

Repetition in Telecinematic Humour

How US American sitcoms employ formal and semantic repetition in the construction of multimodal humour

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1 Introduction

1.1 Object of the study and research questions

This study is a linguistic exploration of repetition in US American sitcoms with a laugh track. It aims to examine the particular realisations and functions of repetition in American sitcom humour and by extension in the humour of telecinematic discourse, i.e. the language of fictional film and television. Based on a theoretical framework that is informed by the pragmatics of fiction, text linguistics, cognitive linguistics and humour studies, and informed by empirical analyses of formal and semantic repetition in the AMSIL (AMerican SITcoms with a Laugh track) corpus, a collection of US American sitcoms that were produced 2010–2016, I examine the ways in which repetition of words and structures, of forms and meaning, of linguistic and non-linguistic signs contribute to sitcom humour. Repetition will be shown to be instrumental microscopically in the construction of individual humorous incongruities, but also macroscopically in the structuring of the sitcom narrative. The humour repetition helps to create in sitcoms is in turn multimodal and multi-layered, and the sitcom needs to be understood as a specific humorous text genre that is based on communication by a sender to a television audience and mediated via the fictional space that fills the screen. Thus, apart from examining the workings of repetition in sitcom humour, the study also sheds light on the particular humour that is created by sitcoms. Notably, the humorous incongruities on which the humorous effects of sitcoms rest are constructed with the help of the specific telecinematic affordances that sitcom episodes offer. Through the lens of repetition, these affordances are discussed individually as well as collectively, and they lead to the presentation of sitcom humour as a particularly multimodal and cohesive humour genre.

Taking into account previous research on repetition in discourse and on repetition in humour, the first result of the empirical analyses presented here will be a typology of formal repetition in sitcom humour, which starts from a presentation and classification of simple repeats on different levels (syntax, lexis, gestures, etc.) and moves on to larger structures and more complex repetitive phenomena that arise when several simple repeats combine into complex repetition patterns. Examining these patterns will already reveal a number of important functions for formal repetition in humour. However, formal repetition will be shown to only be the proverbial tip of the iceberg, i.e. underneath those repetitive structures that are manifest on the text surface, there is a network of semantic repetition that is essential for the realisation of humour within each incongruity, and even more so for the appearance of the comic narrative of the sitcom as a cohesive funny text. As will be shown here, it is due to repetition in all its facets that sitcoms present themselves not as a collection of loosely connected jokes, but as a structured network of humorous nodes that is both the source of the viewers' amusement and the backbone of the sitcom's narrative.

The empirical analyses will explore the role of repetition with regard to its manifestations and functions within the AMSIL corpus, a collection of 16 episodes from 8 US American sitcoms. The following five research questions specify the different aspects of repetition in sitcom humour that are investigated in Chapters 7–11, and they guide the empirical analyses that are presented there.

- (1) What types of simple repeats occur in the AMSIL corpus (a) within individual humorous turns and (b) across humorous turns?
- (2) Given the occurrence of many-to-one relationships between individual humorous turns, i.e. the co-occurrence of several repeats within a single humorous turn, how do humorous turns

in sitcoms construct incongruities with the help of complex repetition?

- (3) What are the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour when it comes to (a) the construction of incongruities based on frames and incongruous elements, and (b) the links between individual instances of humour?
- (4) How does inter-turn semantic repetition contribute to humour cohesion in AMSIL?
- (5) What is the role of repetition in the larger narrative structures of sitcoms, such as scenes, sequences and entire episodes?

In terms of methodology, it is important to note that the discussion of the different functions of repetition as well as of the types of repeats that occur in sitcom humour are based on the empirical findings of the analyses. This is to say that rather than defining top-down what categories of repetition should be observed in the AMSIL corpus, I analyse the data from a position that is informed but not defined by theory. The insights that are gained in this study are thus based on largely data-driven analyses whose results are only theorised *a posteriori*. One result of this approach is that the theoretical framework that is nonetheless presented in the first four chapters remains incomplete in some aspects and is expanded later on based on empirical findings. For instance, the classification of repeats is presented as a result of the first analysis in Chapter 7, and the observations on semantic repetition in Chapter 11 are informed by theoretical works on comic narratives that are discussed in the same chapter, as well as by the results already presented for formal repetition in sitcoms.

1.2 Can repetition be incongruous?

The general relationship between humour and repetition seems straightforward from a cursory glance at formulaic jokes like *knock, knock* jokes or running gags among friends, which reveal that there can indeed be repetition in humour. From previous research we can gather that repetition plays a role in the structure of jokes (Sacks, 1974; Attardo, 2001) – as a device that can support or contribute to humour (Hay, 2001; Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2004; Triezenberg, 2004; Attardo, 2011). Repetition has also been found to be instrumental in the construction of humour especially when it is combined with variation (Tannen, 1989; Attardo, 1994; 2001), most typically when repetition establishes a pattern which is then broken by variation. Some research suggests that repetition is so pervasive in joking that it may “serve to signal that a patch of talk is intended as humorous” (Norrick, 1996: 131; see also Coates, 2007). This suggests that because repetition is often present in or around humour, it has become indexical of humour and shifts the communication into a *joking frame* (Norrick, 1996) or *play frame* (Berger, 1987; Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997; Coates, 2007), that is “a frame of some sort that tells people that whatever is in the frame is ‘humorous’” (Berger, 1987: 10).

However, setting up a *play frame* is not equal to triggering humour, and there is potential tension when we follow the majority of linguistic approaches in adopting the concept of incongruity as the basis for humour (see Chapter 3). Following Suls (1972), incongruity will be understood here in terms of the linear processing of stimuli by recipients – in this case television viewers. Based on the input that is presented to them, viewers will form expectations and use them as a yardstick against which new information is measured. Humour is the result of the unexpected arrival of a new stimulus that is perceived as incongruous with the frame and expectations that have previously been

evoked.¹ Based on this view, it would seem contradictory that repetition, which by definition presents something that has been presented before, could be directly involved in the construction of incongruity: If we have heard the punchline of a joke before, it is no longer unexpected, and should therefore no longer be funny.

Conversely, if we approach repetition in humour from the viewpoint of Gricean pragmatics, being repetitive can be understood as a non-observance of the maxim of quantity. Repetition, from that point of view, can be said to go against expectations and be surprising precisely because of the redundancy it entails (Morreall, 1983; Dynel, 2013b). This surprising repetition, however, can only occur if we do not already expect the non-observance of the maxim – if we expect something new and instead encounter repetition. It would seem then that specific conditions are required for repetition to be unexpected and thus compatible with the triggering of humour as such, whereas in other conditions it would be expected precisely because it has been uttered before and would stand in contrast with humour. Depending on the approach towards repetition in humour and on the definition of repetition, repetition may then be seen either as a contributing or as an opposing element to humour.

One way to approach this apparent contradiction is the understanding of repetition as a heterogeneous concept that entails repetitive patterns on different levels. The understanding of repetition that this study follows will eventually be expanded to include semantic repetition without similarity in form (Chapters 10 and 11). But even where I focus on formal repetition (Chapters 7–9), I offer a broad understanding of repetition that includes not only lexical words, but also syntactic structures, phonetic and prosodic similarities, and even

¹ Further conditions for incongruities to be perceived as humorous are the aforementioned *play frame* as well as the notion of resolvability. These aspects will be left aside for the moment and will instead be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

multimodal aspects that concern the gestures and facial expressions of actors/characters and aspects of telecinematic production such as the *mise-en-scène*. Repetition is made up of a multiplicity of separate phenomena, and the interaction of different types of repetition with humour may vary from type to type. This is further complicated by the fact that, as will be seen in Chapter 8, repeats on different levels often co-occur and have to be examined together in order to shed light on the construction of any given humorous incongruity. Finally, the multifunctionality of repetition in humour that will be made apparent by the empirical analyses suggests that instances of repetition generally do not simply have one specific effect in and on sitcom humour. Together, these observations on the heterogeneity of repetition and its functions in sitcoms suggest that the relationship between incongruity and repetition is complex and needs to be addressed again in the last chapter of this study, when the insights into the occurrences of different types of repetition in the AMSIL corpus will allow a more informed discussion.

1.3 Sitcoms as data for a linguistic analysis

A good site for the analysis of the interface between humorous incongruities and repetition are sitcoms, which essentially come with two promises. The first one is that every episode will be an instantiation of the show. When we watch the third episode of *Friends* (NBC, 1994–2005), for instance, we would say that we watch *Friends* rather than *The One with the Thumb*, i.e. we would use the title of the series and not that of the specific episode. This suggests that when we watch the fourth episode of *Friends*, we do not watch a separate sequel, we continue watching *Friends*. This *continued watching* illustrates that when seeing an episode of a television series we expect that many of its elements will remain the same or at least similar enough for us to recognise it as part of the same larger story. For the prototypical sitcom, we expect among other things that the same characters will meet in the

same places (Mintz, 1985: 114–15); that we will hear the same title song; that each episode will appear in the same time slot of the television week with the same duration (in case we still watch traditional broadcast television) or that it will be grouped together with the other episodes on the online platform we are using (in case we are viewers on, say, *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime* or *Disney Plus*). In short, we expect that we will encounter many instances of repetition on different levels.

The second promise is that, as a sitcom, it will be humorous. As suggested by the *com(edy)* in their name, we expect that sitcoms as multimodal, audio-visual texts seek to invoke amusement in their audiences. Moreover, when we watch a sitcom with a laugh track and listen to the regular recurrence of studio laughter, we get a good indication of the frequency with which television producers expect their audiences to be amused. In incongruity terms, “humour is created when the conventional, predictable flow of discourse is interrupted by an unexpected or ill-fitting element” (Brock, 2011: 264), which means that for a great number of humorous instances there need to be a great number of unexpected elements. On the other hand, the repetitive framework in which the sitcom as a genre is set leads us precisely to expect expected elements. If both promises are kept – that there is humour in sitcoms and that they do repeat themselves – sitcoms must manage to balance both aspects and deliver both the expected and the unexpected.

Based on this dual promise, humorous instances are expected to be frequent in sitcoms, and it seems likely that repetition could feature prominently in the sitcom’s construction of humorous incongruities. This is to say that sitcoms appear to be ideal data for the exploration of the workings of repetition in humour as well as for an analysis of incongruity-construction in telecinematic discourse. Accordingly, the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 7–11 will serve the following aims:

- (a) to contribute to the understanding of sitcoms and more generally of telecinematic texts as complex, multimodal and multi-layered humorous narratives;
- (b) to highlight the genre-specific affordances sitcoms offer for the achievement of humorous effects;
- (c) to show how repetition is employed for humour in ways that are particular to the framework of telecinematic discourse, but also how the different functions of repetition in telecinematic humour are exemplary for humour at large.

Sitcoms are also interesting as data because of their position between conversational humour and canned jokes, the two areas into which much of linguistic humour research can be broadly divided. Whereas studies on the former “typically deal with data from real-life conversation” (Chovanec, 2011: 243) and thus tend to focus on instances of humour in the context of the situation in which they are uttered, research on the latter is concerned with jokes that “ha[ve] been used before the time of utterance in a form similar to that used by the speaker” (Attardo, 1994: 295–296), which is to say they discuss canonical humorous texts that are largely independent of situation and context. Scripted telecinematic humour, and sitcom humour in particular, is interesting in this regard, because it combines conversational with canned aspects. It is conversational in the sense that it is clearly situated within a context (that of the sitcom in general and the specific situation the sitcom characters find themselves in), and rather than being an independent canonical narrative, it is always embedded in conversation.² It is canned in the sense that the humorous instances are not created ad hoc, but are products of the screen writing

² Canned jokes, if their performance and embedding in conversation is taken into account, can of course also be looked at in context. But, other than sitcoms, they are not written with specific performers and speaker roles in mind, and they can be told by different speakers in different situations.

process, which means that they are produced *before the time of utterance* and by somebody different from the speaker.

Comparing the sitcom with other humorous genres, we can furthermore glimpse a number of features that are characteristic for its humour. Like a canned joke, a sitcom is written before it is performed, and its format does not only allow for humour, but leads the audience to expect it; but like conversational humour, its humorous instances are embedded in and dependent on a situation and context. Its communication – between writers-producers and an audience, between actors and actors, between characters and characters, between characters and an audience etc. – is layered (Clark, 1996; Bubel, 2006: 50–58; Bednarek, 2010: 14–17) and multimodal (Bednarek, 2010: 18–21), and it is thus more complex as a humorous narrative than a canned joke. This layering is interesting from a humour studies perspective because it means that humour, too, can be constructed on several communicative levels, for instance as a joke between two characters or on the contrary as an instance that is only humorous to television audiences, but not for the characters within the sitcom.

One result of the layering of scripted telecinematic discourse is a complex relationship between language (and humour) on screen and the audience it is written for. An important notion for the discussion of communication in and with the sitcom is *recipient design* (Sacks et al., 1974; Dynel, 2011c, 2011d), referred to by others as *audience-design* (Bell, 1984; Bednarek, 2010) or *overhearer design* (Clark and Schaefer, 1992; Bubel, 2006, 2008). The three terms denote that the scripted dialogue on screen is shaped with an audience in mind, and the resulting directedness of communication at an addressee has implications for the linguistic patterns that occur. More specifically, the on-screen performance of scripted humorous dialogue requires that its humour be recognised by the real-life audience it targets, and accordingly it will construct humour in a way that optimises comprehensibility for the audience it envisions. Here, too, repetition may play an important part,

as one of its uses in conversational discourse has been identified as that of facilitating language production and comprehension (Tannen, 1989: 49–50; Toolan, 2011: 174), which has been corroborated also in psycholinguistic and psychological research (e.g. Chambers and Smyth, 1998; Garrod and Pickering, 2004). The humorous instances in sitcoms I analyse here are also at least to some extent dependent on what we could refer to with Clark's (1996) term as *feeling of other's knowing* (111), i.e. as a projected understanding of humour the writers must assume in the audience they write for. As such, humour on screen can also tell us something about what humour professionals in television production think their audience will find amusing.

Communication in fictional television series also takes place as conversation between characters. From this point of view, it makes sense to treat the audience as a non-participant of the conversation (Clark, 1996: 14–15). But while television viewer-listeners can be seen as overhearers with regard to the dialogue on a higher level, they are at the same time addressees of the fictional discourse as a whole, which means that on a lower level, they are also ratified participants of the communication that is taking place. This is particularly obvious when the focus is on humour: Clearly, the main aim of a sitcom cannot be to make its characters laugh, but to be amusing to television audiences. Indeed, it is often the case that what is amusing to audiences is not so to characters – because they cannot recognise the humour in the first place, because they do not find it amusing (see e.g. Dynel, 2013a) or because it is at their expense.

1.4 Structure of the study

The twelve chapters of this study are structured such that the direction of the argument will be from the general to the particular and from the microscopic to the macroscopic. Following the introduction, Chapters 2 to 5 offer the theoretical frameworks on which the empirical analyses of the later chapters rest. Chapter 2 explores the communicative settings

and the participation structures that determine the interactions between characters as well as the mediated communication between all those involved in sitcom production and the television viewers. It starts by defining Telecinematic Discourse (TCD) and discussing it as a source of data for linguistic analyses and then takes the reader from general conceptions of participation frameworks to specifically telecinematic models that explain the roles and processes that can be assigned to the different players in sitcom communication. In particular, Chapter 2 discusses the duality of communicative levels that is central not only to sitcom communication at large, but also to the understanding of humour therein.

Chapters 3 and 4 address theoretical conceptions of humour and their application to TCD. Chapter 3 summarises research in linguistics and other disciplines that theorises humour based on superiority (the recipient feels superior to the target of humour), relief (humour releases tension in the recipient), and – most importantly – on incongruity, which is discussed using Suls’ (1972) *Incongruity-Resolution Theory* and Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) *General Theory of Verbal Humour* as exemplars. The final two sections of Chapter 3 describe the context in which humour is admissible and the aspect of surprise that is central to the incongruity-based understanding of humour. Following the same structure, Chapter 4 transfers the general concepts of Chapter 3 to the particular setting of TCD. I explain the premises for incongruities in TCD and explore in particular how the constitutive elements of humorous incongruities are realised telecinematically, which includes the establishment of the humorous frame, the evocation of viewer expectations, surprise and resolution. This is complemented by a discussion of the role of laughter as a humour cue. Finally, Chapter 4 is concluded by a study on different humour constellations in sitcoms (Messerli, 2016), which also serves as a summary of Chapters 3 and 4; and by a working definition of *telecinematic humour* as it is understood in this study.

Chapter 5 concludes the theoretical part of the study by presenting a brief overview of the extant literature on repetition and humour. I discuss existing terminologies of repetition before offering the definitions and classifications of repetition that this study works with. However, a typology of repetition in sitcom humour is itself a result of the empirical analyses and will be presented in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 describes the data and methodology on which the empirical analyses of the remaining chapters rest. It addresses the data collection and the transcription steps that were employed in assembling the AMSIL (AMerican Sitcoms with a Laugh track) corpus, before presenting the US American sitcom episodes that are part of the corpus. In terms of the data analysis, I explain how humour was identified, how the data were segmented and coded, the steps that were taken to establish coder agreement, and the methodological procedures that were followed to arrive at the results that are presented subsequently. This includes a definition of humorous turn (HT), i.e. any conversational turn in which humour occurs, and the motivation for choosing HTs as the main units of analysis.

The empirical part of this study begins with an exploration of formal repetition in Chapters 7–9, before approaching semantic repetition in Chapters 10 and 11. The object of Chapter 7 is to present a typology of simple repeats in AMSIL. I explore the individual instances of formal repetition on different levels, starting from the distinction between repeats that are situated entirely within one HT (intra-turn repetition) and those repeats that span two or more separate HTs (inter-turn repetition), i.e. that establish a link between an earlier turn and the HT at hand. For each category, intra- and inter-turn, I describe and illustrate the following types of repetition based on examples from the AMSIL corpus: lexical repetition, phonetic repetition, structural parallelism, prosodic repetition, kinesic repetition (character multimodality), telecinematic repetition (telecinematic multimodality).

