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BACHELOR THESIS

THE USE OF SENSE RELATIONS IN EXPRESSING LANGUAGE HUMOUR:
TV SERIES ANALYSIS

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the result of my own work and that I have used only the cited sources.

Prague, 15th April 2016   Linda Kopicová

                                                Signature: ………………………….

Acknowledgement

Abstract

This bachelor thesis focuses on sense relations, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic axis, and their use in expressing language humour. The analysis was carried out in a corpus extracted from the TV series *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*. It strives to answer the question whether the sitcoms display the same number of comical incidences both in the first and the last season. Furthermore, it sheds some light on the linguistic realizations employed and the way they operate to trigger laughter. Finally, the thesis provides an insight into the universal tendencies of humour realizations and their reflection in the amassed data.

Key Words

Language humour, Sense relations, Paradigmatic axis, Syntagmatic axis, Axial clash, Collocation, Idiom, Polysemy, Homonymy, Synonym, Antonym, Hyponym, Homophone, Ambiguity, Word play, Pun, TV series, *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother*

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na paradigmatické a syntagmatické vztahy a jejich využití v jazykové komice. Sitkomy *Přátelé* a *Jak jsem poznal vaši matku* posloužily jako materiál pro následnou analýzu. Práce se snaží odpovědět na otázku, zda oba sitkomy obsahují přibližně stejný počet humorných příkladů jak v první tak v poslední sérii. Práce také přibližuje objevující se lingvistické realizace a demonstruje, jaký je jejich účel při vyvolávání humorné reakce. Nakonec jsou představeny vybrané univerzální tendence humoru a jejich uplatnění v nashromážděných datech.

Klíčová slova

Jazyková komika, Paradigmatická osa, Syntagmatická osa, Kolokace, Idiom, Polysémie, Homonymum, Synonymum, Antonymum, Hyponymum, Homofon, Dvojsmysl, Slovní hříčka, Televizní seriál, *Přátelé*, *Jak jsem poznal vaši matku*

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Introduction

The main objective of the proposed thesis is to examine the use of syntagmatic and paradigmatic sense relations in the comical instances in the TV series *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*, and, furthermore, to illustrate the way each of the planes and their features operate to achieve a humorous effect.

Judging from my experience, it seems that over the last few years TV series have been gaining in popularity enticing more and more viewers. I assume that the reason lies in the fact that nowadays there are various genres of TV series to choose from and thus, it may meet different viewer demand. Moreover, following characters' lives for a longer period of time, it allows watchers to emotionally identify with them, or it simply offers an escape from a mundane routine. Being an enthusiast myself, I wished to demonstrate the possibility of relating the concept of structural linguistics with popular TV culture, and consequently, make it more appealing to the general public.

As for the structure of the thesis, it is divided into two main parts, the Theoretical and the Practical. The former comprises of Chapters 1-2, the latter of Chapters 3-4. The aim of The Theoretical Part is to acquaint the readers with the terminological background necessary for carrying out the practical analysis. The First Chapter focuses on the definition and features of the two crucial concepts to this thesis, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic axis. Then each plane is discussed separately to clarify the way they are reflected in language and their potential to cause a humorous reaction. The Second Chapter is centred on the language of humour as such. It sheds some light on the term humour and, subsequently, it continues to introduce one of the most popular theories, The Incongruity Theory.

The Practical Part attempts to demonstrate the linguistic phenomena described in the Theoretical Part. Chapter 3 discusses the material that served for establishing the corpus and the details of the procedure how the data were retrieved and analysed. In the last chapter of this paper, Chapter 4, the results of my research and analysis are presented and commented on. Firstly, I set out with the aim to answer the question whether there is a tendency to decline in the humorous incidences in both of the series. Secondly, the focus is put on the most representative comical instances providing an insight into the linguistic

processes involved to achieve a humorous effect. Finally, I explore universal tendencies, both means and topics, which are most likely to trigger laughter.

Theoretical Part

1   Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Relations

Paradigm and syntagm are terms of utmost importance for this thesis. To be able to examine the use of sense relations in expressing language humour, it is essential to commence with their basic definition and features. Furthermore, this chapter sheds some light on how they are reflected in language and how they are vital to the description of the meaning of words. Subsequently, to prove the notion that both axes play a crucial role when analysing language humour, I opted for presenting selected examples from my research. Finally, it should be mentioned that some of the terminology I present here is taken from a Czech linguist František Čermák, and thus the translation is mine.

The pioneer of modern linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure emphasises that language is a system in which a linguistic sign is "defined by its relations to the other members of that system" (Culler 24). It is vital to mention that each linguistic sign not only possesses relations to the other members within a particular discourse, but also outside it. These relations, simultaneously engaged, create the two dimensional model of a language structure. According to Saussure, the horizontal relationships between linguistic units are described as syntagmatic, whereas the ones established on the vertical dimension as paradigmatic (Crystal 160). Consequently, his approach gives rise to two crucial concepts of structural linguistics known as syntagm and paradigm.
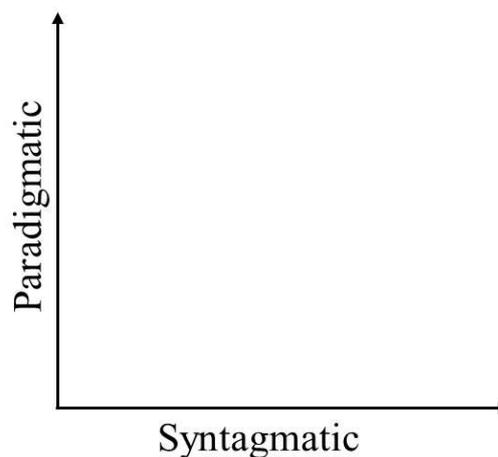

Figure 1: The dimension of sense relations

1.1   Syntagmatic Relations

Generally, syntagm works on all the levels of a language structure (Čermák 279). According to *the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the linguistic term syntagm designates "any combination of units which are arranged in a significant sequence" (Baldick 255). However, for the purposes of this thesis I will focus on syntagmatic relations concerning the lexical level. To present further details, syntagmatic lexical relations deal with the relationships between lexemes; it examines the nature and qualities of their combinations and their abilities to combine (Čermák 279). That is to say, syntagmatic lexical relations scrutinize the lexical and semantic relations "that a word has with other words that accompany it in the stream of speech or writing" (Jackson 96).

Furthermore, it needs to be said that the syntagmatic axis is closely related to grammar, as words on the syntagmatic axis are grouped and ordered "according to grammatical rules" (Malmkjaer 437). Even though Čermák finds grammar significant, he does not assign a great importance to it when discussing meaningful combinations. He emphasises that the basic and main condition for a combination to arise is not grammar, but it is meaning as such and adds that grammar only formally shapes the final combination. To continue, it is necessary to define what the aforementioned meaningful combination is. Čermák, who also uses the term lexical syntagma, believes that it consists at least of two lexemes that are placed linearly and are both governed by mutual semantic compatibility. According to the relationship of the components, lexical syntagma might be further divided into two types, the first type, which is created on an ad hoc basis, displays only a minor affinity between the constituents (Cruse 229), whereas the second type includes combinations whose constituents possess a "certain mutual expectancy" (Jackson 96). To provide an example of these two concepts, I will demonstrate it on the two combinations bellow:

1) long string
2) a long time

Both of these combinations contain the adjective *long*. To elaborate on the first example, it is obvious that these two words are compatible and create a meaningful combination. Čermák states that the fact that the adjective *long* may be combined with the

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word *string* is given by its characteristic features. When describing a string, one can think of attributes such as *short, long, thick*, etc. From these words listed, it is clear that *long* is a characteristic feature of *string* and thus the result *long string* is semantically compatible. On the other hand, when describing, for example, the word *yoghurt*, its characteristic features include *strawberry, light* and *plain*, but the attribute *long* is not found among them, and therefore the combination *long yoghurt* is odd and semantically non-compatible (Čermák 280).

As *long string*, the combination *a long time* is considered meaningful. Nonetheless, unlike the first case, the relationship between *long* and *time* is stronger and more intimate as these words prefer to operate together rather than with other partners and they tend to co-occur frequently in English. In other words, there is a great affinity between the constituents. The latter combination might be labelled by the term phraseme, more precisely a collocation (Čermák 280).

1.1.1 Collocation

It is necessary to point out that phrasemes as such play an important role in this thesis, since I employed them when analysing the amassed data. Hence it is crucial to provide their basic definitions and examples. The terminology I introduce here is taken from *Words and Their Meaning*. Jackson divides the set combinations into two types: **collocations** and **fixed expressions**. As far as collocations are concerned, Jackson claims that they must not be confused with fixed expressions. Even though some characteristics are comparable, the lexemes which create collocations do not have to always appear together, but "there is a greater than chance likelihood that the words will co-occur" (Jackson 96). To present an example, Jackson demonstrates it as follows:

1) He had a false_____ (Jackson 96).

Jackson states that if one was to supply nouns which should succeed the attribute *false*, words such as *eye, nose, beard, expectation*, or *passport* would immediately cross one's mind. Moreover, with a minor change in the sentence, new words could be anticipated; if the indefinite article was omitted, we could expect words such as *teeth* or *eyebrows* to emerge and fill the empty slot. Having given the examples, he concludes that it is regular for words to "keep company with certain other words" (97).

