Irony, Sarcasm and Parody in the American Sitcom "Modern Family"

Article · April 2019

2 authors:

Julija Korostenskiene
Vilnius University
16 PUBLICATIONS   **9** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Aurelija Lieponytė
Vilnius University
3 PUBLICATIONS   **0** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project   Morphosyntax of the Baltic verb View project

Irony, Sarcasm and Parody in the American Sitcom "Modern Family"

Julija Korostenskiene and Aurelija Lieponyte[1]

Abstract

The study explores verbal manifestations of irony, sarcasm, and parody in the American TV situational comedy series (sitcoms) *Modern Family* (*MF*, 2009 - present). The assumption is that character vocalisations in *MF* reflect the archetypal family model and support stereotypical portrayals of family roles. The notion of the stereotype as manifest in the series is taken as a supplementary parameter to account for the ironic, sarcastic, and parodic topics.

Stemming from Victor Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor (SSTH), the study links the negative mode of humor to verbal irony, proposing the impoliteness effect observed in ironic vocalisations as the main trigger of funniness and the result of the implied criticism. The findings generally corroborate the standard theory on irony, sarcasm, and parody. In the series, irony is manifest primarily as attacks on human life universals and generally held beliefs. Sarcasm is usually targeted at an identifiable human being, while parodies are identified as verbal imitations of some original entity (person, work of art, situation, etc.).

Keywords: SSTH, GTVH, Ontological Semantics, evaluative modality, humor, irony, sarcasm, parody, *Modern Family*.

1. Introduction

Irony, sarcasm, and parody (hereinafter *ISP*)—even when very subtle—always imply a sense of criticism. Thus, when approached as humor, an attribute they all undeniably share, they may be viewed its negative modes producing funniness through mocking

[1] Institute of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Philology, Vilnius University, Lithuania, korostenskiene@gmail.com; alieponyte@gmail.com

attitudes. Yet as the very notion of humor, despite the variety of approaches, remains somewhat elusive, the definition of its finer-grained subdomains appears to be even more volatile. But the modern world in general and human relationships in particular permeat with judgmental and oftentimes sceptical attitudes of varying degre; hence a study of how these are coded within the entertainment industry, with its undeniable appeal to and reach for popular values, may offer interesting insights both into what is critiqued as well as what the underlying assumptions of those critiquing are. This is how the present study chooses as its object of exploration the situational comedy *Modern Family* (MF), a landmark of American entertainment in the past years, written and produced by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd. Through examination of the critique-driven ISP, we aim to construct a microtheory of these notions exploring the extent to which the relevant data are compatible with Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script-Based Theory of Humor (SSTH). The other objective is to unveil the phenomena targeted through ISP, assuming them to be an accurate reflection of the issues people are currently most concerned with. Finally, we also seek to fill the methodological gap: the affinity between humor and irony—if compared to other forms of non-literal language, such as metaphor or metonymy,—has yet received insufficient attention in cognitive linguistics (Brône, 2012).

2. Theoretical Background: Humor as the Outset

Despite the prevalence of humor in contemporary societies (Ross, 1998), the humor phenomenon presents a serious challenge when developing its systematic account. As is known, the list of humor-related terms is long and includes concepts, such as a joke, a witticism, the comic or the ludicrous, parody, satire, etc. (e.g. Raskin, 1985, Palmer, 2004, with both acknowledging the confusion caused by lack of terminological explicitness, which results in distinct taxonomic nomenclatures). The intricacies of the nomenclature lead Raskin (1985, pp. 24-26) to favour the global notion *humor(-ous)* and use it interchangeably with *funny(-iness)* (cf. Palmer, 2004). With dictionary definitions hardly lending any significant support (Blake, 2007), the conundrum of pursuing a finite taxonomy of humor categories has even been referred to as *quixotic* Dynel (2009, p. 1284).

2.1.   Classifying Humor

Other authors sought to propose classifications of humor. For instance, Blake (2007) develops a nine-partite humor classification, prioritising the existence of a set-up (or structure) and a *punch*, the very unit within the text that creates humor, in a text, and a term in one way or another present in both Raskin (1985) and Palmer (2004). Most categories in Blake's classification depend on the formal way language is used, viz., humor through polysemous meanings, obscurity in grammar, spoonerisms, etc. Yet his first category, *fun with words* (Blake, 2007, pp. 5-6), could perfectly embrace most of the remaining categories, such as *grammatical ambiguities*, *transpositions*, *clever connections*, etc. (*ibid*., pp. 7-14), as the title of Blake's book—*Playing with Words*—actually implies. More consistent taxonomies are found in Ross (1998) and Dynel (2009).

Ross's (1998) taxonomic division is similar. Her first five levels are entirely language-dependent and agree with major structural language areas (i.e. phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis, and syntax). Structural ambiguity comprises six levels, ranging from the superficial phonological (alone comfortably accommodating Blake's classes *fun with words*, *transpositions*, and *clever connections*) to the most complex discourse level. In Dynel's (2009) classification, humor is comprised of two extensive groups: *jokes* and *conversational humor,* the main criterion being spontaneity, with the former viewed as prototypical, or canned, form of verbal humor (the one undertaken by Raskin (1985)), and the latter the impromptu creation. It is Dylan's conversational humor that captures the forms of verbal humor found in classifications by both Blake (2007) and Ross (1998), as he focuses on semantic-pragmatic categories (e.g. witticisms, retorts, banter, self-denigrating humor, etc). These are precisely the categories that feature forms relevant to the present analysis: *irony*, *sarcasm*, and *parody*. Despite their differences, the three classifications all mention at least two of these three forms, with irony receiving the greatest attention, but all forms exhibiting flexible traits.

2.2. Irony as the Starting Point

In the late 20th century, the multifaceted and inconclusive nature of ISP, with sarcasm and parody viewed as irony derivatives, attracted significant attention (Leech, 1983, Sperber, 1984). With irony perceived as a social occurrence, its impact on society

produced antithetic considerations. Purdy (1999) takes a strongly negative stance: viewing irony as a certain protective cape: rather than being serious, people adopt an ironic pose, submerging into cynicism, self-absorption, and apathy (Purdy, 1999; Schutz, 1977, as cited in Day, 2011). Because of its negative value, irony is primarily associated with politics - no longer an honourable sphere, but the arena of ugly competition. And yet its negative force is sometimes advocated as a tool for making positive changes in social relations (Day, 2011).

2.2.1. Leech's (Im)Politeness

Leech (1983; 2014) approaches irony from the perspective of impoliteness/mock politeness. He views irony and sarcasm as the same phenomenon, viz. *conversational irony*. The modifier *conversational* narrows down the pursuit to verbal irony, non-verbal contexts referred to as *dramatic irony*. Leech's (1983) verbal irony is further delimited by the Irony Principle, following which two meanings are distinguished: *Meaning I* is perceived as infelicitous in a given context and has to be rejected; then, the felicitous *Meaning II* is derived.

Without reference to politeness, Ross (1998) characterises irony in a similar way, viewing it as a discord between what is asserted and what is implied, the mismatch usually being very subtle. Likewise, for Dynel (2009) irony is achieved mainly in two ways: either the implied meaning of the utterance (Leech's Meaning II) is opposite to its literal, explicit, meaning (Leech's Meaning I), or the proposition stated does not combine with the contextual reality (e.g. a mother, looking at her child's messy room, assures that she loves kids who clean their rooms (Dynel, 2009, p. 1289).

In his later research, Leech's (2014) views conversational irony as mock politeness. That is, while courtesy is observed on the surface level, negative evaluation is implied. Such, for instance, is inviting someone to have the deserved rest when they have done nothing. At its deep level, the expression has a clear mocking intention, hence the phenomenon of the *reversal of interpretation* (*ibid.*, p. 101). Leech points out the gradient nature of irony, ranging from hostile threats to comic remarks, and in general, cautions of the risk of irony to be misunderstood. Lest the ironic remark should be read directly, language-independent knowledge is needed, e.g. an overall unfriendly attitude, an

irregular tone of voice, a wry smile, a shrug, etc. (Leech, 2014; Wilson & Sperber, 2012; Ross, 1998).

Blake (2007), like Leech (1983; 2014), distinguishes between tragic (or dramatic) irony and verbal irony, but blurs the boundaries between the two and deprives the latter of the politeness component. Blake explains verbal irony entirely through unintentionally erroneous language use, e.g., mispronunciation and an ironic remark it causes (Blake, 2007, p. 19). Hence irony is the incongruous relationship dependent on the interplay between the character's innocent ignorance and the author's or the audience's superior knowledge.

