Funny as it may be: Humour in the American Sitcoms *I Love Lucy* and *Modern Family*

Juokai juokais: humoras amerikiečių situacijų komedijose *I Love Lucy* ir *Modern Family*

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The present study explores the manifestation of humour in two American TV situational comedy (sit-com) series: *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *Modern Family* (2009 to present). These sitcoms are known as landmarks, each characterising a certain time period in American cultural history: the most initial period (*I Love Lucy*) and the recent one (*Modern Family*). Hence, the initial assumption is that the two series pursue different types of humour. Grounded in Raskin's (1985) script-based semantic theory of humour (SSTH), the analysis stems from the basic notion of the *script*, that is, a set of semantic meanings first constructed in a given excerpt of a text and then violated in a certain way, thereby producing a humorous effect. The outcome of the violation becomes manifest through the overlap of two partly or fully incompatible scripts. The present study hypothesises that, while following the general principle of script violation and overlap, the two sitcoms will tend to focus on the construction and realisation of different scripts. The latter factor has significant implications in light of the notion of the worldview, which is consequently expected to be at least partly different in the given time periods. The study therefore contributes to the larger objective of building a tentative formula of humour for the relevant periods.

KEYWORDS: humour, situational comedy, script, SSTH, bona-fide communication, conversational maxims, discourse.

Introduction

The present study explores manifestation of humour in two American TV situational comedy series (sitcoms): *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *Modern Family* (2009 to present). With each sitcom characterising respectively the very initial and a recent manifestation of American humour on television, we proceed from the assumption that the two series pursue different types of humour.

Grounded in Raskin's (1985) script-based semantic theory of humour (SSTH), the analysis stems from the concept of script as the key element. The script is understood as a set of semantic meanings first constructed in a given excerpt of a text and then violated in a certain way, thereby producing a humorous effect. Since the sitcoms under analysis come from two

different time periods, the present study hypothesises that the series will tend to focus on distinct humorous contexts, the identification of humour patterns and tendencies constituting the main objective of the study. We aim to investigate whether, while maintaining the same formal – script-based – structure, the sitcoms will actualise distinct contextual realities.

While offering primarily a linguistic perspective, the study also has social implications: verbal humour here is examined as defined by tendencies of the mass media, viz. television and sitcoms. In addition, an examination of humour mechanisms in two American TV programmes, which both once enjoyed immense popularity, has an ambition to capture humour tendencies and move from a more formal approach to less theory-constrained domains reflecting the world-views, or rather, change (if any) in the wordview of American viewers.

Theoretical Overview

The concept of humour is constructed here on the basis of several key theoretical premises. The first one concerns the understanding of the term *humour per se*. Following Monro (1988), humour is distinguished from other related terms, namely *wit* (which, generalising, can be defined as a humorous manner to expose one's intelligence), *satire* (i.e., derisive humour as a means to criticise someone or something), and *farce* (i.e., an exaggerated, crude, form of humour centring on ludicrous situations). According to Monro, humour is more subtle and less harsh than the other three forms mentioned, though also less intellectual than, for instance, wit. Raskin (1985) and Palmer (2004) also mention different notions encountered in the vicinity of humour. According to Raskin (1985), the abundance of different terms is confusing and, despite numerous attempts by different authors to produce their own systems of relationship (i.e., taxonomies), there seems to be no unanimous consensus on what is what (*one man's humo[u]r may be another man's laughter* (Raskin, 1985, p. 8)). Likewise, Palmer (2004) refers to the long list of names used to describe funniness; among them, *laughter*, *joke*, *wit*, *comedy*, *parody*, *satire*, *farce*, etc. (p. 6). Both authors concede that the majority of the humour-related terms, with their meanings overlapping to a certain extent, can be roughly regarded as synonyms and be viewed as types of humour (Palmer, 2004). To avoid nomenclature intricacies, Raskin (1985) adopts the term *humour* as the cover term and uses it interchangeably with *funny*. He views the role of a joke as giving humour a certain identifiable form. Raskin (1985) perceives humour as partially natural and partially acquired competence, equally important among other fundamental human traits, such as faith, language or logic. The way how individuals see humour may depend on specific social situations, diverse cultural backgrounds, etc. However, this does not contradict the idea that humour is an *exclusively* human characteristic. All people – no matter what their gender or their social, religious, ethnic, etc. status is – share the ability to see funny things and laugh at them. The fact that same things are often identified as funny by an overwhelming majority of people reinforces the *universality* of humour (ibid.). In addition to being a unique and universal human trait, humour prevails in daily life situations. This is the primary answer which Palmer (2004) gives to the question *Why should humour be taken seriously?* (p. 1). Only then does the authenticity principle come into play, i.e., an idea that humans are the only ones who possess the ability to make jokes (i.e., produce humour), enjoy them, and laugh at them. To sum up, while lacking exact definition, humour refers to a purely human competence, is multifaceted, and can be approached through a variety of ways. A more fine-grained approach to humour is presented below.

Traditional Theories

The commonly acknowledged classification of humour is comprised by three major theories: superiority, incongruity, and release theories. The main distinction between them lies in the reasons why certain situations are thought to be laughable (Monro, 1988), thereby justifying the existence of *the humorous* in humans' lives.

The superiority theory (also known as the theory of disparagement/criticism/hostility (Krikmann, 2006), or social-behavioural theory (Raskin, 1985)) states that humour, including laughter as its component, is essentially negative and aggressive, i.e., "derisive" (Monro, 1988, p. 350), for one uses it to reveal unfavourable attitudes towards the target of the humorous text. Hence, the Superiority theory is based on ridicule (Bardon, 2005). Ridicule, as Bardon (ibid.) explains, is the false and ignorant belief that one possesses more wisdom than others. Generally, such humour selects its targets on social or political grounds, primarily ethnic and gender issues (Krikmann, 2006). On the other hand, Monro (1988) suggests that people often laugh at those who have a certain minimal defect or suffer insignificant misfortunes. Though the examples he provides seem to be somewhat trivial (e.g., traditional comic characters of misers or drunkards, pupils' incorrect grammar or erroneous pronunciation, etc.), Monro points out that followers of the theory consider superiority to be the base of even the most delicate humour. Raskin (1985) further complements this theory with the notion of humour appreciation. He cites Zillmann and Cantor (1976) who view humour appreciation as being in inverse proportion to the hearer's favourable attitude towards the target (the entity being disparaged). Hence humour will only be successful when the ones criticised are enemies of those receiving humour, and vice versa (Raskin, 1985).