Consequently, it is imperative when describing the meaning of a lexeme to take into consideration also the collocations which creates with other words, since part of the meaning of the lexeme *false* is the fact that it is regularly combined with *teeth*, *nose*, *passport*, etc. As has already been pointed out, collocation is based on mutual expectancy, and therefore it goes without saying, that part of the meaning of *tooth* is that it frequently appears in the combination with *false*. However, the mutual expectancy "may not be equal in both directions" (Jackson 97). In language, the probability of *false* to be a member of the combination *false tooth* is higher than for *tooth*, since unlike *false*, *tooth* might appear with other alternative attributes and may create more diverse collocations (Jackson 97). Furthermore, Jackson highlights in which way collocations are "relevant to the description of the meaning of a lexeme" (97) stating that they help us to distinguish the sense of a particular word. He gives an example with the attribute *strong* and its collocations below:

1) *a strong woman*, *a strong door*, *strong tea* and *a strong personality*
   (Jackson 97)

The word *strong* in each example has a distinctive shade of meaning. For instance, in the combination *a strong woman,* it expresses physical strength, whereas in *a strong personality*, it indicates rather moral strength and "implies that a person is influential and persuasive" (Jackson 98). What is more, this aspect of a collocation enables speakers to play with the meanings of words and thus it comes as no surprise that it may be used as a base for jokes and wordplay. The following example illustrates wordplay whose locus lies in double interpretation of the word *infectious* arising from its collocations *infectious laugh* and *infectious disease*:

[ON THE UNDERGROUND]

(Joey works as a model for The City Free Clinic. He is on the subway when he sees his face on a poster. The poster says: WHAT MARIO ISN'T TELLING YOU – VD – YOU NEVER KNOW WHO MIGHT HAVE IT. A variety of scenes are shown with the poster displayed all over New York City.)

[AT CENTRAL PERK]

(Joey enters and sees the gang snickering.)

JOEY:	So I guess you all saw it.
RACHEL:	Saw what?
PHOEBE:	No, we were just laughing. You know, **how laughter can be infectious**. [Friends Season 1, Episode 9]

Moreover, as regards collocations, it should be pointed out what a collocational restriction is. According to Jackson, this term refers to a combination such as *rancid butter*. If one thinks about the word *rancid*, it is almost always accompanied by the word *butter*. Nonetheless, the combination *rancid butter* must not be confused with a fixed expression, since *butter* is able to combine with other adjectives. Consequently, it is the item *rancid* that has "an extremely restricted range" and that is why we might speak of a collocational restriction (Jackson 99).

To proceed, let us take some time to discuss fixed expressions. From Jackson's point of view, this area encompasses multi-word lexemes such as **clichés**, **proverbs**, **idioms** and **conventional similes** (103). In the following lines, I will try to provide an insight into this field of knowledge.

1.1.2 Clichés

It is believed that clichés "emerge when expressions outlive their usefulness as conveyors of information" (Crystal 186). As opposed to old-fashioned words, clichés are losing their power to inform not because of their gradual disappearance, but because they are employed in everyday speech too frequently. Therefore they are considered trite and hackneyed phrases. Crystal is even so audacious as to call them lexical zombies and he ponders what makes people use them. He suggests that the reason for that is one's laziness or lack of imagination. At the same time, there are individuals who defend them pointing out that clichés might have a value. They see their value in the ability to express precisely "what the critics condemn" (186). That is to say, they allow us to be indolent and imprecise in our thinking every time we want to. But above all, they can help us when facing an uncomfortable situation such as offering our condolences or being a part of a forced interaction, e.g. with strangers. In this case, cliché may be deemed as "an admirable lexical life-jacket" (186). Nevertheless, whether we find them intrusive or not, we cannot deny their power of contagion. Not finding a significant example of clichés in my research let me quote those provided by Crystal:

1) *be that as it may, a blessing in disguise, dead as a doornail* (186).

1.1.3 Proverbs

To contrast them with clichés, proverbs seem to be more noticeable both in speech and writing since there is "an incongruity between the literal meaning of a proverb and the context to which it refers" (Jackson 105). If we take into consideration the proverb '*You can't have your cake and eat it'*, we do not allude to a particular cake, but we just use the proverb to clearly express the notion that one cannot have both options (105).

Proverbs are a part of traditional folk wisdom, as they have been passed from generation to generation. They are used in commonplace situations, for instance, when warning people or commenting on life events (105). It is said that proverbs are models of conciseness and directness. Crystal believes that their effectiveness lies in a simple structure and in the use of domestic allusions and he emphasises that this is what makes them perfectly understandable (184). Moreover, proverbs are easily committed to memory since they contain "alliteration, rhythm and rhyme" (184) as may be seen in the following selection.

1) *A friend in need is a friend indeed*;
2) *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*;
3) *Every man must skin his own skunk* (Crystal 184).

The instance below demonstrates that even a proverb may serve its purpose in stimulating laughter:

[AT A PROM]
(The gang tries to sneak into a prom so they could listen to the band performing there. Feeling confident Barney attempts to get there on his own.)

BARNEY: How did you guys get in here?

TED: We just snuck in the back.

BARNEY: *(shocked)* You just snu … Are you serious? I've been trying to get in here <u>all night</u>. I finally paid a janitor 200 bucks to let me borrow this mascot costume. *(Points to the Turtle costume he is wearing.)*

TED: But you got in. **<u>Slow and steady won the race</u>**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 20]

At times, because of the economy of speech, people do not utter the whole proverb, but just a part of it, e.g. '*you're counting your chickens again'* instead of '*don't count your*

chickens before they're hatched'. The outcome of this abbreviation is called an *idiom* which is another topic to cover (Jackson 105).

1.1.4 Idioms

However, proverbs as such are sometimes regarded as idioms by lexicographers and hence they may be found in dictionaries of idioms. Proverbs share an important feature with them and that is the non-literalness of a denoting object. But unlike idioms, there is a direct link between the literal meaning and the denoting object. That is to say, one can easily deduce its meaning from the constituents, e.g. the proverb *slow and steady wins the race* evidently stands for a notion that people who do their work slowly, but thoroughly, will come to better results than those who try to work fast over a short period of time.

It logically follows that an idiom bears no such parallel and we cannot guess the meaning from its parts as it is idiomatic, e.g. *to kick the bucket*. In Jackson's words, "the essential feature of an idiom is its non-literal, metaphorical meaning (106)." Moreover, idioms are characterized as fixed expressions and therefore we cannot replace any of their constituents without losing the idiomatic meaning (Crystal 163), **to kick the box*. Nonetheless, Jackson argues that the fixity of idioms is quite disputable claiming that there are some cases of idioms where some grammatical alterations to its form are acceptable. On one hand, the idiom *to kick the bucket* can take the past tense as in '*Mary kicked the bucket last week.*', but on the other hand it cannot be transformed into passive voice **the bucket was kicked*. Consequently, it is safe to say that idioms "differ in how fixed they are" (106).

Some lexicologists go even further when assuming that pure idioms are only those that "allow both a literal and a non-literal interpretation" (107). In other words, pure idioms should be of a polysemous nature and their interpretation dependable on the context. This misleading ambiguity is often used as a comedic device to create humorous effect as shown in the following instance:

[IN A PUB]
(Ted is urging Barney to call the bridesmaid who Barney slept with the previous night to find out if she knows Victoria. However, Barney is reluctant.)

BARNEY: Because we just hooked up last night. I can't call the girl the next day. I have to wait at least, like, forever.

LILY: Oh, come on, Barney. It's for a good cause.

BARNEY: Ted going all castrati over another girl is exactly not a good cause. Sorry, buddy, I wish I could help you, <u>my hands are tied</u>. **Oh no**, **wait, <u>that was last night</u>**.

<div align="right">[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 13]</div>

1.1.5   Conventional Simile

As discussed above, when analysing the meaning of idioms we must not look at all the constituents as individual items, but we have to consider them as a unity. Nevertheless, that does not apply to the case of a conventional simile, e.g. *as sly as a fox*. Simile can be divided into two parts, the first part *sly* bears a literal meaning, whereas the second part *fox* can be taken non-literally. Jackson claims that English culture attributed human characteristics to non-human entities, e.g. slyness to foxes. We further use these entities to compare them with people. If we take into account the utterance '*She is as sly as a fox.*', it does not indicate that *she* is a fox, but it implies that they both share the same characteristic. Throughout the years these comparisons became a part of everyday speech appearing in a number of fixed phrases (108). The instance below demonstrates the use of a conventional simile in humour:

[AT ROSS' FLAT]
(Ross is kissing with Charlie when somebody knocks on the door.)

AMY: *(Yelling from outside.)* Rachel! Open up! It's your sister! *(She knocks on the door again.)* I have to talk to you!

ROSS: *(He opens the door.)* Hi Amy!

AMY: You're not Rachel.

ROSS: *(sarcastically)* **Still <u>sharp as a tack</u>**!

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 5]</div>

1.2   Paradigmatic Relations

Having examined syntagmatic lexical relations, it is necessary to look at paradigmatic ones. According to *the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms,* the term paradigm

stands for "a set of linguistic or other units that can be substituted for each other in the same position within a sequence or structure". However, the words we want to substitute have to share the same grammatical function, since the syntax of the original structure must not be disrupted (Baldick 182). It follows that the paradigmatic relations, which a word acquires outside the discourse, are not governed by linearity. These relations are "associated in the memory" and "they are a part of the inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker" (Saussure 123). That is to say, a lexical paradigm can be understood as a category of mutually substitutable words that have something in common.