The *echoic (mention) theory of irony* likens irony to an echo of a thought borne by the speaker (Wilson & Sperber 1982; 2012). Irony then is the mocking recognition of the reality different from the idealistic expectation: such is the comment *It was amazing* after a boring event (following the example by Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 127). Following this approach, irony may optionally have a victim (Sperber, 1984; cf. Glenwright & Pexman, 2010). Within the *pretence theory of irony* (Clark & Gerrig, 1984), irony stands closer to sarcasm, as, rather than being directed at a thought, it expresses an attitude toward people.

2.2.2.   *Detaching Sarcasm from Irony*

Generally, while irony is permitted more positive intentions, sarcasm is viewed as utterly negative, or even aggressive (Glenwright & Pexman, 2010; Dynel, 2009; Attardo, Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2013). Following Wilson & Sperber (2012), irony targets thoughts, but sarcasm, albeit indirectly, targets people or their type. In sarcasm, the subject targeted will evaluate the speaker's attitude not as a playful jest, but rather as causing deep offence.

Blake (2007) points out the frequently formulaic nature of sarcasm. One such formula is the comment *Don't spend it all at once*, said to a person who has just received an insignificant amount of money (Blake, 2007, p. 21). Blake cautions that sarcastic remarks may be misunderstood and misinterpreted. His view on sarcasm may be equated with Leech's (1983; 2014) conversational irony and fit into the Irony Principle, viz., its contrast between the infelicitous Meaning I (you should not spend all your money at

once) and then retrieved Meaning II (the sum of money you have received is so small that you *will* spend it at once). Politeness is kept on the surface level (or Meaning I), but is lost on the deep level (or Meaning II). We will have to comment more on the distinction between irony vs sarcasm. For now, it is time to introduce the third term, *parody*.

2.2.3. The specificity of parody

The echoic theory effectively captures the difference between irony and parody (Sperber, 1984). Ironists reproduce what their victim says or is supposed to think in their own words, using their own prosodic elements. Meanwhile parody is grounded in the reproduction of the target's (or victim's) exact words, their prosody (e.g. a tone of voice), body language and facial expressions, etc. Hence the ambition of the parodist is to pretend being someone else. Sperber uses the proportion of relating parody to irony in the same way *as direct quotations stand to indirect ones* (Sperber 1984, p. 135), with irony and parody exposing the same attitudes, but through different means.

Ross (1998) deems parody to be parasitical due to its total dependence on already existing forms. This does not prevent parodies from being creative, for they still involve the perceiver in the conflict between the authentic (or old) and the simulated (or new) (Ross, 1998). The condition is that the audience should be aware of the former to discern the latter (Blake, 2007). The link that joins the two contexts is referred to as *transcontextuality* (Ross, 1998, p. 48).

Some authors extend the notion of parody with the satirical mode; others treat parody and satire as two mutually independent forms (Ross, 1998). The hallmark of satire is its particularly forceful criticism, which might be taken as a distinguishing element in relation to parody (Ross, 1998; Blake, 2007). This is why satire selects as its target deeply ingrained social institutions and beliefs, e.g., the military, the church, differences between higher and lower classes, and employs exaggeratedly high levels (Blake, 2007). Nabokov (1967) uses a witty metaphor to show the contrasting degrees of seriousness in parody and satire, equating the former with a light-hearted game, and the latter with a grotesque lesson. The view on parody as a playful distortion is adopted in this work, too.

2.2.4.   Culpeper's Impolite Mimicry

Irony has also been viewed as combining impoliteness and parodic imitation, hence the term *impolite mimicry* (Culpeper 2011). As the term suggests, a greater emphasis here is placed on prosody.

Impolite mimicry (or mimetic irony) resembles Wilson and Sperber's echoic irony, but what is echoed is behaviour (hence prosody, pitch in particular), ideally seeking for a perfect match, rather than thought. In extensively illustrating his point, Culpeper (2011) notes that what is common for all humor terms is meta-discursivity, signalled by off-record markers. Once they have been detected, the audience knows that the utterance is not meant to be taken seriously. From this follows that impoliteness, and therefore many humorous forms, result from mixing the conflicting values of verbal and non-verbal cues (i.e., polite and impolite signals) and consequently are *multimodal* (Culpeper, 2011; cf. Leech, 1983;2014).

To sum up, ISP always carry a sense of criticism, which can be very subtle. Irony is less personal and may lack the target component altogether. Sarcasm always has a victim whose personal or social space is invaded. Parody is a reproduction of a certain authentic form, typically, a given person's prosody and/or their overall behaviour. The distinctions are relative rather than absolute and consequently, irony, parody, and sarcasm are not mutually exclusive.

2.3. The Semantic Script Theory of Humor

2.3.1. Early theory

The SSTH is a linguistic theory laying out the principles of verbal humor (Raskin, 1985), and regarded as a *foundational work* in its systemised and comprehensive linguistic approach to humor research (Brône, 2012, p. 466). The theory employs formal criteria to determine whether or not the given text is humorous, or funny. The joke is viewed as resulting from two ambivalent *scripts*, i.e. two extended chunks of semantic information evoked by words within a text - the *real* and the *unreal*, the former to be incompatible with the latter. Normally, this duality features a limited number of categories intrinsic to human life and perception, e.g., jokes of judgemental dichotomy *good* vs *bad*; those involving the division *death* vs *life*, *not-obscene* vs *obscene*

(analogically, *not-sex-related* vs *sex-related*), *money* vs *no-money*, etc. (Raskin, 1985, pp. 113-114).

Any humorous text (i.e. joke) must satisfy two conditions:

- It must be compatible with two different scripts, either fully or in part, and
- The two scripts must be opposite in a special way and overlap, fully or partially, on the text. (Raskin, 1985, p. 99)

The SSTH regards jokes as the prototype of humorous manifestations and assumes that the encountered incongruity within a joke makes the perceiver undergo a discoursal, or pragmatic, reorientation (Brône, 2012). The perceiver is forced to move from genuine communication, the *bona-fide* mode, to humorous communication, the *non-bona fide* mode (Raskin, 1985, pp. 100-104; cf. Grice, 1975; Brône, 2012, p. 466).

2.3.2. *An Explanatory Gap within the Theory*

Raskin's humor theory has been criticised for its schematised nature and over-dependence on lexical expressions: scripts in a text are inferred on the basis of semantics of the constituent words (Brône, 2012). For the audience to capture fine-grained incongruities and relate them to humor, texts must have explicit semantic indications of both opposing scripts, which, while observed in prototypical jokes (Ortega, 2013), may not be present in more subtle cases, involving the cognitive level. In addition, Ortega (2013) argues that the SSTH does not demarcate semantic and pragmatic aspects in humor, since the pragmatic switch that happens in a joke (i.e. the reorientation from the non-humorous to the humorous context) relies on formally structured semantic scripts.

Consequetly SSTH has been re-modified into the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2001), supplementing the parameter of script opposition with five levels of knowledge resources (KRs) (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), listed next from the most basic and formal to the most complex and abstract): language (LA), narrative strategy (NS), target (TA), situation (SI), logical mechanism (LM), and script opposition (SP). Generally, KRs are vehicles to measure similarities and differences between jokes (for more information on differential joke parameters, see Attardo & Raskin, 1991, pp. 297-309) and constitute the first phase in the extension of the SSTH. Yet, this first extension is still tightly joke-bound (Brône, 2012).

In the second refinement phase, Attardo (2001) divides all humorous texts into two broad categories of joke-like texts and non-joke-like-texts. The latter category essentially comprises texts that do not manifest the traditional joke structure, where a set-up (or the outlining referential part to gain the audience's attention) necessarily precedes a punch line (or the humor trigger). Attardo (2001) thus emphasises that humor in texts may be made manifest in a variety of forms (using Brône's (2012, p. 469) terminology, in *pragmatically marked* ways, such as alliterations) and makes clear that semantics and pragmatics work simultaneously in humor processing. Given this, the SSTH and its extension GTVH are valid *semantico-pragmatic*, not merely semantic, theories (Attardo, 2001, p. 60). But even if the GTVH is an improved version, it remains contingent on external mechanisms to detect humor in texts (i.e. on the surface level of humorous texts).

In our approach, rather than negate the SSTH/GTVH procedures, we believe that no single theory is capable of explaining humor subtleties perfectly. Aiming to construct a composite humor theory, we suggest that another dimension of Raskin's theoretical accomplishments be incorporated: that of the parametric concept of modality, deriving from Ontological Semantics (*OS*, Nirenburg & Raskin, 2004), a theory of meaning in natural language. Modal values are to be adopted in our analysis as differential measures to capture contrasting force of criticism in ironic, sarcastic, and parodic texts.

