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AGGRESSIVE HUMOUR- SOCIAL NORM VIOLATIONS IN STAND-UP COMEDY

Abstract

This research examines the role of aggression in the frame of social norm violations in American stand-up comedy. The article includes jokes from four performances of two top-rated stand-up comedians analysed through the exclusively elaborated criteria that include the concept of 'face', 'target', frequency of use of sarcastic and ironic utterances and social norm violations. The results of the research show that social norms are extensively violated during stand-up performances, through the use of figurative language or without it in order to perceive the joke successfully.

The results of the present research revealed that violating social norms can have a very positive role in the successful realisation of stand-up humour. It builds a stable face for the comedian by empowering him/ her. The other very crucial function this strategy bears is the process of unintentional affiliation, caused by the act of sharing intimate thoughts and putting trust in the audience.

Keywords: Stand-up, humour, aggression.

Introduction

Humour is a complex social and psychological phenomenon. It is an aspect of social interaction that we are often exposed to. The notion of aggressive humour is not new. Freud (1960) was one of the first scholars who suggested the possible hostile nature of humour. In this study, we are going to discuss aggressive humour in terms of violating social norms and using aggressive figurative resources, such as sarcasm and irony.

Stand-up comedy is a contemporary and well-recognized genre of humour. It is considered to be the “freest form of comedy writing” that is regarded as an “extension of” the person performing (Mendrinós, James, 2004). The improvisation of stand-up is often compared to jazz music (George Carlin, Charlie Rose, 26 March 1996). A comedian's process of writing is compared to the process of songwriting (Woodward, Jenny, 20 Dec. 2012). On the other hand, a comedian's ability to “tighten” their material has been compared to crafting a samurai sword (Louis C.K., Charlie Rose, 7 May 2014).

The stand-up comedy routines are one of the most popular forms of contemporary humour, mainly in the form of television shows or live performances. This genre gives a possibility of realistic interaction between comedians and the audience and enjoys an intimate atmosphere in which one can observe the audience’s reactions, their approval or disapproval. Some recognisable factors are that both comedians and the audience are involved in live interaction and the members of the audience promptly react according to the quality of the performance. The event happens at a specific time and place, and there is spontaneous communicative feedback, e.g., laughs that approve or disapprove the jokes. It makes stand-up comedy a very distinctive type of communication that is not possible to find in other humorous formats. In television comedy series, for instance, “Friends”, “The Nanny” or “The Big-Bang theory”, just to name a few, the linguistic and non-linguistic interaction is neither spontaneous nor natural. The dialogues as well as the scenes, the situations and peoples’ laughs are artificially contrived in scripts; that is, previously planned, altered and edited. All of these reasons have influenced our decision to select the stand-up comedy genre as a valid data source to base this research on. The data of the study includes four performances of two top-rated American comedians. The readers’ attention is not drawn on the pragmatics of humour in this report. Instead, the role of aggression is discussed within the framework of social norm violations in establishing speaker’s face, and building relationships between the speaker and the listener which, in the end serves the effective communication of humour.

1. Theoretical frame of the article

1.1 Verbal aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as the “exchange of messages between two people where at least one of the people is attacking the self-concept of the other person in order to inflict psychological pain” (Infante and Wigley 1986: 67). Rancer and Avtgis (2006) summarize five possible explanations offered by prior scholarship (e.g., Infante and Rancer 1996) for the development of verbal aggressiveness: Disdain, social learning, psychopathology, argumentative skill deficiency, and genetics (i.e., predispositional traits). Specifically, trait verbal aggressiveness is defined as the enduring predisposition of an individual during conflict to verbally attack another person’s self-concept in order to inflict psychological pain (Infante and Wigley 1986). Verbal aggressive messages (the behavioral manifestation of verbal aggressiveness) are presented in the forms of character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, and nonverbal emblems (Infante et al. 1990, 1992).

1.2 Aggressive humour

Humour has the power to both disrupt order and to impose order. For instance, joking can both be aggressive and promote rapport (Norrick, 2003). Holmes (2000) asserts that humour can be repressive as well as subversive. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) also show that joking in conversation might take the form of either bonding or biting, and It can be deployed both as a means for superordinates to maintain control, and as a means for subordinates to challenge or subvert authority.