A lexical paradigm can be divided into two types: **virtual** and **collocational**. The former groups words on the basis of similarity of meaning or common formal features. It can be further characterized by the number of its members and extent. As regard the extent, we may speak of an *open* or *closed* paradigm. A closed paradigm, which has usually a small number of members, cannot expand any further, e.g. personal pronouns, whereas an open paradigm can accept new items quite freely. Contrastingly, a collocational paradigm assembles lexemes which combine with a particular word, however, it is itself excluded from the group. For instance, verbs such as *bark*, *whine* or *growl* constitute a collocational paradigm as they all enter into the combination with the noun *dog* (Čermák 252).

1.2.1 Similarity in Meaning

To further elaborate on a virtual paradigm, it was mentioned above that words may be grouped according to the meaning relations they hold between themselves. Sense relations, as they are often called, are extremely vital when describing and characterizing the meaning of a lexeme. In this section let us focus on the three types of sense relations called **synonyms**, **antonyms** and **hyponyms** (Jackson 64).

The term synonymy designates two or more words that share the same meaning or, more precisely, they "can be used interchangeably in all sentence contexts" (65). However, Jackson argues that it is rare, if not even impossible, to come across a pair of words that would be interchangeable completely. He suggests that the definition above rather refers to the concept known as **strict synonymy**. Linguists present two arguments opposing strict synonymy. One of them is due to the economy of a language; it is believed that to have two words identical in meaning is a luxury "which a language can afford to do without" (66). The other argument is based on the inevitable changes in language. If strict synonyms

happen to appear, then a differentiation of meaning usually takes place as well. It means that one word of the pair is excluded from the context the other is regularly used (*sheep/mutton*). Another change that may occur is the fact that people cease to use one of the words, which then becomes obsolete (67).

Generally, when we speak of synonymy we have in mind "pairs of words that can substitute each other in a wide range of contexts but not necessarily absolutely" (67). In the following lines, let us introduce some examples how synonyms differ.

Firstly, it needs to be said that dialect plays an important role. A lot of English speakers choose a different word when describing the same entity on the grounds that they come from a different region, such as in the case of British and American English (*lift/elevator*) (68). In addition, due to the word formation process known as borrowing, English contains extensive number of synonymous pairs which usually vary in terms of style and formality. Jackson suggests that words of Anglo-Saxon origin occur mainly in colloquial speech, whereas in formal language or writing we rather come across words that originate in French or Latin (*begin/commence*) (69). Another significant differentiation, which must not be neglected, is technicality. Many professions, hobbies and sports have their own specific vocabulary which does not appear in ordinary communication. These lexemes, referred to as jargon, allow us to talk "precisely about aspects of the activity concerned" and enable us to make distinctions that "non-specialists have no need to make" (*heart/cardiac*) (70). Last but not least, the reason why synonyms differ is euphemism. In English, there are many words, usually connected with sex and death, which we do not want to utter aloud as they might cause feelings of displeasure. Thus, euphemism is introduced to mitigate the force of an offensive expression (*die/pass away*) (73).

Despite the fact that both synonyms and antonyms are labelled as sense relations, they are quite distinct from each other. The term antonymy encompasses words that display the oppositeness of meaning. But unlike synonyms, they "occur within the same style, dialect or register" (74). However, when we scrutinize the relations of opposition closely, we may notice certain nuances. Consequently, they are further categorized into three types, namely ***gradable***, ***complementary*** and ***converses*** (75).

Gradable antonyms (*tall/short*) are represented by adjectives which may be modified and which may take comparative and superlative forms, for example '*He is very tall, in fact, he is taller than me*'. Contrastingly, complementary antonyms (*dead/alive*)

can be characterized by the fact that if we choose one member of the pair, we exclude the other. That is to say, one cannot be both *dead* and *alive* at the same time (75). Finally, converses (*husband/wife*), sometimes called relational opposites, refer to such pairs that "represent two (opposite) perspectives on the same relations". It means that if we suggest one member of the pair (*sell*), we imply existence of the other (*buy*) (76).

Let me now turn to the last case of sense relations to be discussed here which is hyponymy. The term displays "the hierarchical relationship between the meanings of lexemes" and refers to such a relation wherein one meaning of a lexeme is incorporated within another one (Jackson 65). To provide an example, we may safely say that the meaning of *poodle* is included in that of *dog* where the lexeme *dog* is a superordinate term to subordinate *poodle* (Jackson 65). It goes without saying that, as it is with all sense relations, hyponymy is essential to analysing the meanings of words (213). In addition, Čermák is convinced that the semantic relation of inclusion is unique in that it embraces all the lexemes in lexicon and he adds that from hyponymy point of view, each lexeme belongs to a particular paradigm, irrespective of the number of members (272).

1.2.2 Similarity in Form

To continue, it is believed that words, on the basis of similarity of form, enter into relations known as **homonyms** and **paronyms**.

To begin with homonyms, this term encompasses words that are identical in both graphical and acoustic form, but have different meaning which is not connected: *ring* (call sb) and *ring* (jewellery). However, Čermák adds that there are subtypes of homonyms which have only one form in common; we then speak of **homophones** and **homographs**. As regards homophones, they differ in spelling, but have identical pronunciation (*male/mail*), whereas for homographs apply the opposite (*lead/lead*) (261).

Another case, which may be also termed as a partial homonym, is a paronym. Paronyms designate words that share some formal features and are easily confused (*poodle/puddle*) (263). Sometimes they are referred to as **malapropism** which is, according to Baldick, "inaccurate use of a long word or words" (*omnipotent/impotent*) (146).

It is assumed that homonyms as such often give rise to misunderstanding and do not contribute to the fluency of communication at all. Nevertheless, there is an area where they may be appreciated and that is wordplay (Čermák 261):

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(Phoebe and Ross are doing a crossword, Monica is cooking, and Chandler is still staring at the phone waiting for a call.)

ROSS: Four letters: "<u>Circle or hoop</u>".

CHANDLER: <u>Ring</u> dammit, ring!

ROSS: **<u>Thanks</u>**.

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 20]</div>

1.2.3 Similarity both in Form and Meaning

The last relation to be discussed at this point is ***polysemy***. Polysemy lies at the intersection of both form and meaning. It describes a single word having two or more meanings that are linked. These meanings, or rather variants of single meaning, may be considered as one lexeme. Should there be no semantic link between the words, then we talk about homonym explored above (Jackson 5).

According to Čermák, polysemy is an important feature of the economy of speech and he adds that as regards form and meaning there is no one to one correspondence in natural languages. Therefore monosemy as such is quite rare and the only part of a language where it occurs is terminology because of the need to name units precisely (62).

Nonetheless, polysemy may lead to ambiguity. It may be characterized by multiple interpretations of an utterance usually caused by polysemous words and lack of context. Even though ambiguity is generally thought of as undesirable, it is employed by many speakers purposefully, for instance to make a joke (63).

[IN A PUB]
(Robin and Lily are on ladies' night.)

LILY: I'm so glad we finally get to hang out just the two of us!

ROBIN: Yeah.

LILY: You sure you're okay giving up your Friday night to hang with an old almost-married lady?

ROBIN: Oh please, I'm so sick of the "meet-market" scene. Guys are like a subway. You miss one, another one comes along in five minutes.

LILY: **Unless it's the end of the night, then you <u>get on</u> anything.**

<div align="right">[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 3]</div>

To conclude, in this chapter I attempted to theoretically examine both syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes. I covered their basic definition and features as well as outlined the way they operate in the field of lexicology. As a result, syntagmatic axis revealed how words cooperate on the horizontal dimension and helped us to comprehend what kind of affinity there is between them. On the other hand, the vertical dimension scrutinized the relations that words display outside the discourse and subsequently how they are, on the basis of some similarity, classified and grouped together.

As my thesis deals mainly with humour, the following chapter strives to present terminology on its language and provide a brief insight into this matter.

2 The Language of Humour

So far the discussion has centred on paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes and their features, now let us proceed with commenting on their comic potential and with exploring the language of humour as such. Firstly, this chapter briefly clarifies the term humour and then continues with the introduction of the incongruity theory. Subsequently, the focus is put on all the layers of a language structure and the linguistic realizations that we perceive as humorous.

Ross defines humour as "something that makes people laugh or smile" (1). However, she later argues that this definition is rather inaccurate. The first reason given is that we cannot say that something lacks humour just because someone did not laugh at it. Secondly, smile and laugh do not have to express only amusement, but it may also indicate one's fear or embarrassment. Despite that, we can agree on *the response* being an important factor when regarding wordplay humorous. To be able to clarify why people laugh we must take a look at language as such (1).

Since ancient times there have been many theories developed on laughter. The number equals nearly 80 (Bergler 2). The description of each is, certainly, not the aim of this thesis but let us examine the ***incongruity theory*** provided by Alison Ross.

2.1 The Incongruity Theory

Language displays many aspects which may serve as amusement for people. One of them is, undoubtedly, incongruity which may be defined by words such as inconsistency or "not fitting well together". Ross suggests that the incongruity theory "focuses on the element of surprise" (7). It is created by the conflict between our expectation and what we actually hear in the joke. Thus, this theory encompasses primarily a misleading ambiguity, or double meaning, which is a feature occurring quite frequently in humour (7). The following lines discuss Ross's typology divided into ***structural ambiguity*** and ***the disruption of language conventions***.

