliterative/idiomatic" in one, "evangelistic register" in one, "alliterative" in two, and "colloquial" in one. "None" is indicated for narrative structure in nine lines. It is unclear how there can be no narrative structure.

Application of GVTH to two American sitcoms

Attempting to apply the GVTH to scenes from two American sitcoms reveals the difficulty of making appropriate KR assignments. At the same time, the analysis reveals interesting differences between the two scenes.

"Frasier"

"Frasier" is a sitcom about a psychiatrist of the same name who hosts a call-in radio show. The program aired on NBC from 1993 to 2004. It was the first series to achieve a five consecutive Emmy wins for Outstanding Comedy Series. In total, "Frasier" earned a total of 37 Emmys, more than any other series in history. The text to be analyzed is scene three of the

"Call Me Irresponsible" episode, which aired October 28, 1993, in which Frasier consoles a woman who has lost her boyfriend as the result of Frasier's advice to him. The jab and punch lines have been numbered and an analysis according to the GVTH is presented after the text.

"Call Me Irresponsible", scene three:

At the radio studio. Frasier is finishing his show.

Frasier: [*on air*] Well, that's just about it for today. This is Dr. Frasier Crane, saying go on out there and make it a great evening, Seattle.

He goes off the air. Roz enters with one of his studio portraits and a pen.

Roz: Hey, before you go, there's a fan in the hall who'd like your autograph.
Frasier: Oh, God. Save me from my adoring fans.

He signs the photo then looks out of the window to see a beautiful woman (Catherine) waving at him.

Frasier: Ooh... ooh, but not from the adorable ones. (1)

He exits into the corridor.

Frasier: Hello. Ah, my producer told me you wanted an autograph. Ah, how should I make this out?
Catherine: You disgust me! You parasitic fraud! (2)
Frasier: Well, that's certainly different from the usual "Best regards." (3)

Frasier moves to escape.

Catherine: Wait a minute, don't walk away from me. For once you're going to face the consequences of what happens after you hang up on your callers.
Frasier: What consequences? What are you talking about?
Catherine: I'm Marco's girlfriend. Excuse me — ex-girlfriend, thanks to you.
Frasier: Marco? You mean the Marco who-didn't-want-to-commit Marco?

He goes into the booth and she follows him.

Catherine: Ah, you damn radio shrinks! You couldn't just tell him to stick with it. That kind of advice doesn't get big ratings. No, break up with her, get on with your life and ruin hers. Now that's entertainment.

Frasier: Now just hold on one minute. Did you actually listen to the show?

Catherine: ...No. But Marco told me what you said.

Frasier: Oh he did, did he? Did he also mention that he said that he was only staying with you to keep his options open? Because that's what he told me. To be exact, he said he was only staying with you until somebody better came along.

Catherine: He said that?

Frasier: He said that to most of Seattle. Apparently you're the only one who missed it.

Catherine: So, it wasn't that he didn't want to commit. He just didn't want to commit to me.

Catherine starts to cry.

Frasier: Well I'm... I'm terribly sorry I had to tell you. But, um, at least now you know the truth. Oh, no-no-no, don't cry. You're in a place of business here.

He places a folder over the mike to protect it from her tears. (4)

Catherine: Ooh, boy, I can really pick 'em, can't I?

Frasier: Oh no, don't go there. Look, this is not your fault. You are a terrifically attractive young woman - I mean, maybe a bit overemotional...

Catherine: [*buries her head in Frasier's shoulder*] OOHH!

Frasier: [*hugging her*] Oh, yes. There, there. Shh... listen, can I... can I get you something?

Catherine: No.

Frasier: A drink of water?

Catherine: No.

Frasier: [*lost, looks around and sees the candy machine*] M&M's?

Catherine: [*they break apart*] Plain or peanut?

Frasier: Whichever you like.

Catherine: Peanut.

He goes to the vending machine in the corridor. She follows.

Catherine: I should have seen this coming. I mean, the guy practically had a coronary

when I brought a toothbrush over to keep at his apartment.