The simple repeats established in Chapter 7 are examined in context in Chapter 8, which starts from a quantitative approach to the correlation of different types of repeats. These correlations are then used to identify relevant examples in the corpus and analyse them qualitatively. The result of Chapter 8 is an overview of how humorous turns make use of multiple simple repeats that together form more complex repetition patterns in their construction of humorous incongruities. Moreover, the discussion of examples already reveals some of the functions that simple and complex formal repetition have in sitcom humour.

Chapter 9 addresses these functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour systematically and presents them as the four C's of repetition into which the individual functions of repetition in sitcom humour can be categorised: constitutive, cohesive, constructional and communicative repetition. Returning to examples that were discussed in the previous chapter and adding select new examples, I illustrate the different functions of repetition that were established based on the analysis and thus present an overview of the effects of formal repetition in AMSIL.

Chapters 10 and 11 shift the focus to semantic repetition and explore the influence of repetition on humour beyond the individual humorous turn. In Chapter 10, I discuss cohesion and coherence and approach the notion of semantic repetition on a more local level as a non-formal link between individual HTs. In an exemplary scene, I demonstrate how semantic repetition is used in sitcoms to connect incongruities and to construct cohesive scenes. This is expanded in Chapter 11 to the narrative of an entire sitcom episode. After a theoretical excursion to the role of repetition in the structuring of longer comic narratives, I present a case study that illustrates the linear as well as the hierarchical structure of a sitcom episode that is ultimately narrated through its humorous instances.

Chapter 12 summarises the study and looks beyond its scope to variation in repetition and humour within the AMSIL corpus as well as to a comparison with different humorous texts and genres. There, I also return to the potential tension between repetition and incongruity as well as to the central questions of this study, which focus on the roles of repetition in sitcom humour and humour at large.

Finally, it needs to be reiterated with respect to the generalisability of the findings of this study that the empirical basis for any insights made here lies in the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the AMSIL corpus. Accordingly, all claims about sitcom humour made here are only valid for the type of sitcom the episodes in the corpus represent. Given the data selection (see Chapter 6), this means that the results of the study can only be directly extended to other contemporary American sitcoms that include a laugh track. Whether or not the findings hold true for other sitcoms (without a laugh track, not American, not made in the 2010s) or even for other humour genres will have to be confirmed by future research. However, American sitcoms with a laugh track are also sitcoms, and sitcom humour is also humour, which is to say that even if other repetition patterns and other functions of repetition are found in other texts, the patterns and functions that are presented here will still constitute valid evidence that humorous incongruities can be constructed by employing repetition in the way it is the case in AMSIL, and that repetition can serve those functions in humour that are evidenced in this study.

2 Telecinematic Discourse

2.1 Introduction: What is Telecinematic Discourse?

To investigate the use of repetition in sitcom humour as it is done in this study, is to use the language of fictional television as data for a linguistic analysis. This raises a number of theoretical and methodological issues that need to be addressed before advancing to more empirical questions.

To begin with, previous research has used a range of different terms to refer to the language of film and television. Of those terms, television discourse (Bubel and Spitz, 2006) would seem an obvious choice. However, this term has been used in a wider sense to refer to broadcast discourse in general and specifically to the communication settings of non-fictional television programmes, such as talk shows and news broadcasts (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009).

It also implies that the discourses of cinema and television are too distinct to be theorised within the same framework. Even if there are discernible differences in the position of cinemagoers and television viewers vis-à-vis the respective artefacts – some of which will be addressed in the following sections – a framework that manages to include different forms of audiovisual fiction seems more promising.

It also has to be noted that the once plausible duality of screening at the cinema and broadcasting to television sets in living rooms has given way to a plurality of settings in which the same content may be viewed and listened to. Accordingly, film discourse and television discourse would be but two of many different fictional audio-visual discourses, and it seems unnecessary to start with the assumption that we need a different framework for each and every of these reception situations. What is more, establishing such a dichotomy only makes sense if the differentiated domains can indeed be separated. This may

seem a simple feat at first glance, but then are we to suggest that a film produced for television leads to an entirely different communication setting than one made for cinemas? And if they do, then are television serials not an entirely different matter as well?

Instead, the view taken here is that fictional television broadcasts and cinematic films lead to communication settings that are similar enough to warrant a unifying framework. For the same reasons, terms like *filmspeak* (Alvarez-Pereyre, 2011), *film discourse* or *film talk* (Dyrel, 2011c) seem equally unfit because they either actually exclude the language of fictional television or give the impression that they do. Instead, I will follow Piazza, Bednarek and Rossi (2011) in using the term *telecinematic discourse* to refer to the discourse of fictional television and to suggest that films, but also other fictional audio-visual artefacts like those produced for YouTube, can be described using the same theoretical framework.

Telecinematic discourse in all its variations shares a number of defining characteristics that, depending on the stance one takes towards it, may make it a problematic, but also a particularly interesting field for linguistic study. I will address some of the reasons behind the “dispute over the applicability of film discourse in linguistic analyses” (Dyrel, 2011c: 43) at this point (see also Alvarez-Pereyre, 2011; Piazza et al., 2011; Jucker and Locher, 2017). First of all, it is quite clear that telecinematic data is just as much naturally occurring as the data of other communication settings. This is so because, rather than being elicited by the researcher, it fits Jucker’s (2009: 1615) definition of data that “occurs for communicative reasons outside of the research project for which it is used.” Within the category of naturally occurring data, however, it is also quite clearly a peripheral member, as it differs in a number of ways from the prototype, face-to-face conversation, which is the basic setting of language use (Clark, 1996: 8–11). One of the essential characteristics of telecinematic discourse is that it involves several communicative levels. This will be discussed in the next

sections, but for the time being I assume as its main level of communication the interaction between the collective sender (Dyner, 2011b), which is to say all those involved in producing it, and the viewers, i.e. the viewing and listening audience.

Taking the features of face-to-face conversation listed in Clark (1996: 9–10, see also Clark and Brennan, 1991) as a benchmark, the participants of telecinematic discourse can be described as neither co-present (1) nor mutually visible (2) or audible (3). The communication is not instantaneous (4) or evanescent (5), and it leaves a record (6). There is no simultaneity between reception and production (7), nor does the ostensible delay between formulating and performing on the side of the collective sender permit referring to the communication as extemporaneous (8). The participants do not fully determine the unfolding of their interaction (9), and self-expression is, at the very least, constrained by the intermediary actors performing on screen (10). To sum up, telecinematic discourse cannot be said to conform to any one of the ten features of the basic setting of face-to-face interaction as listed by Clark (1996) and must therefore be regarded as altogether non-basic.

If language in use is conceptualised as an Aristotelian category, which defines membership in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, telecinematic discourse is thus just as much a member of that category as face-to-face conversation is, and no justifiable claim can be made about either being more or less natural in their occurrence than the other. If, however, language use as a category is assigned prototype structure, which allows for graded membership (see, for instance, Bybee, 2010), telecinematic discourse is not a central member because it is far removed from the prototype of face-to-face conversation in many of its features. Since prototypical members of a category are by definition more representative of the category at large than peripheral members, it seems plausible that more central and

therefore more typical communication settings would be preferred by researchers for analyses of language in use.

Based on these thoughts on the categorisation of language in use, it is not surprising that few studies have analysed telecinematic discourse with the goal of generalising their findings and applying them to language in use at large. At most, researchers have claimed that the language of film and television is in some ways similar enough to that of face-to-face conversation that it can be used as data to investigate, for instance, linguistic innovation (Tagliamonte and Roberts, 2005) or the prosody of humour (Purandare and Litman, 2006). Others have chosen a comparative stance and emphasised similarities and differences to non-mediated, non-scripted communication (Quaglio, 2009; and see Dynel, 2011c, for an overview). The stance this study takes, however, is that telecinematic discourse does not only have merit as one pair-part of a comparison, nor must it be representative for wider uses of language or even for language use at large. The study of telecinematic discourse, just like the study of literary discourse or of institutional discourse, is worthwhile first and foremost in its own right, and a number of studies in the last two decades have suggested as much (among others Alvarez-Pereyre, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2012; Bednarek, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Bleichenbacher, 2008; Bubel, 2006, 2008; Dynel, 2013b;; Kozloff, 2000; Richardson, 2010). Moreover, telecinematic discourse is a particularly interesting field for linguistics because of the interplay of different sign-systems (linguistic, paralinguistic, non-linguistic) and the multiplicity of interacting communication levels. Because of this, pragmatics of fiction, i.e. research from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics into fictional discourses, has recently been gaining traction (see, e.g. Bednarek, 2017, 2018; Jucker and Locher, 2017; Langlotz, 2017; Locher and Jucker, 2021; Messerli, 2017a).

Another look at the differences between telecinematic discourse and face-to-face conversation, as they are listed above, reveals that

some of them are linked to telecinematic discourse being mediated, while others are determined by the fact that it is scripted. The most important consequence of the former is that audiences are limited in terms of direct interaction with the collective sender or the onscreen performers – although social networks like Twitter or Facebook, as well as comment features on platforms like YouTube or Viki have increased the possibilities for asynchronous and near-synchronous follow-ups in recent years (see Locher, 2020; Locher and Messerli, 2020; Messerli and Locher, in press 2021).³ Scriptedness, on the other hand, leads to the separation of the actions of production and formulation and even of the producing and formulating agents: When Sheldon, a character, makes a joke in *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–), the audience knows that the formulation of that joke is more than likely done by the writing staff, and with certainty that production and formulation of that joke are not happening extemporaneously. The consequences that this has for audiences' meaning making and intention reading, which are connected to the concepts of characterisation on the one hand, and recipient design on the other, need to be discussed based on a more general examination of the communication settings of telecinematic discourse and in particular of its participation framework.

I have previously presented an overview of participation structures in fictional discourse, which while focusing on fictional film and television also included the communication that takes place in dramatic performances as well as in reading narrative fiction (Messerli,

³ Rakuten's Viki, dedicated to Korean television drama as well as to Chinese and Japanese television shows, is a particularly interesting case, because it allows for recipients to add comments during their viewing that are tied to the timecode of the video stream they are playing. These comments are immediately available to other viewers, who (if they turn on the feature) will either be able to read them as surtitles or in a separate comments column to the right of the stream. In either case, comments are synchronised to the stream, which allows the tying of viewer responses to the artefact and thus a novel form of a communal and interactive viewing experience.

2017a). The current chapter constitutes a condensed version of that overview, dedicated entirely to the communicative setting of telecinematic discourse. It is quite clear that the theoretical conceptualisations offered in this overview are in many cases not exclusive to film and television, but can be and in some cases have been applied to other areas of interest for a pragmatics of fiction. However, I refer the reader to Messerli (2017a) and sources for an overview that goes beyond fictional film and television, and will neglect the commonalities with other, related discourses in the overview presented here.

Based on an excerpt from the US Sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC 1989–1998), the following sections will discuss the different communicative roles that need to be taken into account when analysing the language in and of fictional film and television. Starting from a non-expert approach to sitcom dialogues that serves to illustrate Goffman’s understanding of participation (2.2), the discussion will present different understandings of the participation framework of film and television reception that have been brought forward in linguistic studies (2.3). This will inform the conceptualisation of viewers, collective senders and the communication between them in this study. Section 2.4 focuses on the viewers’ understanding processes, whereas Section 2.5 summarises some of the relevant aspects of this chapter in order to outline more generally this study’s understanding of telecinematic discourse.

2.2 Characters and Goffman’s (1979) participation framework

2.2.1 A fictional conversation in *Seinfeld* (1989–1998)

I will start this literature review with an example from the well-known and by now classic US American sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC 1989–1998). This example will be used to illustrate the different theoretical

approaches that can be taken towards the participants on- and off-screen. The extract – represented here by a transcription of the broadcast (Example 2.1) – is taken from the television series' pilot, with the title "The Seinfeld chronicles." In order to set up the interaction in this example, I will provide context for some of the participants and the communicative setting. Although the extract is situated at the beginning of the very first episode of the series' first season, a large proportion of the contemporary US American audience will have been familiar with the main actor, Jerry Seinfeld, who was already a well-known stand-up comedian and a regular guest on late night television. In the sitcom, which uses his last name as the title of the series, Jerry Seinfeld plays a fictional version of himself. Prior to the excerpt presented here, the prologue of the episode showed him as a stand-up comedian in a comedy club, performing a routine about going out. Now he and his friend George are sitting in a coffee shop somewhere in New York, chatting over coffee. After a few turns, a waitress, Claire, approaches the table and has a brief conversation with George.

The detailed transcription conventions are included in appendix A.1, but to facilitate the reading of the example, a few explanations need to be added: The numbering refers to camera shots (sequences of film between cuts); the second column from the right transcribes the verbal interaction as well as some of the more significant bodily gestures; and the rightmost column serves as a short description of the visible communicative setting (*mise-en-scène*).⁴

⁴ Since Example 2.1 will be discussed at length throughout Chapter 2, I have chosen a different set of transcription conventions here than I will use for subsequent examples. In particular, I include a more detailed description of the *mise-en-scène* for this initial excerpt. In line with the focus on the visual aspects of the scene is the segmentation into camera shots. As will be seen, later examples will instead segment the data according to turns (see Chapter 6).

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George Ehh, no, eh not at this time.
&-uses pen like a microphone -&

9 *Medium shot of Jerry and George. Claire approaches the table from the background, between George and Jerry, at the centre of the picture.*

Jerry Well, Senator, I'd just like to know what you knew and when you knew it.=

Claire = Mr. Seinfeld. (.) Mr. Costanza
&-covers cup with hand---->

Claire pours coffee into Jerry's cup with her right hand, then tries to pour coffee into George's cup with her right hand.

George Are you sure this is decaf? Where's the orange

indicator?
-----&

Claire It's missing.

10 *Frontal medium close-up of Claire.*

I have to do it in my head. "Decaf ↑left, regular
§--alternates raising-->
↑right. Decaf ↑left, regular ↑right." It's ve:ry
---left and right hand-----§
cha:llenging work.

11 *Frontal medium close-up of George.*

12 *Frontal medium close-up of Jerry.*

Jerry Can you relax?
+-----open hand gesture--+
It's a cup of coffee.
+---both palms upwards--+
Claire's a professional waitress.=

13 *Medium shot of George, Jerry and Claire.*

Claire Trust me, George. No one has any interest in seeing you on caffeine.

14 *Frontal medium close-up of Jerry.*

15 *Frontal medium close-up of George. He smiles.*

+ Jerry
& George
§ Claire

One way of examining the multimodal interactions between the characters is to take a non-expert stance and understand it as represented dialogue. This will be done here in order to both introduce and contextualise the example that will be used throughout this chapter, as well as to briefly outline Goffman's (1979) participation framework, on which most theoretical approaches to fictional participation are based (see discussion of individual models in Section 2.3). I will thus assume the position of a naïve television viewer who approaches this scene as if it were a one-to-one representation of an interaction that could take place in any non-fictional coffee shop in New York City.

From this point of view, the main focus will likely be on the interaction between the two main characters, Jerry Seinfeld and George Costanza, and from shot 9 onwards also on the waitress Claire. In the first turn (shots 1 to 4), for instance, Jerry makes a comment about the second button on George's shirt, while other guests in the coffee shop are drinking their coffees and the waitress in the background is refilling a customer's cup. Looking through the television set into that coffee shop and turning a blind eye to whatever context there may be outside of the fictional world in which the interaction takes place, it is a simple task to identify some of the participant roles that are represented in this turn: the speaker Jerry; the addressee George; and those uninvolved in the ongoing interaction in the foreground. Accordingly, one may start by simply applying the tools of a theoretical framework for face-to-face interaction to the conversation between Jerry and George in order to describe the communicative setting of this example of fictional discourse.

Even from a naïve perspective that leaves away the roles of those involved in TV production and reception, a discussion of the participation structure within the represented coffee shop will have to take note of the fact that George and Jerry are not alone. Therefore, a theoretical approach that goes beyond a purely dyadic view of talk will be necessary in order to arrive at a full picture of the communicative

setting, which manages to also include what role the characters in the background may play in the way the interaction in the foreground takes place.

2.2.2 Goffman's (1979) participation framework

One of the main foci of Goffman's (1976, 1979) influential work is to go beyond a traditional analysis of talk which is limited to two participants and cannot successfully describe the workings of all those conversational encounters where three or more people are present. In earlier work, Goffman (1967) already describes the ratification processes between speakers and listeners and acknowledges the differences between ratified and unratified participants of talk (see footnote 24 in Goffman, 1967: 34), and he explains in more detail the different types of ratified and unratified listeners in Goffman (1976). But he only brings forward his notion of *participation framework* and a clear description of the different participation roles involved in a typical communicative setting in his essay on footing (Goffman, 1979). There, it becomes clear how conversation between ratified participants is influenced by those around it who are listening in or looking on.

I will return to the button remark in Example 2.1 to illustrate the framework that Goffman envisions. Apart from the speaker, Jerry, and the addressee, George, who are the ratified participants here, a number of customers as well as the waitress are present in the scene. In Goffman's terms, these unratified participants may either be *eavesdroppers*, *overhearers*, or *bystanders*. Assuming that they remain unnoticed by the ratified participants, they are either eavesdroppers, if they intentionally listen in on the conversation, or overhearers, if "the opportunity has unintentionally and inadvertently come about" (Goffman, 1979: 8). Or they are bystanders, if George and Jerry are aware of their presence. Even as acknowledged bystanders, the characters in the background are not directly involved in the actual conversation between ratified participants, but as Goffman (1979: 10)

points out, they will nonetheless be influential, because: “speakers will modify how they speak, if not what they say, by virtue of conducting their talk in visual and aural range of nonparticipants.” In other words, the fact that George and Jerry’s conversation takes place in a public place (the coffee shop) and that it is at least potentially overheard by the other customers and the waitress, will influence the linguistic choices of the two ratified participants and the way the conversation evolves.

