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CLASSIFICATION OF LAUGHTER IN STAND-UP COMEDIES

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Abstract

The article is aimed at developing a classification of laughter which can be applied while analyzing stand-up comedies. The author examines such aspects of laughter as the nature of laughter and types of laughter in detail. The author examines the physiological and social nature of laughter. The article also describes various types of laughter. This article distinguishes three main types of laughter based on the degree of intensity, the structural arrangement of ridiculed fragments and significance: warming-up, main and follow-up. Warming-up laughter is the reaction of the audience to the comedian's secondary jokes which are aimed at preparing audience for the main jokes on this topic. Main laughter is the reaction of the audience to the main jokes of the speaker around which all the previous material is based on. Follow-up laughter is the reaction of the audience to statements that follow immediately after the main jokes. The latter type of laughter cannot be taken into account while analyzing the jokes because it can be the reaction to non-humorous material.

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1. Introduction

The present study is devoted to the axiological conceptual framework of humor that consists of ridiculed and praised abstract concepts. The humorous nature of certain phenomena is determined primarily by the corresponding reaction of the audience (viewers or readers). So we take stand-up comedies as data for analyzing humor since they contain a live reaction of the audience.

The process of perceiving humor can be divided into three main components: the understanding of humor, the emotional perception of humor (enjoying the humor), and the expression of humor (Goel & Dolan, 2001).

The main reaction of the audience to humor is laughter, i.e. it is the presence of laughter that allows us to identify the humorous nature of this or that phenomenon (Attardo, 1994). It should also be noted that laughter caused by actualizing certain phenomena emphasizes the important value status of these phenomena.

Laughter is not the only means of expressing humor. In addition to laughter, we can identify the following responses to humor: the development of humor, the repetition of the speaker's words, agreement or disagreement with the message, non-verbal responses and facial expressions such as smiles, nods of heads or raising eyebrows (Hay, 2001; Holmes, 2000; Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1974) while it can be considered that humorous effect is achieved only if the response of the audience is a smile (the main reaction to satire) or laughter (the main reaction to humor).

2. Problem Statement

Most papers and many studies which are devoted to laughter investigate the philosophical and physiological nature of this phenomenon. In these works laughter is classified according to: the emotions which it accompanies (O'Donnell-Trujillo & Adams, 1983; Semenova, 2014); its nature (Propp, 1999; Rjumina, 2010); its intensity (Martin, 2007) and its purpose (Provine, 1992).

These results can not satisfy all the needs of linguistics and humor theory in general. I mean that there are many types of laughter (Propp, 1999; Provine, 1992; Rjumina, 2010; Trovain & Truong, 2017) and some of them are not connected with humor (Trovain & Truong, 2017). Non-humorous types of laughter are not only irrelevant while studying humorous effect they also can lead to incorrect results if they are not sorted out. At present, according to our data, there is no classification of laughter which is aimed at solving this problem.

- Therefore, it is crucial to single out those types of laughter which can be taken into account while analyzing humor to determine a humorous effect.
- Also different types of laughter should be ranked according to their importance for creating humorous effect.

3. Research Questions

In view of the foregoing, we see the subject matter of the article as studying such aspects of laughter as the nature of laughter and types of laughter. For understanding laughter as the primary means of evaluating humor we should study the literature on these subjects and analyze stand up specials.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop the classification which is useful while analyzing stand-up comedies for identifying humorous fragments of texts. This classification should help us to eliminate those types of laughter which are not humorous and take into account those types of laughter which are humorous.

5. Research Methods

While analyzing stand-up comedies we should take into account such criteria as the degree of laughter intensity, the structural arrangement of the ridiculed fragments and significance of these fragments for creating the whole humorous atmosphere. Laughter intensity consists of such parameters as loudness and duration of laughter. The structural arrangement of the ridiculed text fragments considers the sequence of text fragments which are accompanied by laughter. Significance of the fragments is determined by the role of jokes in storytelling, i.e. finding the jokes upon which the whole story telling is based on

In the present work we will analyze the types of laughter in stand-up comedies based on the stand-up special "Chewed Up" by Louis C.K. The script can be accessed at: <https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/2017/07/07/louis-c-k-chewed-2008-full-transcript>. It should be noted that while analyzing different humorous fragments of about 50 other stand-up specials we've identified the same three types of laughter. Bold font highlights those fragments that caused the audience to laugh.