Frasier: [*handing over packet*] Here.

Catherine: Thank you. You want one?

Frasier: Ah, no thanks. Ah, why don't you have a seat here. [*indicates chair*]

Catherine: Thank you. [*sits crossed-legged*]

Frasier: But listen, if... if he was that resistant, why did you stay with him?

Catherine: I had a lot invested in him.

Frasier: Yes, but that's no reason to settle for someone who isn't madly in love with you.

Catherine: Well, right now I'm not sure there are any men out there who are actually capable of falling madly in love.

Frasier: Of course there are. You know, at the most basic level men and women are the same. We both need to be loved, and to love someone, we both want to feel that we matter to someone and that someone matters to us. And making a commitment to another human being is the ultimate expression of our humanity.

Catherine: Wow. Your wife is really lucky.

Frasier: I'm sure she'd say the same thing, especially now that our marriage is over... well, maybe I will have one of those M&M's. (5)
[*takes packet, helps himself*]

The text appears to have four jab lines and one punch line. In the first line, marked (1) in the text above and the categorization below, Frasier is reluctant to meet a fan until he sees that she is an attractive woman. The humor is based on Frasier's sudden change of heart from unhelpful to helpful, possibly related weakly to a sex/no sex opposition. It is additionally emphasized by the similarity of words "adoring" and "adorable". If there is any target to the humor it appears to be Frasier himself.

(1) SO normal/abnormal; unhelpful/helpful
LM unexpected incentive for meeting a fan / play on words
SI request from producer
TA Frasier?
NS statement
LA adoring/adorable

The next line, (2), is related to the expected type of response to Frasier's query regarding to whom he should write the autograph. Frasier and the audience have been led to believe that the woman is a fan; therefore it is anticipated that normal language related to autograph signing will follow. Instead, her response is to verbally abuse Frasier in strong words.

(2) SO normal/abnormal; adoring/detesting
LM autograph signing
SI meeting with fan
TA Frasier
NS question response
LA disgust, parasitic, fraud

Line (3) follows closely on (2) as a swift comeback made humorous with understatement. It is unclear if Frasier is the target but it seems possible given the self-deprecating tone of the words.

(3) SO normal/abnormal; impolite/polite
LM understatement
SI meeting with fan
TA Frasier?
NS statement
LA Best regards

The next jab is a visual joke (4), as Frasier attempts to console the woman while at the same time trying to protect the microphone by covering it with a folder. Frasier appears to be trapped in a situation in which he feels compelled to be sympathetic but in which he is revealed to preoccupied with other concerns.

(4) SO actual/non-actual; sympathetic/businesslike
LM Frasier's fastidiousness
SI consoling crying woman
TA Frasier?
NS visual
LA visual

The last line, which is the punch line, is the second actual/non-actual script opposition in the text, as well as the only one which has an institutional target. Frasier waxes eloquent on the importance of love, only to reveal that his own marriage has failed.

(5) SO actual/non-actual; sentimental/unsentimental
LM Frasier's divorce
SI expounding philosophically
TA marriage
NS statement
LA irrelevant

Figure 3 shows a summary of the categorization for the scene from "Frasier".

Fig. 3. Summary of analysis of "Frasier"

	SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
1	normal/abnormal	situation-specific	request	Frasier?	statement	adorable/adoring
2	normal/abnormal	play on words	meeting with fan	Frasier	question response	disgust, parasitic, fraud
3	normal/abnormal	understatement	meeting with fan	Frasier?	statement	Best regards
4	actual/non-actual	situation-specific	consoling	Frasier?	visual	visual
5	actual/non-actual	situation-specific	expounding	marriage	statement	irr

"Friends"

The situation comedy "Friends" was broadcast on NBC from 1994 to 2004. The program is about the lives of three men and three women in New York

City and it garnered five Emmy nominations for Outstanding Comedy Series, winning it once. The text to be analyzed is scene six of the "Fake Monica" episode that was broadcast on April 27, 1995. In the scene, the rather uptight character Monica has become friends with a woman who has stolen her identity. This general plotline may be considered a meta-script opposition of enemy/friend. In the scene this script opposition as well as others are developed.