2.1.1 Structural Ambiguity

Ambiguity as such may be found at all levels of a language structure. We shall examine it in the following way: ***phonology***, ***graphology***, ***morphology***, ***lexis*** and ***syntax***.

As regards *phonology*, there are many words in English which have different spelling, yet are pronounced the same. The reason for that lies in the spelling system in which each sound is not represented by a distinct symbol. This peculiarity may be often noticed in wordplay that is based on "two possible interpretations of the same group of sounds" (9), in other words, on **homophones**.

[AT A HALLOWEEN PARTY]
(Barney approaches a girl in a hula outfit. She is wearing a lei.)

BARNEY: Hey.

HULA GIRL: Hey.

BARNEY: **So, what does a fella have to do to <u>get lei'd</u> around here**?

<div align="right">[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 6]</div>

Or many jokes may result from the misinterpretation of similar sounding words termed as **malapropism** (11).

[AT CENTRAL PERK]
(Friends are drinking coffee and chatting.)

MONICA: Hey, Joey, what would you do if you were <u>omnipotent</u>?

JOEY: Probably <u>kill myself</u>!

MONICA: Excuse me?

JOEY: Hey, **if <u>Little Joey's dead</u>, then I got no reason to live**!

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 4]</div>

As *graphological* ambiguity is represented visually, I have not come across it when analysing my data. Suffice it to say, that these jokes often play with word boundaries or with the spelling of a word, e.g. by adding an extra letter:

'TO LET – TOILET' (13)

The next category deals with *morphology* which is a discipline concerned with the formation of individual words. Words may consist of one or more morphemes, "the smallest meaningful units of sense" (14), which are further divided into bound or free. Ross claims that if we are familiar with the way morphemes are structured to create meanings, we can exploit this knowledge in jokes. She adds that sometimes the same combination of sounds or letters may designate "a word or a bound morpheme or a

syllable" (14). This confusion serves its purpose in the example below where the sequence of letters *let* is, firstly, used as a suffix and, secondly, as the final syllable in a word:

'What's a baby pig called?'
'A piglet.'
'So what's a baby toy called?'
'A toilet.' (15)

As for *lexicology*, the lexicon of English is vast as it has been borrowing words from many languages such as Latin, French, Greek and etc. For that reason, lexical ambiguity accounts for an endless source of puns (16). In the first chapter, we have already brought up this subject when we discussed the terms **homonymy** and **polysemy** and their possible use in the language of humour. Let us now consider other cases which are presented by Ross: **polysemy of prepositions, phrasal verbs, idioms** and **collocations**.

A basic feature of prepositions is the fact that they are polysemous in any language and thus they may be used in different contexts expressing variety of meanings. (17). The humorous effect in which it may result is illustrated below:

[AT CENTRAL PERK]
(Joey, Chandler and Ross are at Central Perk. Ross is telling them about his dream.)
ROSS: I had a dream last night where I was playing football <u>with</u> my kid.
CHANDLER AND JOEY: That's nice.
ROSS: **No, no, <u>with</u> him**. *(He mimes holding the baby as a football.)*

[Friends Season 1, Episode 17]

To turn to phrasal verbs, they stand for multi-word lexemes whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of their constituents. However, they may be sometimes interpreted both idiomatically and literally. The humorous ambiguity arising from the double interpretation of a phrasal verb occurs in the following joke:

'When is a car not a car? When it *turns into* a garage.' (18)

In the case of double interpretation of idioms and collocations, we can observe how crucial the collaboration of syntagmatic and paradigmatic planes is when bringing humour to life. The first chapter (pp. 5 – 9) established that both idioms and collocations display syntagmatic character. Their constituents closely cooperate on the horizontal dimension creating particular meaning. Nevertheless, intentionally misleading or insufficient context

may reveal another interpretation which until that remained hidden. In other words, the paradigmatic relations emerged invading the syntagmatic axis (Chiaro 34). This axial clash gives rise to the pun as it may be seen here:

[HOMELESS SHELTER KITCHEN]
(Ted and Robin are trying to help, but everyone refuses them.)

TED: This is crazy. When did it get so hard to do charity work?

ROBIN: I do <u>charity work</u> all the time. Remember when I said **I'd <u>find you a girlfriend</u>**.

<div align="right">[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 9]</div>

To proceed, the instances of *syntactic ambiguity* show that the locus of a joke does not lie in the polysemous nature of a word, but that it is "the structure that can be interpreted in two different ways" (Ross 24):

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(Girls are chatting and revealing their secrets.)

PHOEBE: Oh! Oh! Oh! Okay, fine, fine. Now I don't feel so bad about sleeping with Jason Hurley.

MONICA: What?! You slept with Jason?

PHOEBE: You'd already broken up.

RACHEL: <u>How long</u>?

PHOEBE: **A couple of hours**.

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 4]</div>

2.1.2   The Disruption of Language Conventions

The previous section presented Ross's typology concerning ambiguity that lies "in the words or structure of language" (8). The classification that follows strives to present the incongruity caused by the disruption of language conventions "that construct meaning" (27). Ross states that all language users store these conventions, or rules, of "how language usually works" in their memory. Consequently, if they are broken in any way, it results in incongruity with humorous potential (28).

Let us begin to examine the aforementioned conventions on the levels of *semantics*, *pragmatics*, *discourse* and *register*.

Semantics is a linguistic discipline that studies the meaning. On the paradigmatic axis it deals with sense relations a word display outside the discourse such as *synonymy* or *antonymy*, whereas on the syntagmatic axis it explores the combinations into which a word enters. However, when nonsensical and odd combinations are produced such as *tautology*, *paradox*, *contradiction* or *oxymoron* they have an enormous potential to make us laugh (32):

[IN AN OFFICE]
(Ross is persuading Rachel's boss to give her a raise. Ross is trying to use the fact that Mr. Zelner's son is interested in palaeontology.)

ROSS: Just hear me out. How would you feel about offering her a raise?

MR. ZELNER: Not good, Ron.

ROSS: Perhaps I can persuade you. What if you can give your son this:

(Holds up a huge egg.) **Genuine pterodactyl egg replica**.

[Friends Season 10, Episode 15]

Or figures of speech such as *simile* and *metaphor* may create an unusual and humorous image, too (35):

[BRIDAL SHOP]
(Lily is shopping for her wedding dress.)

VICTORA AND ROBIN: *(Lily comes out from a dressing room.)* Oh!

LILY: It's okay, guys, I hate it.

VICTORIA: Just horrible.

ROBIN: It's bad, it's really bad. Short in front, long in the back? **That is the mullet of wedding dresses**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 16]

Furthermore, Ross discusses humour that "refer to the nature of language" itself (37). By that she means that we have committed to our memory a lot of pre-packaged and automatic phrases which we use automatically, not thinking of their meaning. Nonetheless, by minor alteration of this material we can get refreshing and humorous novelty:

'Pheebs, you wanna help?

Oh I wish I could, but I don't want to.' (37)

To continue, the levels of pragmatics, discourse and register are just touched upon as they are not of a significant importance to this thesis. As for *pragmatics*, it studies the way a particular utterance changes its meaning in different contexts. It is believed that a sentence may be characterized by its *sense* and *force*. The term *sense* refers to the information a sentence conveys in general, whereas *force* indicates how its message may differ in various contexts:

'Do I make good coffee?   You make great coffee.
Do you think I'm a good cook?   You make great coffee.
It's your turn to make the coffee.   You make great coffee.' (39)

Furthermore, Ross mentions the *cooperative principle of conversation* which scrutinizes "the relation between sense and force". It lists maxims of conversation that, if followed, are said to prevent misunderstandings. However, in the example below the maxim of ambiguity is broken and humour arises:

'A: I didn't sleep with my wife before we were married, did you?
B: I don't know. What was her maiden name?' (41)

In terms of *discourse*, we study the rules and conventions of language "in extended stretches of written and spoken text" (41). Ross believes that the beginnings of texts may give away a lot of information. Consequently, if we read or listen carefully, we can often make certain assumptions what is to come next. However, humourists intentionally subvert these expectations to make us laugh:

[TED'S APARTMENT]
(Ted cannot forget an encounter with a girl he met four years ago.)
BARNEY: You know, Ted, it's been four years. She could be engaged or married or, <u>God forbid</u>, **fat**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 6]

Finally, let us concentrate on the level of *register*. The term is used to describe the range of styles in language. Every day people shift between different styles according to the situation they happen to be in, e.g. chatting with a friend, talking to the president etc. Nonetheless, if they select a wrong style, and particularly when the shift between them is too great, it may have humorous consequences:

'She can make you laugh, she can make you cry, she can bring tears to me eyes, she can bring blood to me shoulders, she can bring the kettle to the boil.'(45)

Having outlined the theoretical framework of the thesis, we can move on to the analysis of language humour found in the TV series *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*.

Practical Part

It is generally thought that the more seasons a TV series has, the more noticeable decline there is in its quality. Being fond of situation comedies, I was eager to discover if the same statement applies to humour which accentuates and highlights the plot of each episode. Therefore the goal I set was to find out if the first season is charged with approximately the same number of comical incidences as the last, or if the aforementioned tendency to decline is present. Moreover, I was especially interested to see if the chosen situation comedies share similar sense of humour and if the same linguistic realizations are engaged in the jokes. Finally, the aim of the thesis is to prove Ross's belief that "the most obvious feature of much humour" is ambiguity or double meaning (7).