The second of the theories is known as the incongruity theory. Raskin (1985) puts incongruity (or inconsistency/ contradiction/ bisociation (Krikmann, 2006, p. 27) theories under the unifying name of cognitive-perceptual theory. The approach was established in the 18th century as the response to the Superiority Theory (Raskin, 1985; Monro, 1988). Incongruity is manifested through the collision of two distinct lines of thought, or planes of content (in more recent discourse referred to as *frames, schemas, scripts*, etc.). Though they are mutually irreconcilable, the planes must still share some common part which would enable the transition from one frame (line, schema, etc.) to another. Therefore, the hearer (reader), who has already accommodated themselves with the first script, unexpectedly arrives at the second script – such that contradicts the previous one. This is when certain cognitive processes take on their role, allowing the hearer to unravel the apparent contradiction and find a plausible hidden interpretation. The sense of surprise and satisfaction generated by the re-consideration (renewal, modification, etc.) of the initial understanding thus result in humorous effect and laughter (Krikmann, 2006). Therefore, it seems reasonable to claim that the incongruity theory relies on the discovery of what is inappropriate (that is, irregular, abnormal, or unexpected) positioned within the boundaries of what is appropriate (that is, regular, normal, expected).

The final is the release theory, also referred to as the relief/relaxation theory (Krikmann, 2006). According to Freud (1905 [1974]), regarded as the most outstanding promoter of this theory, the release of suppressed emotions, alongside the pleasure that follows it, is the typical characteristic of all humour (as cited in Raskin, 1985). As the term *psychoanalytical* suggests, mental reactions produced by humour and taking place in the recipient are at the centre of attention. Humour here is seen as the liberator releasing humans from taboo territories and social constraints they are expected to follow. Freud (1905 [1974]) refers to such restraints *the censor* (as cited in Monro, 1988); Monro (ibid.) defines them as *internal inhibitions* (p. 354). Thus, humour acts like a mechanism of substitution: its function is to allow the release of suppressed, and often aggressive, stimuli which are then given a more acceptable form of laughter (Krikmann, 2006). The two substantial areas of impulses being repressed by humans, as Freud suggests, are sexual or malicious in nature (as cited in Monro, 1988).

Raskin's Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH)

The theory of incongruity has served as the basis in the formation of linguistic humour theories. Nevertheless, Raskin himself claims that his script-based semantic theory of humour is "neutral with respect to all of those [traditional] theories and is, in fact, easily compatible with most, if not all of them" (1985, p. 40). Still, as one of the linguistic theories, it seems to contribute most substantially to the Incongruity Theory (Krikmann, 2006).

Raskin's semantic theory of humour aims to reveal particular linguistic properties which make texts funny. Therefore, for a text to be funny, it must satisfy certain linguistic conditions which are "necessary and sufficient" (Raskin, 1985, p. 47), alluding here to Noam Chomsky and his transformational grammar. According to Chomsky (1965), any competent language speaker is capable of determining whether a given sequence of words (e.g., a sentence) is grammatically correct. Likewise, the same speaker should be competent enough to recognise the funniness of a text. Attardo (1994) admits that such an extension of the notion of competence is legitimate and humour, consequently, is a valid object for the linguistic study. As an ideal grammar of some language provides its users with a thorough structural description leading to the understanding of a sentence (Chomsky, 1965), the linguistic theory of humour also uses perfectly mechanical, formal, procedures when determining whether or not the text under consideration is funny (Raskin, 1985). It is equally important to note that the SSTH is designed to model the native speaker's humour competence and also represents the idealised community where speakers and hearers share identical senses of humour. Finally, the theory is best manifested in single-joke-carrying texts (i.e., the jokes which include only one punchline, or only one script opposition) (ibid.).

The central notion within Raskin's (1985) theory of humour is the *script*, defined as the extended chunk of semantic information that surrounds a word or is evoked by it. Within a joke, customarily two scripts are developed and the interaction between the scripts involved results in ambiguity. Language users have incorporated within themselves a significant amount of such scripts, each representing the basic knowledge of certain situations (routines, procedures, etc.); e.g., the knowledge of what people do in those situations, how, and when they do it. Further, scripts might be of *common sense*, *individual* scripts, and *restricted* scripts (Raskin, ibid.). Scripts of the first category are widely shared by all the members in a society. Meanwhile individual and restricted scripts result from subjective experience and are familiar only to a limited group of individuals (i.e., they are not common for the entire speech community).

Table 1 below shows how the script governs the main hypothesis of the SSTH.

Table 1
The main hypothesis
(Raskin, 1985, p. 99)

A text can be characterised as a single-joke-carrying text if:	
The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts;	The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special way and overlap, fully on in part, on this text.

The two conditions are necessary and sufficient for a text to be funny: when both of the conditions are satisfied, the text is said to be a single-joke-carrying text (Raskin, 1985). Although any ambiguous text is compatible with two scripts, it is clear that not all ambiguous texts are funny (consider, for instance, Chomsky's famous sentence *Flying planes can be dangerous* (Raskin, 1985, p. 64)). Thus, the condition of script overlap is not enough, and that is why the two overlapping scripts must be opposite in a specific sense. Raskin (ibid.) exhaustively explores the intricate nature of the script overlap and script oppositeness. For the present analysis, it will suffice to highlight the most relevant aspects of script behaviour.