"The Fake Monica", scene six:

At Monica and Rachel's apartment. Monica, Rachel and the fake Monica are there.

Rachel: No way. No way did you do this.
Fake Monica: Monana was very brave.
Monica: It was so wild. We told them we were the Gunnersens in room six fifteen. Only to find out the Boston Celtics had taken over the entire sixth floor!
Fake Monica: So once they caught on to the fact that we're, y'know, short and have breasts...
Monica: ...They threw us out! I was thrown out of a hotel! Me! (1)
Rachel: Go Monana! Well, you ladies are not the only ones living the dream. I get to go pour coffee for people I don't know. Don't wait up. [*Exits*] (2)
Fake Monica: Oh, by the way, tomorrow we're auditioning for a Broadway show.
Monica: 'Scuse me?
Fake Monica: There's an open call for "Cats". I'm thinking we go down there, sing "Memories" and make complete fools of ourselves. Whaddya say?
Monica: Nonononononono. Think who you're dealing with here. I mean, I'm not like you. I-I can't even stand in front of a tap class.
Fake Monica: Well, that's just probably 'cause of your Amish background. (3)
Monica: What?
Fake Monica: Well, you're Pennsylvania Dutch, right?
Monica: Right. Till I bought a blow dryer, then I was shunned. (4)
Fake Monica: I-I used to be just like you. And then one day I saw a movie that changed my life. Did you ever see "Dead Poets' Society"?
Monica: Uh-huh.
Fake Monica: I thought that movie was so incredibly... boring. I mean, that thing at the end where the kid kills himself because he can't be in the play? What was

that?! It's like, kid, wait a year, leave home, do some community theater. I walked out of there and I thought, 'Now, that's two hours of my life that I'm never getting back'. And that thought scared me more than all the other crap I was afraid to do. (5)

Monica: Wow. Then I would definitely not recommend "Mrs. Doubtfire". (6)

The text appears to have five jab lines and one punch line. The first line is related to the notion that it is "normal" to feel ashamed at being thrown out of a hotel. Monica, on the other hand, feels pride that she has been so bold and reckless. The language is relevant because the exclamation emphasizes her evident delight.

(1) SO normal/abnormal; pride/shame
LM Monica's desire to be exciting
SI retelling past events
TA Monica
NS exclamation
LA exclamation

The next line, (2), is dry humor as Rachel implies that Monica's achievement of being thrown out of a hotel is hardly the amazing accomplishment that Monica apparently feels that it is. The humor is realized through the use of the language items "ladies"; "living the dream"; "get to"; "Don't wait up", through which Rachel suggests ironically that she has as exciting a life serving coffee as a waitress as Monica has getting thrown out of a hotel.

(2) SO actual/non-actual; exciting life/boring reality
LM Monica and Rachel's life is boring
SI Rachel going to work
TA Rachel, Monica and Fake Monica
NS parting
LA "ladies"; "living the dream" (idiom); "get to"; "Don't wait up"

In (3), the Fake Monica refers back to an earlier falsehood that Monica has told her, namely that she is Amish. The recurring theme as well as the fact that the Fake Monica continues to be misled into interpreting Monica's behavior based on faulty knowledge is the basis of the humor.

(3) SO actual/non-actual; Amish/non-Amish
LM the Fake Monica believes Monica is Amish
SI cheering up Monica
TA Fake Monica?
NS statement
LA irr

Line (4) continues the humor of line (3) as Monica hastily embellishes her fictitious story of her Amish background. The story addition is premised on the idea that the Amish would "shun" her for use of a hairdryer.