3 Material and Method

All the amassed data which I present in this chapter are taken from the two immensely popular American sitcoms *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*. As they are my personal favourites as well, it was easy to choose the primary sources for the corpus. Furthermore, having almost the same number of seasons, I believe, they represent ideal material for answering my questions.

For the oncoming analysis, it is necessary to briefly introduce both of the shows and set up a broader framework for the chosen wordplay. However, as they are quite alike in nature, I suppose, it is sufficient if just a short summary is provided for both:

- They take place in New York City.
- They follow everyday lives of a group of friends in their late twenties.
- The types of the main characters are almost identical, too. To avoid confusion, the names in bold refer to the sitcom *Friends*.
    - **Ross**/ Ted – a clever man who has an on-off relationship with the woman he desperately loves. He has an annoying personality trait: always corrects people.
    - **Rachel**/Robin – a woman who joins the group in the first episode. She works hard to have a successful career.
    - **Chandler**/Marshall – a man who has a great sense of humour.

- **Monica**/ Lily – a woman who takes care of the whole group. She marries the funny man above. Together they fulfil the concept of a harmonious relationship.
- **Joey**/Barney – an incurable womanizer. He falls in love with the career woman.
- **Phoebe** – a kind and crazy woman.

- After work the main protagonists usually end up in their favourite public place: **Central Perk** or MacLaren's Pub.

To be able to prove the fact that there is a decline in the incidence of humorous examples throughout the seasons, I resolved to scrutinize the first and last seasons of both TV series. The difference should reveal if the aforementioned tendency actually occurs.

First of all, I gathered my data by watching the episodes and selecting the jokes that engaged my attention and, more importantly, I focused on those realized at the lexical level of a language structure. Furthermore, each joke was transcribed with the help of two websites *Crazy for Friends* and *Hypno Series* which offer complete scripts for each episode.

After completing the corpus, which includes 138 instances of humour realisations, I proceeded to the actual analysis. Firstly, I focused on identifying the ***punch line*** (typed bold in cited instances), and subsequently I concentrated on the language of each joke trying to find out what the specific features are that trigger humour. That is to say, I looked for "some word or phrase in which the whole matter of the joke is fused" (Nash 7). Nash suggests that this detonator should be referred to as a ***locus*** claiming that it is the indispensable part of a joke usually appearing at the end of its structure (7). In all examples, the words that stand for a locus are clearly distinguished from others; they are both underlined and typed in bold.

Generally, wordplay tends to be carefully prepared and structured. Therefore, before presenting the locus, it usually introduces another word or phrase that makes "the preparation for the discharge of the joke", termed as ***pre-location*** (underlined) (34). The following instance illustrates all three identifications listed above:

24

(Rachel is applying for a new job.)

MONICA: *(To Rachel)* Do you really want a job with Popular Mechanics?

CHANDLER: *(To Rachel)* Well, if you're gonna <u>work</u> for mechanics, **those are the ones to <u>work for</u>**.

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 18]</div>

Having identified the aforementioned categories, I set out with the aim of precisely describing and labelling the processes in the humour realisations on the basis of the discussed theoretical concepts such as homophones, polysemy, idioms, etc.

Furthermore, my data contains ample examples of jokes whose locus is based on multiple interpretation of a particular word or phrase. Analysing predominantly informal language, I was able to detect some of the meanings only in *Urban Dictionary* that focuses on streetwise expressions. To clarify the terminology used in this field, we should draw a line between the expressions whose meanings were included either in *Urban* or *Oxford Dictionaries* termed as ***polysemy/homonymy***, and those whose ambiguous nature was rather context dependant. For the latter I adopted the term ***ambiguity arising from the context*** illustrated as follows:

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(Girls are talking about their ex-boyfriends.)

MONICA: Which one was Pete Carney?

RACHEL: Pete the Weeper? Remember that guy who used to cry every time we <u>had sex</u>. *(Imitating)* "Was it good for you?"

MONICA: Yeah, well, I'll take a little crying any day over Howard-the-I-win-guy. *(Imitating)* "I win! I win!" I went out with the guy for two months. **I didn't get to <u>win</u> once**.

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 14]</div>

Finally, I classified the jokes into three distinctive categories according to the axis of sense relations that was employed to bring about the humorous effect, namely ***paradigmatic***, ***syntagmatic*** or ***axial clash*** when both axes were engaged.

Nevertheless, I experienced some difficulties in finding a humorous realisation based solely on syntagmatic axis. At first glance, there were many jokes which seemed to manifest syntagmatic features only, but on closer examination I was able to detect

paradigmatic characteristics as well. Let me offer a demonstration of this peculiarity in the instance below:

[IN A PUB]

(Ted is telling Lily a story about one of his dates.)

STEFANIE: *[A flashback to the date]* Okay, this is difficult to say, back when I lived in LA, I was pretty broke, so I spent a month making adult films.

TED: Wow, okay … how many did you make?

STEFANIE: <u>A-hundred-and-seventy-five</u>. *[Flashback ends]*

LILY: Say what you will about the porn industry … **they are <u>hard workers</u>**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 4]

The locus of the joke evidently lies on the syntagmatic plane as it is created by the collocation *hard workers*. However, Lily puts this label on people working in the porn industry whose job description involves having sex. And this is where incongruity arises since sex, for majority of people, represents entertainment and amusement rather than their daily job routine. Consequently, in this context the word *sex* acquires an unusual connotation from which the whole joke derives a lot of energy. A connotation as such stands for associations that a certain word suggests "in addition to its straightforward dictionary meaning" (Baldick 49). As associations lie outside the discourse, but display a direct link to the word, we may speak of the involvement of the paradigmatic axis, too.

The full set of analysed jokes, which may be found on the attached CD, is further explored and commented on in the following chapter.

4 Results

In this chapter, which is subdivided into four parts, the results of my research are presented. As has been mentioned earlier I selected comical instances which took my interest and, furthermore, I focused on those which featured syntagmatic or paradigmatic lexical relations introduced in the theoretical part (pp. 4 – 15). Few of the analysed jokes revealed that they are realized at a different level of a language structure, however, I resolved to include them in my corpus anyway.

Based on quantitative analysis, the first subchapter strives to answer whether the first season contains approximately the same number of humour implementations as the last or whether the expected decline is present. Secondly, the focus is put on sense relations and their use in humour which is subsequently demonstrated on the most representative instances. Finally, the last two subchapters shed some light on universal tendencies, both means and topics, which stimulate laughter.

4.1 The Decreasing Tendency of Humour Incidence

In total, my corpus is composed of 138 instances of jokes retrieved from both of the sitcoms. As for *HIMYM*, out of 86 examples, which were explored, 51 of them were detected in the first season while the rest, which amounts to 35, was noted in the last. The following formula was used to calculate the percentage **D**ecrease:

$$D_{HIMYM} = 100 \times \frac{(L - F)}{F} = 100 \times \frac{(35 - 51)}{51} = \frac{-1600}{51} = -31.372\,\% \doteq -31\%$$

(where *L* stands for the total sum of the jokes in the last season and *F* designates the total sum in the first)

From the calculation we can observe that there has been quite a significant decline in the number of humour realisations occurring in the series. In fact, the last season includes 31% fewer jokes than the first.

Similarly, the tendency to decline applies to the sitcom *Friends* as well. Altogether, I transcribed 52 instances out of which 37 were found in the first season and 15 in the last.

The percentage **D**ecrease goes as follows:

$$D_{Friends} = 100 \times \frac{(L - F)}{F} = 100 \times \frac{(15 - 37)}{37} = \frac{-2200}{37} = -59.459\,\% \doteq -59\%$$

(where **L** stands for the total sum of the jokes in the last season and **F** designates the total sum in the first)

In comparison to *HIMYM*, the result shows that the drop has been even greater; according to the amassed data, the last season contains 59% fewer humour realisations than the first.

This might have been probably caused by the fact that after almost ten years of running the writers of the shows had no more original ideas left. Another reason may lie in the humour itself. Each writer has a specific sense of humour which is reflected in their work. However, if their wit follows the same pattern throughout the seasons, it may be perceived as worn-out and repetitive. Consequently, it seems to lose its appeal to the viewers.

The summary of the humour implementations occurring in the sitcoms is provided in Table 1 below.

	HIMYM	%	Friends	%
First Season	51	59%	37	71%
Last Season	35	41%	15	29%
Total	86	100%	52	100%

Table 1: The occurrence of jokes in the sitcoms

4.2 Sense Relations and their Use in Humour

Before examining each axis thoroughly, we should present their engagement rate in the humour realisations. Graph 1 illustrates that the paradigmatic axis appears almost in all of the instances, either on its own or in co-occurrence with the syntagmatic axis. This result seems to foreshadow the belief that the majority of wordplay is based on double meaning or ambiguity.