Insofar as characters, places, events etc. are understood as representations of real people, real places and real events, Goffman’s participation framework for non-fictional face-to-face interaction can thus be used to describe the participation roles of the fictional participants, which is done by simply mapping each fictional character role to the non-fictional referent it represents.⁵ Essentially, this amounts to the observer taking the position of a character that shares the space of the other fictional characters and operates entirely oblivious to the fictionality and constructedness of the fictional world.

Arguing from this position, an interactional analysis of the scene may focus on a range of features that may strike the researcher as different from other interactions in coffee shops.⁶ For instance, turn-taking happens in such a fashion that there are no overlaps; there are no false starts and turns almost exclusively consist of syntactically well-formed sentences; there is only a single hesitation marker (George in shot 8); and the interlocutors show a propensity to rhythmically stress several words per intonation unit and accentuate those stresses with the help of hand gestures. In other words, the interaction can be described as exceedingly orderly and thus different from spontaneous face-to-face interaction in an informal setting. When trying to explain this

⁵ Understanding fictional characters as if they were real-life people is what Culpeper (2001) calls the humanising approach.

⁶ The extract here can be compared, for instance, with the examples in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

orderliness of the displayed turn-taking, the naïve position of audience-as-character will no longer be sufficient to explain the interaction – it becomes necessary to look past the represented fictional situation and include the telecinematic context in which the interaction takes place.

The most obvious answer to the question why an analysis of the spoken interaction in *Seinfeld* is markedly different from spontaneous face-to-face interaction is quite simply that it is *not* spontaneous interaction. While some circumstantial evidence within the fictional world points to an informal talk between friends in a coffee shop, there is also clear evidence that this is taking place within a fictional television series – for instance in the form of the conventional metacommunicative cues that are available to audiences in television guides, their own viewing context or the cues within the broadcast itself (see Brock, 2009). It is thus safe to assume that most audiences of *Seinfeld* will share the knowledge that the representation on screen is not the product of the surreptitious recording of an actual conversation between Jerry Seinfeld and Jason Alexander (the actor who plays George Costanza in the sitcom), but that there is some form of television-making apparatus at work, which involves writers, producers, directors, actors, as well as operators of cameras, sound, lighting and other telecinematic parameters. Whereas spontaneous spoken interaction involves negotiating turn transitions between interlocutors as well as thinking and speech production processes in each participant, such negotiating and processing is absent or greatly reduced in the case of fictional interactions, because the interaction is scripted and thus prepared not only in terms of the formulation of individual utterances, but also in terms of the turn-taking between interlocutors.

This distinction can best be clarified with the help of the concepts of *animator*, *author*, and *principal* (Goffman, 1979), i.e. the differentiation of three roles involved on the speaker-side of any interaction. While the animator is the one vocalising the utterance, the

author formulates it, and the principal is the one whose set of beliefs are being expressed in language (Goffman, 1979: 16–17). All three roles are performed by the speaker in spontaneous spoken interaction, who has something she means to express in mind, formulates it and utters it. In fictional discourse, however, these roles are separated: The actor Jerry Seinfeld vocalises what the writing staff of *Seinfeld* formulated and the creators/producers of the sitcom meant to convey.

This is to say that the synchronous interaction between Jerry and George in Example 2.1 is in fact part of a larger communicative context of television-making. The interaction on the surface depends on communicative processes on another level, which include the collective of those involved in making the fictional artefact – in this case the sitcom – as well as those involved on the recipient-side, i.e. the audiences or readers that are observing the fictional interaction.⁷

2.2.3 Two communicative levels

Within pragmatics as well as media and television studies, there is wide agreement that this duality of levels needs to be taken into account when approaching the communicative setting of telecinematic discourse and of mass media communication (see Chovanec and Dynel, 2015: 5), as well as that of other forms of fiction. The levels in fictional discourses have been discussed using different terminology – and broadly speaking two different spatial metaphors have been brought forward to conceptualise their relative position within the communicative setting. The first one understands fictional interaction as embedded in communication between authors/producers and audiences; the second one places inter-character talk on a layer on top of the primary layer between the producers and recipients of the artefact. Despite the spatial difference between the two understandings, both conceptualisations are

⁷ The different conceptions of the role of the audience/reader will be discussed in Section 2.3.

similar in that they highlight a dependency of the fictional level on the primary communication between authors/producers and audiences.

Examples following the first paradigm include Short (1981), who speaks of dramatic discourse in terms of embeddedness; Burger (1984, 1991; Burger and Luginbühl, 2014), who follows the same notion of embeddedness when he situates mass media communication in different communicative circles (*Kommunikationskreise*); and Androutsopoulos (2012: 140–141), who uses the term *double framework* – in explicit analogy to models from literary studies – and states that “communication in the fictional world is embedded into the communicative relation between ‘author’ (or ‘producer’) and ‘reader’ (or ‘audience’).”

Essential to the second paradigm is Clark (1996: 353), who regards as a commonality of the language of “novels, plays, movies, stories, and jokes, as well as teasing, irony, sarcasm, overstatement, and understatement” that they involve a form of joint pretence between participants, which opens up a second domain or *layer of action*. Clark emphasises the clear hierarchy between the layers, with layer 2 (the fictional joint pretence) being dependent on layer 1. The model visualises the fictional layer (as well as other dependent layers) as a stage, and layer 1, on which it rests, as a representation of the “actual world” (Clark, 1996: 16).

The notion of *layers* is taken up by Kozloff (2000) and also by Bubel (2006, 2008), who includes Short's (1981, 1989) embeddedness and Burger's (1984, 1991) communicative circles, but most heavily relies on Clark's (1996) conceptualisation for her own model of screen-to-face communication. Bednarek (2010) in turn discusses television language based on Bubel's model, whereas Piazza, Bednarek and Rossi (2011) only implicitly follow the same spatial hierarchy when they speak of a *double plane of communication*. Desilla (2012), following Vanoye (1985), regards the communication between authors/producers and audiences as happening on a *vertical level*, which is opposed to the

horizontal level of fictional interactions. Dynel (2011d) and Brock (2015) both develop their own models and visualisations and speak more generally of *communicative levels* (see discussion in Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4).

Finally, I have offered a different, not primarily spatial understanding of sitcom participation in Messerli (2017b). This view, which is based on a conceptualisation of telecinematic discourse as a form of ventriloquism, or in fact as multiple acts of ventriloquism, will be discussed briefly in Section 2.3.5.

Despite the range of different terms and different metaphors employed in the theoretical works mentioned here, there will be a clear consensus when analysing Example 2.1 from any of the theoretical vantage points that the interaction between Jerry and George is in some way dependent on – i.e. it is embedded in or rests upon – another level of communication between authors/producers and television audiences. Furthermore, all scholars represented here will agree that this dependency of fictional communication will greatly affect the form Jerry and George’s interaction takes – both with regard to the linguistic realisation of the individual utterances and the interactional organisation of the conversation between the two characters.

There are, however, substantial differences with regard to how exactly the roles of authors/producers and audiences are conceptualised, and how the meaning-making and understanding processes on both sides are theorised in the different approaches.

2.3 Models of participation in telecinematic discourse

Having established the Goffmanian participation framework as well as the multi-layeredness of telecinematic discourse and by extension of fictional discourse at large, this section will discuss five theoretical approaches to a specifically telecinematic participation framework. All of these models focus on the audience and their understanding

processes, while the actual production of the telecinematic artefact is only marginally represented. However, as the chronological discussion will show, a tendency towards a more fine-grained look at production-side processes can be observed.

The first theoretical framework discussed here is the one put forward by Bubel (2006, 2008), which is commonly referred to in connection with the viewer-as-overhearer paradigm. Bubel adopts the notion that audiences are overhearers from Kozloff (2000), and the same view is also shared by Richardson (2010). Subsection 2.3.2. will discuss Bednarek's (2010) additions and specifications to Bubel's model. Dynel's (2011d) viewer-as-ratified hearer approach will be discussed in Section 2.3.3, and Brock's (2015) comparison of different comedy genres will be presented in Section 2.3.4. Finally, my own conceptualisation of sitcom as ventriloquism will be added in 2.3.5 (Messerli 2017b).

2.3.1 *Screen-to-face communication*

The central notion in Bubel's (2006, 2008) participation model of telecinematic discourse is that audiences have to be conceptualised as overhearers – an understanding which had already been put forward in film studies by Kozloff (2000). Like all other theoretical approaches presented here, Bubel is indebted to Goffman, but her model is notable for a more in-depth integration of cognitive pragmatics and specifically for the inclusion of the audience's thinking processes. In order to characterise Bubel's understanding of telecinematic discourse, it is best to briefly look back to Goffman (1979) and to include the elaboration on the Goffmanian framework by Clark and Schaefer (1992) and Clark (1996), which will illuminate how Bubel transfers the relevant aspects of participation to the telecinematic domain.

As Bubel (2008: 62) acknowledges, Goffman himself already addresses the role of theatre as well as radio and TV broadcast

audiences, and he positions them as different from participants and non-participants in ordinary face-to-face conversation: Audiences for Goffman are participants in stage events rather than in talk, and he explains that there is a need for participation frameworks specific to theatre, radio and television (Goffman, 1979: 12–14). Bubel (2008), however, does not focus on Goffman’s notion of *audience*, and instead is interested in what the communication situations of the everyday overhearer and that of the television or film audience have in common:

The cognitive processes going on in the spectator while he or she is listening to film dialogue are generally parallel to those that occur in everyday life, when we take on the role of an overhearer, whether or not the conversation we are overhearing is meant to be heard by us, and whether or not the conversationalists are aware of our listening in. (61)

Bubel’s discussion of spectators follows Clark (1996) in using a wider definition of overhearer, which encompasses all three types of non-ratified listeners mentioned by Goffman (1979) and envisions overhearer roles on a continuum between bystanders and eavesdroppers. Irrespective of such terminological differences to Goffman, Bubel’s (2008) model for what she terms *screen-to-face discourse* positions audience members as unratified participants, who are outside of the main communication situation and have no “rights or responsibilities” (Bubel, 2008: 64; see also Clark, 1996: 14) in the ongoing interaction.

For Bubel (2008: 64–65), this lack of rights and responsibilities compared to ratified participants leads to a disadvantage for overhearers in general, and telecinematic overhearers in particular, when they try to understand conversations on screen. Bubel (2008: 64) specifies first of all that spectators have limited personal common ground with the characters. Using Clark’s (1996) terms she states that characters and

audience have few shared experiences due to the limited time they have interacted with each other (the length of the film or TV series).

Moreover, the experiences that they share are one-sided, with audiences gathering knowledge about characters, but not vice versa. The same one-sidedness of the shared experiences leads to an inability on the side of the audience to play an active part in negotiating meaning (Bubel, 2008: 64). These disadvantages serve as a stepping-stone to convincingly explain the motivation behind what Bubel terms *overhearer design*, which is how she labels the version of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) *recipient design* she uses in her model. This means that fictional conversations do not just occur of their own accord, but are written with a television audience in mind.

On the one hand, Bubel (2008: 62) thus acknowledges that spectators strictly speaking cannot be regarded as eavesdroppers or bystanders, because – as Short (1989: 149 quoted in Bubel, 2008: 62) points out – “the situation is arranged to be overheard on purpose.” On the other hand, she lists two reasons for insisting on referring to them as overhearers. The first one is the similarity she sees between television audiences and those overhearers of face-to-face conversations that are not only acknowledged by the ratified participants, but who are meant “to glean certain information from what [the conversationalists] are saying” (Bubel, 2008: 62). The second reason has to do with the separate layer of action on which the fictional interactions take place. Just as this layer is conventionally sealed off from the interaction between authors/producers and audiences, face-to-face conversations of ratified conversationalists are equally separated from an overhearing third party (Bubel, 2008: 62).

The resulting model thus marries two at least seemingly contrary positions of the audience, which has to be understood as both the target of the author/producer's *overhearer design*, and also as the hermetically sealed off and disadvantaged overhearer listening in on inter-character conversations. For this combination of different audience roles, Bubel

leans on Clark and Schaefer's (1992) elaboration on Goffman's (1979) notion of overhearer. Their discussion of attitudes towards overhearers identifies *disclosure* as one possible attitude, which means that "the conversationalists want the overhearer to gather certain information from the conversation, providing the overhearer with enough evidence to make correct conjectures" (Bubel, 2006: 55). This is central for Bubel because it combines an intention to be understood with the notion of overhearing.

In Bubel's model, fictional verbal interaction is designed by the film production crew with overhearers in mind, and film recipients use cognitive processes of conjecture to read the cues designed for them and to understand the interaction on screen "with the help of the part of their world knowledge that overlaps with the world knowledge the production team projects onto the characters" (Bubel, 2008: 67). While foregrounding verbal interaction, she also explicitly includes other telecinematic sign systems, such as camera angles and the editing process as part of what is designed for the overhearing audience, but she does not further discuss such aspects of multimodality.

Bubel (2006, 2008) also addresses the degree to which the audience can be said to be aware of the fictionality of the ongoing interaction. She follows Clark (1996) here and adopts his notions of *imagination* and *appreciation*. They describe two types of cognitive processes in viewers, which take place on different layers of action. Imagination refers to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (see e.g. Kozloff, 2000: 47; Bednarek, 2012b: 47) – which means that audiences at least to some degree willingly pretend that the utterances and actions performed by the fictional characters are products of the characters' own will and intent rather than of the writing processes involved in film and television making. The result of this process of imagination is a key component in audiences' enjoyment of fiction: "One effect of film is that it transports the audience into the realm of

the story and, doing that, evokes emotions and suspense” (Bubel, 2008: 59; see also Clark, 1996: 366).

In contrast, the second process of appreciation requires that audiences are aware of the constructedness of the fictional layer and enjoy the craftsmanship of the production-side processes that lead to its construction. In her discussion of appreciation, Bubel (2008: 60) also points to Kozloff (2000: 55–60), who highlights that characters may overtly or discretely address the viewers and break the illusion, which is the case for instance in moralising speeches, allegorical elements and authorial messages. In other words, while imagination immerses audiences in the topmost fictional layer, appreciation draws attention to those underlying layers necessary for its construction. The duality in the different notions of overhearer as outlined above thus finds its equivalence in an oscillation between two very different viewing processes that in Bubel’s view can both be in operation at different moments in the telecinematic viewing situation.

Applying Bubel’s model to Example 2.1, Jerry and George can be said to address each other in a fashion that invites audiences to read specific cues and make inferences based on them and on their world knowledge. Audiences “retrieve stored cognitive models or frames that are prompted by the utterance” (Bubel, 2008: 63), which in this case may include information about interactions among friends, events that happen in coffee shops, but also knowledge about film and television in general, and sitcoms in particular. The fact that the cues designed by the production crew guide the understanding processes of the audience gives a plausible explanation, for instance, for the fact that the waitress in shot 9 addresses the customers Jerry and George with their full last names, and in shot 13 refers to George with his first name. Jerry similarly uses the first name of the waitress in shot 12, when he mentions that “Claire is a professional waitress.” Irrespective of whether or not such usage of first and last names may be odd in non-fictional coffee shops, Bubel’s approach will highlight that this

information neatly complements prior knowledge of the television audience, who – as stated in Section 2.2.1 – are likely to already know the main actor/character Jerry Seinfeld, but will have no knowledge of the names of any of the other characters. Apart from whatever motivation there may be within the fictional setting for the characters to use each other's names, this information is quite clearly written by the scriptwriters for the benefit of the television audiences. Later in this episode, and in subsequent episodes, knowledge of these character names can be assumed to be part of the production crew's and the regular audience's common ground.

The fact that the camera in shot 1 shows the exterior of a coffee shop can be understood in similar ways. Based on the conventions of continuity editing (see also Section 10.4), this exterior shot can be inferred to be of the same coffee shop in which the verbal interaction takes place a moment later. Thus, the telecinematic signals indicate the location of the subsequent interaction to the television audience – notably in absence of any characters in the initial exterior shot. A further case in point is the positioning of the characters which sit at an angle of approximately 45 degrees, which is to say that their upper bodies can still be said to face each other, while also being pointed at the camera. The montage is done in such a fashion that the speaker is always optimally visible, as can be seen for instance in the medium close-ups in 5 and 6 – the same goes for the audibility of their utterances. In short, the entire telecinematic apparatus is employed in such a fashion that audiences are in the best possible position to overhear Jerry and George's talk and to arrive at the understanding that the production crew envisioned.

2.3.2 Participation, characterisation and multimodality

Bednarek's (2010) contribution to research on telecinematic discourse is substantial in a range of aspects, which include work on characterisation and the use of corpus linguistic methods on

telecinematic data (see also Bednarek, 2012a, 2017). This chapter's discussion of her view on participation structure will be kept short, however, since she makes use of Bubel's (2006, 2008) model in her work rather than developing a participation framework of her own. Nevertheless, her discussion of Bubel's (2006, 2008) model is worth including here because it specifies a number of aspects that were only mentioned in passing in Bubel's discussion. Two of these aspects are highlighted here.

The first aspect is the distinction between target audience and actual audience, which – as Bednarek (2010: 17) states – is only implied in Bubel's (2006, 2008) model. Bednarek illustrates how target audiences are being construed not only by the film or the television series itself, but also by other texts, such as those present on DVD cases. In this regard, she opts for a stronger focus on production-side processes than Bubel (2006, 2008), and she also takes into account a larger context of telecinematic production and reception, which includes commercial factors. On the side of television and film production this means that creative agents can be differentiated from commercial agents; on the side of the reception, target audiences can be regarded as a commodity for advertisers (Bednarek, 2010: 17).

Bednarek (2010) makes explicit the difference between target and actual audience, and she describes in some detail how target audiences are construed in televisual artefacts as well as in and by ancillary products. Because of her focus on the language of fictional television as it is manifest in the artefact, she does not speak about actual audiences in great detail. However, her close reading of DVD cover texts is informative, as it reveals an appeal to affective reactions of potential audience members. They are invited to join in the positive evaluation of the television series that is manifest in such adjectives as “much-loved” or “irresistible”, and to become or remain a part of those fans of the series whose evaluation forms part of the DVD cover texts (Bednarek, 2010: 53). On the one hand, these findings construe the

actual audience of telecinematic discourse as a heterogeneous group, which can for instance be categorised based on their knowledge about the series – from the uninitiated to knowledgeable fans – or in terms of their emotional attachment (53), which also implies that actual audiences perceive and understand telecinematic artefacts in different ways. On the other hand, Bednarek’s (2010) discussion suggests that from the commercial vantage point of television producers the target audience is ideally a homogenous mass of emotionally invested fans.