Michael Billig (2005) argues that humour is essential for social life, and that it is in profound ways connected to social order (particularly in the case of ridicule). He claims that laughter is rhetorical and that there is an under-analysed relationship between humour and embarrassment. What is embarrassing is typically humorous, and people do not only laugh with others, but also at others, and take pleasure in breaches in social order. Billig distinguishes between disciplinary humour, which 'mocks those who

break social rules, and thus can be seen to maintain social order', and rebellious humour, which 'mocks social rules, and, in its turn, can be seen to challenge [...] the rules' (Billig, 2005; 202).

These theories show that humour can be the part of aggressive communication and it indeed has certain pragmatic purposes, like socializing, showing attitudes and establishing one's self.

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1.3 Irony

According to Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G., (2009), the verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker employs is very different from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. An ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of a certain attitude or evaluation, but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation.

Irony must not be confused with sarcasm which is directly expressed. Sarcasm expresses a certain meaning in a sharp, bitter, cutting, caustic, or acerbic manner; it is the instrument of indignation, a weapon of offense, whereas irony is one of the vehicles of wit.

1.4 Sarcasm

Attardo (1999) defines sarcasm as an overtly aggressive type of irony, with clearer markers/cues and a clear target (Attardo, 1999: 793). Sarcasm may employ ambivalence (Rockwell, 2006), although it is not necessarily ironic (Partridge, 1969) Most noticeable in spoken word, sarcasm is mainly distinguished by the inflection with which it is spoken (Irony. Dictionary.com) and is largely context-dependent.

Martin (2007) maintains that irony is where the literal meaning is opposite to the intended and sarcasm is aggressive humour that pokes fun. It seems obvious that using both ironic and sarcastic utterances can be significant contributions to aggressive language. Martin also claims that irony is not only used to signify something but also to perform a certain action. Thus, he considers irony not only as a semantic process but also as a pragmatic phenomenon; using irony gives the speaker possibility to express what they think or feel towards what they are saying. It is this „critical edge“, as Hutcheon (1995) calls it, that differentiates irony from such other tropes such as metaphor.

1.5 Target

Dauphin (2000: 3) defines sarcasm as “a form of ironic speech commonly used to convey implicit criticism with a particular victim as its target”.

1.6 Implicature

An implicature is something the speaker suggests or implies with an utterance, even though it is not literally expressed. This phenomenon is part of pragmatics, a subdiscipline of linguistics. H. P. Grice coined the term in 1975 and distinguished conversational implicatures, which arise because speakers are expected to respect general rules of conversation, and conventional ones, which are tied to certain words such as "but" or "therefore" (Grice, 1975:24–26).

1.7 Punchline

The function of the punchline is to make the audience laugh. A linguistic interpretation of the punchline/response is enlightened by Victor Raskin in his "Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour" (1985). Humour is evoked when a trigger, contained in the punchline, causes the audience to abruptly

shift its understanding of the story from the primary (or more obvious) interpretation to the secondary, opposing interpretation. The punchline will serve as another tool in the research to correctly analyse and interpret stand-up jokes.

1.8 The concept of 'Face'

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest the concepts of “face-saving “ and “face-threatening acts” (FTAs). The Face is defined as the public self-image, projected by a person. A Face-threatening act in some way damages the „Face“ of a person, acting in opposition to what the interlocutor thinks, believes or desires. Every time an FTA occurs, it is possible to lessen it through what is labelled as a “Face-saving act”. These acts spontaneously occur in conversation and other social interactions. Therefore, it is likely to find such instances in the use of ironic or sarcastic utterances. Observing face-threatening acts in stand-up discourse will help us to determine the role of the aggressive language in creating laughter; it is expected that the seriousness of the target’s Face damage increases the quality of the joke.