Contrastingly, it should be pointed out that the horizontal plane of sense relations is represented to a much lesser extent since it creates only nine per cent of jokes.
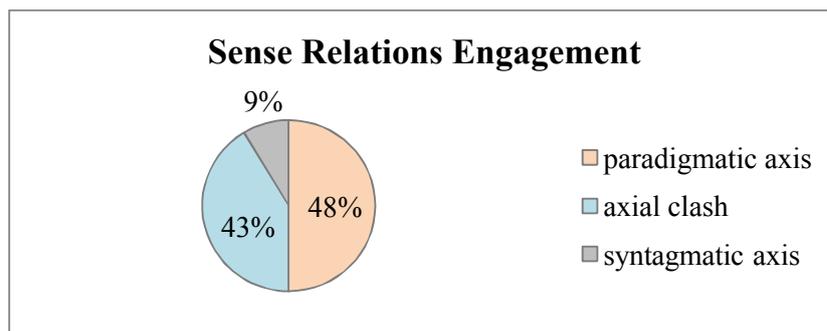
Graph 1: Engagement rate of each axis

The following subchapters put focus on each plane individually. They are discussed and listed in descending order according to the frequency of occurrence. Furthermore, the most representative of the linguistic realizations are carefully examined to provide an insight into the way they operate to trigger humour.

4.2.1 Paradigmatic Axis

As far as paradigmatic plane is concerned, jokes are predominantly created by the linguistic realization of polysemy. Apart from homophones, all the realizations seem to be distributed evenly in both of the series (see Table 2). The entry *other* designates jokes where more than one paradigmatic linguistic realization is engaged.

Linguistic Realization	HIMYM	Friends	Total	%
Polysemy	27	13	40	60%
Ambiguity	4	5	9	13%
Homophone	5	1	6	9%
Synonym	1	2	3	5%
Homonym	0	2	2	3%
Paronym	1	1	2	3%
Hyponym	1	0	1	1%
Other	2	2	4	6%
Total	41	26	67	100%

Table 2: The frequency of linguistic realizations

4.2.1.1 Polysemy and Homonymy

With 40 instances polysemy constitutes the largest group of paradigmatic relations in the series. However, as noted in the theoretical part (p. 18), sense relations very often combine to generate a pun. For that reason ample number of the instances, which exploit the polysemous nature of a word, manifest syntagmatic features as well and thus they are explored later in the section dealing with the axial clash.

As opposed to polysemy, homonyms were identified only in two cases. This result appears to support Čermák's opinion that polysemy is a common feature of lexicon (62). Hence we are more likely to encounter a word having multiple interrelated meanings than two lexemes sharing the same form.

At times, it is troublesome to distinguish between polysemy and homonymy since the difference may seem subtle (Chiaro 39). Therefore I frequently had to consult a particular word with an etymology dictionary. Nonetheless, it holds true for both of these options that their two-faced nature is, in lexical play, "brought out by the environment in which they occur, where a more 'obvious' meaning is usually expected" (39). See the instance below:

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(All of them have just finished playing poker. Rachel has lost.)

RACHEL:	OK, sorry to break up this party, but I've got resumes to fax before work tomorrow. *(Gets up to leave.)*
GUYS:	Whoa, whoa, whoa!
CHANDLER:	Wait, Rach, we gotta settle.
RACHEL:	<u>Settle what</u>? *(Looks puzzled.)*
CHANDLER:	**<u>The Jamestown colony of Virginia</u>**.

[Friends Season 1, Episode 18]

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* the item *settle* is a polysemy denoting the following meanings in the joke:

1. "pay (a debt or account)"
2. "establish a colony in"

Playing poker with money, it seems to be apparent that Chandler by saying *'We gotta settle.'* means that Rachel is supposed to pay the debt since she has been defeated. However, she has joined the game for the very first time. It is highly probable that she is not well acquainted with the rules and thus she does not fully comprehend Chandler's statement. Being confused, she asks rather abruptly *'Settle what?'* putting stress on the latter. By this question she unconsciously creates a perfect opening for the following pun. Had she said only 'Settle?', it would not have had such a force to unable Chandler to exploit the ambiguity, for he might have explained her politely what was expected. It is the

pronoun *what* that played into his hands to unravel the unexpected meaning of establishing a colony.

4.2.1.2 Homophone

It goes without saying that homophone, likewise the options above, usually needs an environment where its ambiguous nature may be revealed. However, the following wordplay, rather than relying on the context, takes advantage of lack of knowledge.

[IN A RESTAURANT]
(Ted is breaking up with Natalie again. She wants to know why.)

NATALIE:	Okay, So what's the problem?
TED:	It's … I can't explain it.
NATALIE:	TRY!
TED:	It's … <u>ineffable</u>**.**
NATALIE:	**I'm <u>not "F-able"</u>**?

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 4]

Evidently, Natalie confused the word *ineffable* with the same sounding *in-F-able*. The former stands for something that is "too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words" (Oxford Dictionaries). On the other hand the latter may be considered as a neologism which resulted from the unfortunate situation.

The root of the neologism is expressed by the capital letter F which is nowadays used as a shortening for the offensive expression *fuck*, typically called an F-word. One of the meanings of this highly polysemous word, which is employed here, is "to have sexual intercourse with someone" (Oxford Dictionaries). Moreover, the derivational suffix *–able* is added giving the expression an adjectival quality. *F-able* pronounced /ˈefəbl̩/ sounds the same as a part of the word ineffable /ˌɪnˈef.ə.bəl/. Natalie further misinterprets the sequence of letters *in* thinking it is a negative prefix instead of an initial syllable. Basically, what she believes that Ted told her is that she was not attractive enough to make Ted sleep with her.

Firstly, this misunderstanding was probably caused by the fact that Natalie was not familiar with the word ineffable as such. Secondly, the context in which the word is uttered is crucial, too. Before saying *ineffable,* Ted makes a long pause as he does not possess the courage to tell her. As a result, it seems that the word is expressed separately making the

version of Natalie's more valid. Without the interruption, the sentence *'It's ineffable.'* would not seem to be so misleading.

4.2.1.3 Malapropism

Let me now turn to a verbal slip which appears to be quite scarce since it was identified in the corpus only once. The term *malapropism* is derived from Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop (*The Rivals*) who is famous for confusing similar sounding words (Chiaro 20). This humorous effect which it may create is discussed in detail below:

[AT CENTRAL PERK]
(Friends are drinking coffee and chatting.)

MONICA: Hey, Joey, what would you do if you were <u>omnipotent</u>?

JOEY: Probably <u>kill myself</u>!

MONICA: Excuse me?

JOEY: Hey, **if <u>Little Joey's dead</u>, then I got no reason to live**!

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 4]</div>

Joey is well-known for the fact that he does not have a wide vocabulary. Apart from that, he may be characterized by the adjective *oversexed* as he is very fond of having sexual relations. With that on his mind, it is no wonder that he mixes up the word *omnipotent* /ɑːmˈnɪp.ə.ţənt/ with *impotent* /ˈɪm.pə.ţənt/. These items resemble each other quite significantly in the acoustic form, they share the same root *potent* and their initial letter is a vowel followed by the letter *m*.

In addition, the answer *'Probably kill myself.'* displays a great deal of irony. To kill himself would obviously mean to have the last chance to exercise any power at all. Thus, this may be taken as the first indication that Joey did not get the word right. Feeling puzzled, Monica demands an explanation. It is in the moment of uttering the sexual innuendo *'Little Joey's dead'* when we realize what he actually imagined under *omnipotent*, reassuring us that he would rather die than live without any sex at all.

Nonetheless, the author of the joke does not stop at that and further exploits the comic potential:

ROSS: Uh, Joey…<u>OM-nipotent</u>.

JOEY: *(shocked)* **You are**?

<div align="right">[Friends Season 1, Episode 4]</div>

This example creates an axial clash by "generating more than one item from what was a single item in the first place" (Chiaro 35). The original word boundaries established along the syntagmatic axis are eliminated by the intersecting paradigmatic plane. When Ross, feeling the need to clarify the situation, emphasises the first two letters *om- /ɑːm-/*, he unintentionally produces an impure homophone resembling the weak form of *I'm* /ʌm/.

With that Joey misinterprets the message again. His spontaneous reply *'You are?'* gives away that he heard Ross say *'I'm impotent'* (see Picture 2).
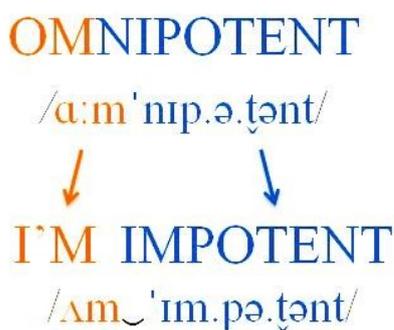

Figure 2: Phonetic resemblance

4.2.1.4 Humour Arising from the Paradigmatic Combinations

There are four humorous instances that arise from the engagement of more than one linguistic realization of a paradigmatic character. From these there are three examples which bring humour to life with the help of synonyms. The combination of a double meaning and synonym is presented as follows:

[HOMELESS SHELTER KITCHEN]
(Ted and Robin are sorting through food donations. They are helping Amanda who works there. However, Ted has noticed that she is taking some of the food home.)

TED: Hey, Amanda, what's this box for?

AMANDA: Oh, that's for me. You can put it in my car.

TED: In your car, um, then you'll take it …

AMANDA: Home? We get so much extra food. No one can eat it all. Oh, Truffle oil. Score.

TED: *(shocked)* People donated this food thinking it was going to feed the <u>hungry</u>.

AMANDA: I know, and **I'm <u>starving</u>**.

[HIYM Season 1, Episode 9]

The item *hungry* is polysemous in nature. Generally, the adjective designates "feeling or showing the need for food" (Oxford Dictionaries). However, with the definite article, the expression undergoes a partial conversion sharing some qualities with a noun. The meaning is shifted denoting all the people who suffer from hunger.