2.3.3   *OS-driven proposal: capturing humor values*

OS approaches natural language processing through a constructed world model (i.e. ontology) and in computational linguistics, is positioned as a systematic approach to automated speech processing, which has been referred to as the *ideal form* (Nemec, 2006) or a *canonical interpretation* (Bremer, 2008) of the text meaning. Proceeding from the assumption is that the ontological parametric feature of modality allows one to capture fundamental shades of meaning (Korostenskaja, 2012), below we briefly present modality types and propose a mechanism to be applied to ironical, sarcastic, and parodic humor manifestations.

In OS, modalities are attitudinal measures of meaning elements (Nirenburg, McShane, & Beale, 2003) and have seven types: epistemic, epiteuctic, deontic, volitive,

potential, evaluative, and saliency (Nirenburg & Raskin, 2004). Their value range is represented in the scale [0.0, 1.0]. For instance, the epistemic modality estimates the speaker's attitude toward the factivity of what their utterance proposes, with the value 0.0 ranking the situation as impossible; 0.6 as potentially possible, and 1.0, when the speaker genuinely believes in the possibility of X. Analogically, numerical values are applied to other modalities, but will not be discussed here for space considerations.

In our analysis, the evaluative modality is employed as the criterion to distinguish between the ISP triad. We believe that it conveniently hinges on the speaker's attitudes towards events, objects, and their properties; and estimation shifts from the worst possible (0.0) to the highest possible value (1.0) (Nirenburg & Raskin, 2004). Explicit vocabulary cues include, among many others, verbs like *like, admire, dislike* or *hate,* general adjectives, such as *good* and *bad*, etc. As the modes of ISP correlate, in essence, with one's more or less critical attitudes, an application of the evaluative modality may produce numerical values that correspond to the critical force in the speaker's implied, more than explicitly uttered, meaning.

With the set of tools presented—irony, sarcasm, parody, script, and the evaluative modality—we are now ready to proceed directly to our analysis.

3. Methodology

Samples of verbal humor are taken from the American situational comedy series (sitcom) *Modern Family* (hereinafter referred to as MF) (2009-present). The seasons analysed are Season 7 (2015-2016) and Season 8 (2016-2017), the last two complete seasons that had already been publicly released during the sample compilation phase. Each season comprises 22 episodes, 44 being the total number of episodes considered (an episode lasts for approx. 20-22 minutes). The analysis focuses on perceptibly ironical, sarcastic and/or parodic utterances supposed to provoke a humor response from the audience.

All in all, 460 humorous utterances were encountered, with 263 instances coming from Season 7 and 197 from Season 8. All texts are framed in the same manner, with the final informative segment indicating the source of the joke through the relevant season

(abbreviated as *S*; e.g. *S7*) and episode (abbreviated as *E*; e.g. *E1*). The structural model of text representation is given below:

(1)

[Context clarification.]

Character X [Inquires politely]: text.

Character Y [Harsh and emphatic]: Text.

S7: E1

As our analysis is not interested in possible season differences regarding ISP observed in the texts, the latter are treated irrespective of the season they belong to. Humorous instances that do not feature the three relevant forms, such as canned jokes, spoonerisms, grammatical ambiguities, tautologies, are disregarded. Dramatic irony is also excluded, for it is purely pragmatic and creates tension and humor through situations when the audience has superior knowledge over the character.

By and large, the qualitative method is applied throughout the study. The texts extracted from the series are grouped into one of the three categories, irony, sarcasm, or parody, all stipulated by the distinction of the two Scripts—the Explicit script I and the Implicit script II. The quantitative research method is used to determine the prevailing mode (irony, sarcasm or parody) in the sample compendium.


4. Findings and Discussion

MF is a mockumentary; i.e. an indispensable part of the storytelling in each episode is characters talking into the camera as if they were addressing the audience directly. The series treats relationships in the Pritchett-Dunphy-Tucker family living in Los Angeles, California. The main caracters are Jay Pritchett ($\approx$70 y. o.)—the patriarch figure in the family, strict and unsentimental; his wife Gloria Delgado-Pritchett ($\approx$ 46 y.o.), her son from first marriage Manny ($\approx$18 y.o.), Jay's children Claire Dunphy ($\approx$ 47 y.o.), and Mitch ($\approx$40 y.o.); Claire's husband Phil Dunphy ($\approx$ 48 y. o.), and Mitch's spouse Cameron (Cam) Tucker ($\approx$45 years old), with whom they raise their adoptive Vietnamese daughter Lily ($\approx$9 y. o.). The notion of the stereotype as manifest in the series (Pugh

(2018), Borkent (2016), Vuković (2016) is taken as a supplementary parameter to account for the ironic, sarcastic, and parodic topics.

4.1. The General Distribution of ISP in MF

The distribution of ironic, sarcastic, and parodic texts within the sample is displayed in the pie chart below.

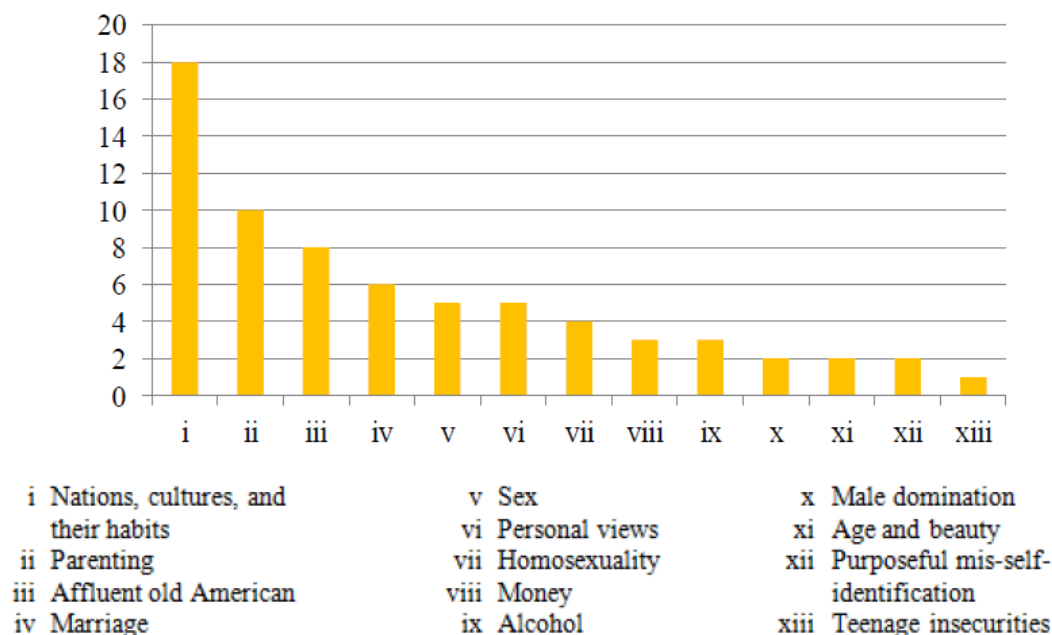Figure 1. Distribution of ironic, sarcastic, and parodic texts in MF
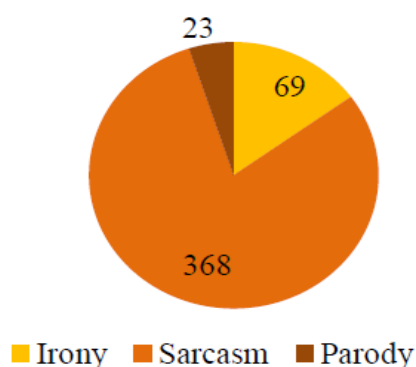
The overwhelming majority (80%) of texts involved are regarded as instances of sarcasm. As evidenced by *Figure 1*, the number of sarcastic utterances is more than five times greater in comparison with irony (15%) and exceeds parody (5%) by sixteen times. Such predominance of sarcasm, however, is not surprising. Given that MF is basically construed as verbal encounters between different characters, their vocalised ironies (*ironies* is used here as the broad term encompassing the three modes) often target a definite personal victim, which is the core feature of sarcasm. Indeed, the victim component is of crucial importance when differentiating between less direct ironies (or simply irony) and more direct, thus more critical, ironies (or sarcasm).