That individual audience members view and understand telecinematic discourse differently is made clearest, however, when Bednarek (2010: 214–220) addresses the relationship between the ideologies of the artefact and the audience. Here, she relies on Hall’s (1994: 209) distinction of three different viewer positions vis à vis the meaning intended on the production side (Bednarek, 2010: 217).

The second aspect on which Bednarek elaborates is that of multimodality, which again is only implied in Bubel. Bednarek (2010) distinguishes *multimodality in characters*, i.e. gestures, gaze, facial expressions as they are performed by the characters on the fictional layer, from *multimodality in the product*, which refers to “the meaning potential of the moving image itself” (Bednarek, 2010: 20) and includes such aspects as camera, editing, lighting, but also different dimensions of sound. With regard to the understanding of the participation structure, Bednarek’s discussion of multimodality highlights the range of communicative acts and semiotic systems that need to be taken into account as part of the communicative setting in and of fiction. As part of *multimodality in character* she also observes that bodily gestures of characters and actors are conflated in telecinematic discourse (Bednarek, 2010: 19), which means that they simultaneously take place on the fictional layer and on the layer of production crew, recipients and actors. Bednarek (2010: 143–176) dedicates an entire chapter to multimodal performance, where she is mostly interested in the multimodal construal of character identity. This is interesting because

it illustrates ways in which production crew and audiences can co-construct meaning based on shared interpretations of character utterances and actions, which are again written to be overheard or seen by the audience. The notion of signals that take place simultaneously on several levels, and the effect of this simultaneity on audiences are not further discussed by Bednarek (2010). This issue resurfaces in Brock (2015), however, and will be further discussed in Section 2.3.4.

2.3.3 Communication between collective senders and (meta-)recipients

The participation structure proposed by Dynel (2011d) positions itself opposite that of Bubel (2006, 2008). Dynel's (2011d: 1629) aim is to "argue against the viewer-as-overhearer approach and advance a new conceptualisation of the film viewer as a listener to film discourse/talk." She takes issue with the two contradictory audience participation roles inherent in Bubel's term of *overhearer design*, as they were discussed in Section 2.3.1 in this chapter. To reiterate, whereas the term *overhearer* positions the audience as unratified participants sealed off from the space in which characters interact, *design* suggests that the fictional interaction is aimed at and written for that same audience.

Based on a literature review of how overhearers have been understood in ordinary interaction, Dynel (2011d) arrives at a general definition that defines overhearer as:

an unratified participant (rather than a non-participant) who listens to (and usually also watches) an utterance (or a turn) being performed in an ongoing interaction without the speaker's permission (and usually, but not always, the ratified hearer's/hearers' permission). (1629)

The central aspect here is the lack of permission or, as Dynel adds, the fact that the speaker does not intend to be overheard. Based on this definition, Dynel finds the use of the term *overhearers* for

audiences ill-advised, even though it is frequently applied to audiences of mass media (Dynel, 2011d: 1630). With regard to film audiences, Dynel takes into account Richardson's (2010: 60) point that film viewers can be seen as overhearers because they are usually not directly addressed, as well as Bubel's argument which has been discussed here in Section 2.3.1. She highlights, however, that the *collective sender*, the umbrella term she uses for all those involved in the production of fictional film and television, designs character dialogue specifically for the audience, and that viewers therefore need to be regarded as ratified participants in telecinematic discourse. Based on Goffman's *imagined recipients* and Hutchby's (2006) *distributed recipients*⁸ she proposes to refer to film and television audiences with the term *recipient* instead.

Dynel (2011d) understands telecinematic communication as hierarchical, with the fictional level 1 embedded in the communication between collective sender and recipient on level 2. On that second and superior level, the role of the ordinary recipient is further distinguished from that of the *metarecipient*, which is a term reserved for more analytical recipients, such as researchers. She explains the concept of metarecipient as follows:

This is an informed recipient who watches a film as if from a privileged position, analysing its discourse consciously and, frequently, making insightful observations about a meaning conveyed and methods employed to achieve this end in the collective sender's production layer.

(Dynel, 2011d: 1633).

Contrary to the analytical metarecipient, Dynel repeatedly describes the ordinary recipient as immersed in the fiction and oblivious

⁸ Hutchby (2006: 14) proposes the term *distributed recipients* to refer to the audience of broadcast talk, because it "seems to capture the sense in which the audience is addressed, albeit often indirectly, and situated as a ratified (though non-co-present) hearer rather than an eavesdropper."

of its constructedness: “Normally, the viewer willingly forgets about the real production end and engages in characters’ interactions” (Dynel, 2011d: 1632), and further: “The viewer normally assumes that there are no other authors of utterances than the characters, which is the essence of regular film watching” (Dynel, 2011d: 1632). Dynel adds that the rigid separation between recipients and metarecipients is done for methodological clarity, and she acknowledges that ordinary recipients may in fact share some of the analytical observations typically associated with metarecipients.

Dynel’s distinction at least potentially marks two endpoints of a continuum between immersion and awareness of the artefact – or in Clark’s (1996) and Bubel’s (2006, 2008) terms between appreciation and imagination of the recipient. This is important because it points towards more attention in the theory to individual differences in the audience. The metarecipient/recipient dichotomy is based on ideal viewer types rather than real viewers, but it can be read as a step away from understanding audiences as universal. The cognitive processes that Bubel (2006, 2008) included into her framework can of course also be read as an acknowledgement of a diversified audience in which each individual viewer is influenced not only by the cues that are provided on the fictional layer, but also by their individual prior knowledge. Bubel (2006, 2008), however, speaks only of different processes on the part of the viewers, not of different viewer types or even individual viewers that would need to be distinguished.

With regard to the extract from *Seinfeld* (Example 2.1), distinguishing metarecipients and recipients will result in two different understandings of the scene. Ordinary recipients will follow the initially offered non-expert interpretation of the scene as if George and Jerry were real people in a real coffee shop in New York, i.e. they will willingly suspend their disbelief. Metarecipients, on the other hand, will be aware of some of the ways in which linguistic and other means are employed for the construction of the scene. They will observe, for

instance, how the actors perform their roles or how incongruities are constructed in their dialogue for humorous effect – in short, their viewing will be similar to the one offered here at the end of Section 2.3.2.

2.3.4 Participation slots for viewers

Brock's (2015) approach to telecinematic participation is important for a number of reasons: First of all, it addresses the overhearer/ratified participant difference in the role of film and television audiences and offers a view that combines both approaches. Secondly, it suggests a more explicitly dynamic model of recipientship than those of Bubel (2006, 2008) or Dynel (2011d). Finally, it compares a range of different comedy genres and thus highlights important questions with regard to the universal applicability of fictional participation frameworks.

Brock's (2015) approach to participation in sitcoms and other comedies follows Dynel (2011d) in its understanding of television audiences as ratified participants. Brock (2015: 28) refers to the audience as: "addressee and indeed the central and intended recipient of the communicative system of the TV discourse." He chooses the term *TV viewer* instead of Dynel's *recipient*, but this is a mere terminological difference. He also subscribes to the same hierarchy of levels, and refers to the level between collective sender and TV viewer as *Communicative Level 1 (CL1)*, which is "the primary and only real level of communication here" (Brock, 2015: 29–30). Interaction between characters takes place on *CL2*. Interestingly, however, Brock does not discard the viewer-as-overhearer notion as completely as Dynel (2011d). Similar to Bednarek's (2010) mention of character and actor gestures being conflated on the speaker-side (see Section 2.3.2), Brock argues on the hearer-side that TV viewers can be in different roles at the same time. While they are always ratified addressees on CL1, they can be overhearers, but also speakers or addressees of individual characters on CL2.

In order to position TV viewers in a certain way, Brock (2015: 32) envisions that “a fictitious participation slot is constructed into the participation framework on CL2 in order to accommodate the viewer.” The default camera position in the television comedies that Brock analyses resembles that of a person present in the scene, and the fictional characters conventionally ignore the presence of a camera altogether (Brock, 2015: 32). As a result, the constructed participation slot “resembles the position of a natural overhearer and [...] becomes the main (fictitious) identification point for the real TV viewer to slip into” (Brock, 2015: 32–33). The positioning of the viewer as a fictitious overhearer is thus considered a collaborative achievement by the collective sender, who prepares the slot, and the viewer, who plays along – just as viewers generally need to suspend their disbelief in order to engage with the fictional layer.

While the range of extracts discussed by Brock (2015) will not be discussed here in full, it is worth mentioning that he provides convincing examples from less conventional comedies that construct a different fictitious participation slot. For instance, he shows how point-of-view shots are used in the British sitcom *Peep Show* (Channel 4, 2003–2015) to position viewers as speakers and addressees of inter-character conversations.

More generally, his separation of viewer participation roles on CL1 and CL2 means that the viewers of the comedies Brock is interested in are in two roles at the same time. They need to be immersed in order to empathically follow the fictional story, but they also need to be akin to Dynel’s (2011d) metarecipients in order to laugh at the humour that is being constructed for them. In some ways, this can be seen as reminiscent to the inherent contradiction in Bubel’s (2006, 2008) concept of overhearer design, which makes the audience both overhearer and target of character interaction. However, explicitly foreseeing two participation roles for viewers on different communicative levels is an important addition by Brock. This

positioning of the audience in a dual role is all the more important to this study as it seems to be characteristic of film and television comedies.

A final theoretical achievement in Brock's (2015) framework is the comparative position he takes with regard to participation, moving from different subtypes of television comedies to other comedic genres (stand-up comedies and candid camera comedies). The result of this approach is a range of different participation models and visualisations, which are all based on the same theoretical understanding as it was outlined here, but show a different participation configuration for each particular communicative setting.

2.3.5 The communicative setting of the sitcom as ventriloquism

In Messerli (2017a), I have offered an alternative to the spatial understanding of participation in sitcoms and more generally in telecinematic discourse. There, I have illustrated that a strictly spatial understanding of multi-layered communication in sitcoms does not capture well the dynamic repositioning of viewers, which is achieved, for instance, through different humour constellations (Messerli, 2016). Instead, I have used ventriloquism in different senses⁹, but most notably following Cooren's (2012, 2013) work in Communication studies, in order to demonstrate that viewers potentially interpret character

⁹ Ventriloquism in Messerli (2017a) has been approached in a perceptual sense that captures the perceived unity of events between sound and image; as technological-ideological ventriloquism, which refers to the employment of the telecinematic apparatus to facilitate the illusion that the characters speak on their own behalf; as narratological ventriloquism, which addresses the different voices at the disposal of the collective sender to speak to the television viewers, which in turn can be regarded as a realisation of Goffmanian *say-foring*, i.e. of ventriloquism as a discourse strategy; and as constitutive ventriloquism in the sense of Cooren (2010, 2012, 2013; Cooren et al. 2013).

interactions as products of different agencies that range from the genre of the sitcom, the sitcom producers, actors, characters and perhaps even to the actions and utterances that these characters perform. Any event in the fiction, which includes all instances of humour, are identical in principle in that they are always the results of dummies being animated by ventriloquists. However, as the examples in Messerli (2017a) show, different sitcom scenes position audiences differently, so that they may focus on different agents and thus infer different ventriloquists, or in Goffman's terms principals, on whose behalf these dummies communicate. While this alternative model avoids the paradoxical conceptualisation of viewers as inhabiting two spaces at the same time and can be used to more aptly render the dynamic positioning and repositioning that recipients are subject to when engaging with telecinematic discourse, it has the disadvantage of being less intuitively understandable – for the most part because it does not follow the spatial conceptualisation that research tradition has made conventional.

For the current purposes of exploring the functions of repetition in sitcom humour, I will therefore refrain from relying on my own ventriloquism model and adhere to the spatial tradition. Following Brock (2015), I will speak of two communicative levels (CL1 and CL2), while bearing in mind that the static position of viewers and the duality of positions implied by this conceptualisation are simplifications of more dynamic and more diverse participant roles. I will thus follow the consensus that telecinematic and other fictional communication takes places on (at least) two separate levels or layers, which comprise the communication between the collective sender or film production crew and the television or film audience on one level, and the fictional interaction between characters on another. And I will regard this latter level of communication as subject to *audience* or *recipient design* (the term used by Dynel, 2011d), i.e. I will assume that those conversations which take place in the seemingly self-contained fictional world are in fact written with the television or film audience in mind, and that viewers are meant to understand the meaning that is

construed by the collective sender. Accordingly, I will understand the television viewers as the primary ratified participants of communication in telecinematic discourse, even though they also suspend their disbelief to empathise with the characters they see on screen.

2.4 Television viewers as recognisers of telecinematic discourse

To summarise the understanding of communication in and of telecinematic discourse that this study follows (see Section 2.5), I will return here to the reception processes of the audience in particular and to the notions of conjecture that were raised when discussing Bubel's (2006, 2008) model.

The decision to regard the television viewers' role as quite different from that of everyday overhearers or eavesdroppers can be supported by discussing Clark and Schaefer's (1992) "Dealing with overhearers", which is also taken up by Bubel (2008). Focussing on the perspective of speakers in everyday talk, Clark and Schaefer (1992) approach overhearers in the context of audience design and list four different attitudes that speakers may take towards overhearers, which are (1) indifference, (2) disclosure, (3) concealment, and (4) disguise (256). Whereas they see "only one legitimate attitude" (255) that speakers can take towards ratified participants, which is "to be openly informative" (255), Clark and Schaefer (1992: 256) assume that overhearers are met with differing communicative efforts: from attempts to overtly or covertly conceal the intended meaning from unrated participants, as in (3) and (4), to being as transparent as possible (2). Shifting to the perspective of listeners, addressees are said to recognise meaning, whereas overhearers can only conjecture, which means that they are forced to "draw inferences [...] from inconclusive evidence" (Clark and Schaefer, 1992: 260, emphasis removed).

Conjecturing thus refers to the fact that overhearers cannot follow regular patterns of building up common ground through shared experiences and joint actions (Clark, 1996), but can only speculate what experiences and actions shared by the ratified participants might have led them to the utterances the overhearers are trying to understand. In addition to these backward-oriented inferences, overhearers also lack access to the possibilities of *grounding*, which refers to interlocutors' efforts to make sure that their intended meaning has been understood by the other ratified participants; to reach closure for their joint actions; and "to establish them as part of their common ground" (Clark, 1996: 252). Grounding is defined as "establish[ing] [something] as part of common ground well enough for current purposes" (Clark, 1996: 221, italics removed), which is done by finding ways in communication to establish that intended meaning has indeed been communicated. In Clark's (1996) terms, interlocutors look for *closure* of their actions, which is why they *present* contributions to communication to respondents, who may in turn *assert* the initial contribution with the help of some form of verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement, or ask for clarification (252). Based on these signals, contributions reach closure and are integrated into the interlocutors' mutual common ground.

Regarding the communication between speakers and overhearers, there is no evidence for speakers that overhearers have understood their intentions, and there is no way for overhearers to signal their understanding to the speakers – if they were to provide such signals, they could no longer be considered to be overhearers, but would need to be regarded as ratified (side-)participants. Accordingly, if the goal for interlocutors is to be understood by overhearers, i.e. disclosure, they will design their interaction in such a fashion that as much of the information as possible is accessible to the overhearers, and they will try to avoid any insider knowledge only available to cultural communities of which the overhearers may not be part (Clark and Schaefer, 1992: 264–265).

In this respect, television viewers are similar to overhearers: Because of the mediated, asynchronous and asymmetrical nature of telecinematic discourse, the collective sender cannot ground contributions based on viewer responses, and thus needs to design the second communicative level (CL2) in such a fashion that it is as open as possible to the television viewers' understanding. Crucially, however, the viewers differ from overhearers in their ability to access the first communicative level (CL1) of the collective sender. Overhearers have no access to the regular patterns of building up common ground and therefore conjecture about the shared experiences and joint actions that may have taken place between the ratified participants, prior to their current interaction. This means that any interaction that is being overheard is interpretable only relative to the assumptions made about the interlocutors' common ground, and these assumptions in turn depend on the current interaction. Conjecturing thus involves much ungrounded guesswork, and in the prototypical situation of overhearing a conversation, which entails unawareness or indifference on the part of the interlocutors, overhearers will know that their dynamic efforts in situating the witnessed conversation are bound to be unreliable.

But even if speakers' attitude towards overhearers is that of disclosure, which Babel's audience-as-overhearer model (2008: 66) describes as the default attitude of film discourse, the inferences overhearers make are only seemingly more reliable. First of all, disclosure does not encompass the communication of the attitude of disclosure itself, i.e. while ratified participants may communicate in full awareness of being overheard and with the goal of conveying information to the overhearing party, they do not necessarily communicate that awareness and their communicative aim. From the overhearers' perspective, this means that they will not be able to reliably establish to what extent the interlocutors they are listening to are disclosing, or instead concealing relevant information. Moreover, even if they were to reliably discern disclosure, overhearers would still

be, as discussed above, at a disadvantage because they do not have full access to the common ground the ratified participants share.

Television viewers, on the other hand, are in a different position with regard to the onscreen actions they are witnessing. There is also a lack of common ground with onscreen characters, but that disadvantage has less of an impact on their listening activities because it is limited to the inter-character level (CL2) of communication and thus subordinate to the main communication (on CL1) between collective sender and viewers (a communicative level that is of course missing in real-life overhearing). On CL1, collective senders communicate with viewers in a regular way in that they share experiences and joint actions – albeit asymmetrically – via CL2, and accumulate common ground in an orderly fashion. To use Clark and Schaefer's (1992) terminology: Rather than *conjecturing* on the basis of overhearing talk from the position of unrated participants, viewers draw from their knowledge of and about the fictional layer and from their shared experience with the collective sender, and *recognise* meaning based on the common ground they have established. Audience design describes then how the collective sender designs the fictional layer in the absence of grounding in order to build up common ground with the audience.