6. Findings

The question of the nature of laughter is mainly considered from two positions. Firstly, the physiological nature of laughter is considered within the framework of psychology. Secondly, the social nature of laughter is studied within the framework of philosophy.

To begin with, let's consider the physiological nature of laughter. Certain emotions are released with the help of laughter (Spencer, 2020). According to Izard there are 10 basic emotions: interest, joy, surprise, grief, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame, guilt. Thus, the definition of an emotion should include three main aspects that characterize this emotion: a) an experience of emotions; b) processes occurring in the nervous, endocrine, respiratory, digestive and other systems of the body; c) observable expressive complexes of emotions (Izard, 1977). According to Semenova (2014) laughter is one of the three components of emotion, namely its external manifestation. Thus, laughter cannot be considered as an emotion. Moreover, it should also be noted that laughter can express nervousness, frivolity, joy, pleasure, sympathy, positive surprise, anger, actions (preserving or threatening reputation) (O'Donnell-

Trujillo & Adams, 1983) while within the framework of humor the main emotion expressed by laughter is joy (Martin, 2007). Ruch (1990) proposed the term "pleasant excitement" to denote pleasure occurring after laughter. Laughter also contributes to overcoming various fears and breaking social taboos (Martin, 2007).

Philosophical works primarily study the social nature of laughter. According to Bergson (2014) there is no humor outside the human nature and laughter is accompanied by insensitivity towards a ridiculed object. According to Hobbes (1991) laughter arises as a result of a sudden feeling of superiority either over others or one's own past experience. Rjumina (2010) put forward the assumption that humor is based on those ritual situations in which there was ritual laughter. Veale (2004) noted that laughter often arises not because of humorous characteristics of a joke, but because of the listener's desire to laugh, i.e. a recipient of a joke is ready to perceive humor and probably is looking for humor in any situation. This is especially true for those listeners who choose to watch humor (stand-up concerts, sitcoms, etc.). It is also important to note that laughter can accompany not only a joke itself, but also be a final stage of some conversation (Glenn & Holt, 2017).

Since ancient times laughter has been divided into natural (which was perceived mainly negatively by most philosophers) and cultural (which was perceived positively by most philosophers). According to Rjumina (2010) the expression of cultural laughter is a smile while the expression of natural laughter is laughter. Propp (1999) distinguished a number of different types of laughter: mocking, kind, evil, cheerful, reckless and ritual. Laughter is also divided according to its intensity which depends on the level of emotional stress and excitement (Martin, 2007). Provine (1992) distinguished everyday laughter which is a social signal of friendliness and positive emotions in general. In addition laughter is divided into spontaneous and staged (Trovain & Truong, 2017). In modern culture there is also such a phenomenon as offscreen laughter which helps the viewer to experience humor (Chafe, 2007). It should also be noted that laughter may not be related to the expression of humorous effect. Thus non-humorous laughter is the laughter caused by external physical stimuli, such as tickling and laughing gas (Trovain & Truong, 2017).

Laughter can also be divided according to its antithesis. In our opinion an antithesis of laughter is an emotion that should be overcome in a certain situation. So the antithesis of laughter can be: shame, fear, anger, gloom, etc. The selection of one antithesis seems unjustified to us since laughter has a complex nature. Fear as the main antithesis of laughter was singled out by Sychev (2003) who defined laughter and fear as correlated states. One of the main fears that laughter is aimed at overcoming is the fear of death (Rjumina, 2010). Many scientists single out shame as the main antithesis of laughter. As Morreall (1983) noted we laugh in order to change the psychological state from negative to positive when embarrassed. An important role of laughter in overcoming gloom was noted by Kant. According to Kant (1966) providence gave people three things to comfort them in their sorrows: hope, sleep and laughter.

Based on the analysis of stand-up comedies we identified three main types of laughter according to the degree of intensity, the structural arrangement of ridiculed fragments and significance: warming-up laughter, main laughter, follow-up laughter.

The cases of warming-up laughter include the reaction of the audience to the speaker's secondary jokes which support the main joke of the fragment. The warming-up laughter is usually short, not loud, and does not cover the entire audience. In stand-up comedies, however, the warming-up laughter is the

most popular one, it means that most jokes of a comedian cause this type of laughter. Such jokes are usually placed before the main joke upon this subject.

In the following example the main joke (both of those guys still need a fat baby and a dead dog to make me) about fat people is accompanied by the secondary joke (it's not your age plus 200 pounds).

