

Assignment #2 (Due September 15th @ 4pm)

Context: Over the past few weeks, we've discussed the "Big Three" characteristics of language as a system:

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| 1. Sound/sign: | phonetics, phonology | | the articulation/sounds of the utterances |
| 2. Structure: | morphology, syntax | | the structure of the words/sentences |
| 3. Meaning: | semantics, pragmatics | | the actual meaning, context, and framing |

However, this systematic approach to language rarely considers the interactive & communicative ways language is used. In this assignment, we will attempt to bridge the gap between the systematic and communicative qualities of language by investigating how comedians use language to make us *laugh*.

Prompt: You are a critic writing 4-5 page review that compares two of the clips presented below:

1. Sebastian Manescalco: Doorbell
2. Hannibal Buress: The Weirdest Part of Working in the Office (CW: language)
3. Mae Martin: The Russell Howard Hour (CW: language, suicide reference (1:55-1:59))

The final goal of your review is to recommend the reader to watch one of your chosen clips over the other. Center your argument around one or two of the "Big Three" characteristics that we have discussed. Some questions to think about and help build your argument are: how does each comedian use the characteristic(s), and what does the characteristic(s) contribute to their overall performances? How do the two comedians take advantage of the same characteristic(s) differently? Who is the audience for each comedian, and how do the comedians build rapport with them? What's effective? What's not as effective? Write a clear thesis statement and use evidence from the clips to defend your argument. For this assignment, underline your thesis statement.

Other information:

- Scripts to the clips are posted on Canvas; physical actions will not be outlined on the scripts but can be considered in your analysis (where relevant). Timestamps will be included.
- You will write this paper from the perspective of a reviewer/critic, meaning you are welcome to adopt a less academic tone. However, please keep *your* writing appropriate for publication in a major newspaper like The New York Times (aka: no curse words, no derogatory remarks, etc.). This content restriction does not apply to the clips, so feel free to cite anything that the comedians say.
- Prior to turning in this assignment, you will read plenty of written reviews for published content. Think about how "professional" critics structure their writing. What kinds of language do they use? How do they present the material? Why might they write this way? A useful exercise is to consider alternative phrasings of the stand-up material and the linguistic implications for such alternatives.
- While you are asked to focus on one or two of the Big Three characteristics, you do *not* have to ignore the other characteristic(s), especially as the characteristics often tangle with one another. The reason I ask you to focus on one or two of the Big Three is to avoid shallow writing: I'd rather you thoroughly investigate a few qualities, rather than only touch upon many.
- Citations of the clips should be conducted as follows:
 - In-text: (Last Name), if the comedian name is not already referenced in the sentence.
 - References: [Last Name, First Initial]. [Year that the clip was posted]. YouTube. [Link].