On many occasions throughout his book, Raskin refers to one and the same joke:

(1)   *"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."* (Raskin, 1985, p. 100)

Despite the fact that joke is obscene, adultery being its main theme, its plain nature serves well to illustrate the collision of two scripts. First, the standard (neutral) situation unfolds and evokes a standard (neutral) script – that of DOCTOR (or PATIENT, or both DOCTOR-PATIENT, with the relevant meanings thus referring to medicine-related realities). The script manifests itself mainly through the words *doctor*, *patient*, and *bronchial*. The male subject (the pronoun *he* gives sufficient grounds for assuming that the subject is a man) who seeks medical treatment asks for the doctor, which is an absolutely adequate question for a patient to ask. The response the subject receives, though negative, is also appropriate. Then, the information given about the doctor's wife – the emphasis on her being young and beautiful – may at first seem rather irrelevant or not worth paying attention to, and, on the whole, does not contradict the initial situation (i.e., the patient coming to see the doctor).

However, the situation starts to seem odd the moment when the woman, after having declared the doctor's absence, invites the patient to come in (the phrases like *The doctor will arrive soon*, or *Just wait here if you prefer* would normally be expected in such a situation). Yet her whisper raises questions, too. As a consequence, the hearer must reconsider their primary impressions, since the initial script DOCTOR has lost its validity. At this point, the hearer starts looking for another interpretation and finally arrives at the script LOVER: the man, who is not a real patient but rather a lover of the doctor's wife, has arranged to meet the woman when her husband is not at home. The situation depicted no longer seems odd and is perceived as a joke since "… all the previously odd pieces fall neatly into place" (Raskin, 1985, p. 105). Hence, the woman's whisper, her invitation, and the remarks on her good looks are actually working for the script LOVER, incongruous with the first script DOCTOR. The joke presented is said to be somewhere between a full script overlap and a genuinely partial script overlap.

The existence of script overlap is not enough for a text to be funny. The overlapping scripts must also be opposite (i.e., negate one another) in a specific sense. As partial overlaps prevail over full overlaps, the same can be said about absolute oppositions (i.e., oppositions in which one script clearly negates the other). Generally, oppositions are treated as local antonyms, or two linguistic entities whose opposite meanings result in a specific instance of discourse and, therefore, serve only for that discourse (Raskin, 1985). Thus, two entities which normally would not evoke any impression of opposition are deliberately opposed to produce the hearer's humorous reaction. For example, in *[S]talemate. The wife you are tired of* (Raskin, 1985, p. 46), the entity *woman* is opposed to the entity *stalemate* – such an opposition is designed specifically for the joke.

As the examples above show, every joke is composed of two situations (i.e., scripts): the *real* and the *unreal*. The former (the one which actually takes place) is incompatible with the latter (the one which actually does not take place). Raskin (1985) provides three generalised dichotomies dealing with the opposition between *real* and *unreal*, which are as follows:

_ **Actual situation vs non-actual (non-existing) situation:** a joke is set in the actual situation (i.e., the situation in which protagonists of the joke find themselves), the non-actual situation then contradicts the actual one. To this type of opposition, Raskin applies the "diagnostic construction" "It is the case that … , and is not the case that … ", where two contradictory propositions should enter the empty slots (ibid., p. 111).

_ **Normal (expected) state of affairs vs abnormal (unexpected) state of affairs:** such an opposition takes place when something that is generally accepted and considered to be ethically, morally, politically, etc. fair is negated.

_ **Possible situation vs implausible (or less possible) situation:** the impossible, or rather implausible, state of affairs replaces the possible situation at some point within a joke (Raskin, 1985, p. 111).

Each of the categories can be further divided into smaller sub-categories, the number of which is fairly limited. Normally, such subdivision contains categories essential to human life and perception. For instance, some jokes are of judgemental dichotomy (*good* vs *bad*); others involve the division *death* vs *life*, *not-obscene* vs *obscene* (analogically, *not-sex-related* vs *sex-related*), *money* vs *no-money*, etc. (Raskin, 1985). All jokes must have an element responsible for making the unreal seem less unreal. This is achieved by using particular expressions, which provokes the transition from the initial to the second situation (i.e., from one script to another, from the real to the unreal). Lastly, the boundaries between the proposed types of the opposition are not tight and may be fuzzy with the relevant joke relatable to several oppositions (ibid.).

The full semantic analysis the joke *DOCTOR/PATIENT vs LOVER* may thus be delivered in the following way:

(2) **Analysis of/ Text:** *"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."*

     Resulting effect: Humorous/ Joke

     Script 1: DOCTOR/ PATIENT

     Script 2: LOVER

     Type of oppositeness: Actual vs Non-actual, Non-sex-related vs Sex-related. (Raskin, 1985, p. 127)

Discourse Considerations

Raskin's humour theory may further be complemented with several notions pertinent to the field of discourse analysis (DA). Raskin (1985) often emphasises that his theory revolves around verbal jokes (see, for instance, Raskin, 1985, p. 45), which naturally implies that the theory tackles humour within the larger notion of discourse, i.e., a medium of production of actual words (a text) thereby constituting a type of communicative effort. Potter and Wetherell (2005) refer to discourse as being action-oriented (i.e., functional) in nature. This means that, in order to perform certain actions, the speaker will engage in a particular object-construction activity, in other words, will choose a certain way to perform the action. Consequently, people interact through discourse. Developing this idea still further, Johnstone (2008) explains that there are social situations when discourse participants have relatively fixed social roles and thus are expected to use discourse in a way that is, to a greater or lesser degree, pre-arranged (e.g., communication between a server and their client). Interestingly, at this point Johnstone (2008), too, mentions the term *script*. In DA, however, the notion refers to a particular social situation which requires specific discursive behaviour from its participants. This leads to Grice's (1975) well-known conversational maxims (maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner), constituting the essence of the cooperative principle (CP), which, in turn, defines the essence of bona-fide (BF) communication.