1.9 Stand-up essentials

Stand-up comedy is a contemporary and well-recognized genre of social humour. It is a verbal communication between a single, standing performer saying funny things directly to a live audience. Stand-up comedians deliver humorous stories, jokes, and one-liners, typically called a shtick, routine, or set. It can take an amateur comedian about 10 years to perfect the technique needed to be a professional comedian. (Louis C.K., Charlie Rose, 7 May 2014); As maintained by Seabaugh, being a stand-up comedian is a constant process of learning through failure” (Seabaugh, Julie, 18 March 2014). That means that comedians try to push the limits, they sometimes take serious risks which may result in losing their Face.

“If Something is uncomfortable, go for it” (Sep 29, 2017). Louis C.K.’s 10 rules to success [in stand-up comedy] include 1. Welcome obstacles; 2. Fail to success; 3. Explore the uncomfortable; 4. Enjoy being responsible; 5. Be self-aware (Louis C.K. Sep 29, 2017). As it turns out, comedians’ responsibilities do not end on the stage, their statements are materials for tense public discussions and sometimes are thoroughly neglected.

In stand-up comedy, the feedback of the audience is instant and crucial for the comedian's act. Audiences expect a stand-up comedian to provide four to six laughs per minute (Nevins, Jake, 4 October 2017) and a performer is always under pressure to deliver, especially the first two minutes (Frances-White, Deborah; Shandur, Marsha, 2016). This example of constant pressure is another reason for comedians to be expected to be emotionally strong and steady.

The most obvious characteristic features of stand-up humour are its socially inappropriateness, aggressiveness and impoliteness. The stand-up audience laughs at the things that they would cry about at different occasions. Topics of stand-up jokes are almost unlimited. To make people laugh about such a serious topic as child molestation, for example, is not easy. Accordingly, there must be sets of linguistic and psychological strategies employed in this type of discourse which would help them to exercise control over the audience and avoid massive face damages.

1.10 Social norm violation – empowering one’s self

Norms are essential within societies and groups because they create order (Stamkou, Van Kleef, Homan & Galinsky, 2016). Accordingly, violating norms is disapproved because this can create disorder within the societies and groups (Feldman, 1984; Stamkou et al., 2016).

In some cases, norm violation could result in positive consequences, such as a gain in power or status (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir & Stamkou, 2011; Van Kleef et al. 2012). This means violating social norms indeed can be used strategically by the comedians for certain psychological reasons, such as to gain power over the audience and to establish themselves as authorities.

According to the approach/ inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), the powerful are relatively free to behave as they wish. High-power individuals encounter fewer social constraints and live in more resource-rich environments (e.g., money, knowledge, support). This activates their behavioral approach system, which is accompanied by behavioral disinhibition; they appear to act at will without fear of negative consequences. Individuals who feel powerful are more likely to act in goal-congruent ways than those who feel less powerful (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Powerful individuals are also more likely to take risks (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), express their emotions (Hecht & LaFrance, 1998), act based on their dispositional inclinations (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001) and ignore situational pressures (Galinsky et al., 2008).

This scheme must be helpful in detecting the role and share of social norm violations in stand-up discourse. Do comedians actually reveal the signs of empowerment after violating social norms and is it actually noticeable in the audience response?

1.11 Aggression – elevating one's self

There are a number of definitions of aggression. The earlier ones focus on physical aggression. For instance, May (1972) relates aggression and violence to power. He distinguishes five levels of power: 1. the power to be; 2. the power of self-affirmation – not only to be but to be significant; 3. the power of self-assertion – I demand that you notice me; 4. aggression – taking some of the power of another for oneself; 5. Violence, largely physical. It seems that applying an aggressive narrative to their performance can be a crucial factor for gaining power and superiority over the audience. They may solidify their face by making themselves, respectively, important, noticeable and powerful with the help of the aggression.

Other definitions outstep physical aggression and suggest a broader perspective of the concept. Steinmetz (1977: 19) defined aggression as the intentional use of physical or verbal force to obtain one's own goal. Steinmetz argued that aggression is based on the intentionality of the act, the success or failure of the act, the instrumental or expressive use of the act, and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of

the act. This definition suggests that aggression can serve as an additional tool for comedians to put their trust in. Aggressive discourse may help them to gain power over their audience and force them to act against their will, e.g. approve comedians' abnormal viewpoints about social norms.