Parody seems to be the most distinctive mode in the triad. This is mainly due its transcontextuality and reliance on copying techniques: unlike irony and sarcasm, parody must follow the already existing models. Meanwhile linking the new with the original makes the mode of parody too complex for casual and relatively short verbal encounters, hence the low number of parodic texts in the series.

4.2. Irony as a Means to Laugh at Daily Realities

Let us first consider irony. Figure 2 below holds formal data concerning the 69 texts identified as examples of irony.

Figure 2. Distribution of ironic texts in MF

i	Nations, cultures, and their habits
ii	Parenting
iii	Affluent old American
iv	Marriage
v	Sex
vi	Personal views
vii	Homosexuality
viii	Money
ix	Alcohol
x	Male domination
xi	Age and beauty
xii	Purposeful mis-self-identification
xiii	Teenage insecurities

The excerpts where ironic stances have been identified are grouped into 13 categories in terms of their thematic topics, which all reflect Raskin's (1985) claim that the domain of potential humor categories is limited, and people tend to laugh at things that pertain to their everyday life. Irony thus approximates to conventional humor forms (e.g. jokes, following Raskin). Due to space constraints, only major categories will be selectively discussed below.

4.2.1. Category i: Nations, cultures, and their habits

This dominant has to do primarily with cultural discrepancies. Texts that concern clashes between cultures (or simply between specific communities) tend to verge on sarcasm. They usually have victims; but though human-like, victims are not individualised and the ironic speaker generally targets the idea of the entire population.

The perceived criticism here is less harsh (when compared to sarcastic instances proper) and should be assigned moderate critical values, which is why the relevant category is classified as ironic and not as sarcastic.

Interestingly, the higher the speaker's personal involvement in the topic treated, the higher the chance that the audience will find utterances amusing. Gloria, for example, frequently comments on the poor and dangerous Latin America, where she originally comes from, as illustrated below:

(2)

[Manny and Jay had an argument. Jay leaves home angry.]

Gloria [To Manny; reproaching]: Why did you get him so mad? I need him in a good mood. I need to ask him to go with me next week to Juárez to my cousin's wedding.

Manny [Seriously concerned]: Is that safe?

Gloria [Causal]: The invitation says, *Short run to the reception*.

S7: E22

The text targets Latin American as an underdeveloped region. In (2), Gloria assumes an ironic attitude to answer Manny's question about safety in Juárez (Mexico). Her reference to the invitation note (i.e. *Short run to the reception*) seems innocuous on the surface level. On the deep level, however, Gloria implies that a long run to the reception would expose wedding guests to a higher risk of external violence that runs in Juárez, a city in a country where criminal activity hits record levels. Though Gloria's indirect remark is sufficient to elicit humor on its own, what amuses even more is the shift from the text's initial, non-ironic, context of going to a wedding to the implicit mockery of dangers in Mexico and, thus, of the very wedding. Referring to Raskin's (1985) SSTH, the introductory context might be treated as Script I (WEDDING IN JUÁREZ) and the final ironic comment, as Script II (GETTING TO THE RECEPTION). The collision of the scripts is resolved through meaning inversion; after the Irony Principle has been applied, the final conclusion is made: weddings in Juárez are not safe.

There is also an instance where Gloria targets the Peruvian nation, though without the previous implications of violence and educational deprivation:

(3)

[Gloria is telling Jay, Mitch, and Cam about her family's special sauce recipe.]

Gloria [Holds the recipe in her hands; sentimental]: My great-aunt Miranda was the only one that could make it, and because I was the oldest girl that didn't marry a Peruvian, the recipe passed down to me.

S7:E6

The surface meaning of the text simply states that Gloria is among the oldest daughters in her family, she did not marry a Peruvian, and the family sauce recipe was entitled to her. In this Meaning I, Gloria's mention of Peruvians bears no major importance and might even be viewed by the audience as accidental. Nonetheless, it is very likely that Gloria's reference to the Peruvian population is ironic and impolite on the deep level, and that her seemingly inoffensive comment uncovers adverse opinions held by Colombians toward Peruvians. Hence, according to the implied Meaning II, other sisters were dismissed as candidates for the possession of the valuable sauce recipe as a form to punish them for marrying Peruvian men. The very situation of giving such great prominence to sauce and relating it to cultural antagonisms is humorous. Furthermore, it can be asserted that there are two semantically opposite scenarios on the surface structure: SAUCE RECIPE as Script I (non-ironic) and PERUVIAN HUSBAND as Script II (ironic). As soon as the scripts are consolidated, the meaning inversion takes place.

From the perspective of Peruvians, (3) is not particularly aggressive. And yet, it is useful to make a brief digression to earlier seasons of the series where a similar, though significantly more mordant, example is found. In Season 2, Episode 5, (*Unplugged*), Gloria reproaches Jay for hinting negatively at her Colombian origins. She says:

(4)

Because in Colombia, we trip over goats and we kill people in the street. Do you know how offensive that is? Like we're Peruvians!

The final remark excited much disapproval in the media, with the head of People's Defender's Office in Peru demanding explanations. One Peruvian representative claimed that Vergara, the actor executing Gloria's character in MF, could control the script and that her offensive and racist comment was purposeful (Associated Press, 2010). Compared to the ironic undertones in the previous sauce-recipe context, the present text features explicit criticism: Gloria attacks Peruvians openly (Peruvians are now the proper victim) and is more sarcastic than ironic. On the whole, the attention that this single comment received proves that sarcasm—or extreme cases of irony (following Leech's (2014) irony gradation)—may indeed have immense critical force and be perceived as a serious offense by the victim thus putting genuine human interactions at risk (Purdy 1999).

Gloria's irony is also directed at white English-speaking American population on two occasions with one of them strong enough to assume the value of sarcasm: there Gloria openly ridicules (*What is with you Americans and the foot?*) the abundance of idioms in the English language. Interestingly, while mocking the American style of verbal expression, Gloria herself becomes the victim of dramatic irony. In her tirade against particular English sayings (i.e. the ones involving the noun *foot*), Gloria misuses the idiomatic term *the shoe is on the other foot*; she, probably unintentionally, confuses *shoe* and *foot*, which results in *the shoe is in the wrong foot*. The situation of her judging speaking habits of others and becoming the object of laughter herself is very likely to stimulate humor responses from the audience. Since this text exhibits Gloria's incorrect usage of English, it also contributes to the stereotypical MF characterisation of Gloria as a female immigrant from Latin America.

Beside the confrontation between Latin Americans and U.S. Americans, there are two instances with speakers hinting at peculiarities of the Vietnamese culture. These are

Cam and Mitch, representatives of the Tucker-Pritchett branch of the family, who have an adopted a Vietnamese daughter (the fact that the topic concerns the ironic speaker personally contributes to funniness). The text in (5) below is more expressive and more impactful regarding the humorous effect it elicits:

(5)

[Lily is afraid of riding a bike. Cam believes she must fight her fears and finally learn how to ride.]

Cam [To Mitch; firm]: We are doing this tomorrow. She is getting on this bike.

Mitch [Anxious]: What's the rush? She's 8 years old.

Cam [Continues calm and firm]: Most Vietnamese kids her age are already riding a bike to work.

S7:E16

As Meaning II, Cam implies that American children—or the Western world children in general—are better off than their peers in Oriental countries. More, the mention of Vietnam, and not some other Far East nation, is purposeful and directs to Lily's Vietnamese origins. But on the deep level the audience may infer that, had Cam and Mitch not adopted Lily, the girl would probably be living in Vietnam and already working. That is, her life in Vietnam would be significantly more miserable. Instead of childish stubbornness, the girl is thus expected to be grateful to her fathers and start acting more mature. Cam thus assumes an ironic stance toward the child position in Vietnam, but is sarcastic about Lily's abnormal fears. Alongside, he introduces the second script (VIETNAMESE CYCLING TO WORK) that contrasts to some degree with the situational context that opens the conversation (LEARNING TO RIDE A BIKE).

Other texts lack culture-based discrepancies, but still relate to this category, for they refer to certain nations (communities) and particularise issues regular Americans are confronted with: e.g., reading billboards along the highway, which may serve a substitute for the broken radio, European cultures, or even Russian totalitarianism.

4.2.2. Category ii: Parenting

The second most common ironic field in MF is parenting and parent life. An expressive ironic representation is the recurrent allusion to the stripper pole observed in (6) below:

(6)

[Phil has been really tough on Luke after the boy got arrested while driving without a license.]

Claire [To Phil]: You think maybe you're being a bit hard on Luke?

Phil [Excessively serious]: We're his parents, Claire. It's our job to keep him off the stripper pole.