In this light, humorous communication, or joke-telling mode, may be perceived as non-bona-fide (NBF) communication, the other two types of NBF comprising lying and play-acting (Raskin, 1985; 1992). In DA, joke telling represents a special type of cooperative effort – the non-bona-fide mode of communication – which involves intentional violation of the four Grice's maxims applied to the bona-fide mode. Therefore, while humorous communication

should be based on its own CP, with the maxims of the BF mode specifically assigned to the joke telling techniques, all jokes without exception belong to the NBF type of communication (Attardo, 1994) and operate under their own maxims which make ambiguity possible. Should these maxims not be controlled by the speaker, humour fails (Raskin, 1985).

Methodology

Joke instances used for the present study were collected from two American situational comedy series (sitcoms): *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *Modern Family* (2009 to present). Each sitcom is a landmark of the relevant period of television humour in American cultural history. *I Love Lucy* (*ILL*), first aired in 1950, is arguably the most famous representative of its early stage. Meanwhile, reflecting modern tendencies in American TV humour, *Modern Family* (*MF*) has frequently been commended for its mockumentary nature.

The total number of jokes collected is 305: 140 instances from *ILL* and 165, from *MF*. The referential boundary is 20 episodes taken from the first seasons of each programme (an episode in both lasts for approximately 25 minutes). This approach is motivated by purely methodological considerations: due to the fact that the first seasons in *ILL* and *MF* differ quite significantly in the number of episodes – 35 in *ILL* and 24 in *MF* – a boundary had to be set to ensure that the same number of episodes from each series would be analysed.

All jokes were first subcategorised on the basis of their core topics, some of which were common for both sitcoms. The names given to those categories usually reflect a certain confrontation manifest in the joke, follow the pattern *X vs Z*, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

The initial stage of joke compilation consisted in identifying all instances of verbal humour, out of which certain jokes were later excluded. The latter comprise non-verbal humour (such as facial expressions, gesticulation, etc., which act as a humorous stimulus), as well as cases of verbal humour based entirely on culturally-bound phenomena (e.g., in the second episode of *ILL*, a character refers humorously to *The Andrew Sisters*: for the hearer to perceive this text as humorous, they must be aware of the formerly popular American female singing trio), which require "local" awareness and "cultural" literacy.

The method applied for joke characterisation is based on qualitative analysis. All instances are examined individually, following the pattern presented in the analysis of the DOCTOR/PATIENT joke above: the text of a joke is presented and the two scripts involved in joke production are identified, after which the type of oppositeness between those scripts is established.

Grice's maxims are employed as an additional formal parameter: 1) to evaluate humorous language (the transition from non-humorous to humorous language in particular) and, given their prevalence in the explorations of the (non-)bona-fide communication; and 2) to provide for a more in-depth analysis of the joke. It is believed that consideration of common conversational practices (and their violation) in jocular utterances is an essential component in understanding how exactly script collision operates. As the maxims are addressed by Raskin (1985) himself in his original work on the SSTH, they are seen as an integral component in verbally expressed humour. Precision being a valid factor and assuming that any BF infringement proceeds in a focused manner to the effect that the maxims will not be equally involved, we limit the number of violations of Grice's conversational maxims to two per text.

The analysis of the text and referencing of the source are illustrated below:

(3) *[Text]*
Script 1: [SCRIPT A]
Script 2: [SCRIPT B]
Opposition: [e.g., *Actual situation vs Non-actual situation*]
Violated maxim of BF communication: [e.g., *maxim of manner]*

Abbreviated title of the series, Series No., Episode No

Findings and Discussion

Categories

In the course of analysis, eleven categories of humour themes were distinguished in *ILL.* They are listed below, with the number in parenthesis referring to the instances encountered: *Husbands vs Wives* (31), *Men vs Women* (26), *Women vs Women* (15), *Women's logic* (28), *Dating* (1), *Eating and weight* (5), *Alcohol-related jokes* (1), *Word play* (22), *Funniness through simile* (5), jokes based on the principle *It refers to X vs It does not refer to X* (5), and *Purposeful vs Unintentional jokes* (1). The first seven categories (from *Husbands vs Wives* to *Alcohol-related jokes*) can be said to reflect the realities essential to human life. Therefore, these categories are of a more general nature. The remaining four categories (from *Word-play* to *Purposeful vs Unintentional jokes*) exhibit humour of a more specific nature, since they are either based on linguistic properties (as in *Word-play* and *Funniness through simile*), or do not fit the realities seen as typical examples of human life (as in *It refers to X vs It does not refer to X* and *Purposeful vs Unintentional jokes*).

MF yields thirteen categories: *Family* (106), *Men vs Women* (4), *Sex related vs Non-sex related* (8), *Love vs Money* (1), *Dating* (1), *Alcohol-related jokes* (2), *Good vs Bad* (2), *Brave vs Coward* (4), *Culture X vs Culture Y* (9), *Word play* (19), *Funniness through simile* (4), *It refers to X vs It does not refer to X* (4), and *Everyone vs No-one* (1). As in *ILL*, some topics manifest traditional human perception (categories from *Family* to *Culture X vs Culture Y*); the others are more specific (from *Word play* to *Everyone vs No-one*). The broadest category *Family* contains five subcategories, all referring to relationships within a family, which are as follows: *Parents (Adults) vs Children* (49), *Husbands vs Wives* (35), *Parents-in-law vs Children-in-law* (6), *Sibling vs Sibling* (15), *Family vs Football* (1).

The series were compared primarily on the basis of the established categories and the prevailing script oppositions, as well as BF maxim violations. The most common oppositions and maxim violations of both programmes were determined and their content compared. The analysis involves elements of both synchronic and diachronic cuts as each individual joke is first assessed along the pre-established criteria and then relevant jokes from different time periods are compared in-between.