Infante (1987: 158) argues that aggression is embedded within the context of interpersonal communication. He suggests that interpersonal communication demonstrates aggression if it applies force physically and/ or symbolically in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage or, maximally to defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack, that may refer to other person's body, material possessions, self-concept, positions or topics of communication or behaviour. As Yule (1996) points out, if a speaker says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is a Face-threatening Act. Rusieshvili (2006) argues that sarcasm is one of the most powerful ways to threaten someone's face. Javier Contreras Armijo et al. (2011) asserts that sarcasm is the most successful way to make people laugh. Accordingly, applying aggressive humour with the correct use of figurative resources can be the ultimate strategy for successful performance for a comedian.

1.12 Group affiliation

Affiliation is a positive, sometimes intimate personal relationship (Zimbardo, P. & Formica, R. 1963). Under certain conditions, people will prefer and have an affinity for one's in-group over the out-group, or anyone viewed as outside the in-group. This can be expressed in one's evaluation of others, linking, allocation of resources, and many other ways (Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., Akert, R. D. & Sommers, S. R., 2015).

Affiliation can include concern over establishing, maintaining, or restoring a positive affective relationship with another person or persons. (Byrne, D.; U. Texas, 1 November 1961). As maintained by Tajfel et al. argues that people can form self-preferencing in-groups within a matter of minutes and that such groups can form even on the basis of completely arbitrary and invented discriminatory

characteristics, such as preferences for certain paintings (Tajfel, H.; Billig, M. G.; Bundy, R. P.; Flament, C. (April–June 1971).

Trust, intimacy, loyalty, access to sacred knowledge or truth follow upon secret membership (Simmel, 1950). These theories enable us to think that people can be affiliated on the basis of any type of shared viewpoint. In order for the comedians to gain the affinity of their audience, they have to make them members of their social group. If trust and intimacy are two of the most basic factors of being a member of a particular group, we can suppose, that every moment of releasing a risky [containing violations of social norms] joke can be counted as an act of turning the audience members into a particular comedian's group members - sharing one's skewed viewpoint on a well-established norm creates intimacy and can be a great example of revealing a trustful attitude.

1.13 Audience response

Audience response is a reaction of the receivers after hearing the humorous message, which is the only immediate way that the comedian can test or establish audience's approval or disapproval. According to Atkinson (1984: 21), good public speakers do not only "speak" but they manipulate the audience in order to elicit affiliative responses.

One of the most frequent audience's responses is laughter. According to Jefferson (1985:27-33), there are different forms of laughter such as "huh" or "hah" and is timed accordingly to the talk in progress and the corresponded social situation. He has examined how sometimes laughter is invited by a current speaker by the placing of a laugh particle upon completion of an utterance.

In his study, he found two types of audience's responses. The first response is affiliation which is shown with laughter, applause, cheers, whoops, and whistles. In addition, Atkinson (1984:21-31) claims that audiences not only react with one of the responses. It seems that they are ordered in quite specific ways. For example, applause emerge from laughter to show particular appreciation of the recent material. Other responses such as cheers, whoops, whistles have different characteristics. They are often loud and distinctive.

2. Methodology

The corpus collected for this research comprises four humorous routines that represent the genre known as Stand-up Comedy, namely: 1) Louis C.K. Live at Beacon theatre. One-hour show with the audience of 2500 people as well as TV viewers; 2) Louis C.K. Monologue – SNL. Saturday Night Live (SNL), an American late-night live television variety show broadcasting on National Broadcasting Company (NBC); 3) Bill Burr, “Why Do I Do This”. Recorded in 2008 - Stand-up Special. Published on Oct 25, 2017; 4) Bill Burr, “You People are all the Same” Published on May 7, 2017.

These routines were selected from American comedy shows. The humorous utterance segments were selected from each routine in relation to research purposes. They were later analysed based on the set of criteria and measured by the instruments elaborated for this research.