Feeling outraged, Ted uses the latter option to point out that the food is not intended for her, unconsciously creating an opening for her witty reply. By answering with the synonym *starving,* Amanda discharges the comic potential by bringing the other meaning of *hungry* to the surface.

4.2.2   Axial Clash

This subchapter embraces various comic examples that are generated by the cooperation of both of the planes. As there are many linguistic realizations employed, it is difficult to provide a detailed summary. To generalize, Table 3 groups the instances into two distinctive categories on the basis of shared similarities. The first entry includes jokes which rely on the combination of a collocation and double meaning such as polysemy, homophone, etc. Similarly, the second entry comprises wordplay that engages a multiple interpretation as well, however, with an idiom. As for the examples which do not display either of these features, they are summarized in the section *Other*.

Linguistic Realization	HIMYM	Friends	Total	%
Collocation and double meaning	23	14	37	63%
Idiom and double meaning	6	3	9	15%
Other	10	3	13	22%
Total	39	20	59	100%

Table 3: Wordplay arising from the cooperation of the axes

Furthermore, if we take into consideration the data provided above and the fact that more wordplay was obtained from *HIYM* than from *Friends*, it seems that the wit is expressed by the same linguistic realizations in both of the shows.

4.2.2.1 Collocation and Double Meaning

The pattern of a collocation and double meaning represents the largest group of the examined category *Axial Clash*. This frequent co-occurrence, 37 to be precise, may indicate two facts that have been mentioned earlier. Firstly, it seems to prove Jackson's statement that it is common for a word to "keep company with certain other words" (97) and secondly, it may foreshadow the hypothesis that, when it comes to humour, playing

with lexis and their meaning is extremely important. The example below may be considered as a case in point:

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(Joe works as a model for the city free clinic. He is going to represent a guy with a disease.)

MONICA:	*(To Joey)* Oh, wow, so you're gonna be one of those "healthy, healthy, healthy guys"?
PHOEBE:	You know, the asthma guy was really cute.
CHANDLER:	Do you know which one you're gonna be?
JOEY:	No, but I hear Lyme <u>disease</u> is open, so … *(Crosses fingers.)*
CHANDLER:	Good luck, man. **I hope you <u>get</u> it.**

[Friends Season 1, Episode 9]

This humorous realization creates an ideal environment to toy with the following collocations:

1) get a job
2) get a disease

Even though they are not clearly expressed in the body of the wordplay, we do not have any difficulty to understand the joke since as language users we have these combinations stored in our memory, which the author presumably relies on.

In the theoretical part we touched upon the fact that a collocation can specify the meaning of a word (p.5). When we examine the collocations above, although the meanings of the verb *get* may seem identical, they are shifted. To prove that, let us provide a definition for each:

1) "Succeed in attaining, achieving, or experiencing; obtain";
2) "contract (a disease or ailment)" (Oxford Dictionaries).

The polysemous potential is exploited in the punch line *'I hope you get it.'*. Chandler has found a situation where the two-faced nature may be revealed, with his response not only does he wish Joey to get the job, but at the same time he drops a hint that Joey should get the Lyme disease.

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4.2.2.2 Idiom and Double Meaning

Although the occurrence of the instances based on idioms does not reach such a high number as the previous category, we cannot deny that they provide an ideal material for many jokes, especially, when they allow for both idiomatic and literal interpretation. See the examples below:

[AT RACHEL AND MONICA'S FLAT]
(Joey is telling friends that he is donating his sperm.)

JOEY: Alright, come on you guys, it's not that big a deal. Really … I mean, I just go down there every other day and … make my contribution to the project. *(Friends laugh)* Hey, hey, but at the end of two weeks, I get seven hundred dollars.

ROSS: Hey.

PHOEBE: Wow, ooh, **you're gonna be making money <u>hand over fist</u>**!

[Friends Season 1, Episode 24]

To the amusement of Joey's friends, he decided to become a sperm donor. Needless to say, the job description involves masturbation which is performed with the help of one's hand. Being offended by the reaction, Joey emphasises that the job is well paid. After that Phoebe seizes the opportunity and hints that he is *"gonna be making money hand over fist"*. This deliberate choice of words manipulates the meaning leaving us with two possible interpretations. The idiomatic version indicates that Joey is going to make money quickly. However, the literal reading wittily points out that he is going to do so by sexual self-satisfaction.

As we might have noticed above, it is usually a carefully planned environment which reveals the duplicity of an idiom. Contrastingly, in the instance below it is the joker himself who intentionally brings the ambiguity to life.

[TV STUDIO]
(A weather man is presenting the news.)

WEATHER MAN: And so tropical storm Willy is going to be with us at least until Monday. It's gonna <u>rain cats and dogs</u>, folks. **So don't step in a <u>poodle</u>**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 21]

After close scrutiny, we may observe that there are at least three linguistic processes involved at the same time. At first sight, giving the preceding context, the listener translates the idiom metaphorically. Nevertheless, as they read on they realize that there has been a linguistic trap set for them. The joker deliberately interprets the expression word for word referring that real cats and dogs are going to fall down from the sky. This mischief is exposed when he uses the paradigmatic relation of hierarchy, in other words, when he warns us not to step on a *poodle*. Evidently, the breed selection has been a purely tactical manoeuvre as well, for it significantly resembles the word *puddle* in an acoustic form (/ˈpuː.dəl/, /ˈpʌd.əl/). Thus it refers back to the idiomatic meaning of the expression *rain cats and dogs*.
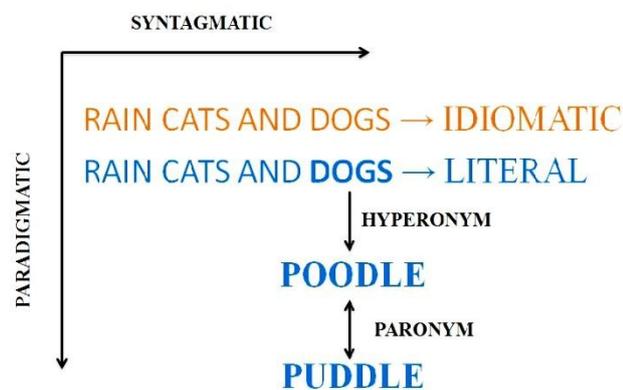

Figure 3: The overview of the linguistic processes

4.2.2.3 Other Types of Axial Combinations

Finally, let us elaborate on humour realizations that do not fulfil the requirements of either of the categories above.

[IN A PUB]
(Barney is telling about his plans for Thanksgiving.)
BARNEY: Thanksgiving in a strip club, who's in? The Lusty Leopard has a surprisingly good Thanksgiving buffet. Plus, they do this thing. Heather dresses up as a pilgrim and Misty dresses up as an <u>Indian</u>, and they "share a meal" *(Indicates something nasty.)*
LILY: *(disgusted)* Oh, Barney.
BARNEY: I'm sorry, **Native American**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 19]

The collocation Native American is nowadays considered to be an inoffensive version of the word Indian. This instance humorously exploits both the concept of a political correctness and the disruption of discourse.

Being a proverbial womanizer, Barney is trying to lure his friends into a strip club on Thanksgiving. Nonetheless, when he starts to describe the sexual activity the strippers usually do, Lily becomes disgusted and reprimands him. Thinking that Barney apologizes for that, his reply fails to fulfil our expectations by humorously using the politically correct synonym.

4.2.3 Syntagmatic Axis

As noted earlier, humour is usually triggered by some ambiguity present in the body of a joke (paradigmatic feature). Thus wordplay based solely on the syntagmatic axis is rather scarce. With twelve instances it amounts to the category with the lowest frequency of occurrence.

Generally, these examples derive the comic energy from an apt remark on the situation the characters find themselves in. It should be noted that in some cases minor paradigmatic features may be still detected, however, the syntagmatic nature prevails and therefore I resolved to leave them in this group. Table 4 summarizes the linguistic realizations engaged.

Linguistic Realization	HIMYM	Friends	Total	%
Collocation	2	5	7	58%
Idiom	2	1	3	25%
Proverb	1	0	1	8,5%
Paradox and collocation	1	0	1	8,5%
Total	6	6	12	100%

Table 4: Humour realizations based on the syntagmatic plane

Nonetheless, the quantitative data obtained for the syntagmatic axis do not provide enough relevant information to draw conclusions whether the humour is expressed by the same linguistic realizations in both of the sitcoms.

The last humour implementation to be discussed at this point is rather an exception to the tendency I outlined above.

[IN A PUB]
(Ted got to know that Robin didn't want to be in a serious relationship and that she was looking for something casual. However, Ted is mesmerized by her and he tries to get her anyway.)

MARSHALL: Alright, so call her up!