Thematic Patterns

As the data above suggest, it is possible to distinguish the predominant categories containing the greatest number of thematically related texts. In *ILL*, these categories refer to the relationships between a man and a woman, comprising both the broader *Men vs Women* and the more specific *Husbands vs Wives*. In *MF*, the majority of instances indicate a different type of human relations: the realities that are commonly associated with family life. Thus, *ILL* has a tendency to focus more on the humour whose central figures are a male subject (often a husband) and a female subject (often a wife). Contrastingly, the dominating humorous texts in *MF* show a variety of diverse roles (father, mother, children, siblings, grandparents, etc.), with the roles of a husband and a wife being but a part of them.

Examples 4a and b below illustrate the series *ILL:* example 4a belongs to the category *Husbands vs Wives*; (4b), though not restricted to the relationship *husband-wife*, preserves a similar thematic background with the figures of a man and a woman lacking marital relation. For this reason, the former belongs to the category *Husbands vs Wives*, while the latter to the category *Men vs Women*.

(4) a) (*Wife A and husband B*)
A: Before the evening is over, we may see a spook.
B: Don't tell me you invited your mother.
ILL S1E7

b) (*Male A and female B about the husband of B*)
A: You look seriously ill to me.
B: Oh, if it's his head, he's all right. There's nothing up there to hurt.
ILL S1E7

Proceeding to *MF*, since its humorous texts tend to indicate various types of relations within a family, the broad category *Family* is subdivided into five narrower subcategories. The following examples demonstrate two of such subcategories: *Parents (Adults) vs Children* (5a) and *Sibling vs Sibling* (*5b*).

(5) a) (*Granddaughter A and grandfather B*)
A: You took my shoes?!
B: No, I took your freedom. Sorry, kid, it ain't your night.
MF S1E8

b) (*Female A referring to her older sister (Haley)*)
A: Haley hates football. Which is weird, because it's all boys and there's no reading required.
MF S1E6

In addition, *Family* here also contains the confrontation *husband-wife*, which no longer forms a category of its own, but rather enters a broader one:

(6) (*Female A*)

A: I realised something. The first day of school is tough on all my kids, especially the one I married.

MF S1E6

The subcategory *Family vs Football*, contrasts with those exemplified above as, rather than featuring a humorous confrontation between family members, it marks a collision setting the concept of family in the domain of football, as depicted in example 7 below.

(7) (*A is the wife of B*)

A: Whose side are you on?

B: She's my daughter. You're my wife. Let's remember what's important here: there's football game on.

MF S1E5

Certain similarities between the two sitcoms are also worth mentioning. Both series share six categories: *Men vs Women*, *Dating, Alcohol-related, Word play, Funniness through simile*, and *It refers to X vs It does not refer to X*. The categories *Dating, Alcohol-related,* and *It refers to X vs It does not refer to X* can be concluded as highly specific, for they yield a very limited amount of texts in each of the programmes. The same applies to the category *Men vs Women* in *MF*: it is represented by only four texts. One of such examples is example 8 below. In the text, the roles of the man and the woman do not specifically indicate a relation proper to family members. This category talks about men and women in a rather general way, a manner often observed in *ILL* (e.g., 4b).

(8)   *(Male A; Claire is the wife of A)*

A: I listen with my mind. And if you pay attention, women will tell you what they want; by telling you the opposite of what they want. Like, the other day, Claire was like, *You have to move your car. There's no space in the garage for both of our cars*. And what she's really saying is that, you know, I should probably get a sports car.

MF *S1E6.*

Furthermore, in both series, *Word play* and *Funniness through simile* together contribute a substantial number of texts: 27 in *ILL* and 23 in *MF*. These are the categories that refer to humorous language which principally depends on ambiguous, or unexpected, interpretations of a certain lexical item. For instance, the verb *to poke* takes the non-existing meaning *to play poker* (*ILL*), the adjective *odd* might be interpreted both as *strange* and *not divisible by two* (*ILL*), the figurative meaning of the idiom *to sweep under the rug* is purposefully combined with its literal meaning (*MF*), while the image *father-superman* is assimilated to the image *father-illegal immigrant* (*MF*).

Finally, series-specific categories are to be mentioned: three in *ILL* and five in *MF*. In *ILL,* these concern women, or realities normally associated with women, and comprise *Women vs Women*, *Women's logic*, and *Eating and weight*. *MF* has a many as five categories, which also tend to indicate certain confrontations common to humans' life: *Sex related vs Non-sex related*, *Love vs Money*, *Good vs Bad*, *Brave vs Coward*, and *Culture X vs Culture Y*.

To sum up, in both series humorous texts (and hence their scripts) generally refer to phenomena essential to everyday human life: relationships, daily activities, and emotions. The next section discusses the oppositions identified in the collected jokes.

Oppositions

All collected examples have been found to contain two scripts (or scenarios) that overlap and, at the same time, oppose each other in a specific way. Below we will discuss how the three script oppositions/dichotomies discussed in the theoretical part (viz., normal/abnormal, actual/non-actual, and possible/implausible) are manifest in the two series.

Taking script behaviour as the most salient feature in Raskin's theory, the discussion below examines specifically the confrontation between two scenarios within a given script.

First, the analysis of the series has revealed that the dichotomy *normal / abnormal* is more accurately captured via a somewhat looser distinction *Expected state of affairs/unexpected state of affairs* (we will return to that below). We also found that in both series, the oppositions function in a similar fashion: the situation that actually takes place is opposed to a situation that contradicts the real one). Table 2 below presents the distribution of the three dichotomies in both series:

Table 2
The distribution of the dichotomies in *ILL* and *MF*

	ILL	MF
Expected/unexpected	35%	68%
Actual / non-actual	40%	27%
Possible/implausible	25%	5%

As the data suggest, while there is no significantly leading opposition in *ILL*, jokes in *MF* are built primarily on a single dichotomy, *viz. Expected state of affairs/ unexpected state of affairs*, which accounts for nearly 70 % of all instances. What is specific about this distinction?