2.1 Research and Analysis Instruments

The central instrument for this research was the identification of the violation of social norms. Another relevant instrument included in the analysis was decoding ironic and sarcastic utterances as powerful figurative resources of aggressive language.

2.2 Data analysis

The data analysis carried out in this research involved several procedures. These procedures and the criteria were carefully selected based on several theoretical descriptive resources such as, sarcasm, irony, implicature, concept of ‘face’ and punchline. Components were sorted out with this order: the

type of utterance; implicature; apparent speech act; intended speech act; detected social norm violation; the presence of target; the identification of the punchline, implicature, audience reaction.

The initial stage of the research involved the selection of the routines alongside the repeated watching and listening of the television shows downloaded from Youtube. After the transcription process was completed, the next step was to carefully examine every utterance in the routines. All the humorous utterance segments were selected from these four routines and treated as specific data for the present research to the extent that they were regarded as the most representative utterances involved in the expression of aggression and social norm violations.

2.2.1 *Louis C.K. Live at Beacon theatre*

“I was thinking the other day, what if there was a baby who was born... and there's been a lot of fu**ed up babies, there's all kinds of babies born. There's been babies with, you know, that connected at the base to a dog or whatever; there's pity babies with three legs with hands on them; there's been Chinese babies.”

Type of utterance: sarcasm

Implicature: being Chinese is another kind of weirdness.

Apparent speech act: commenting

Intended speech act: mocking

Violated social norm 1: insulting children with different disabilities

Violated social norm 2: insulting Chinese nation

Target: Chinese people

Punchline: “there's been Chinese babies”

Audience reaction: applause; long, interrupting laughter

2.2.2 *Bill Burr, "Why Do I Do This"*

I have no hatred in my heart for gay people, all right? They're cool, they're funny, generally speaking, they're neat, you know? I got a lot of positive things to say about them, you know. [Once they] moved [into] your neighborhood the property value goes up, because they make it fabulous, right? They can't reproduce. So that I'm making more in the way [these] people [are] wonderful for the environment, god bless them."

Type of utterance: sarcasm

Implicature: the only positive thing about gay people is that they can't reproduce.

Apparent speech act: praising

Intended speech act: mocking

Face-threatening act: yes

Target: gay community

Punchline: "wonderful for the environment"

Social norm violation: expressing antipathy towards gay people

Audience reaction: applause, intense laughter

2.2.3 *Louis C.K. Live at Beacon theatre*

"I don't know how I'm gonna tell my kids... how the f**k you compete with that? How do you take a miserable person with no control over their lives (children) and tell them with a straight face: "ah, you can't do drugs, you can't do that, baby, all drugs are a perfect solution for every problem you have right now [...] drugs are so fu**ing good that they'll ruin your life.'"

Violated social norm: referring to drugs positively.

Audience reaction: applause, laughter, screaming.

2.2.4 Louis C.K. Monologue – SNL. Saturday Night Live (SNL),

“Child Molesters are very tenacious people. They love molesting child. It's crazy. It's like their favorite thing. I mean, it's so crazy, because when you consider the risk in being a child molester, speaking not of even the damage you're doing, but the risk-There is no worse life available to a human than being a caught child molester. And yet they still do it. Which from you can only really surmise that it must be really good.“

Violated social norm: joking about child molestation

Audience reaction: booing, long laughter

2.2.5 Pragmatic functions of social norm violations

Racism, as well as sexism and homophobia are the most highly discussed topics over the centuries and expressing such humiliating attitudes publicly is especially condemned by the society. Using racist, sexist and homophobic statements in their discourse, in our opinion, is a signal that comedians are not afraid of being excluded or ashamed. On the contrary, they gain a power as norm violators (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir & Stamkou, 2011; Van Kleef et al. 2012) and get more congruence in achieving their purposes (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). The same effect bears the ignorance of other social duties. As a rule, one is excluded from being a part of a society if being a bad parent or a rude neighbour, but not in this case. Establishing themselves as an authority help comedians ignore situational pressures (Galinsky et al., 2008) and act at will without fear of negative consequences (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003).