To illustrate this, I will return to Example 2.1 and to the first episode of *Seinfeld*. Since the extract is taken from the beginning of the pilot episode of this sitcom, broadcast in 1989, contemporary audiences cannot have seen previous episodes of the same programme before, but as mentioned earlier are likely to have been familiar with the comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Based on that familiarity and also on a range of communicative and metacommunicative cues, for instance the list of names in the title credits, the television viewers will know a great deal about the interaction between Jerry and George that they would not know if Jerry and George were (non-fictional) people talking at a nearby table. They know that this interaction is part of a sitcom called *Seinfeld*. They can infer from the title that the main character is

someone called Seinfeld, and they are also likely to know, as part of their world knowledge, that this relates to the comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Informed by knowledge about stand-up and by knowing that Jerry Seinfeld is a stand-up comedian, they understood the opening shots as part of a stand-up routine, which in turn points to a special relation between the Jerry on screen and the Jerry Seinfeld audiences know to be a real person. As part of the fictional television programme, which is understood as such among other things based on the use of extradiegetic music and the laugh track, Jerry is clearly a fictional character. The fictional Jerry, however, acts like the viewers have seen the real Jerry Seinfeld act (as a stand-up comedian) and is also called “Jerry”. Based on the interactions and situations in which they witness Jerry, television viewers will be able to confirm or adapt the expectations they may have transferred from their knowledge about Jerry Seinfeld. The laugh track serves as a cue that this is a sitcom, which will in turn lead to genre-specific expectations, including that it is intended to be humorous by the collective sender, that it will be comparatively short (closer to twenty minutes than to, say, two hours), that there will be more episodes to follow this one, that the characters will return in the following episodes, etc. Based on cinematic and televisual conventions, recipients expect that what they see and hear is not accidental, but that it is designed for them and for a purpose.

In sum, the collective sender will build up personal common ground with the viewers, which involves both communicative levels. Within the former, the viewers follow normal processes of interpreting meaning that are based on the way characters on screen perform joint actions, both verbal and non-verbal, and on the fictional situations of those actions. In van Dijk’s (2008) terms, television viewers establish *mental models* of the fictional situations based on different types of knowledge they have about the world. At the same time, viewers also gather knowledge about the collective sender whose actions are the manifold communicative events that constitute CL2.

Thus, viewers will use different aspects of their world knowledge, including those concerning the conventions of fictional television and cinema, to form mental models of the communication situation between the collective sender and themselves. Accordingly, television viewers do not understand characters as either people or constructs, but have access to and oscillate between both positions, and – based on the cues constructed by the collective sender – may shift to either position at any given moment. In this vein, film theorists David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson (2004) are quite right in pointing out that “the artwork *cues* us to perform a specific activity. Without the artwork's prompting, we could not start the process or keep it going. Without our playing along and picking up the cues, the artwork remains only an artifact” (49). In other words, while the artwork serves as the pivot for telecinematic discourse, it allows or even cues the audience to be active viewers. Recipients recognise explicit and implicit cues in the situated fictional interactions in *Sex and the City* that allow them to interpret the relationship between characters as friendship (Bubel, 2011). They are able to do so precisely because these cues, for instance expressing alignment, are indexical of friendships in a real-life setting. Recipients also align with the characters’ points of view in the “funny guy” scene in *Goodfellas* (Bousfield and McIntyre, 2011). There, the empathy with fictional characters is not only triggered by linguistic and paralinguistic actions, but by the specific use of the camera, which “create[s] the illusion of close proximity between the participants in the discourse world and those in the text world” (Bousfield and McIntyre, 2011: 123). As will be discussed in the following chapter, humour may also exemplify the difference between viewers’ reaction to people and to fictional characters: “In life if someone fell down on the street, we would probably hurry to help the person up. But in a film when Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin falls, we laugh” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004: 50).

2.5 Summary: Communicative setting of telecinematic discourse

The sections above have discussed the sources that inform this study's conceptualisation of telecinematic discourse. Based on Clark (1996), I regard the construction of characters and their situated actions as a result of joint pretence between sender and viewers, i.e. the communication on CL1 constructs a second level, CL2, and at the same time is mediated through that constructed second level. While the viewers are not present as such on CL2, they make use of the slot prepared for them (Brock, 2015) and, in pretending to be witnesses of the fictional events, align themselves with the characters. They imagine that the fictional characters could be real and make inferences about them as they would in the real world. These inferences are informed by situated linguistic and non-linguistic actions, which is what Bednarek (2013) summarises under the term *multimodality in the performance*. But they are also fed by specific cinematographic means and thus by Bednarek's *multimodality in the product*.

As recipients within the fictional layer are only pretend-witnesses that imagine, they remain firmly rooted on CL1 where they engage in communication with the collective sender. Depending on viewer type, e.g. Dynel's (2011d) recipient and metarecipient, and on multimodal cues, viewers will be able to shift their attention to CL1, and also to specific sublevels of CL1 communication that contribute to the construction of the fictional world. This is what Clark (1996) calls appreciation, and as I have discussed it requires awareness *that* CL2 is fictional and thus a product of joint pretence, but not *how* CL2 is constructed.

The *how* points to the different sublevels involved in the construction of the fictional world. For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to look into the detailed production processes that take place before the viewers engage with the audiovisual artefact. These processes are relevant only insofar as they are manifest in the

communication that takes place while viewing and listening: It is worth noting, as Dynel (2011d) does and as the reading of the credits after any fictional audio-visual artefact will reveal, that there are a great number of different roles involved in making television shows and films. Consequently there will be many different sublayers in the construction of the telecinematic fictional layer, which all add to the overall meaning. The scriptwriter creates the verbal interactions and gives some indication as to the fictional situation in which they take place; the director specifies the settings and characters (together with set designers, casting agents, cinematographers), and together with actors shapes the performance of the scripted interactions; the editor, together with the director, decides on the final sequence of camera shots that reaches the recipients; and so on.

In theory, there are thus a plethora of sublayers that all form part of the patchwork pretence that collective sender and recipients engage in. For practical purposes, however, only very few of these sublayers need to be distinguished at any given moment. For instance, the actions and the sublayers of scriptwriters, directors, producers and editors will often not be discernible, since all that remains of them in the final artefact are the products of the writing, directing, producing and editing processes, but not the processes themselves. For the understanding of the communicative setting of telecinematic discourse, it is not necessary to specify all sublayers of the basic layer of interaction. Suffice it to say that these sublayers are there and that the collective sender can potentially direct the viewers' attention to any of them. Following van Dijk (2008), it needs to be added here that directing viewers' attention to such a sublayer does not grant direct access to it, but leads to the activation of a mental model of the respective process. For instance, the main character's shenanigans in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* may be read as a showcase by the actor Jim Carrey and as a routine event within the acting sublayer; but they may also be seen as part of what Tom Gunning (1986) calls the *Cinema of Attractions*,

which is to say that the film is structured in terms of individual spectacles rather than narrative causality. In the latter case, the same action would trigger a mental model of dramaturgy and thus of the sublayer of scriptwriting. This illustrates that different sublayers exist and co-exist at the same time, and that awareness of them is dependent on the individual viewer and on the cues implemented by the collective sender.

In the case of idealised immersed viewers that completely suspend their disbelief and interpret characters as people within the fictional world, for instance, the communicative events of camera and other cinematographic parameters are understood as part of CL2 rather than indexes of the processes necessary for its construction. This explains why something as artificial as showing a series of close-ups may lead to proximity between recipients and characters, as is found in Bousfield and McIntyre (2011): Recipients join in on the pretence and are not likely to be cued by the use of the camera to form a mental model of the decoupage utilised to construct the fictional layer in a specific way – and this despite the fact that having one’s field of vision filled entirely by several faces in quick succession is certainly not the most unostentatious way of using cinematography. Informed by their understanding of conventional audience roles, viewers will look past the camera as signifier and instead focus on the conventional signification within a telecinematic context, which is that the fictional sender wants them to focus here on what happens visually on and around the face of the character in the frame. In this sense, the close-ups are cinematographic gestures that point to the embedded communicative actions.

These different viewer positions, be it as idealised endpoints between imagination and appreciation or as dynamic roles between which the same viewers oscillate, are also relevant when it comes to the understanding of sitcom humour. Individual humorous instances may reveal the collective sender’s assumptions regarding the role of the

audience for which the particular scene is designed, and in turn the telecinematic realisation of humour may dynamically position and reposition viewers to adopt a more analytic or immersed viewpoint. Before such considerations are addressed in Chapter 4, Chapter 3 will present a more general approach to humour that focuses on the particular cognitive and textual mechanisms by which humorous effects are achieved.

3 Humour

3.1 Introduction

The goal of the next two chapters is to arrive at a working definition and theoretical description of *telecinematic humour*, viz. the sum of individual humorous instances that can and do occur in telecinematic discourse (TCD). A review of the extant literature on the subject reveals that little research has been done on the specific workings of humour in TCD. While some studies use humour in TCD as a specimen for humour at large (e.g. Purandare and Litman, 2006; Brône, 2008; Stokoe, 2008), some scholars have examined specific aspects of humour in fictional film and television (e.g. Brock, 2004, 2011, 2015, 2016; de Jongste, 2017, 2020; Dynel, 2011a, 2016; Messerli, 2016, 2017b, 2020; Urios-Aparisi and Wagner, 2011). Whereas Brock's (2011, 2015, 2016) work has a strong focus on participation structures and was already discussed in Chapter 2, de Jongste (2017, 2020) explores intentionality and the role mental models play in the UK Sitcom *The Office*. Dynel contributes to both these areas of interest by exploring participation-based humour in *Friends* (Dynel, 2011a) and intentionality and humour in *House* (Dynel, 2016). Urios-Aparisi and Wagner (2011) use data from *Sex and the City* to analyse the role of prosody in conversational humour. My own work has investigated different constellations of humour in the sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (Messerli, 2016), the conceptualisation of sitcom humour and communication in terms of ventriloquism (Messerli, 2017b) and repetition in sitcom humour (Messerli, 2020), which presents preliminary findings of the research that is discussed here in full.

Beyond these studies specific to humour in TCD, humour in general has been theorised since Plato – most extensively in philosophy and psychology, but also in various subdisciplines of linguistics. This chapter will outline how humour has been described mainly in the

linguistic, but where necessary also in the philosophical and psychological literature. Instead of a comprehensive history of humour theory (for detailed overviews see Keith-Spiegel, 1972; Morreall, 1983; Attardo, 1994),¹⁰ I will introduce the most important, canonical, conceptions of how humour can be approached theoretically, and I will discuss those aspects that are of importance for the understanding of humour brought forward in this study. The particular telecinematic realisation of humour that occurs in sitcoms will be explored theoretically in Chapter 4, and empirically in Chapters 7 to 11.

The focus of this initial understanding of humour is on the local construction of individual humorous instances. The network of cohesive ties that exist between instances of humour will be addressed later – first by discussing formal inter-turn repetition in the corpus of sitcoms (Chapters 7 and 8) and its contribution to cohesion (Chapter 9), then by exploring the larger structures of sitcom scenes (Chapter 10) and episodes (Chapter 11). In order to discuss the macroscopic extension of humour, previous work on comic narratives will be discussed as a framework to conceptualise the workings of repetition and humour in the larger narrative structures of the sitcom. However, since for the following chapters, the focus is on individual instances and their connection, I will postpone a theoretical discussion of such longer comic narratives to Chapter 11 (see Section 11.2 in particular).

A good starting point for an introduction to humour research are the three classical strands of theory that have often been used as a categorisation tool in the introductory sections of humour chapters and articles: *superiority*, *relief* and *incongruity* theories. Although such a tripartite segmentation is somewhat simplistic, it is still useful for a first coarse-grained look at how humour has been conceptualised in theory.

¹⁰ Attardo (1994) gives the most detailed account, dedicating more than 300 pages to both central and more peripheral theoretical understandings of humour as they have been outlined by Greek, Roman, Renaissance and modern researchers and philosophers.

Accordingly, the next sections will briefly discuss approaches to humour based on the concepts of superiority (3.2) and relief (3.3), before highlighting models of humour that are based on incongruity (3.4). Section 3.5 discusses the context in which humour occurs as well as the knowledge and expectations that humour recipients bring to the humorous event. Importantly, this section addresses the notion of *play frame* as a way to understand the contextual conditions for humour to arise. The final section in this chapter (3.6) will shed light on the role of surprise in humour.

3.2 Approaches to humour based on superiority

Plato and his student Aristotle are often regarded as the first scholars to theorise humour, and more specifically to connect the emergence of humour to a feeling of superiority (Keith-Spiegel, 1972; Zillmann, 1983; Morreall, 1983, 2008; Attardo, 1994; Martin, 2007; Dynel, 2013a).¹¹ As Keith-Spiegel (1971: 10) mentions, Plato thought that “laughter arises from the simultaneity of pleasure and pain resulting from envy and malice.” Attardo (1994: 19) adds that Plato understood as the source of humorous laughter the ridiculous, which he thought to be the result of a lack of self-knowledge. Aristotle similarly considered laughter to ensue as a reaction to weakness and ugliness, as is pointed out by Ruch (2008: 29). However, Keith-Spiegel (1972: 7) and also Zillmann (1983: 86) emphasise that for Aristotle the perceived deficit may only lead to laughter so long as it is not paired with pain or grief. Focussing on commonalities between the two, Mayerhofer (2013: 211) highlights that both of them share the view that what from today’s perspective can be termed humorous laughter is always targeted at someone. The target of the derision is seen by the observer as inferior

¹¹ But see Schmby (2013: 77–78) for an overview of humour research that attempts to link modern humour theory to Zen, Hebrew and Egyptian traditions.

in some way, and it is this feeling of superiority that ultimately leads to mirth.

The inherent aggression in this position leads Attardo (1994) to refer to these theoretical works as “hostility theories”, whereas Fine (1983) speaks of the “Hobbesian view” due to the fact that Hobbes was the first modern philosopher to add substantially to the concepts brought forward by Plato and Aristotle. Hobbes, too, emphasises the link between aggression and humour (Morreall, 1983: 5), and describes laughter as the “sudden glory” one experiences when faced with others’ imperfections (see also Pollio, 1983: 224; Zillmann, 1983: 86–87; Berger, 1987: 7). As Morreall (1983: 5) points out, Hobbes also regards the prototypical laugh as being directed at someone else, but explicitly includes the possibility that one may laugh at one’s former self.

These early accounts make clear that superiority-based approaches to humour are especially apt at characterising what personality psychology calls “aggressive humour”, i.e. humour at the expense of others (Ruch, 2008: 39). It is important to note, however, that neither of the three classical propagators of superiority regard aggression as such as the cause for laughter. What they emphasise is the comparison of our present self to something or someone, and a form of pleasure conditioned by the fact that the result of this comparison is in our present self’s favour. This contrast between the defects we observe and the self we congratulate may also be conceptualised as a form of incongruity, which is to say that “[f]rom this perspective superiority is, ultimately, only a kind of incongruity” (Berger, 1987: 8).¹²

Approaches to humour based on superiority have been useful in explaining social aspects of humour. They have led, for instance, to

¹² Berger (1987: 8) adds, however, that other scholars would in turn regard incongruity as being entailed by superiority; i.e. that incongruity always functions in relation to “some sense of the order of things and of status (whether social or epistemological).”

Disposition Theory, which expands Aristotle's qualifications that pain and mirth cannot co-exist to the essential assumption that positive or negative disposition towards the target of disparaging humour and towards the disparaging agent correlate with the intensity of mirth (Zillmann, 1983: 98–98). However, while it seems of little use to deny that there are aggressive forms of humour and that superiority may play a role in how and why humour emerges, it is also clear that an approach to humour purely based on perceived superiority will not easily be able to explain all forms of humour, and will therefore be of limited explanatory value for some domains of humour. For instance – as Ritchie (2005: 277) quite rightly points out – it is questionable how useful any superiority-based model of humour may be as a methodological tool to explain absurdist jokes.

Accordingly, I concur with Morreall (1983: 14), when he states that: “Our general conclusion about the superiority theory, then, is that it could not serve as a comprehensive theory of laughter, for there are cases of both humorous and nonhumorous laughter that do not involve feelings of superiority.”¹³

3.3 Approaches to humour based on relief

While Keith-Spiegel (1972) in her detailed review of early humour theory makes a distinction between Release and Relief Theories on the one hand, and Psychoanalytic Theory on the other, most other scholars use either term (Relief, Release or Psychoanalytic) to refer to a second theoretical tradition in describing humour. Often associated with Freud, this view is more interested in the psychological causes and functions of humorous laughter than in the stimuli and cognitive processes that

¹³ It is important to note here that Morreall (1983) gives the same verdict to each of the three traditional strands of theories, i.e. that they cannot sufficiently explain humour. He presents his own “New Theory,” which combines the central elements of all three strands.

trigger humour. It proposes that it is the build-up and release of nervous energy that leads to laughter (Keith-Spiegel, 1972: 11).

Whereas the superiority-based approaches can be described as prototypically social in nature, theory based on the premise of relief rests firmly within the psychological and physiological, as it is interested in aspects of humour internal to the individual rather than in external stimuli. However, as Morreall (1983: 20) points out, the tension at the core of humour may either be present all along in the individual or be created by a humorous event itself. The former cases can be linked to taboos and suppressed feelings and the joy in breaking or overcoming them (Morreall, 1983: 20) – they are interesting because they account for forms of humour and humorous reactions that occur without any external triggers. The latter cases are based on emotions aroused by the situation, e.g. the narrative of a joke, and the subsequent release of that tension with the punchline of the joke (Morreall, 1983: 22) – these cases share, as will become evident in the next section, a close resemblance to how a view based on incongruity and resolution explains humour.