S7: E6

Stripper poles, whose mention immediately invokes negative connotations, are pictured as things from which children need to be protected by their parents. In *(x)*, Phil's words about keeping Luke *off the stripper pole* might be translated on the deep level simply as providing the boy with proper education and making him pay for his misbehaviour (Phil here also mocks the very idea of parenting as a full-time job). Alternatively stated, Phil gives a superficially irrelevant answer to Claire merely to communicate he does not think he is too hard on Luke (i.e. Meaning II). Phil's ironic remark constitutes the second, unreal, script KEEPING OFF STRIPPER POLE (interestingly, in the series, there is another ironic mention of stripper poles with regard to parenting (*S7*: E16)). This shift from one script to another leads the ongoing (non-ironic) conversational context to unpredicted (ironic) semantic environment and thus amuses the audience.

Another subgroup of texts in this category foreground the parent-child issues, generally revealing the difficulties of parental life [S7:E9, S7:E10; S7:E11; S7:E16], with ironic remarks sounding funny on the surface, but exposing criticism on the deep level.

4.2.3. Category iii: Affluent old American

The uniqueness of this category lies in its complete reliance on Jay's character: Jay is always the ironic speaker who communicates meanings that promote the stereotypical

representation of his MF character and, in general, of a particular men category: an old man who makes fortunes and whose money guarantees him a beautiful younger wife. For instance, (7) below implies that old men often have beautiful young wives. Such implicit assertion is present in Jay's somewhat aggressive and cynical question (more rhetorical than direct) after Tommy (Jay's son Joe's preschool friend) unexpectedly comments on his old age.

(7)

[Tommy, a boy with very prominent ears, comments on Jay while he is reading a story.]

Tommy [Innocent]: You're old.

Jay [Harsh]: You seen my wife, Big Ears?

S7: E5

Even though neither Gloria's younger age, nor her attractiveness is explicitly mentioned in Jay's answer, these are precisely the characteristics attributed to Jay's wife after the implicit Meaning II is obtained. As happens with many ironic texts, the neutral pre-context that leads to the ironic remark acts here is Script I (BEING OLD). Irony then breaks the text congruity with somewhat aberrant and opaque Script II (HAVING WIFE). The humorous effect is even higher considering that the receiver of Jay's ambiguous remark is a little boy. That is, Jay reacts to Tommy's innocent and naive observation inappropriately, as if he were talking to an adult. Calling the boy *big ears* also has sarcastic undertones, since Jay targets the prominent ears as a defect in the child's physique. Actually, such metonymic sarcasm shows aggression already on the surface and, therefore, depends less on meaning inversion. His aggression, though, is verbal rather than physical while the anti-social side of Jay's character role is enhanced in other instances, all of which manifest his witty and comic irony.

Another subgroup are texts in which Jay implies he can manipulate lower classes only because he is in a financially better position. A humorous and ironic situation of such social disparity is depicted in (8) below, where Jay addresses a train attendant.

(8)

[Jay is travelling by train and gives a twenty-dollar bill to a female train attendant. The bill features Andrew Jackson, the seventh U.S. president.]

Jay [To the train attendant; authoritative]: Here's an Andrew Jackson. Make a clean set of sheets happen, I'll introduce you to his twin brother.

S7: E21

The sentences above infringe normal politeness expected during the customer-attendant interaction. Instead of simply stating what he needs, which would not be considered as an attack on the train worker, Jay uses ambiguous language. On the surface level, Andrew Jackson is a living person who happens to have a twin brother (i.e. Meaning I). On the deep level, Jay implies he will pay double if the woman he addresses complies with his orders (i.e. Meaning II). The surface meaning is obviously nonsensical and merely contributes to Jay's superiority and the attendant's inferiority. That is, Jay uses the allusion to Andrew Jackson purposefully, as a witty way to impose power on the other. And yet, he does not criticise the train attendant directly, but rather degrades the common middle class, which is exploited by and depend on the rich.

Nonetheless, Jay himself is concerned about this stereotype:

(9)

[Jay is telling Gloria about their new Afro-American neighbours.]

Jay [Honestly concerned]: A black family's moving in right across the street the same day my security cameras are going up. Well, what am I supposed to do? I made the appointment weeks ago right after the break-in down the street. But they'll think I made the call the minute I saw them because I'm a racist old man.

Gloria [Honestly surprised]: Why would the neighbours just assume that you're a racist?

Jay [Sighing]: Gloria, Gloria, Gloria. You'll never understand the stereotypes old white men face.

S8: E2

The text differs from others in this category, for it explicitly names the notion of stereotype: the society, especially the Afro-American population, sees old white American males as racists (to note, the present example also relates to the topics treated in *Nations, cultures, and their habits*, for it hints at cultural controversies). To expose his criticism toward this social interpretation of the American man, Jay produces an ironic comment after Gloria's naive question at the end of the conversation. However, an even more amusing aspect of the text is its combination of dramatic irony and verbal irony. The former is more like a hypothetical scenario, where the new neighbours, an Afro-American family, are about to misjudge Jay's behaviour and treat him as a proper racist due to an unfavourable coincidence. All in all, Jay begins the conversation preoccupied with his public image and ends it with an ironic and mocking evaluation of racial stereotyping.

4.3. Sarcastic Encounters Between Characters

Since sarcastic texts are basically instances of more intense irony that target specific human beings, they, too, exploit the Irony Principle. The compatibility of sarcastic meanings with the Irony Principle is illustrated below in (10):

(10)

Jay [Firmly]: I never forget anything.

Gloria [Casual]: When we park at the mall, we have to take a picture.

S7: E10

Though Gloria's turn in the given dialogue does not manifest any explicit insult, impoliteness is implied within the second, deep, meaning. Once Meaning II is derived, her remark is identified as an attack on Jay, ridiculing the man's claim about his good memory. The SSTH also applies: the superficial content of the ironic remark serves as Script II (or ALWAYS TAKING PICTURES), which is inconsistent with the non-ironic content of the sentence uttered by Jay at the beginning (i.e. Script I NEVER FORGETTING THINGS).

The subsequent presentation of sarcastic texts within the sample compiled does not develop the concept of meaning inversion further; neither does it include more detailed references to the script theory and the irony-SSTH behaviour. To implement certain theoretical observations not yet applied practically and focus on the nature of the speaker roles in sarcastic encounters, analyse sarcastic texts from a different angle: our discussion supports the view of sarcastic texts containing criticism (aggression, ridicule, mock, etc.) already in the surface representation, as noted by Dynel (2009). Culpeper's (2011) concept of impolite mimicry is also addressed.

4.3.1. *Family-Based Sarcasm*

Sarcasm is more derisive and, importantly, more direct than irony. In the analysis, texts classified as sarcastic feature human antagonism, where one party targets the other; the former is thus victimised by the latter. This is why texts with sarcastic meanings are organised in categories naming the participants in such confrontations. The majority of the categories represent encounters between the Pritchett-Dunphy-Tucker family members whose relationship is governed either by consanguinity or affinity.

The distribution of sarcastic texts within the character relations is provided in *Figure 3* below. The first of the charts represents such distribution in a general way, where family-bound roles indicate that the sarcastic speaker mocks a family member. *Figure 4* then particularises the categories of sarcastic encounters.