2.2.6 Use of ironic and sarcastic utterances

Intensive violation of social norms with almost equally intensive use of resources, such as irony and sarcasm is the ultimate indication that comedians choose to be aggressive and mean. They use these

figurative resources in order to strengthen their negative attitude towards a certain topic, e.g. make their discourse more aggressive (Sarcasm is "a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt" (Boxer, D., 2002).

Pragmatic functions (empowerment, superiority) of the aggressive strategy and using irony and sarcasm help them to exert feelings of superiority and power over their audience as it is characteristic for norm violators according to Van Kleef et al. (2012). They create authorities out of themselves during each performance and gain more freedom to express their emotions as Hecht & LaFrance mention while discussing powerful people's behaviours (1998), say anything in any way, as it is characteristic for people in power according to Chen and Lee-Chai (2001) and Van Kleef & Co^{te}, (2007), and finally ignoring the risks of damaging their face as Galinsky (2008) argues while describing powerful individuals.

2.2.7 Audience reaction

The successful achievement of comedians' purposes is shown by the component, called - 'audience reaction', that shows high level of audience satisfaction and confirms undeniable success of almost every joke (even about such risky one as a child molestation) by high frequency of intense laughter and applause, sometimes with screaming and interruptions. People responded with intense laughter and applause (sometimes with screaming) even on such risky jokes as child molestation, killing children or physically assaulting old people. These results were quite expected to us, taking into consideration presumed pragmatic features of aggressive humour and social norm violations.

2.2.8 Group affiliation

Group affiliation can be another important factor in achieving more freedom and reducing risks of face damage. By sharing their skewed perspectives comedians force the audience to support them as in-group members do, according to Aaronson et al. (2015).

3. Results

Violated social norms included topics: racism, sexism, homophobia; expressing negative/ nihilistic attitude towards the concepts, such as, family, parenthood; ignoring duties, such as being a good citizen, respecting old people/ weaker sex; neglecting parental duties.

Out of 17 utterances selected we detected cases of sarcastic (2) and ironic (1) utterances; cases of face-threatening act in all cases (3) makes obvious the fact that the stand-up comedians selected for this study do intend to express humour by means of face-threatening acts inflicted upon the victim's face.

Cases of booing and laughter combination (1), long, interrupting laughter and applause combination (2); laughter and applause combination; (2); intense laughter and applause combination (3); laughter (3); intense laughter (1); laughter, applause and screaming combination (1); laughter, applause screaming combination (1); intense laughter and applause combination (3) show audience satisfaction.

4. Discussion

4.1 Pragmatic functions of social norm violations

Racism, as well as sexism and homophobia, are the most highly discussed topics over the centuries and expressing such humiliating attitudes publicly is especially condemned by society. Using racist, sexist and homophobic statements in their discourse, in our opinion, is a signal that comedians are not afraid of being ridiculed or condemned. These tools help the comedians to exert feelings of superiority and power over their audience as they are characterised by norm violators, according to Van Kleef et al. (2012). The comedians create authorities out of themselves during each performance and gain more freedom to express their emotions, as claimed by Hecht & Lafrance while discussing powerful people's behaviours (1998). In addition, the comedians express their opinions, get more congruence in achieving their purposes, and finally, ignore the risks of damaging their Face, and situational pressures as

Galinsky et al. (2008) Chen and Lee-Chai (2001) and Van Kleef & Co[^]te[^](2007), (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003) asserted while describing powerful individuals.

4.2 Use of ironic and sarcastic utterances

Intensive violation of social norms with almost equally intensive use of resources, such as irony and sarcasm is the ultimate indication that comedians choose to be aggressive and even mean. They use these figurative resources to emphasise their negative attitude towards a certain topic, e.g. make their discourse more aggressive (Sarcasm is a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt (Boxer D., 2002).

Saying ,for example, that gay people are wonderful for the environment (2.4.2) is funnier and a more bitter way of pointing out that they can't reproduce. Comparing Chinese children to children with anomalies (2.4.1) is also more effective way to describe their 'weirdness'.