(4) SO actual/non-actual; Amish/non-Amish
LM the Amish do not use hair dryers
SI covering up an earlier lie
TA Amish
NS statement
LA "shunned"

In line (5), the Fake Monica begins to speak of a movie that changed her life. The audience and Monica expect that the assessment of the movie will be positive, particularly because "The Dead Poet's Society" is known as a movie with a message about seizing the day. However the Fake Monica explains that it was so boring that it served to spur her to stop watching tedious movies and be active. The Fake Monica's pause as she searches for the best word to describe her reaction to the movie heightens the humor.

(5) SO actual/non-actual; moving/boring
LM garden path
SI explaining turning point in life
TA "Dead Poet's Society"
NS statement
LA pause

It is unclear what the script opposition of line (6) is. Monica suggests that "Mrs. Doubtfire", another movie starring Robin Williams, will be even more boring than "The Dead Poet's Society". It is possible that the source of humor is the notion of the role of movies in the lives of the spectators.

(6) SO actual/non-actual?
LM "Mrs. Doubtfire" is boring
SI follow-up comment
TA "Mrs. Doubtfire"
NS statement
LA irr

Figure 4 shows a summary of the breakdown for the scene from "Friends".

Fig. 4. Summary of analysis of "Friends"

	SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
1	normal/abnormal	situation-specific	retelling	Monica	exclamation	exclamation
2	actual/non-actual	situation-specific	going to work	3 characters	parting	"ladies"; "living the dream" (idiom), "get to"; "Don't wait up"
3	actual/non-actual	situation-specific	cheering up	Fake Monica?	statement	irr
4	actual/non-actual	situation-specific	covering up	Amish	statement	"shunned"
5	actual/non-actual	garden path	explaining turning point	"Dead Poet's Society"	statement	pause
6	actual/non-actual?	situation-specific	follow-up comment	"Mrs. Doubtfire"	statement	irr

Conclusion

Longer humorous texts are different from pithy jokes. In particular, the logical mechanism appears to often be weaker or more situation-specific. In Attardo's (2001) analysis of the scene from the sitcom "The Mary Tyler Moore Show", out of 20 "lines" only two were labeled as "pun" or "antecedent reference error". The rest were situation-specific. Although Attardo's analysis of the Anne Sexton poem "Cinderella" recorded more technical logical mechanisms, some of these, for example those marked as "pun", were not puns in the true sense of the word but rather very slight twists of phrases or alliterative embellishments. Similarly in this researcher's analysis of two short scenes from the sitcoms "Frasier" and "Friends", only two out of five "lines" for "Frasier" and one out of six "lines" for "Friends" appeared to use a technical logical mechanism.

When logical mechanisms rely on language-specific techniques such as puns, it seems clear that the language must also be a salient feature. Nonetheless, more analysis of this relationship is required. In Attardo's (2001) analysis of the "Mary Tyler Moore" sitcom, the correlation is opaque. When language is a salient feature of sitcom humor, it is often driven by the use of unusual employments, such as evangelistic register, use of extremely topic-specific words such as "shunned", or by a mismatch of words and other words or words and the perceived situation, such as "fuss" and "famine" or "parasitic" and "Best Regards".

Attardo (2001) puts forth the notion of the "ideal reader" of a humorous text. However, in practice researchers are not ideal readers. Thus Attardo's excrement/non-excrement coding of three lines from the Anne Sexton poem appears unsuitable to this researcher. Hempelman and Ruch (2005) acknowledge the problem of interrater reliability even among experts trained together. Certainly, the categorization process is by no means obvious in many cases.

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the General Theory of Verbal Humor is extremely useful in comparing different humorous texts or different parts

of the same text. While the sections of "Frasier" and "Friends" that were analyzed were too short to merit any definitive conclusions, the findings suggest preliminarily that "Frasier" script oppositions may be more likely related to normal/abnormal oppositions while "Friends" is more concerned with "actual/non-actual" oppositions. Moreover, the targets of the lines in "Friends" is more explicit than in "Frasier" although generally neither are as overt as the targets in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show". In this way, classification according to the GTVH renders interesting and valuable comparisons and it is hoped that it will be applied further and at greater length to sitcom humor.

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