Morreall (1983) offers a detailed discussion of both a simpler version of Relief Theory as it was proposed by Spencer (1875), and of the more elaborate Freudian version. For the purposes of this brief overview, suffice it to say that not unlike the superiority view, explaining all or even most instances of humour with the release of a surplus of nervous energy will at the very least stretch concepts like psychological tension and relief, and cannot be regarded as sufficient for a comprehensive humour theory. In order to understand how humour is constructed in telecinematic discourse, which is the goal of this study, an approach based on *relief* could highlight existing taboos and tensions within viewers, but it would still need to explain the mechanisms on the level of the text-surface which evoke or activate tensions as well as those that release them. These mechanisms are addressed by incongruity and incongruity-resolution models, which

broadly explain humour as the result of external stimuli and the cognitive processes they trigger.

3.4 Approaches to humour based on incongruity

The final, and most accepted (Berger, 1987; Veale, 2004; Dynel, 2013a) of the three canonical strands of humour theories is cognitive rather than social or psychological at its core (Langlotz, 2015: 252). It is centred on the concept of incongruity, which can be rendered in very general terms as “involv[ing] some kind of difference between what one expects and what one gets” (Berger, 1987: 8). This is to say that based on patterns we experience and recognise, we formulate expectations about subsequent events, and the totality of the events we actually encounter can thus be divided into those that we expected, and those we did not expect. A first assumption most approaches to humour based on incongruity have in common is that something unexpected is required for humour to ensue.

While Aristotle included what can be interpreted as a predecessor of the idea of incongruity in passing, it was Kant (1781) who linked humour to expectations which are not fulfilled, before Schopenhauer (1859) more explicitly introduced a mismatch between perception and expectation as that which triggers humour (Morreall, 1983: 17). Bergson (1900/2002: n.p.) has a very specific understanding of that mismatch of ideas, viz. that it is based on “[...] une certaine raideur de mécanique là où l’on voudrait trouver la souplesse attentive et la vivante flexibilité d’une personne” (‘a certain mechanical rigidity where one would like to find the attentive suppleness and lively flexibility of a person’, my translation). Most other authors have a broader conception and their own terminology for the incongruous elements responsible for humour, be it Bateson’s (1953: 3) “implicit presence and acceptance of [...] paradoxes,” Koestler’s (1964) bisociation, i.e. “the perceiving of a situation or idea in two habitually

incompatible frames of reference” (Suls, 1983: 40), or Raskin’s (1985) and Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) script opposition.

While the contributions to incongruity-based humour research are far too numerous to be discussed here in full, it is important to highlight some of the central notions and differences between individual theories insofar as they are relevant for this study’s understanding of humour. Subsequently, I will outline two theories that have been particularly influential, which are Suls’ (1972) *Incongruity-Resolution Theory*, and Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) *General Theory of Verbal Humour*. These two theories are included as representatives of two different schools of thought when it comes to incongruity. The former focuses on incongruity in the sense of perceiving a sudden violation of expectations, i.e. of the appearance of an element that does not fit the schema that had been previously evoked. The latter emphasises the simultaneous presence of two schemata or scripts in humour, and the need for backtracking and re-processing once the coexistence of the two scripts is noticed.

3.4.1 Incongruity-Resolution Theory (Suls, 1972)

Suls (1972) is interested in the processing of both verbal and non-verbal forms of humour, and specifically of jokes and captioned cartoons. To that purpose, he presents a model that hinges on two stages of humour recognition and appreciation: (1) the disconfirmation of perceiver expectations and (2) the finding of a “cognitive rule,” which can be “a logical proposition, a definition, or a fact of experience” (Suls, 1972: 82)¹⁴. As this and indeed the name of his theory suggest, incongruity is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for humour in Suls’ view: “Humor occurs when an incongruity can be made to follow and sense can be made of the parts of the joke” (83). This making sense of the

¹⁴ All references in this section refer to Suls (1972) unless specified otherwise.

joke is described by Suls as a form of problem-solving which reconciles “the experience of an abrupt disconfirming incongruity” (88).

Regarding the first stage of the two-part humour processing, the information-processing model that Suls uses to explain humour suggests that the recipient first of all uses information they read from the input they get “to formulate a narrative schema which is used to predict forthcoming text” (85). Subsequently, new information is cross-checked against those predictions, which results in a matching condition or in a mismatch. In case the new information matches recipient expectations, and if it is also understood as an ending, the result will be that the recipient perceives “no surprise, no laughter” (85). Suls specifies that “[t]his situation should occur if the person has heard the joke before or if he has somehow managed to predict its ending” (86) – thus also foreshadowing one way in which humour and repetition may interact.¹⁵ Conversely, if an incongruity is detected, and if the incongruous element is at the end of the text, it will lead to surprise (86). According to Suls, this is so because having reached the end of the text means that there is no possibility for reconciliation of the incongruity within the text, and consequently “the individual experiences an abrupt disconfirmation of his prediction” (87).

At this point, the second stage of processing begins, in which the recipient will try to discover some form of congruence between the punch line and the set-up of the text (87). This process is described as the finding of a semantic, logical, or experiential rule (89), and it is important to note here that Suls explicitly highlights the similarities that humour processing shares with information processing in general: The second stage of his model is based on the General Problem Solver (Newell et al., 1958), which is to say that at the basis of humour processing it assumes general cognitive rather than humour-specific processes. Furthermore, when he addresses the complexity of this

¹⁵ The interaction of humour and repetition will be discussed in Chapter 5.

processing, Suls describes humour problem solving as elaborate, yet “work[ing] at a rapid rate, just as sentence processing seems to occur as rapidly as the sentence is read” (91) – again aligning humour processing with language processing more generally. This focus on similarity is noteworthy especially when comparing Suls’ theory with that of Attardo and Raskin (1991), whose emphasis on the unique in humour and its processing is epitomised in their concept of a *Non-Bona-Fide* mode, in which they suggest humour operates.¹⁶

Returning to the humour-specific, Suls brings forward four deciding factors: The first and most obvious one is incongruity, for which he suggests different degrees or intensities when he states that it is dependent on “how much the punch line violates the recipient’s expectations” (92). Suls does not specify, however, how intensity of incongruity could be measured, but only suggests that it is linked to unexpectedness (92–93). A second factor is the complexity or cognitive demand of the problem solving, which he predicts needs to be of a moderate level to reach a maximum level of humour – a joke that is too elaborate may be impossible to solve; the resolution of one that is too easy will not provide a feeling of success (92). Related, but not identical, is the factor of time the problem solving requires. Here, Suls suggests that “the feeling of success may be associated with the time spent on the problem irrespective of the number of operations required for the solution” (93). The final factor is salience, by which Suls means that “if the joke content is relevant to the individual, he will find it funnier than a noninvolved individual” (95).

Although Suls starts out with the categorical assumption “that there are no incongruous situations that are not funny” (84), he is quick to add as an important qualification that the recipient needs to know that something is intended to be funny in order to find that reacting to it with laughter is “admissible and appropriate” (84). The latter notion,

¹⁶ See discussion in the next section on the *General Theory of Verbal Humour*.

that laughter needs to be admissible, is an important additional condition that relativises incongruity as a sufficient condition for humour. This humorous context in which an incongruity has to occur to lead to a humorous effect will be discussed in Section 3.5 in terms of the notion of *play frame*. In introducing the model, Suls also adds the proviso that what it describes is narrative humour, while explicitly excluding slapstick, gestures and facial expressions among others. This means that for humour to be explainable by his notions of incongruity and resolution, it needs to be based on a “sequence of ideas” rather than a “single exposure” (82).

Apart from these limitations in scope, there is no doubt that Suls’ theory of humour aims to be a comprehensive one that, while formulated on the examples of captioned cartoons and verbal jokes, can be extended to other forms of humour as long as they can be understood as sequential in nature. The four factors of humour indicate on the one hand that this is indeed mainly a cognitive and structural model, as Suls claims himself (81), but they also illustrate that Suls remains true to his promise of “including situational, motivational and emotional factors” (81). Saliency, for instance, highlights the baggage a recipient brings to a humour-processing event, and is akin to aspects of Disposition Theory insofar as it underlines the dependence of successful humour processing on personal psychological factors within the individual. His model also hints at socio-pragmatic considerations when it addresses humorous intentions and the influence of their recognition by the recipient on their predisposal to laugh.

As stated at the outset of this section, incongruity-based theories of humour are the most generally accepted of the three traditional strands. One point of discussion, however, is the question whether incongruity is sufficient in itself, or whether that incongruity needs to be resolvable upon its detection (see discussion in Yus, 2016: 90–94). Suls (1972) is very clear on this, and the individual steps his schema of humour processing proposes are formulated in such a manner that they

can be tested empirically. He suggests that humour needs both a mismatch between what occurs and what is expected, yet also a sensible reason as to why that particular incongruous element follows the schema-evoking beginning of the narrative. As Pepicello and Weisberg (1983: 73) point out, removing either incongruities or resolvability of incongruities should thus result in a reduction of humorousness. Subsequent studies by Shultz (1974) and Shultz and Horibe (1974) have taken up this question and given support to Suls' (1972) assumptions by presenting participants in an experimental setting with modified jokes and finding that these modifications of incongruity or resolvability do indeed affect perceived funniness (see also summary in Pepicello and Weisberg, 1983).

3.4.2 General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo and Raskin, 1991)

The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) was brought forth by Attardo and Raskin (1991) as an extension of Raskin's (1985) earlier Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH). Whereas Suls (1972: 84) emphasises the linearity of processing and states that jokes are constructed to mislead, and to lead to "a single interpretation," Attardo and Raskin (1991) focus on the co-existence of incongruous ideas in the recipient while making sense of a joke. This is neither to say that Suls (1972) would deny that co-existence – even though the conceptual metaphor of a logic machine that underlies his two-stage processing model suggests step-by-step testing of compatibility with expectations rather than continuous ambiguity; nor that Attardo and Raskin's (1991) model is non-linear, as they, too, focus on narrated humour in the form of jokes, whose punchline forces a shift of attention from a first frame of reference to a second one. However, the GTVH's understanding of the clash of ideas at the centre of humour is more narrow than that of Suls (1972). For humour to ensue, the GTVH first of all requires full or partial compatibility of the narrative with two ideas, which is to say that

the detected incongruity does not just lead to surprise and humour based on unexpectedness and on reconciling the two parts of the incongruity following a semantic, logical, or experiential rule, but by activating another idea that was there all along: It makes the recipient “backtrack and realise that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning” (Attardo and Raskin, 1991: 308). Moreover, the GTVH also requires that this second idea be not just unexpected, but opposed to the first one, which can be read as an elaboration of Suls’ (1972) notion that incongruities come in different intensities and with different degrees of unexpectedness. While Attardo and Raskin do not explicitly claim that their theory-driven model would present sufficient conditions for humorous jokes, they do so implicitly, when they link their hierarchy of knowledge resources to logical joke generation (1991: 314–316).

The GTVH uses as its most central unit of analysis the scripts that are evoked by narrative jokes. *Script* here refers to “a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc.” (Attardo, 1994: 198). For the purposes of this study, differences to similar concepts like Fillmore’s (1975) *frame*, Langacker’s (1987) *domain* or even the narrative schema that Suls (1972) refers to in his model are negligible (but see Yus, 2016: 81–84 for an overview of the subtle differences and Langlotz, 2006: 57–66 and sources for a concise discussion of knowledge representation in the mind).¹⁷ All these terms may be said to refer to:

¹⁷ Suls’ (1972) use of the term *narrative schema* is unfortunate because it can easily be misunderstood as a reference to a narrative frame in a Goffmanian sense, i.e. something that is framed as being part of a narrative. Suls, however, uses the term simply to refer to a first script or frame that is identified by recipients and shapes the expectations they have with regard to subsequent stimuli. Because of this potential for confusion, I will simply speak of frames here and will refrain from using Suls’ terminology.

A schematization of experience (a knowledge structure), which is represented at the conceptual level and held in long-term memory and which relates elements and entities associated with a particular culturally embedded scene, situation or event from human experience.

(Evans, 2007: 85)¹⁸

In Attardo's (1994: 200) understanding, scripts are directly linked to lexical items, by which they are evoked (Attardo, 1994: 200). The narrative events in a joke are meaningful insofar as they activate knowledge structures in the recipient, which in turn lead to expectations as to which actions and events are consistent with the frame and which ones are not.

In the GTVH's modelling of the workings of a joke, humour ensues when an event is incongruous with the script that has been evoked. This perceived clash with the other script leads to an interpretative shift insofar as it "causes a passage from the sense reconstructed thus far in the joke to a second, opposed sense" (Attardo, 1994: 107). This notion leads to the GTVH's rendering of the incongruity at its centre as Script Opposition, which is however but one of six knowledge resources the theory presents for the description and hierarchical comparison of jokes. The other knowledge resources – Logical Mechanisms, Situations, Targets, Narrative Strategies, Language – need not be discussed in detail here, but they have at least three important functions within the model: First of all, they offer more descriptive detail with regard to the way in which jokes and other forms of humour are constructed. This is especially true for the knowledge resource *logical mechanism* (LM), which specifies how exactly the two scripts are combined and can be read as an elaboration of the cognitive rules that Suls (1972) suggests we are looking for when being engaged in the resolution processes in his model. Accordingly, Hempelmann and

¹⁸ This definition in Evans (2007) refers to *frames*.

Attardo (2011: 125) equate the study of Logical Mechanisms to the resolution of incongruities and they argue that the GTVH sees “partial resolution of the incongruity as a defining feature of many types of humor.” Secondly, the fact that they are ordered hierarchically means that differences between jokes can not only be pin-pointed, but weighted in the sense that, for instance, differences in the situation (SI) of the joke are less substantial than differences in script opposition (SO). Finally, they include the *target* (TA) of the joke, the discussion of which allows for the inclusion of superiority aspects into what is otherwise an essentially incongruity-based framework.¹⁹

One aspect of the GTVH that merits discussion here is their postulate that humour works within a *Non-Bona-Fide* (NBF) mode of communication, i.e. that the general principles of communication, in particular in the way they are described by Gricean pragmatics, give way during jokes to different norms and expectations. Raskin (1985) presents redefined maxims specifically for jokes, which essentially replace a more general communicative setting with the joke as a frame of reference. Thus, the joke-specific variant of the Maxim of Quantity depends on what is needed for the joke, the Maxim of Quality predicts compatibility with the world of the joke, the Maxim of Relation is based

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning as a side note that Attardo & Raskin (1991) claim that neither the SSTH, nor the GTVH should be included into the category of incongruity theories. This is so, they say, because “many incongruity-based theories carry a conceptual baggage that SSTH has no use for” (331) and because both GTVH and SSTH are “much better defined, developed, and explicated than a regular incongruity-based theory” (331). Far be it from this study to question the baggage of other theories or indeed the well-definedness of the GTVH, but this notwithstanding, neither of the two stated reasons seem particularly good arguments for excluding a theory from a category. Every theory comes with its form of conceptual baggage, and excluding all but the most well-defined theories from a category seems of little use. At the very least I would suggest that it is not very difficult to find a strong resemblance between the GTVH with its notion of script opposition and other members of the incongruity category, which is why I include the discussion of Attardo & Raskin’s (1991) theory in this section.

on relevance to the joke, and the Maxim of Manner assumes efficient telling of the joke (Raskin, 1985: 103; Attardo, 1994: 205–206; see also similar line of argument in Brock, 2004, 2009).

Dynel (2008) discusses the relation of humour to the communicative principle (CP) in detail and arrives at the conclusion that humour, while it does flout maxims, does not violate them and is fully compatible with Grice's CP. Since Grice speaks of a principle, i.e. of something that per definition applies universally, Dynel's (2008) arguments against the NBF amount to a defence of Grice's CP in general, and not just of the communicative properties of humour: Assuming that humour does not fall within the CP is to say that either the CP is not a principle at all or that humour is not communication. It needs to be added here that the reformulations of the maxims that Raskin (1985) proposes are unproblematic per se: They simply specify the generalised maxims for a particular type of communication, viz. that of joke-telling or humour more generally. However, Attardo stands by his claim that the NBF mode in which humour operates is constituted by an "unredeemed violation of the CP, i.e. a violation of the CP that does not generate an implicature" (Attardo, 2006: 354), and one has to take issue with the fact that he insists with some vehemence (see for instance Attardo, 2006) that humour follows a non-cooperation principle (NCP).

Yus (2016: 40–45), speaking for Relevance Theory at large, disagrees with the application of Gricean pragmatics to humour first and foremost on grounds of those aspects of Grice's theory that Relevance Theory is generally critical of, which includes the degree of cooperation that can be expected of interlocutors, cultural dependency of the different maxims and the model of interpretation to arrive at the speaker's implicature, which is unnecessarily complex in their view. Engaging with the Gricean CP nonetheless, Yus (2016) rightly objects to the notion that in the case of humour speakers are often uncooperative, because their withholding of information which will

only be revealed with the punchline of the joke constitutes a violation of conversational maxims:

But again, this violation of the maxims is not a signal of lack of cooperation or unwillingness to communicate the information; on the contrary, it signals the explicit control that the speaker exerts on the hearer's interpretive steps in processing the humorous text, so as to guarantee the derivation of humorous effects, which are meant (and acknowledged) to be a valid outcome of communication (not evidence of uncooperativeness).
(43)

Based on this commitment to humorous effects, Yus finds that in humour the CP is neither flouted nor violated. Similarly, Dynel (2008: 175) states that “the humorous speaker has no intention of genuinely deceiving the hearer.” But she concludes quite differently from Yus (2016) that “the humorous speaker flouts maxims, aiming to amuse the hearer” (Dynel, 2008: 175). In other words, all the misleading that may happen in the set-up of humour happens both in accordance with the speaker’s plan and in full awareness of the hearer.