Pragmatic functions (empowerment, superiority) of the aggressive strategy mentioned above and utilising irony and sarcasm help the comedians to exert feelings of superiority and power over their audience as it is characteristic for norm violators, according to Van Kleef et al. (2012). They create authorities out of themselves during each performance and gain more freedom to express their emotions, as claimed by Hecht & Lafrance while discussing powerful people's behaviours (1998). In addition, the comedians express their opinions like the people in power (Chen and Lee-Chai 2001 and Van Kleef & Co[^]te[^], 2007), and finally, ignore the risks of damaging their Face as Galinsky (2008) argues while describing powerful individuals. It is shown by their selection of topics (racism, homophobia, child molestation, etc.), the ways of communicating them to the audience (sarcasm, irony) and responses they get from the audience (approval).

The joke about child molestation (2.4.4) for example, was publicly condemned in an American talk show "the talk" broadcasting on CBS, yet the audience responded with laughter, applause and cheer which is referred to Atkinson as 'approving' and 'affiliation' (1984:21-31). The racist joke and a joke about drugs were also 'approved' by the audience, without even immediate booing.

4.3 Audience reaction

The successful achievement of comedians' purposes is shown by the component referred to as the "audience reaction", that shows a high level of audience satisfaction and confirms the undeniable success of almost every joke (even about such a risky joke as child molestation) by a high frequency of intense laughter and applause, sometimes even with screaming and interruptions. As revealed by the research, people responded with intense laughter and applause even to such risky jokes as child molestation, killing children or physically assaulting old people. These results were quite expected to us taking into consideration presumed pragmatic features of aggressive humour and social norm violations.

4.4 Group affiliation

Group affiliation can be another important factor in achieving more freedom and reducing risks of Face damage. By sharing their skewed perspectives, comedians force the audience to support them as in-group members do, according to Aaronson et al. (2015).

5. Conclusions

The results of the present research showed that violating social norms do have a positive role in the successful realisation of stand-up humour. It takes part in developing the stability of the comedian's face, which ensures more freedom and reduces risks of Face damage. The study revealed two main pragmatic functions of aggressive humour within the frame of social norm violations. The first one is creating authority by making oneself superior and the other one is group affiliation, that provides one with the undoubtful support from his/ her group members.

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Appendix

“It's boring having kids, you gotta play kid games, you gotta play board games... You go like: “you got six, honey”. And then she goes[counting]: “one [pause], two[pause]” “it's just here, just go here”, that's just too heavy. “[Daddy], I'm learning”, “I know, you're gonna grow up stupid, cuz I'm bored, I can't take it baby, I can't, I can't watch it. I'm bored more than I love you.””

Violated social norm 1: ignorance of parental duties

Violated social norm 2: talking to kids without considering their fragile nature

Audience reaction: applause; long, interrupting laughter

“Sex is such a constant thing we choke. It's not even sex to us [men], it's just p***y. That's what we call it, p***y. It's such a compliment. It's not about girls or chicks, like it wasn't the 50s. There's no guys anywhere in the world saying: “let's go, meet some chicks and kiss them on the mouth and see what happens.” There's none of that: “hmm I sure would like to have a girl and my arm around a girl.” No, it's not, it's just pussy [...] it's not even some people's p***ies, it's just p***y like big pink balloon letters in front of our faces all the time.”

Violated social norm: referring to woman as a sexual object

Audience reaction: intense laughter; applause; screaming

“There is an old lady in my neighborhood [...] and her legs are... her legs are a nightmare! They're just white with green streaks and bones sticking out, and her legs are “ughh” I saw a guy with no legs wheeling by and he was like: “I'd rather just have air down here like I have to look down at that s**t.””

Violated social norm: expressing disgust towards old people

Audience reaction: intense laughter; applause

“I got an argument with this girl the other Day. [Have] You ever met somebody, like, within the first couple of minutes of meeting them, they feel like they can, like, sum you up. Just like: “[do] you now, what your problem is?” And you just have this unbelievable urge just to take her head and just mush it into whatever they're eating.”