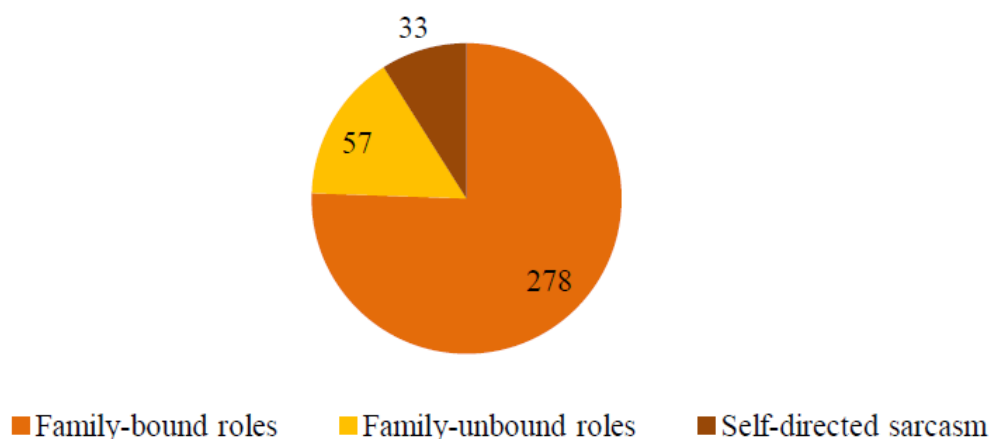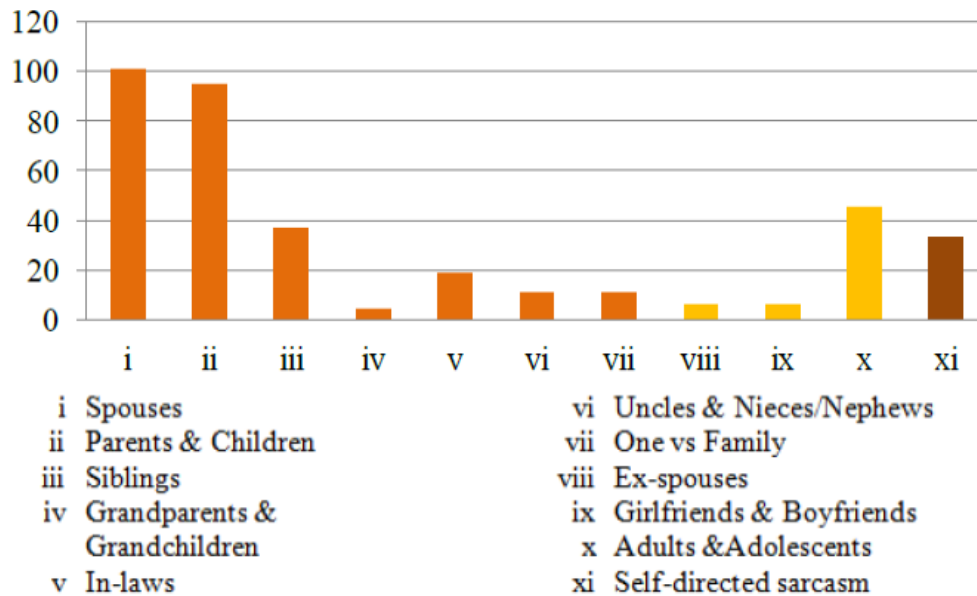Figure 3. General distribution of sarcastic texts in MF

Figure 4. Categories of sarcastic encounters in MF

i   Spouses
ii Parents & Children
iii Siblings
iv Grandparents &
    Grandchildren
v   In-laws

vi   Uncles & Nieces/Nephews
vii One vs Family
viii Ex-spouses
ix   Girlfriends & Boyfriends
x   Adults & Adolescents
xi   Self-directed sarcasm

Within the eleven categories identified, seven are purely family-oriented (categories *i-vii* indicated in darker orange in the graph) and amount to 278 texts in total (76% of the sarcastic sample). Categories *viii-x* lack family bounds between the parties (i.e. the sarcastic speaker and their victim); texts within these categories constitute merely 15% of the sample. Since the series is about family encounters, the study naturally pays attention to verbal sarcastic exchanges between family members (i.e. first seven categories). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that less family-oriented sarcastic encounters, such as *Ex-spouses* or *Adults and Adolescents*, still almost always feature a character from the main set. Alternatively stated, there is a limited number of texts where all participants are exclusively secondary characters. The confrontations thus do not seem to address "realities" other than those experienced by the main Pritchett–Dunphy–Tucker clan.

The remaining 9% (33 texts) constitute the final category *Self-directed sarcasm* (indicated in darkest orange), which is unique in that the speaker adopts a sarcastic demeanour at their own expense; that is, a character ridicules herself/himself. Following Dynel's (2009) taxonomy, this category might also be designated as self-denigrating

humor. These texts are assigned the value of sarcasm considering that speakers vocalises mocking remarks to victimise themselves (i.e. the speaker becomes the target of their own verbal attack).

In fact, the fusion of the sarcastic speaker and the sarcastic victim into one entity is controversial and might be questioned: negative evaluations against oneself might be held to be less severe, more playful instances of criticism, which would subsume them under the mode of irony discussed earlier. Since different interpretations arise and the theory presented does not sufficiently reflect any of them, the present study does not expand on the subject of self-derogatory vocalisations. The only texts addressed here are (11) and (12) below that somehow contrast in their implied degrees of criticism:

(11)

[Manny presents himself on the phone to a girl who works in a coffee shop and whom he likes very much.]

Manny [Self-assured]: Hi, Chelsea? I was in earlier, wearing the green jacket that's louder than that guy laughing at his own screenplay.

 S7: E4

(12)

[Jay and Gloria are at the Dunphys', attending a seminar on how to *clean out your emotional drawer*. Jay is resting on Gloria's lap.]

Gloria [To Jay; authoritative]: Now close your eyes.

Jay [Surprised]: Why should I close my eyes?

Gloria [Somewhat self-loathing]: Because I don't like you looking up at my neck like that. The other day, I took a *selfie* from down there and I thought that I was *face timing* with my grandmother.

S7: E8

In (11), Manny uses a self-attack so as to sound funny and impress the girl; through a clever simile, he degrades his peculiar sense of style. The very context of a boy courting a girl is rather innocent and, consequently, entails lower critical values. The text in (12) is

nonetheless much more negative. Alluding to her grandmother, Gloria self-ridicules her fading beauty, which, more than a playful attack, already resembles harsh criticism (the text might indeed be seen as a proper instance of sarcasm). It should be added that both texts offer mocking attitudes toward the stereotypical representation of the MF character roles (Manny's over-sophistication and Gloria's physical attractiveness), which makes them even more amusing.

In general, sarcastic confrontations most often take place between wives and husbands (category *i*); less numerous but still prevailing are sarcastic remarks delivered by parents/children against their children/parents (category *ii*); and remarks where a sibling (a brother or a sister) attacks another sibling (a brother or a sister) (category *iii*). Further subdivisions are possible. Thus *Spouses* has two subcategories: *Husband vs Wife* and *Wife vs Husband*, the first member in the pair indicating the sarcastic speaker, and the second the victim. To account for the intricate character relationships in *MF*, *In-laws* features seven subcategories, while *Parents and Children* contains as many as thirteen minor groups (in addition to common relations like *Mother vs Daughter* or *Son vs Mother*, sarcastic remarks are also attributed to kinships such as *Step-mother vs Step-daughter* (e.g. Gloria vs Claire) or even more convoluted *Step-son-in-law vs Step-mother-in-law* (e.g. Cam vs Gloria)). Yet, the analysis here undertaken does not exemplify such detailed specification; this delimitation merely serves to validate the family-oriented nature of the series and, if needed, might be consulted in the appendix section.

Overall, sarcasm in MF is harsher when parents use it against their adult children than when they target their adolescent children. This is well evidenced by the subcategory *Father vs Son* in *Fathers and Sons*, where the majority of the texts are confrontations between Jay (a father) and Mitch (an adult son) and not, for example, Phil (a father) and Luke (a teenage character).

4.3.2 *Impolite Mimicry, Open and Formulaic Sarcasm, and Linguistic Creativity*

Below we will discuss instances of sarcasm as well as the text's capacity both to expose criticism toward other human subject and to elicit humor responses, supporting alongside stereotypical role characterisations in MF. A number of sarcastic texts support Dynel's (2009) assertion on self-evident impoliteness that is possible in sarcasm. There

are also texts that corroborate Blake's (2007) mention on the so called pre-established, formulaic, forms, and texts that represent Culpeper's (2014) impolite mimicry.

The first category, ***Spouses***, is illustrated by a text relatable to Culperer's impolite mimicry (the other instance of this kind concerns Cam's ex-lover Keifth and is found in *S8: E10*).

(13)

[Cam has met his old friend Jace he has not seen since college.]

Cam [To Mitch, pointing to Jace; enthusiastic]: That's Jace.

Mitch [Bitter]: How many *s's* in *Jace*? I heard twelve.

S7: E4

In both cases, Mitch's attacks on Cam are jealousy-driven. Mitch targets his husband's prosody as a way to imply he does not approve of the enthusiasm Cam shows while talking about other men (i.e. Jace). Even though the speaker imitates his victim - Mitch selects for his attack a single feature of Cam's prosody - the imitation part in these texts is too short to justify the parodic mode.

Sarcastic productivity and creativity of Jay's character in *MF* is prominent in the category ***In-laws***. It seems that Jay degrades both his sons-in-law, Phil and Cam, on similar grounds, even though they identify themselves differently in terms of their sexual orientation. Since Jay's character represents a stereotypical over-masculinised family's patriarch, his mockery of Phil and Cam naturally targets their subtle personalities:

(14)

 [Cam has bought a new bag that closely resembles women's purse and is now showing it to Jay.]