You know like when you go to the doctor they give you like a formula for how much you should weigh? I'm pretty sure it's not your age plus 200 pounds. That doesn't seem like.. Like, I was watching a boxing match today, and both guys, they weighed a hundred and ten pounds each. So, both of those guys still need a fat baby and a dead dog to make me.

In addition such type of laughter can be caused by simple use of obscene words. Using obscene words is funny for many people simply because it breaks the taboo on using this type of words. In the following example stand-up comedian started his greeting with insulting (faggot) the person from the audience.

Hello, alright... thank you, alright faggot how you doin'.

The cases of the main laughter include the reaction of the audience to the main jokes of the speaker around which all the previous material is built on. The main laughter is long, loud and covers most of the audience. Usually there are not so many jokes in one performance which cause these type of laughter.

In the following example the main joke (I'm saying that being white is clearly better) about advantages of being a white person is accompanied by the secondary jokes (I'm white which thank god for that shit; you're not white you are missing out because this shit is thoroughly good.).

I'm healthy, I'm relatively young. I'm white which thank god for that shit. That is a huge leg up, are you kiddin' me? Oh god I love being white, I really do. Seriously if you're not white you are missing out because this shit is thoroughly good. Let me be clear by the way, I'm not saying white people are better. I'm saying that being white is clearly better, who could even argue?

Cases of follow-up laughter include the reaction of the audience to statements that follow immediately after the main jokes. Follow-up laughter is usually short, loud and does not cover the entire audience.

The following example comprises warming-up jokes (you start getting boners when you're 9 and you don't cum for 3 fucking years; you just pass out moaning in a ditch somewhere; If you ever see a 9 year old on the street just give him 20 bucks 'cause he's very unhappy), the main joke (Or suck his dick) and a follow-up joke (however you feel like you can help him out) about boy's sexual life.

That's the worst thing about a little boy's life is that you start getting boners when you're 9 and you don't cum for 3 fucking years. It's 3 years of just vicious little boners. That don't go away, you just pass out moaning in a ditch somewhere and you wake up and you're still hard. It's awful! If you ever see a 9 year old on the street just give him 20 bucks 'cause he's very unhappy. Or suck his dick, however you feel like you can help him out.

Follow-up laughter as well as warming-up laughter can also be caused by using obscene words.

In the following example humorous effect of the main fragment (okay, here we go" [exhales] "ahaha, you.. I'm gonna suck ya" "muahaha ookay, HERE WE GO!") is based on comedian's acting and

it's not really based on some verbal expression. Follow-up laughter is caused by insulting (faggot) the person from the audience.

There must be something you gotta do to get yourself ready, y'know, “[clears throat] okay, here we go” [exhales] “ahaha, you.. I'm gonna suck ya” “muahaha ookay, HERE WE GO!” So, faggot, I don't know.

In addition follow-up laughter is often caused by repeating or paraphrasing the joke that caused the main laughter. In the following example a joke (Just say nigga you stupid cunt.) which causes follow-up laughter refers to the previous text fragments (I would never call a woman a cunt; Why don't YOU fucking say it instead and take responsibility).

I just... cunt, I just like the way it sounds. I don't use it as an insult, I'll be alone in the laundry like “cunt, cunt” I just like saying it. I would never call a woman a cunt ... You say “the N-word” and I go “Oh, she means nigger,” you're making ME say it in my head. Why don't YOU fucking say it instead and take responsibility. With the shitty words you wanna say, just say it, don't hide behind the first letter like a fagot. Just say nigga you stupid cunt.

As for the quality of humor statements that cause follow-up laughter are inferior not only to the main jokes, but also to secondary jokes. Moreover, follow-up laughter is often caused by statements that are not humorous. In addition the presence of follow-up laughter depends on the intensity of the underlying laughter. If the main laughter is not intense, follow-up laughter may not occur at all.

It should be noted that stand-up comedians quite often use obscene words in their performances which causes laughter from the audience since the corresponding social taboo is violated in such cases. mentioned.

7. Conclusion

Thus, we distinguish three types of laughter: warming-up, main and follow-up. At the same time warming-up laughter and main laughter are relatively independent types of laughter while follow-up laughter depends on the main laughter. It should be noted that although we took one stand-up special as an example the present classification is relevant for all the works we analyzed in the course of our study.

The classification of laughter presented in our work does not contradict the existing works on this topic. Moreover, the developed classification complements the theory of laughter.

The perspective of further research is connected with studying and classifying other types of emotional reactions to humor. Further classification which are aimed at distinguishing humorous and non-humorous types of laughter are also preferable and important.

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