The crux ultimately lies with the definition of cooperativeness and what it entails. Discussing the issue further, Raskin and Attardo (1994: 37) themselves speak of speakers and hearers being cooperatively engaged in the NBF mode that is humorous communication, which is seen by Yus (2016: 45) as the solution to reconciling cooperativeness with humour. However, as Dynel (2008) points out, the commitment to explicitness, truth and literalness (rather than using figurative language) that Raskin and Attardo (1994) regard as the prototypical case for *Bona-Fide* communication is problematic and a deviation from Grice’s views, who explains at length how the flouting of maxims leads to the creation of implicatures. This is to say then that there is no reason to assume that humour operates outside of the principles of communication, but that in humorous as well as in non-

humorous communication meaning making and understanding depend on the context and on the communicative intent that is established as common ground between all participants.

I thus regard the claim that humour is non-cooperative as thoroughly refuted, but I would add here on a meta-theoretical level that what leads Raskin and Attardo to such claims is their dedication to finding that which is unique in humour. It is in relation to the same search for uniqueness that the GTVH has drawn criticism from exponents of cognitive linguistics (e.g. Brône and Feyaerts, 2004; Brône et al., 2006). Specifically, it has been pointed out by Brône and Feyaerts (2004: 364) that instead of “describ[ing] the semantic structure of humorous texts without reference to normal language use,” it would be more useful to follow the approach of cognitive linguistics, which “highlights the interrelationship between ‘normal’ language use and ‘marked’ humorous’ utterances.” Thus they propose to integrate the theory of humour into the existing CL framework rather than to explicate humour with autochthonous, humour-theoretic, models (see also Langlotz, 2015: 243–284). The rebuttal that Attardo (2006) offers to these criticisms is fierce, and he is very clear about where his interests lie:

Humorous interpretation uses the same linguistic/
cognitive tools as non-humorous interpretation does.
So what? What is interesting is how humorous
discourse *differs* from serious discourse. (244,
original emphasis)

To differentiate humorous from non-humorous discourse is certainly a worthwhile endeavour. This study follows the view, however, that it is not just the identification of that difference that is interesting, but also the fact that humour is achieved based on the same cognitive principles that apply to serious discourse.

I thus agree with the description of the processing of humorous inputs that Yus (2016) offers in his study on humour and relevance theory:

These strategies do not differ substantially from the ones we engage in while interpreting non-humorous inputs, because we are biologically endowed with one single ability to turn schematic stimuli into contextualised interpretations, and we do not possess different cognitive capabilities for processing different kinds of stimuli. (38)

In sum, humour is not processed differently in principle from other inputs, nor is it constituted by mechanisms that are themselves specifically humorous. Instead it rests on a combination of factors – not unlike the ones described in Suls (1972) – which constitute humour only in combination and in the appropriate context.

3.5 Humour in context

Before turning to the specifics of humour in the context of Telecinematic Discourse (TCD), it is necessary to highlight two further aspects that have already been mentioned in passing: These are the role of the context in which humour may or may not successfully ensue, and the aspect of surprise (3.6). Although the proposition of a *Non-Bona-Fide* mode of humour, as envisioned by Attardo and Raskin (1991), cannot be upheld (see 3.4.2), it does point to an important aspect of humour construction to which any humour theory must pay heed. Incongruity and resolution can successfully describe the mechanisms that trigger humour, and these mechanisms are indeed necessary for humour, but they are in themselves insufficient to separate *humorous* clashes of ideas from others which may lead to negative emotions. As Attardo (2017: 136) points out, research on humour has traditionally not been interested in identifying humour and distinguishing it from non-humour. Instead, most theorizations of humour – including the

GTVH – have worked on prototypically humorous texts such as jokes and thus from the premise that the data they focus on will unambiguously be accepted as humorous by their readers. In this study, I will address the problem of humour identification first theoretically in terms of the contextual conditions that may distinguish humorous from non-humorous incongruities (Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2). Later, I will present studio laughter, a property of the data I analyse, as a heuristic to identify intended humour (Section 4.7).

3.5.1 The Benign Violation Hypothesis (McGraw and Warren, 2010)

One solution is presented by McGraw and Warren (2010), who approach the issue with the notion of benign violations. In their summary of the extant psychological literature, they find three different conditions for humour, which is sometimes described (1) as the result of some form of violation; (2) as occurring within nonserious contexts; and/or (3) as dependant on two co-existing and contradictory ideas (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1142).²⁰ Based on a combination of these conditions, which had not all been considered together, their Benign Violation Hypothesis (BVH) suggests that

three conditions are jointly necessary and sufficient for eliciting humor: A situation must be appraised as a violation, a situation must be appraised as benign, and these two appraisals must occur simultaneously.

(McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1142)

The humorous violations, whose evolutionary origins are assumed to be in “apparent physical threats, similar to those present in play fighting and tickling” (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1142,

²⁰ The GTVH (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), which was discussed in the previous section, is an example for a theory that is based on the third condition in McGraw & Warren (2010).

paraphrasing Gervais and Wilson, 2005), are understood by the authors as violations of personal dignity, linguistic norms, social norms, or moral norms. And these violations are benign if (a) there are competing salient norms that suggest that something is acceptable or unacceptable; (b) there is only weak commitment to the violated norm; “or (c) the violation is psychologically distant” (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1142).

One of the strengths of the BVH is that it is not just put forward as a theoretical model: In five experimental studies the authors put their theory to the test by comparing benign moral violations with situations without moral violation and with non-benign moral violations. Overall, the studies show that benign violations can elicit laughter as well as behavioural displays of amusement, but also a mixture of amusement and disgust in participants²¹ (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1147).²² Some of the findings in the individual studies are worth mentioning here: In the first study, participants were more likely to rate scenarios including a moral violation (e.g. a son snorting his father’s ashes) as wrong than a similar scenario without violation (e.g. a son burying his father’s ashes), but they were also more likely to claim that the version including a violation made them laugh (1143). These findings suggest that what the authors posited to be a moral violation was indeed rated as such by the participants, and they provide further empirical evidence that violations, at least moral ones, are connected to laughter. The second study arrived at similar results, but tested for displays of amusement (smiles and laughter) instead of self-report about whether or not the respective scenario made the participant laugh (1144). In addition, this experiment found that participants who rated the test scenario as both wrong and not-wrong were more likely to find it amusing than those who felt it was simply wrong (1144). This indicates

²¹ In two of the studies, the participants were people that were approached on campus; in the other three the participants were undergraduate students.

²² All references in this paragraph refer to McGraw and Warren (2010).

that ambivalence or more generally the co-occurrence of two sets of moral norms had a positive effect on displays of amusement in participants. Studies three to five aimed at the connection between violations and negative emotions as well as with humour. They found that if two norms were at stake, violating one of them but not the other resulted in a mixture of amusement and disgust for the majority of participants, whereas violating both norms in most cases caused feelings of disgust without amusement (1144–1146). Furthermore, the subsequent studies found that commitment to a violated norm made participants less likely to find the violation amusing and that those primed to be psychologically distant from a scenario were more likely to find it amusing (1145–1147).

The psychological research of McGraw and Warren (2010) gives support to several of the key aspects of humour that have already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Since in their design, moral violations are essentially narrative elements that are incongruous with existing moral norms, their findings clearly support that incongruity can be important for humour. Furthermore, the results of their comparison between morally ambivalent scenarios (one norm was violated, but another one was followed) and violations of several norms indicate that some form of shift between different scripts or frames are indeed conducive to or even necessary for humour. In this case, being able to re-frame the violation of one norm as moral with regard to a different set of norms led to a more positive response. This finding can be interpreted in Suls' (1972) terms as the finding of a moral rule that is able to render the moral violation acceptable. The research of McGraw and Warren (2010) does not give any clear answers with regard to the cognitive processing of the moral violations in the sense of a linear temporal progression of individual thinking steps. However, their study design presented participants with a moral violation and then followed it up with either another violation (the harmful condition) or with a reference to a second norm that was not violated (the harmless condition), which means that there was a clear order of (1) incongruity

followed by (2) a morally acceptable condition or another violation. It is then plausible to assume that in terms of cognitive processing, participants would first perceive an incongruity, before then looking for a way of mitigating that incongruity by finding a rule – in this case a moral one – that would allow them to explain or at least render acceptable the initial moral violation. At the same time, the increased likelihood of the harmless condition to elicit a humorous response indicates that people are more likely to perceive an incongruity as humorous if it can be framed as harmless – at least if it is presented in the form of a moral violation.

This brings us very close to the notion of play, which will be discussed in the following section. Before doing so, however, it needs to be pointed out that McGraw and Warren's (2010) studies are limited in a number of ways that make it unclear whether their findings may be applicable to other forms of violations or humorous incongruities. First of all, the scenarios they use to test the response of their participants are very specific and few in number, and they allow no conclusions as to how strong or weak of a moral violation may be necessary or sufficient for humour. One of their scenarios, in which a rabbi was hired as the spokesperson of a company's line of pork products, was rated as morally wrong only by 21% of their participants, but 62% of them stated that the same scenario made them laugh (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1143). While their studies show that there is humorous potential in moral violations, this scenario – which their paper unfortunately does not discuss in any detail – thus shows that the perception of a moral violation may not be a necessary condition for a humorous response. This is not to say, however, that participants perceived the scenario as entirely congruous. Since the study only asks for specifically *moral* violations, any other causes for humour such as other forms of incongruities would not have been registered.

This also points to a second limitation, viz. the fact that their research is limited to moral violations. However, as the authors point

out, other research in psychology has found similar effects for other types of violations (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1147), which is also in line with linguistic research on incongruity as it was presented in Section 3.4.

The final limitation that needs to be mentioned here is the notion of the *benign* that is crucial to McGraw and Warren (2010). As mentioned earlier in this section, a violation is understood as benign in their research if it is either (a) compatible with another norm; (b) the respective participant is only weakly committed to the moral norm that was violated; or (c) there is psychological distance between the relevant norm and the participant (McGraw and Warren, 2010: 1142). While each of the conditions a–c is shown to be relevant in McGraw and Warren’s studies, they are also notably different from each other, which makes *benign* as an umbrella term for the three a very fuzzy concept – even more so since the individual conditions are fuzzy themselves. For instance, it is safe to assume that not all moral norms are perceived as equally important and that violations of more important moral norms might lead to different reactions than those of less important norms. Furthermore, violation itself can be understood as a gradual concept, i.e. there may be stronger and weaker violations of the same norm. Finally, with regard to (b) and (c), one may ask how weakly committed or how psychologically distant a participant needs to be to/from a norm for its violation to be optimal for amusement.

It seems preferable then to take apart the conglomerate of notions McGraw and Warren (2010) subsume under the term *benign violation* and to approach from a different angle the conditions and settings under and in which a violation or indeed an incongruity needs to occur for it to be humorous. What the discussion of these conditions will arrive at is that humour is the result of incongruity and resolution within a play frame.

3.5.2 Humour in a play frame

Play, as it was presented in Bateson (1953) and elaborated on in Bateson (1955/1972), refers to the notion that utterances and conversations can be framed as playful, i.e. that interlocutors can use metacommunicative signals to communicate to each other that “this is play” (Bateson, 1955/1972: 179). The interactive notion of frame on which Bateson’s play frame is predicated needs to be distinguished from the cognitive notion of frame mentioned in Section 3.4.2. As Dynel (2011b: 219–221) points out, the latter one refers to the way concepts and knowledge are structured and organised and is roughly synonymous to schema or script; the former on the other hand “can be viewed as an interactive event orientated towards a particular goal and centred on rules and expectations but negotiated and co-constructed by interacting parties” (Dynel, 2011b: 219). This is not to say, however, that interactive frames do not also have a cognitive side. In his work on frames, Goffman (1974/1986: 247) emphasises that what he calls the frame of an activity is “sustained both in the mind and in the activity.” The external brackets that initiate and end an activity thus set off what they enclose from that which comes before and after them in both senses: they communicate the type of activity that is about to ensue, and in doing so they activate a cognitive framework for the processing of that activity.

In the case of humour, signalling a play frame communicates that those engaged in communication need to understand the bracketed unit as humorous rather than serious. Coates (2007: 31–32) points out that this necessitates collaboration between interlocutors, which is to say that a play frame is established if it is successfully communicated and understood. It needs to be added here, however, that situations can easily be imagined in which a play frame is inferred by one party when none was intended by the other. Such cases are referred to by Goffman (1974/1986) as *miskeyings*, and my study on the US Sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (CBS, 2012) has shown that in the case of TCD such *miskeyings*

on the fictional plane can be a resource of humour as it is constructed by the collective sender for television viewers (Messerli, 2016; see discussion in Section 4.8). For the moment, however, it can be assumed as the prototypical case for humour that a play frame is both meant by one party and understood by the other and thus established collaboratively.

How humorous *keying*, i.e. the establishment of a play frame, may be negotiated in face-to-face interaction is nicely shown by Kotthoff (1999). In her research on conversational humour, Kotthoff investigates what she calls *joint humorous fictionalisations* from a conversation analytic perspective: In these, interlocutors not only shift the topics of their conversations, they also shift keying, which is to say they collaboratively negotiate that they are engaged in talk about the topic in a humorous way, which means for Kotthoff (1999:126) that “the relationship to reality is loosened.” This approaches again the terrain of non-bona-fide communication refuted earlier in the chapter, so it is perhaps more apt to say that they interactionally negotiate new communicative aims that include some form of amusement. Humorous keying is achieved with the help of contextualisation cues, which are “constellations of surface features of message form [...] by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows” (Gumperz, 1982: 131, italics removed). In Kotthoff (1999), for instance, a laugh particle serves as a humour cue that is taken up by other conversationalists and developed into new variations that continue the ongoing fictionalisation sequence. Similarly, Kotthoff (2000) in analysing women’s self-mockings during dinner conversations among friends demonstrates the importance of initiating laughs, which invite other conversationalists to not take stated problems seriously.

More generally, humorous contextualisation cues may include “gestures, peculiar prosody, facial expressions, code switching, social

stylistics, interjections and laughter” (Dyrel, 2011b: 224). How a humorous frame can be established in the specific case of TCD will be addressed in Section 4.3, but whatever the specific contextualisation cues in any given example of TCD may be, they will serve to establish that the stretch of conversation they mark is intended to be understood by television viewers as humorous rather than serious. In this vein, the present study regards as a pre-condition of humorous incongruities that they occur within an established play frame.

3.6 Humour and surprise

To conclude this summary of general humour-theoretical observations, the role of surprise in humour needs to be addressed. Keith-Spiegel (1972: 9) already writes that: “The elements of ‘surprise,’ ‘shock,’ ‘suddenness,’ or ‘unexpectedness’ have been regarded by many theorists as *necessary* (though not necessarily *sufficient*) conditions for the humor experience.” For Morreall (1983), for instance, to experience humour is to experience a mental shift, which in his view necessitates that an audience “must be caught offguard with something that they cannot smoothly assimilate” (Morreall, 1983: 84). Accordingly, he postulates as one of his principles of comic technique a “necessity of originality and freshness,” which is to say that “what is funny has to surprise us in some way” (Morreall, 1983: 84).

For Suls (1972), surprise is equally essential to humour: That joke endings are incongruous means that they do not logically follow the premises, which in turn means that they are surprising (Suls, 1972: 84). And later on, he states that the “degree of incongruity is directly related to the amount of surprise experienced” (Suls, 1972: 91). Suls can thus be included into the group of those scholars that view surprise and violation of expectations as two sides of the same coin: We are surprised by that which does not fit our expectations, and what we expect can therefore not be surprising. This also implies that what is not

surprising cannot be funny, which entails that insofar as repetition is expected, it may be an obstacle to humour.

A different view is taken by Dynel (2013b), who argues for a distinction between the two notions of surprise and unexpectedness. The crux here lies in the understanding of the concept of *expectation*. As Dynel (2013b: 132) states with reference to Hurley et al. (2011): “[P]eople are not capable of anticipating countless phenomena and occurrences they experience and yet are not continually surprised by them.” Concurring with the importance of novelty and surprise for humour, she argues that we should not speak of a violation of expectations, since we should not assume that specific expectations are always formed. Instead, humour for her hinges on the unexpected, which may or may not be a violation of specific expectations, but cannot be that which was anticipated, and also “cannot be effortlessly assimilated” (Dynel, 2013b: 132). While it is worthwhile to point out, as Dynel does, that there may be a difference between the unexpected and that which goes against specific expectations, this view does not differ in principle from that of Suls and indeed of most incongruity humour theorists. We can simply add the proviso to Suls’ (1972) view of expectations that they need not necessarily be specific (which is already implied by the link between expectations and narrative schemata).

Yet another view of surprise is taken by Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) typology of humour in audiovisual media. Rather than primarily understanding surprise as unexpectedness and as a constitutive element of humour, they describe it as a category of humour: In their typology, ‘surprise’ – which consists of subcategories labelled ‘conceptual surprise,’ ‘visual surprise,’ ‘transformation’ and ‘exaggeration’ – is one of seven humour techniques used in television commercials and a category of humour like ‘slapstick humor,’ ‘irony,’ ‘clownish humour,’ ‘satire,’ ‘misunderstanding,’ or ‘parody.’ In their sample of 319 humorous Dutch commercials, they find that surprise is

used as a humour technique in a little less than half the commercials that are aimed at children or at a general audience, and it is particularly frequent (60%) in those aimed at adolescents.²³

Their coding allows for the same commercial to include several humour techniques, and indeed ‘surprise’ is not listed in their results as one of the categories that is often found on its own. However, Buijzen and Valkenburg still imply that a substantial number of humorous techniques in their sample did not include any surprise, which means that for them surprise cannot be called a necessary condition for humour. In their discussion, the authors link particular humour strategies to the three canonical strands of humour theories and in particular connect surprise to incongruity – which leaves open the possibility that surprise may be a necessary condition for humour of the incongruity type.

Unfortunately, such questions are not addressed by the authors, and their categorisation and more importantly the definition of the individual categories and subcategories are not transparent enough to allow clear conclusions about the role of surprise (in a less narrow sense than the authors use it) within humour. Nevertheless, their findings are interesting because they confirm the importance of surprise in humour (it being one of the most frequently found humour techniques in their sample), while at the same time raising the possibility of humour without surprise.