Violated social norm: expressing urge to assault a weaker sex/ being impolite

Audience reaction: applause; laughter

“This is what happened, okay? She tried to say I was homophobic. I think this is full of s**t and this is the story. All right, we were in a diner, right? We just got done eating, okay? It came out I was looking down at the ground and when I looked up, there was like these two dudes like hardcore making out, you know, it's like I wasn't fu**ing ready!”

Type of utterance: sarcasm

Implication: gay couple kissing is such an unpleasant picture to see, that one should be ready for it.

Apparent speech act: commenting

Intended speech act: mocking

Face-threatening act: yes

Target: gay community

Punchline: “I wasn't fu**ing ready”

Social norm violation: expressing antipathy towards gay people

Audience reaction: intense laughter; applause; screaming

“One time I was at a swimming pool with my kids, a public pool, and I had my daughter, my six-year-old on my arm like this [showing a manner], she was like clamped on and she's kicking [...] it was so much fun and then she got off and another random child just clamp on it [his arm], like a rat, “get off of me!” “but I love you!” “no, you can't, stop it!” [acting out drowning a child (by him)] [to people] “I think the kid's dead, I don't know”.”

Violated social norm 1: expressing hatred towards children

Violated social norm 2: joking about a crime

Audience reaction: applause, interrupting laughter, screaming

“There's no story [...] honestly, tell a story about Clifford. Make something happen, well, maybe he steps on a policeman and shatters his spine and it's devastating to the community. He hangs on for two months and then dies and there's a whole, you know, funeral with bagpipes and everybody's crying and Clifford gets the death penalty and there's a whole book about his appeal process and how he found Jesus but everybody said it was bulls**t the cops' wife was like: “I want that dog dead!”. And then he goes to the chair and they shave all his red fur off but now he's Clifford the big pink dog and you put him on a big funny electric chair that the town got together and built.”

Violated social norm: giving children literature an inappropriate plot.

Audience reaction: applause, laughter, screaming.

“We saw a kid riding a bicycle down the street. you're never gonna see that s**t again you never see him playing outside. His parents just have him inside now man. they just feeding him and feed them you know, making them fatter and fatter, trying to make them unf**kable.”

Violated social norm: joking about children molestation.

Audience reaction: laughter.

“It's unbelievable, everybody is talking about pedophiles and all that type of stuff. I don't know, maybe that's moral nowadays, it's like easier now because the Internet, you know, cuz back in the day he had to work for it, right, you know you got to get an ice-cream truck. Let's figure out, when the kids got out of school you pick a straggler, you know I just go on the internet just google:

“WWWE Road””

Violated social norm: joking about pedophilia

Audience reaction: laughter

“How does this happen already? I'm 45 already and my as****le just like, my as****le is like the waistband on the old pajama bottoms just loose and ineffectual.”

Violated social norm: talking publicly about extremely intimate and more importantly, inappropriate topics.

Audience reaction: intense laughter

“I actually had the urge to elbow an old lady in the face the other day. No, it's not real I swear to god man. I was going to get off the plane, right? You know the rules when you go to get off the plane it goes row by row by row, right? And this lady's all like: “ooh I'm 90, I get to cut everybody, right? So, she starts waddling around me, you know, I'm competitive, I start boxing up right my luggage, I swear to God, I did this, I'm literally taking up the whole aisle and all of a sudden I just go around and she just starts waddling all around me! “

Violated social norm: expressing urge to assault old people

Audience reaction: laughter

“I don't know how you guys stay Married. How the f**k you do it? I know, you take the happy family photo, it's just sitting there, you know, you never just think of that, just someday, you know, just slam in the garage door in your head putting yourself in a coma for a couple of alone hours.”

Violated social norm: expressing negative attitude towards the concept of family

Audience reaction: laughter; applause

“They're relentless, they never Stop. And there's no reason for them to stop. You know why? Because you can't hit Them. That's what it is. Think about that, there are no physical ramifications for being an as****le when you're a woman.”

Violated social norm: expressing urge to hit a weaker sex

Audience reaction: laughter

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