TED: No, calling's not casual! I just gotta bump into her somewhere. If only I knew her schedule **I could <u>arrange a chance encounter</u>**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 19]

It is evident that the punch line *'I could arrange a chance encounter.'* contains incongruity. To be specific, there is a semantic clash between the items *arrange* and *a chance encounter*. The word *encounter* usually refers to an unscheduled meeting. The concept of an unplanned activity is even strengthened by the modifier *chance*. Therefore when combined with the verb *arrange,* which expresses planning, it gives rise to a self-contradictory statement, termed as *paradox*.
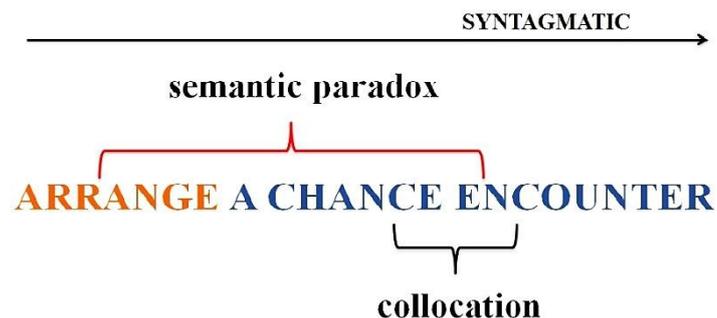

Figure 4: Semantic paradox

4.3   A Universal Way to Stimulate Laughter

The analysis of the preceding subchapters has implied that the most relevant feature of humour is ambiguity or double meaning. As far as my data is concerned, the assumption proved to be true. I have identified 110 instances (80%) that are based on ambiguity at all the levels of language, namely phonological (A), morphological (B), lexical (C) and syntactic (D).
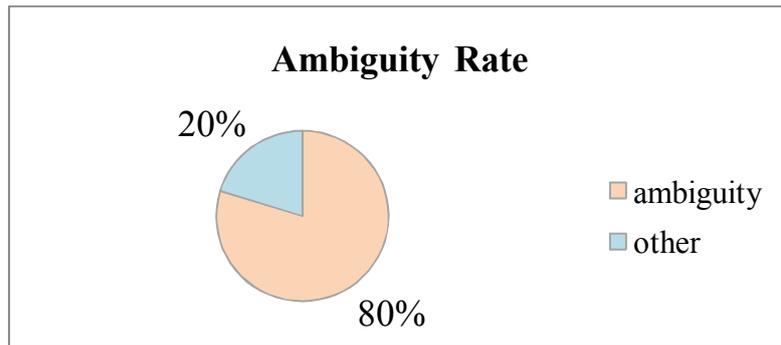
Figure 5: The frequency of ambiguity occurring in the analyzed instances

A. [IN FRONT OF A CLUB]

(Lily is looking for Marshall. Lily is angry at him because he ran away from their party and went to see Ted, Barney and Robin who were in a club. Robin is sad because she could not get into a VIP room.)

ROBIN: Actually, I can't even get myself in. I was such a dork. I get recognized one time and I start thinking I'm Julia Roberts. No VIP. I'm not even an IP. I'm just a lonely little P sitting out here in the gutter.

LILY: Know something; **I'd <u>take a P</u> in the gutter over Julia Roberts any day**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 5]

B. [AT A POLICE STATION]

(Ted and Barney were arrested in Philadelphia. They have just been released. Barney has met a girl called Sasha.)

BARNEY: Sasha. She's having friends over for drinks at her house. It's gonna be legen... <u>wait for it</u>...**and I hope you're not lactose intolerant cause the second half of that word is... <u>dary</u>**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 3]

C. [AT A HALLOWEEN PARTY]

(Barney approaches Hula Girl wearing a devil costume.)

BARNEY: I apologize for my gender. Let me make it up to you. Make you a drink.

HULA GIRL: You certainly are a charming devil.

BARNEY: *(Points to the horns on top of his head.)* **I'm also a <u>horny</u> devil**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 6]

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D. [AT THE TANNING SALON]
   (Ross and a male assistant are walking through a hall.)

   ASSISTANT: Alright Mr. Geller! Right this way! So, how dark do you

   wanna be? We have one, two or three.

   ROSS: Well... I like how you look, <u>what are you</u>?

   ASSISTANT: **<u>Puerto Rican</u>**.

   [Friends Season 10, Episode 3]

However, as I predominantly focused on the jokes that featured syntagmatic and paradigmatic lexical relations, it logically follows that the most frequent type of a double meaning is realized at the lexical level (86%) which embraces linguistic realizations such as *polysemy*, *homonymy*, *ambiguity arising from the context* and *double interpretation of an idiom*.

This finding seems to manifest how crucial the ambiguity in the language of humour is. It may be assumed that its main feature is bringing something shocking and unexpected to the surface. Our expectations are not fulfilled and in a consequence it may often provoke laughter.

Even though "different people are amused by different things" (Chiaro 5), this surprising element seems to be a universal way to discharge humour. I believe that for that reason it is chosen by many jokers and its occurrence is so significant in the data.

4.4   A Universal Topic that Stimulates Laughter

Having introduced the common means of telling jokes, let me now turn to a topic of humour that tends to occur quite frequently as well. There are many subjects that are found to be amusing in all Western societies, for instance, derogatory or lavatorial jokes, however, the one, I wish to present here, is the theme of sex (Chiaro 9).

Ross claims that it has been provoking laughter for "as long as written evidence exist" (66), but at the same time it has always been treated with great caution. In other words, even though the topic of sex may be generally considered as socially acceptable, certain limitations are still imposed. Therefore the explicit language, which is perceived offensive, is substituted by euphemisms and innuendos (A, B) (66).

A. [AT TED AND MARSHALL'S FLAT]
(Barney is urging Ted to wear a different costume because he has been dressed as a hanging chad three years in a row.)

TED:	No thanks. I'm sticking with the hanging chad.
BARNEY:	Oh you're dangerous, Maverick. Your ego's writing check your body can't cash. OK. Here's the plan, and I crap you not. I'm getting us into the Victoria's Secret Halloween party. Trust me, by the end of the night, **your <u>chad</u> will not be hanging**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 6]

B. [IN A RESTAURANT]
(Monica is cooking with her co-worker Frannie telling her about the date with Paul.)

FRANNIE:	Are you kidding? I take credit for Paul. Y'know before me, **there was no snap in <u>his turtle</u> for two years**.

[Friends Season 1, Episode 1]

In relation to my thesis, when analysing the data, I could not help but notice how prevalent the humour instances concerning this topic were. To be more precise, it takes up 35% of all humour implementations. The distribution of jokes with sexual overtones in both of the series is illustrated in Table 5 below.

Topic	HIMYM	%	Friends	%
Sex	35	41%	13	25%
Other	51	59%	39	75%
Total	86	100%	52	100%

Table 5: The number of jokes with sexual overtones

The results show that 41% of all cases occurring in *HIMYM* bear sexually charged humour. As for *Friends*, the number does not reach such a high percentage rate, it equals 25%. That means that *HIMYM* contains almost two times more incidences than *Friends*. I presume that the reason lies in the character of *Barney*. He is a notorious womanizer who takes pleasure in telling dirty jokes. Moreover, he possesses a great ability to make sly innuendos out of seemingly innocent things (A).

A. [ON A PLANE]

(Barney has made Ted to fly to Philadelphia to meet new girls. Ted finds it stupid.)

BARNEY: *(To Ted)* No! No! The night has just started. Look, airport bar. Flight

attendants! **They'll get your <u>tray table</u> at its full upright position**.

[HIMYM Season 1, Episode 3]

Finally, even though there are five main characters in the sitcom, so, hypothetically, each of them should tell approximately the same number of jokes, the examination revealed that in terms of sexual instances Barney's obscene comments amount to 44% which is certainly not a negligible number.

Conclusion

This thesis sets out to examine the use of sense relations, the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic axis, in the comical instances retrieved from the TV series *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*, and, furthermore, to confirm or refute the hypotheses which were suggested at the beginning of the Practical Part (p. 23).

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first part provides the necessary theoretical background for the analysis. It defines the concept of sense relations, introduces their features and outlines the way they are reflected in language. Then it continues to discuss the language of humour as such, it clarifies the term humour, and, subsequently, one of the most popular theories is presented, The Incongruity Theory.

The second part, building on the theoretical one, specifies the material and the method through which the data were obtained. Furthermore, it proceeds to the analysis of the corpus which was carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively. As for the quantitative research, it was expected that the first season of both of the series bears a higher number of occurring humorous incidences than the last. This hypothesis arose from the general belief that the more seasons a particular TV series has the more likely there is a tendency to decline in its quality. For that reason, having examined situational comedies, this paper attempted to discover if the same applies to the number of humour instances which, in this case, are necessary for the plot of each episode. The results indicate that there indeed is such a correlation, both of the TV series contained fewer humour realizations in the last season and the percentage decrease was quite significant as well.

Moreover, the Practical Part aimed at finding out whether the selected sitcoms exploit, more or less, the same linguistic implementations in the occurring jokes. The following analysis revealed that both *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother* predominantly contained humorous instances which were realized at the Paradigmatic Axis, and secondly, those in which both paradigmatic and syntagmatic planes were engaged. Having taken into consideration the amassed data, it appeared that, apart from minor deviations, the humour was expressed by identical linguistic realizations in the series. However, it should be mentioned that wordplay which lied solely on the syntagmatic axis was involved to a much lesser extent. Therefore, in this particular case, it was impossible to draw any satisfactory conclusions. Concerning the qualitative examination, it explores the most representative

instances in detail, and describes all the processes engaged which contribute to creating a humorous effect.

Finally, the Practical Part strived to prove the notion that most of the humour realizations are achieved by ambiguity or double meaning. A close scrutiny supported this belief, as the corpus comprised a large number of samples which displayed the aforementioned characteristics. Interestingly, another general tendency was deduced from the gathered material as well and that was the frequent use of a sexually charged topic, which occurred in one third of all the analysed humorous examples.

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