The *expected/unexpected* dichotomy appeared to capture more accurately an idea that is first presented as generally accepted, or as fair and reasonable in the given context, and then is modified in such a way that it (suddenly) no longer seems accepted and becomes unexpected. On this view, the values *normal* and *abnormal* represent extreme cases and

consequently were only assigned to those texts whose unexpected situation causes the strongest impression of the ethically, or morally, unacceptable. Such are the examples 9a-b below. In 9a, the expected state of affairs is that a person should help their best friend, and in 9b, that a beautiful village should be a safe place to live. But the naturally expected flow of events is broken in the second part of the texts: 9a negates the universal conception of one's best friend (i.e., a person who will never abandon their friend), and 9b assimilates the beauty of the village with murderers, hence the ethically unacceptable scenario:

(9) a) *(Females A and B (Ethel); B thinks her husband is about to come and kill her)*
A: Let me go.
B: Ethel, Ethel you can't do this to me. You're my best friend.
A: That's why I can't stand to see you riddled with bullets.
ILL *S1E4.*

b) *(Female A)*
A: I come from a small village; very poor but very, very beautiful. It's the number one in all Colombia for all the murders.
MF *S1E1.*

As regards the *actual/non-actual* dichotomy, it was found to allow for the so-called *diagnostic construction*, which reformulates the text following the formula: *It is the case that … , and is not the case that … .* The two jokes below illustrate the point:

(10) a) *(Wife A and husband B)*
A: Fred, did you really eat 16 oysters?
B: But I was doing it for you. I was trying to find you a pearl.
ILL *S1E3*

b) *(Wife A and husband B)*
A: I'm gonna take a shower. Do you care to join me?
B: You know, honey, there's a gun in the footlocker in the garage. If I ever say no to that question, I want you to use it on me.
MF *S1E4*

In both 10a and 10b, the non-actual situation appears as somewhat absurd. Thus it is obvious that the husband in 10a had no intention to find a pearl for his wife and that the man in 10b will never agree to be actually shot. Therefore: *It is the case that the man ate 16 oysters just for the reason of hunger/ the man wants to have sexual intercourse with his wife, and it is not the case that the husband ate 16 oysters in order to find a pearl for his wife/ the man wants to be shot.*

Lastly, the third opposition *Possible situation vs Implausible situation* possesses the least number of texts in both series. The core of the dichotomy is the possibly unrealizable situation that, within the text, replaces the possible situation. The point is illustrated below:

(11) a) *(Females A and B)*
A: We'll find some men somewhere.
B: Where? There's no place where millions of single women haven't already looked.
ILL *S1E1*

b) *(Son A and father B talking about the mother of B and ex-wife of A)*
A: Well, you know, mom's in town.
B: Your mom?
A: No, your mom. She's back from the grave.
MF *S1E4*

The beginning of each text introduces a possible situation, or the first script. Thus, there are still men to be found by single women (11a) and the son is talking about his mother's visit (11b). Then, the second scenario is introduced. It acts as the implausible situation of the respective beginning, with the world completely lacking single men and the son's mother becoming his late grandmother. Similarly to the opposition *Expected vs Unexpected*, the dichotomy *Possible*

vs Implausible has a slight variation, too. It is the bifurcation into *Possible vs Less possible*, where the impossibility of the second script is not a completely unquestionable true. The text in example 11a above could be seen as a representative of this slightly modified opposition, assigning the value *less possible* to the claimed lack of single men (i.e., assuming that the mentioned statement of single men might contain some degree of truth).

Summing up, the most immediate humorous effect seems to be caused by the opposition *Expected vs Unexpected*. The hearer accommodates to the first, or the expected, scenario and expects to remain within its boundaries. When a new and unexpected script is introduced, it strikes the hearer as rather shocking. The collision between the two scenarios is soon perceived as humorous. In contrast, the texts dominated by one of the other two oppositions may require more time to prompt humorous reactions, since the hearer has much weaker initial expectations about the possible (i.e., expected) course of the events.

The use of laugh tracks deserves a mention of its own. Background audience laughter is present in *ILL*, but not in *MF*. As a result, laugh tracks in *ILL* guide the hearer (viewer), indicating the exact instances of the episode which are supposed to be humorous, or may contain a script opposition. Therefore, the presence of the background laughter contributes to the distributive differences between the script oppositions in the two series. That is to say, the hearer will likely to perceive as humorous those texts which are supplemented with background laughter, even when/if the script opposition is not easily discerned to the effect that all three types of oppositions will stimulate humour equally. In contrast, in *MF*, which is void of such tracks, the hearer is left on their own to decide whether a given text contains incongruity (i.e., opposing scripts), or not. Under these circumstances, the opposition *Expected state of affairs vs Unexpected state of affairs* appears to bear the most immediate effect on the viewer and consequently may be regarded as the most effective opposition to provoke humour.

The oppositions having been considered, the next section concentrates on the prevailing violations of the Gricean maxims.

Maxim Violation

As a form of NBF communication, humour implies violation of the conversational maxims (VCM) pertinent to the BF mode. The four maxims are well-known and include the following: maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner (Grice, 1975). Due to space constraints, below we only summarise how VCM is manifest in the series under analysis:

_ A significant number of instances combine at least two violations, allowing for a distinction of complex maxim combinations, e.g., the quantity and quality violation, the quantity and relation violation, the quantity and manner violation, the quality and relation violation, the quality and manner violation, and the relation and manner violation.