Cam [Proudly]: This is a gentleman's tactical tote. And I'll have you know, this exact model was carried by a member of SEAL Team 6.

Jay [Casual]: Yes, while his girlfriend tried on dresses.

S7: E12

Here Jay trivialises Cam's pompous description about his new bag. To make his argument about the bag more authoritative, Cam first refers to SEAL Team 6, a component part of the U.S. Navy. Jay then defeats Cam's self-confidence by moving the conversation to a somewhat primitive, non-real, context (i.e. there is a humorous shift from Script I MILITARY MEMBER to Script II MILITARY MEMBER'S GIRLFRIEND). In both examples, Jay's mocking criticism is implicit and must be inferred through meaning inversion.

The sarcastic mode, both to convey criticism and to elicit humor, is sometimes implemented through set formulas. Such is the joke in *S8:E3*, from the category ***Uncles and Nieces/Nephews***, featuring the knife-metaphor to indicate betrayal: the speaker feels betrayed by other human subject and employs the metaphorical image of a knife to imply criticism toward the traitor (in a sense, the sarcastic speaker takes revenge by verbally victimising their traitor).

Figure 5 below indicates the number of sarcastic vocalisations attributed to each character from the main set targeting other MF characters (i.e. self-directed sarcastic attacks are excluded).

Figure 5. Sarcastic speakers in MF
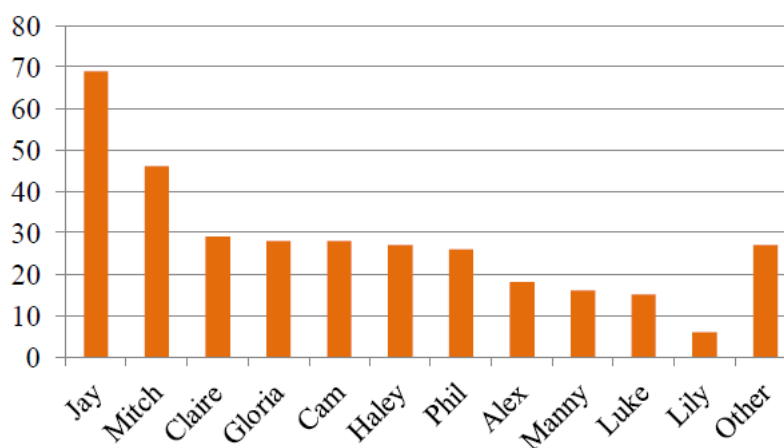
As *Figure 5* suggests, sarcasm is generally the mode of expression undertaken by adult characters, with Jay being the most sarcastic character in the series. He is often mordant and manipulative toward other family and non-family characters. Adult sarcasm in *MF* is found to be more elaborate and more impactful in terms of funniness, whilst the younger generation within the cast is less original regarding the mocking remarks they utter.

4.4. Parody and Its Distortions

The 23 parodic texts constitute as little as 5% of the texts collected and are classified into three groups according to the original entity provoking parodic verbalisations. These comprise human subjects (i.e. the category *Person imitation*, artistic genres such as literature or films (i.e. *Genre imitation*), or simply some contextual situation (i.e. *Real life parodic representation*):

Figure 6. Distribution of parodic texts in MF
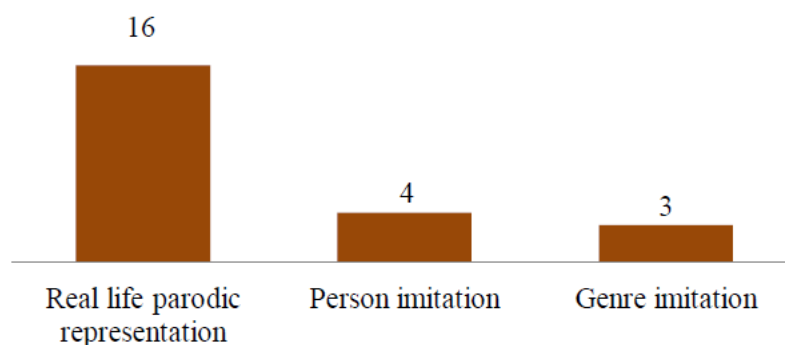
Parodic texts in MF tend to be significantly longer than the ironic or the sarcastic ones. Normally, sitcoms present a wide range of contexts during a relatively short episode and evolve verbal encounters with frequent changes in conversational turns. Thus, more lengthy parodic verbalisations are simply inconvenient for such dynamic nature, which might explain their small number in MF. As regards character representation, parodic texts are similar to those in irony and sarcasm in that they, too, refer to human universals (e.g. love, marriage, parenting, etc.) and, alongside, target and

mock the character stereotypes on which the series itself is built. For space constraints, we will not be discussing this section further

4.5. Survey Results: Modal Values of Impoliteness in ISP

To establish modal values of ISP, and, in this way, to make the qualitative study of the three forms more versatile, a survey was conducted taking the negative critical force as the value parameter of the evaluative modality (Nirenburg & Raskin, 2004). The survey conducted involved an initial focus group of 12 participants; it then was repeated with additional 51 respondents for more accurate results. All participants were third year male and female language students at Vilnius University not supposed to have any specific theoretical knowledge on the subject. The focus group participants were asked to evaluate the level of hostility (i.e. unfriendly demeanour) on a scale from 0 to 10 in seven utterances that imply different attitudinal shades—among them, ISP—of the speaker toward their interlocutor (where 0 marks absence of hostility and 10, its highest degree). Based on the general observation expressed by the respondents that the 0-10 scale was too broad, it was reduced to 0 to 5 (where 0 marks absence of hostility and 5, its highest degree) during the second round of the survey, now with the additional 51 respondents. The numerical values obtained during both stages were then mutually harmonised and finally rendered to meet Nirenburg and Raskin's original scale [0.0, 1.0].

In the survey, the respondents were provided with seven identical situations (a two-line dialogue), where the only item that differed was the interlocutor's X manner in which they reacted to Y's utterance and which was indicated by **speech tags**, as seen in the model below:

(15)

I'll never finish this book! said X sadly.

Obviously you won't, **Y answered**.

The following are the seven speech tags used: *replied*, *teased in a friendly manner*, *teased*, *ridiculed*, *answered ironically*, *answered sarcastically*, and *answered mimicking Y's sadness*. What is taken into consideration is the respondents' sensitivity to

the overt vocabulary cues that indicate the speaker's Y attitude toward the speaker X, such as *teased* or *ironically*. The participants were asked to evaluate the level of criticism (i.e. hostility, impoliteness, aggression) of each conversational situation based on different Y's attitudes. Nirenburg and Raskin's (2004) scale [0.0; 1.0] was used to assess the extent evaluative modality, here equivalent to the degree of criticism, where 0.0 would indicate lack of criticism and 1.0, its maximum.

The modes of ISP, overtly cued through respectively *answered ironically*, *answered mimicking Y's sadness* and *answered sarcastically* score the highest values of impoliteness (together with the situation containing the verbal cue *ridiculed*, which is given the value of 0.7 and which reasonably reflects the mode of sarcasm). Therefore, the respondents generally regard ISP as significantly negative in nature. Among the triad, the lowest value belongs to irony (0.63), while sarcasm and parody score 0.65 and 0.67 accordingly. To compare, the lowest value—0.22—is granted to banter (represented by *teased in a friendly manner*), and a relatively low value (0.4) is also attributed to teasing (represented by *teased*). Indeed, the non-harsh nature of both bantering and teasing can be supported by referring to the illustrative examples contained within Dynel's (2009) taxonomic classification of humor forms.