_ Generally, the dominant violation in both series is that of the relation maxim: in *ILL* it accounts for 32% of instances; and in *MF*, for 40%. It is usually based on a rather drastic transition on the scale real vs assumed to the effect that the two given scripts may lack any clear justification whatsoever. This is illustrated by example 12 below:

(12) a) *(Wife A and husband B (a singer-bandleader))*
A: You know, I've been thinking about shows like Burns and Allen. George Burns uses his wife on the show. Why don't you?
B: I'd love to. You think she would leave George?
***ILL** S1E6*

b) *(Daughter A and mother B)*
A: So, mom, there's a party tonight at Andrew Adler's, and everybody's gonna be there.
B: Oh, that sounds like so much fun, but I have other plans.
***MF** S1E8*

– The second most prominent violation is the manner maxim in *ILL* (17%), and, interestingly, the maxims of quantity and relation in *MF* (17%).

– On the humorous instance/VCM scale, the two series are comparable: in 102 texts in *ILL* and 99 texts in *MF* the violation of either the quality, the quantity, the relation, or the manner maxim was identified.

– It may be argued that all humorous texts, albeit to different degrees, involve the violation of the quantity maxim, i.e., scripts will exceed the limits of necessary information. The humorous effect is the strongest when the main idea is formulated in the first line(s): this information would perfectly suffice for the practices of BF communication if it had not been for the superfluous – excessive and unnecessary – comment that follows rendering the entire situation as humorous. A good example is the following text from *ILL*:

(13) *(Males A and B referring to the wife of A)*

A: She seems to have some idea that I'm going to kill her.

B: That doesn't mean anything. Sooner or later every married woman decides that her husband wants to kill her. She's usually right.

ILL S1E4

The two last sentences in example 13 are somewhat redundant: while the first speaker is concerned about his wife's thoughts, the second interlocutor vaguely hints that he himself might have considered killing his own wife.

The third popular violation refers to quality, with the speaker communicating apparently untruthful information. The humorous response is caused primarily by the lie contained within the given text, as illustrated below:

(14) a) *(Husband A and wife B talking about the unpaid utility bills)*
A: I make good money. I bring it home and it disappears. Now, what have you been doing with it?
B: I sank it all in a phoney gold mine.
ILL S1E5

b) *(Male A talking about himself and his sister (Clair))*
A: We were called Fire and Nice. I was fire, 'cause of the red hair, and Claire was nice, because it was ironic and she wasn't.
MF S1E7.

In example 14a, the female character deliberately lies to her husband. She offers him an absurd picture of sinking money in a gold mine, which, in addition, is indicated as fake and non-existent (i.e., phoney). The speaker in example 14b is dishonest, too. Here, the property assigned to the speaker's sister (i.e., *nice*) does not comply with reality. As the text evolves, it becomes clear that the woman's supposedly unpleasant (or not nice) character is the reason for calling her nice, which contradicts common sense.

ILL is based mainly on the four "pure" violations; "complex" violations composed of (at least) two VCM are more frequent in *MF*. Thus the second largest group in *MF* (29 texts) is the violation which includes the maxims of quantity and relation. Example 15 below exemplifies the "complex" violation *quantity-relation*.

(15) *(Gay couple, males A and B)*

A: I should try to learn more about football.

B: That is very mature of you.

A: I figure if football fans can learn it, how hard can it be?

B: That's very elitist of you.

A: I'm taking baby steps here, all right? I'm actually looking forward to it. 'Cause it's not just the game. It's the bands and the drama, and the pageantry.

B: Don't forget about the team mascots.

A: They were ascots?

MF *S1E5*

The text develops the subject of football. The first script, which assigns to the game such features as fans, drama, mascots, etc., is interpreted as too extensive in BF mode: it contains many redundant constructions (e.g., the rhetorical questions *how hard can it be?*, *all right?*) Hence, the quantity maxim is disregarded. Then, the first interlocutor's failure to hear correctly the word *mascots* violates the relation maxim, since the noun *ascots* has no connection to football.

On Stereotypes

Our analysis has shown that the two sitcoms, despite the timespan that separates them, do not offer a radical change in worldviews. In both series, humorous topics primarily hinge on family relations. Marital problems dominate in *ILL*; *MF* is more diverse regarding the "real-life" domestic topics it treats and exhibiting a shift from "spousal humour" to "family humour" and construction of more dynamic humorous speakers (i.e., a wider range of characters who speak humorously / verbally create contrasting scripts, which is supposed to produce funniness).

Another common feature is focus on the woman. In *ILL*, women (wives) are perceived as somewhat silly counterparts for men (husbands), which is vocalised in jokes made by both men and women themselves. In *MF*, though there are some (patriarch-like) characters who continue supporting the stereotypical image of a silly-dependent-on-her-husband woman, female characters are no longer the main victim targeted and ridiculed within the jokes; rather, women and men are already equal and men in *MF* are frequently targeted because of their faulty, imperfect intelligence. In all instances, the Superiority theory is manifest as the "clashes" between people are typically concerned with power imbalance.

But despite the fact that humour in both *ILL* and *MF* maintains the same formal patterns, the thematic focus is different, and the humorous texts of each sitcom unfold different realities. *ILL* concentrates on the relationships between a man and a woman (or, accordingly, a husband and a wife), while humour in *MF* targets family bonds: the relations between adults and children (less those between siblings), as well as between spouses.

Considering *ILL*, it is the role of the woman that is frequently degraded: men are wittier than women, men have power over women, women are less intelligent than men, etc. To illustrate, the positive attitude towards women contained in the first script in example 16 below is soon contradicted by the second script, where the woman is no longer literally "*fabulous*", but idiotic (the secondary and unconventional interpretation of *fabulous*).

(16) *(Male show presenter talking)*

A: *Females are Fabulous.* Welcome to another session of Females are Fabulous, our very outstanding program based on the theory that any woman is willing to make an idiot out of herself in order to win a prize.