In general, the numerical values obtained (i.e. 0.63, 0.65, and 0.67) corroborate the theoretical accounts on impoliteness in verbal ISP. Being highly comparable, they also validate the close interrelationship between the three modes and the lack of clear differential boundaries. And yet, appreciating the slight differences that do exist between the numerical expressions concerned, it can be stated that irony, among the three modes, is the least aggressive, whilst parody is the most negative form. Value 0.63 could thus account for victimless ironies, leaving 0.65 to ironies featuring victims, or sarcasm. The remaining value 0.67 then applies to Sperber's (1984) precise reproductions or Culpeper's (2011) impolite mimicries, namely, to verbalisations that tackle and distort the victim's typical verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

Nonetheless, the practical analysis shows that the modes might effectuate impoliteness in quite contrasting degrees. Ironic texts, for instance, are observed to mock human universals through witty and playful comments (e.g. Gloria pictures motherhood as starvation and Phil calls marriage a *sit-here-and-listen* thing). Without a human victim

involved and because of the playfulness effect, such texts are likely to be perceived by the audience as notably less threatening than the sarcastic ones. Though sarcastic speakers often, too, exploit language in creative ways, their creativity is a means to attack a definite human subject; the playfulness of sarcasm thus only increases the ridicule effect. Unlike irony, sarcasm permits explicit impoliteness. Naturally, openly aggressive texts (e.g. Jay comparing his daughter to an animal's back, and Alex metaphorically defining Luke's ignorance as a vast *cloud of stupid*) must score the highest values concerning the perceived criticism. Impoliteness therefore seems to fluctuate not only among the modes but also within *a mode*, constantly generating different modal values. Finally, looking at the texts assumed as parodic in MF, the only category that could amount to 0.67 in terms of impoliteness is *Person imitation* (an instance where Manny echoes Cam's exact wording whilst at the same time mimicking his non-verbal cues). Texts in other categories diverge from the iconic interpretation of parody as a perfect duplication of the victim's conversational behaviour.Such texts then relate to proper parodies as non-personal irony relates to sarcasm.

5. Conclusions

The present study examines the interaction between irony, sarcasm, and parody, often characterised as semantic-pragmatic phenomena, in the sitcom *Modern Family*. In our analysis, irony is manifest principally as attacks on human life universals and generally held beliefs. Sarcasm is treated as an attack on an identifiable human being, while parodies are identified as verbal imitations of some original entity (person, work of art, situation, etc.).

The analysis of 69 ironic texts extracted from two MF seasons shows that the mode of irony is best approached through the principle of meaning inversion, where the non-vocalised meaning (i.e. Meaning II) exposes the speaker's critical stance toward the topic addressed. The indefinite boundaries between irony and sarcasm become manifest in texts addressing other cultures. Texts in which ironic vocalisations are preceded by the honest introductory (non-ironic) context are effectively captured by the SSTH: the ironic remark takes the role of the incongruous second script; the contradictory script behaviour enables the recognition of ironic meanings, and thus complements the Irony Principle.

The mode of sarcasm comprises the overwhelming majority of the texts compiled, with speakers targeting specific human subjects in order to criticise or ridicule them. On other occasions speakers verbalise sarcastic comments of self-deprecatory nature, a dimension for which no adequate theoretical explanation has been found. Our study of the sarcastic texts corroborates the theoretical accounts on the possibility of explicitly impolite sarcasm (i.e. sarcasm without meaning inversion), formulaic sarcasm (i.e. pre-established sarcastic structures), as well as. Additionally, sarcastic speakers sometimes expose Culpeper's (2011) impolite mimicry.

The least numerically, but the most extensive in textual form is the mode of parody. Only a very limited number of texts accurately account for parody as impolite mimicry targeting the victim's verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The vocalisations encountered thus favour more Ross's (1998) interpretation of parody as a parasitical form that relates to the original form through transcontextuality. Finally, ironic, sarcastic, and parodic vocalisations of MF characters (especially ironic and sarcastic ones) support the stereotypical representation of the very characters and their daily lives, with sarcasm being the dominating mode.

The survey conducted to establish the most representative modal values of the perceived criticism in ISP shows that people generally think about ironies as a significantly negative phenomenon. The virtually identical numerical expressions of sarcasm and parody corroborate their treatment in theoretical accounts as irony derivatives.

References

Attardo, S. (2001). *Humorous Texts : A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis.* Berlin & New York: Mouton De Gruyter.

Attardo, S., & Raskin, V. (1991). Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model. *HUMOR. International Journal of Humor Research*, 293-348. Retrieved November 30, 2017, from https://www.scribd.com/document/340905715/184169269-Script-Theory-Revisited-pdf

Attardo, S., Wagner, M. M., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Prosody and Humor.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Associated Press. (2010, October 29). Peruvians Offended By "Modern Family". *CBS News*. Retrieved March 15, 2018, from

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/peruvians-offended-by-modern-family/

Blake, B. J. (2007). *Playing with Words: Humor in the English Literature.* London: Equinox Publishing.

Borkent, L. (2016). *Analyzing Stereotypification in the TV Series "Modern Family".* Bachelor Thesis, Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities, The Hague.

Bremer, M. (2008). *Why Ontological Semantics Is Neither Ontological nor Semantics.* Retrieved January 22, 2018, from

http://www.mbph.de/Language/WhyOntologicalSemanticsIsNeitherOntologicalNorSemantics.htm

Brône, G. (2012). Humor and Irony in Cognitive Pragmatics. In H.-J. Schmid (Ed.), *Cognitive Pragmatics* (pp. 463-504). Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

Clark, H. H., & Gerrig, R. J. (1984). On the Pretense Theory of Irony. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 121-126. Retrieved January 31, 2018, from

https://web.stanford.edu/~clark/1980s/Clark,%20H.H.%20_%20Gerrig,%20R.J.%20_On%20the%20pretense%20theory%20of%20irony_%201984.pdf

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Day, A. (2011). *Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate.* Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Dynel, M. (2009). Beyond a Joke: Types of Conversational Humor. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1284-1299. Retrieved October 25, 2017, from

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2009.00152.x/full

Gecevičiūtė, A. (2016). *"No Peer Pressure": Analysis of Verbal Humor in Age-Related English jokes.* Bachelor Thesis, Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology.

Glenwright, M., & Pexman, P. M. (2010). Development of Children's Ability to Distinguish Sarcasm and Verbal Irony. *Journal of Child Language*, 429-451. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from

https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-child-language/article/development-of-childrens-ability-to-distinguish-sarcasm-and-verbal-irony/5D69DC0F3EEC5729F84644AA0A390C94

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole, & L. J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.

Hay, J. (1995). *Gender and Humor: Beyond a Joke.* Master's Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington.

Holmes, J. (2006). Sharing a Laugh: Pragmatic Aspects of Humor and Gender in the Workplace. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26-50. Retrieved January 30, 2018, from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378216605001281?via%3Dihub

Korostenskaja, J. (2012). Addressing Template Composition and Parametric Features of Aspect and Modality. *Studies About Languages*, 28-36. Retrieved November 3, 2017, from

https://www.kalbos.lt/zurnalai/21_numeris/04.pdf

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics.* London: Longman.

Leech, G. N. (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Lowest common denominator [Def 2]. (2018). *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online.* Retrieved March 7, 2018, from:

https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/lowest-common-denominator

Nabokov, V. (1966). Nabokov's interview. (A. Appel Jr., Interviewer) Retrieved October 24, 2017, from

http://www.lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter06.txt_with-big-pictures.htm

Nemec, P. (2006). Ontological Semantics (Review). *The Prague Bulletin of Mathematical Linguistics*, 55-56. Retrieved November 3, 2017, from https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/pbml/86/nemec.pdf

Nirenburg, S., & Raskin, V. (2004). *Ontological Semantics.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Nirenburg, S., McShane, M., & Beale, S. (2003). *Operative Strategies in Ontological Semantics.* University of Maryland, Institute for Language Information Technologies.

Ortega, M. B. (2013). An Approach to Verbal Humor in Interaction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 594-603. Retrieved February 7, 2018, from https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/35227/1/2013_Alvarado_Procedia.pdf

Palmer, J. (2004). *Taking Humor Seriously*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pugh, T. (2018). Conservative Narratology, Queer Politics, and the Humor of Gay Stereotypes in Modern Family. In T. Pugh, *The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom* (pp. 161-190). New Brunswick, Camden, & Newark, New Jersey, & London: Rutgers University Press.

Purdy, J. (1999). *For Common Things: Irony, Trust and Commitment in America Today.* New York: Vintage Books.

Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor.* Dordrecht, Boston, & Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company.

Ross, A. (1998). *The Language of Humor.* London & New York: Routledge.

Sperber, D. (1984). Verbal Irony: Pretense or Echoic Mention? *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 130-136. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from http://www.dan.sperber.fr/wp-content/uploads/1984_verbal-irony-pretense-or-echoic-mention.pdf

Vuković, T. (2016). *Representation of Gender in "Modern Family".* Graduate Thesis, University of Zadar, Zadar. Retrieved March 17, 2018, from https://repozitorij.unizd.hr/islandora/object/unizd%3A444/datastream/PDF/view

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2012). Explaining Irony (Ch 6). In D. Wilson, & D. Sperber, *Meaning and Relevance* (pp. 123-145). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved January 31, 2018, from http://www.dan.sperber.fr/wp-content/uploads/WilsonSperber_ExplainingIrony.pdf