ILL *S1E5*

The woman of *ILL* also serves as model for the traditional housewife, who has no knowledge regarding paying bills, wholly depends on the husband's money, wants to please him, and is concerned about her weight. Contrastingly, men in *ILL*, if compared to women, are rarely stereotyped. Only two humorous instances that clearly disparage men were identified*.*

In *MF*, the most frequent generalisations concern lack of understanding and support, either between parents/adults and children, with children sometimes portrayed as too immature to grasp the supposedly intricate matters, or between "same level" family members, viz. between siblings and husbands and wives. Social inequality is an emerging theme. In example 17 below, the unexpected second script degrades the image of a hard-working, presumably Latin, man who achieves things on his own effort and foregrounds the idea of the "real man" as directly related to one's wealth, since money empowers its possessor to buy other men's physical labour.

(17) *(Latin wife A and husband B; at the beginning, A refers to her son)*

A: It's important that we teach him how to do things for himself. In my culture, men take great pride in doing physical labour.

B: I know. That's why I hire people from your culture.

MF S1E2

Finally, a special case in *MF* is the category *Sex-related vs Non-sex-related*. As observed in examples 18a-b, these jokes, too, contain a kind of a stereotype: men's strong sexual desire. Yet, in comparison with the previous texts, they have features characteristic of the release theory.

(18) a) *(Male A talking about his new female neighbour)*
A: Am I attracted to her? Yes. Would I ever act on it? No, no way. Not while my wife is still alive.
MF S1E2

b) *(Wife A and husband B)*
A: I'm gonna take a shower. Do you care to join me?
B: You know, honey, there's a gun in the footlocker in the garage. If I ever say *no* to that question, I want you to use it on me.
MF S1E4

The male speaker in example 18a admits his sexual interest towards a new female neighbour. Then, the man suppresses the urge to satisfy such a desire, stating that never would he *act on it*. Nonetheless, the speaker eventually liberates from strict moral restraints, or internal inhibitions, and reduces the never-ending period of sexual abstinence (regarding the new neighbour) to the period until his wife dies. In example 18b, the male character agrees to be killed if one day he refused taking shower with his spouse. Again, the man's reaction indicates the release of suppressed emotions, which unfolds into pleasure.

In light of the theoretical framework employed, it can be concluded that humour topics, though they present different names and contrasting categories of human relations, viz. man vs woman in *ILL* and family relations in *MF*, are comparable in that both stimulate humorous reactions, with characters engaging in funny dialogues / monologues about the "life" that surrounds them, which supports Raskin's (1985) assertion that humans laugh at things that pertain to their most immediate everyday life). What differs though is the way particular (mainly, gender-based) stereotypes are approached in the sitcoms.

Conclusion

The present article explored the techniques of humour as used in two famous American sitcoms: *I Love Lucy* and *Modern Family*. Grounding analysis in Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humour, it was discovered that, while the principles of humour construction in both *ILL* and *MF* are the same and follow the SSTH, the prevailing thematic categories observed in their scripts differ significantly and are most apparent in the humour instances involving stereotypes. *ILL* primarily targets women and portrays them as lacking intelligence, unable to take care of a family budget, constantly concerned about weight, etc. Meanwhile *MF* focuses on the relations between family members or even within different social groups.

The results of the study contribute to the larger issue of the cultural worldview which, as has been shown, exhibits signs of variation in the relevant periods.

As regards oppositions, humorous texts in *ILL* and *MF* demonstrate formal, or structural, resemblance. The two prevailing oppositions are the actual vs non-actual situation and the expected vs unexpected. Notably, the opposition expected state of affairs vs unexpected state of affairs tends to produce the most immediate humorous reaction, which explains its overwhelming predominance in *MF*: unlike *ILL*, *MF* does not use background laugh tracks, which serve as a guide for the hearer to track humorous texts within each episode.

As for maxim violations, the relation maxim is the one violated most often. This violation is applied to texts in which realities proposed by the second script drastically digress from those presented in the first script. Consequently, in most cases, the violation of the relation maxim accompanies the opposition *expected vs unexpected*.

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Santrauka

Julija Korostenskienė, Aurelija Lieponytė. Juokai juokais: humoras amerikiečių situacijų komedijose *I Love Lucy* ir *Modern Family*

Straipsnyje koncentruojamasi į Raskino (1985) semantinio scenarijaus humoro teoriją (*the script-based semantic theory of humour*). Tai viena lingvistinių humoro teorijų, pritaikoma tik verbaliniams, arba išreikštiems žodžiais, tekstams, besiremianti sąvoka *scenarijus* (angl. *script*), kuri gali būti apibūdinta kaip semantinių reikšmių rinkinys, tekste sukuriantis tam tikrą kontekstinę situaciją. Anot Raskino, humoristiniuose tekstuose atsiskleidžia du kontrastingi scenarijai. Straipsnyje Raskino Semantinio scenarijaus teorija yra pritaikoma tiriant humoro apraiškas, t. y., jo panašumus ir skirtumus dviejose Amerikos situacijų komedijose: *Aš myliu Liusę* (*I Love Lucy*) (1951–1957) ir *Moderni Šeima* (*Modern Family*) (2009- dabar). Iš viso analizuojami 305 tekstai: 140 tekstų iš 20 pirmo *Aš myliu Liusę* sezono serijų ir 165 tekstai iš 20 pirmo *Moderni šeima* sezono serijų. Kiekviena komedija atstovauja skirtingiems laikotarpiams televizinio Amerikos humoro istorijoje. Tyrimo metu pasiekti rezultatai rodo, jog humoro tematika (t. y., skriptuose pristatomos gyvenimo realijos) studijuojamose televizijos programose skiriasi, nors struktūriškai humoras atitinka Scenarijų teoriją (t. y., įgyvendins pagrindinę hipotezę) abiejose komedijose. Remiantis atrinktų juokų duomenimis, straipsnyje išvystoma pasitelkiamų humorui temų klasifikacija ir aptariamas pats humoro efektą sukuriantis mechanizmas.

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