While Suls (1972) regards surprise as the counterpart to expectations, Dynel (2013b) puts that equation into question, but agrees with the importance of surprise and novelty for humour, and Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) display a narrower understanding of surprise as a category of humour and link it to incongruity in particular. In sum,

²³ The researchers coded each of the distinguished humour categories as either present or absent and in the case of ‘surprise’ reached satisfactory inter-coder agreement (Cohen’s $K > .78$).

there is thus general agreement at least among those scholars that approach humour through the lens of incongruity that surprise is an important aspect of or even a necessary condition for humour (see for instance Brock, 2009; Carrell, 1997; Forabosco, 2008; Keith-Spiegel, 1972) but questions as to the relation between expectations and surprise, and the necessity of either for humour will need to be discussed in more detail as part of Chapter 5 on repetition.

Having discussed the relevant theoretical frameworks that inform this study's understanding of humour, I will now shift the focus to humour in the specific context of telecinematic discourse. Based on this concretisation, I will present a working definition of humour at the end of Chapter 4.

4 Humour in Telecinematic Discourse

4.1 Introduction

Informed by these general observations on humour in Chapter 3 and by the discussion of the communicative framework of Telecinematic Discourse (TCD) in Chapter 2, the current chapter shifts focus to the specific realisations of humour as they occur in TCD and approaches a working definition of *telecinematic humour*. In order to do so, it takes into account the potential of the multimodal and multilevel setting of TCD for humour, which is to say that it addresses the types of telecinematic humour expected to occur based on the properties of the communicative setting of TCD and the characteristics of humour as they are described by humour theory.

The first sections in this chapter (4.2–4.6) transfer Suls' (1972) theory to fictional film and television and discuss its different components in their realisation in TCD, starting from the occurrence of incongruities and ending with their resolution. I will first address the construction of incongruities in TCD's multilevel communicative setting (4.2) and the establishment of the humorous frame on the level between the collective sender and viewers (4.3). The subsequent sections highlight viewer expectations (4.4) and surprise (4.5) in relation to different types of background knowledge. Section 4.6 exemplifies the resolution of incongruities in TCD based on a scene of the Monty Python film *Life of Brian* (1979). Section 4.7 is dedicated to laughter and the relation between humour and laughter. It discusses to what extent laughter can be regarded as a humour cue in general, and within the setting of the sitcom in particular, and it introduces the methodological decision of using extradiegetic laughter as a marker of humour (see also section 6.5.1). Section 4.8 presents the range of humour constellations found in a case study on an episode of the sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (CBS, 2012). It illustrates many of the observations made

in this chapter and demonstrates empirically the range of telecinematic humour as it can be found in one contemporary US American sitcom. The final section in this chapter (4.9) offers a working definition of telecinematic humour.

4.2 Incongruities in Telecinematic Discourse

Following Suls' (1972) view of incongruity and resolution (see Section 3.4.1), humour can be defined as the result of a complex set of cognitive processes which (a) are triggered by a stimulus that does not fit expectations (formed based on previous stimuli) and is therefore surprising (incongruity-stage); (b) lead to the discovery that the new stimulus is understandable or resolvable in the sense that a rule can be found that explains the connection between the previously evoked schema and the unexpected elements; and (c) occur within a humorous frame in which it is permissible to be amused or indeed to laugh.

In order to define *telecinematic* humour, one must at the very least ask (1) how TCD or more broadly the different viewing situations in which viewers engage with telecinematic artefacts establish a humorous frame; (2) how TCD evokes the frames based on which viewers form expectations; (3) how surprising and unexpected stimuli are presented to the viewers; and (4) how the presented incongruities can be resolved by the viewers. Before approaching these individual questions, it needs to be reiterated here that *telecinematic* humour is also a form of humour, i.e. there is no reason in principle why contextualisation cues that have been shown to be instrumental in establishing a humorous frame in face-to-face interaction (see Section 3.5.2) should not also occur within TCD and achieve similar effects. However, it is the premise of this study that the communication between collective senders and viewers, mediated via a second, fictional communicative level, gives rise to new possibilities for the construction of humour that go beyond what has been observed for conversational humour in other settings.

4.3 Establishing a humorous frame in TCD

That communication in the context of TCD is largely unidirectional, from the collective *sender* to viewers or *recipients*, entails that the negotiation of the humorous frame is also unevenly distributed: Insofar as keying relies on the sending and receiving of contextualisation cues, such cues can in principle only be sent by the production side of TCD, and they can only be received by the viewers. This is not to say that viewers have the passive role of linearly decoding humour signals that have been carefully constructed by the collective sender, nor that any presence or absence of such humour-initiating cues will unambiguously and universally lead to the successful establishment of a humorous frame. However, the view of telecinematic humour that this study follows is predicated on the assumption that television and film viewers, while they *actively* play along, still play *along*, i.e. they typically follow such humour cues as are presented to them by the collective sender.

As Brock (2004: 161–164) points out, some institutional humour cues reach the viewers before the viewing process begins. Whether reception of TCD takes place at the cinema, in front of the television set or on any other screen, viewers, at least potentially, have knowledge about the programme they are set to watch, which in the case of comedies includes the genre-based assumption that the artefact with which they are about to engage is supposed to amuse them. These contextualisation or metacommunicative cues can for instance be found in television listings and in trailers (Brock, 2004: 161; 2009: 182) – whether they are published through traditional TV guides and broadcast on television or online on sites like *tv.com*, *Imdb* or *YouTube*, to name but a few popular hosts of information about television series and films. Another way knowledge about films and television is dispersed is through recommendation, be it personal recommendation from one

viewer to another, or institutional recommendation as it is offered by many Internet streaming platforms (e.g. *Amazon Prime*, *Disney Plus*, *Netflix*). In all these cases, viewers are made aware explicitly and/or implicitly before watching that what they are about to see is – in this case – comedy. Genre labels such as *comedy* or *sitcom* are prime examples of explicit cues, as are descriptions in trailers and informational texts that advertise the program as funny. Implicit cues can be present for instance in the form of comedians or actors that usually appear in comedies; other agents involved in the production process, such as producers, creators of television shows or film directors; information about the plot that points to it being humorous rather than serious; or posters and other pictures which may for instance show laughing characters or hint at humorous incongruities.

Apart from those cues that are communicated before the viewing process even starts, comedies are often also implicitly marked as being humorous in the artefact itself. To use the terminology of Genette (1997), the paratext of the artefact – i.e. those “verbal or other productions” that “surround it [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure that text’s presence in the world” (Genette, 1997: 1, original emphasis) – consists both of *epitextual* productions, such as the ones described above, and of *peritextual* ones, which form part of the artefact itself.²⁴ The laugh track (see discussion in Section 4.7), for instance, forms part of the peritext of many sitcoms and immediately identifies a television series as a sitcom, because studio laughter is not traditionally broadcast with any other televisual artefact. Titles, other information given in the opening credits, or the presence of well-known comedians and comic actors may equally serve as peritextual humour cues. And as part of the text itself, i.e. as textual

²⁴ While Genette (1997) discusses text and paratext in the context of books, his distinction of different textual and paratextual elements can easily be transferred to telecinematic discourse.

cues, there are typical plot elements that will also help to establish or reinforce a humorous frame, as will the occurrence of humour itself (in the sense that while humour may presumably occur in all film and television genres, frequent humorous events point to an increased likelihood that this is comedy).

Based on these textual and paratextual cues, viewers will infer before and during the viewing process that inciting humour is part of the communicative intent of the collective sender and that most of the cues that together communicate that intent are themselves communicated intentionally. In other words, the collective sender – at least ideally – establishes as common ground (in the sense of Clark, 1996) between themselves and the viewers that what is being communicated is humorous, and that both the collective sender and the viewers are meant to know that it is humorous.

Since the communicative framework of TCD comprises at least two communicative levels (see discussion in Chapter 2), humour cues can not only be conceptualised as occurring in different spaces relative to the artefact, but they can also be distinguished based on whether they are situated on CL1 or CL2. Seen from this perspective, epitextual cues are by definition outside of the artefact and thus necessarily external to CL2. Peritextual cues, even though they form part of the artefact itself, are equally extradiegetic, which is to say that all paratextual humour cues are firmly situated on CL1 and thus part of the communication between collective sender and television audiences *about* the fictional space. Textual humour cues, on the other hand, are placed within CL2 in the form, for instance, of character actions and reactions. In this case, television viewers recognise that between the interacting fictional characters a play frame has been established, which may or may not coincide with the establishment of a play frame between collective sender and television viewers. The result of the coexistence of the two distinguished communicative levels and the humour cues that may occur on each of them is a range of different humour constellations that

will be illustrated with the help of a case study in Section 4.8. The discussion there will show that conflicting humour cues on CL1 and CL2 can themselves constitute incongruities and thus construct humour.

4.4 Viewer expectations

The second question raised above refers to the narrative schema that according to Suls (1972) forms the basis for viewer expectations: On what then are the schemata that TCD evokes based? Given the cognitive dimension of Suls' (1972) model and taking on board his emphasis on the similarity of humour processing to other processes of meaning-making and understanding, it seems useful to take a brief look at cognitive semantics in order to address frame-evoking in TCD. One of the central tenets of the cognitive understanding of semantics is that there is no neat separation between semantics and pragmatics and between word and utterance meaning, i.e. meaning is not stored in tidily separable entities that are then combined in order to create sentence or utterance meaning; words, in this view, are access points to larger knowledge structures (Evans and Green, 2006: 160–161), which means that the stimuli in Suls (1972) serve to activate pre-existing knowledge about the particular frame or domain that each stimulus is commonly associated with.

In the case of TCD, it is of consequence that the ongoing communication between collective sender and viewers is interactively framed as fictional, as televisual, as comedy, etc. For the genre at hand, the television sitcom with a laugh track, that laugh track is perhaps the most salient cue that frames the ongoing interaction as fictional and as a specific type of comedy. I will return to the laugh track in Section 4.7, but for the time being want to focus on the fact that knowledge made salient by any given stimulus does not only relate to particular activities as they have been experienced by the viewers, or to world knowledge about that stimulus, but also to representations within fiction, on

television, in television sitcoms. This will be illustrated based on Example 4.1 from the opening scene of the sitcom *See Dad Run* (Nick at Nite, 2012–2014).²⁵

Example 4.1: Opening scene of *See Dad Run*, S01E01

David and his teenage daughter Katie are having a conversation in her bedroom. The interaction is accompanied in the broadcast by the studio audience's reaction. Katie wears a pink hoodie and initially faces away from the camera so that her face is not visible to the audience. The scene ends with the production assistant Kevin's turn, which reveals the scene to be part of a television sitcom (within the sitcom).

(SA: Studio audience)

- [00:01] David: Katie? Honey, it's dad. +
 ---opens door-----+
 ±(1.0) Oh, I can't ± believe (.)
 ±--closes door-----±
 & ooh.hh. that you're leaving for college next week.
 &--puts his left hand on his chest-----&
 (2.0)
 +--arm gesture--+
 So many memories. (.) ±Come on, let me see that ±
 ±--arm gesture both arms±
 sweet face, %come on.
 % --walk--towards K with arms
 outstretched--%
 [00:18] +--puts hands on K's shoulders and turns her
 HT1 around, her face is still hidden because the hood of
 her sweater -is pulled close----±=
 SA: ±=hahahahahahaha
 [00:24] David: + And now I'm reminded of your ↑birth. +=
 HT2 +--opens up K's hood with his hands and lowers it
 over her head-----+=
 SA: =hahahahahahaha[ha]
 [00:27] Katie: [My] life is over!

²⁵ The transcription conventions for this and all subsequent examples can be found in Appendix A.2. Gestures and other multimodal aspects are only included selectively and in a simplified manner.

- [00:29] David: Mm Baby, I know you thought you and Chad would be together forever (1.0) but I promise you there's ± one guy (1.3) that will a:lways be ±there for= ±- "one"-gesture with right hand----± =you, no matter what.
- [00:38] Katie I love you Daddy. %
%--hugs-D----->
- SA: Aaaaaa[aaaaah.]
- [00:41] David: [Oh wait], you thought I was talking about me? (.)
- SA: =hahaha[[hahaha]]
- [00:44] David: [[This is]] ↑awkward.
- SA: =hahahahahahahahaha
-----%
- Kevin: +-walks in from the right, standing still facing the camera, blocking the view of D and K--+
- [00:48] Kevin: A::ND. ±WE'RE ±OUT.
±-cut gesture-±

The scene in Example 4.1 can first of all be described with a focus on character interaction as a father talking to his daughter before she leaves for college. The first camera shot, which includes the intonational unit, “Katie, honey, it’s dad,” explicitly identifies the speaker as the father and the addressee as Katie. It also implicates that he is about to have a conversation with his daughter, which is achieved with the help of a number of verbal and telecinematic contextualisation cues. There is the *mise-en-scène*, with a puppet hanging on the door that David opens and a shelf on the left with a stuffed animal and three pink books. There is the activity of knocking on the door, the speaking character identifying himself as the dad and the term of endearment, “honey,” which all unambiguously identify the girl to whom David is talking as his daughter Katie. David’s invitation for her to show her “sweet face” activates knowledge about faces and particularly such faces that can be categorised as sweet, and it raises the expectation that we will see just that, a daughter’s sweet face as her father would perceive it.

The humorous event in turn 3 is triggered then by revealing that counter to the viewers' expectations, Katie's face is hidden inside the hood of her sweater, i.e. the father's seemingly revealing gesture of turning Katie around so that she faces him results not in the revelation of her "sweet face," but in the display of the front of the hood of her sweater, which still conceals her face. It is important to point out that the audience is not left to their own devices when it comes to noting the sweet face/face hidden in the hood contrast – the laugh track clearly communicates that others, ratified by the collective sender, have found this moment funny, and that they are thus invited to share in the amusement.

On a different level, the ongoing conversation also activates knowledge about typical interactions and conversation topics between fathers and daughters. Thus, when the first humorous event is followed by David comparing the emergence of his daughter's face from the hood of her sweater to memories of her birth, the reference to an entirely different frame comes unexpected and leads to another instance of humour.

While the first two humorous events can be explained almost entirely without resorting to anything that would be specific to TCD – apart from the way in which Katie's face is revealed in the first event – David's next turn illustrates that relevant knowledge does not only concern the world, but also specifically the viewing experience of the audience. It is important to note the orchestration of the moment in which David says there is one guy Katie can always count on. At the same time as he utters the word "one", David lifts his hand, the index finger pointing upwards, and slightly moves it back and forth. This gesture is directed at Katie, but occurs centrally in the frame, optimally visible for the television viewers – and is accompanied by a musical cue that underlines the dramatic importance of the scene. The ostentatious dramatization realised by means of these coinciding gestures foreshadows the surprise that follows moments later. Kevin

announces that “we’re out” and reveals that what the viewers have seen up to this point is in fact not the reality of the diegetic world, but a sitcom within the sitcom. It turns out that *See Dad Run* is about David, a sitcom star who is now retiring from his onscreen role to become a stay-at-home dad with his real family.

This excerpt illustrates nicely a range of aspects that are relevant for the expectations that the stimuli in TCD raise. First of all, it makes clear that the activated knowledge is based both on fictional and non-fictional frames, i.e. in some cases television scenes require knowledge of the conventions of television- and/or filmmaking, genre conventions or even tropes of the particular sitcom we are watching, whereas in other cases scenes reference knowledge that the collective sender assumes as communal common ground between themselves and their viewership²⁶. Secondly, it points to the fact that in many cases the activation of pre-existing knowledge is not as simple as mapping lexical items to the frames they are associated with. One of the consequences of the layering of TCD is that there are several sign systems in operation at the same time. Thus, while what David says to Katie, i.e. the performed dialogue onscreen, activates certain knowledge, the situation in which the dialogue occurs, what is shown on screen, may lead to the activation of other frames. David’s “one guy” moment can only be understood in full if the viewers conceptualise it as a father promising to be there for his daughter, but also as a typical or even clichéd way of dramatising the uttering of such a promise in fictional television. Some viewers may even understand the moment as a self-referential act of the collective sender who marks that this scene is in fact part of a sitcom within the sitcom by employing overly emphatic gestures and dramatic music in order to orient towards a melodramatic way of filmic storytelling. Other, less analytic viewers will instead be surprised by

²⁶ See Brock (2004: 273) for a more detailed list of what he calls “erwartungsbildende Instanzen” (“expectation-evoking entities”), i.e. different types of knowledge that are responsible for viewer expectations.

the sudden revelation that what they have just seen is not in fact a scene of *See Dad Run*, but of the fictional sitcom from which the protagonist is now retiring.

4.5 Surprise in TCD

Question (3) addresses such moments of surprise and more generally the surprising and unexpected stimuli that occur within TCD. Since the capacity for stimuli to be surprising is directly dependent on the expectations of the viewership, they equally relate to the different levels of knowledge – fictional and experiential – that have been discussed. Stimuli can thus be surprising to the viewers because they go against what can be expected based on their world knowledge, their knowledge about fictional narratives, about telecinematic narratives, about the particular sitcom, and so on. Furthermore, they can be unexpected on a number of verbal and non-verbal levels. Since humorous incongruities essentially consist of two elements, the (narrative) frame that is active because it has been evoked by what Suls (1972: 85) calls the “read-in of the introduction of the joke,” and the surprising stimulus, it follows that the multiplicity of verbal and non-verbal levels on which this stimulus is surprising translate to what Brock (2004: 225) calls “Ansatzpunkte von Inkongruenzen,” (‘starting-points for incongruities’). Since Brock (2004) offers the most thorough discussion of the position of incongruities on different levels in the context of telecinematic discourse – he discusses roughly fifty examples of different levels on which incongruities occur on as many pages – I will briefly summarise and translate his findings here to provide a comprehensive overview of the means by which telecinematic discourse can construct humorous incongruities.

In order to structure the different starting-points for incongruities, Brock (2004) first of all distinguishes between five types of viewer knowledge that are relevant for the construction of humour in television comedies:

- language knowledge
- knowledge about communication
- world knowledge and social knowledge
- knowledge of non-comedic genres and institutional knowledge
- comedy genre knowledge

While the terminology suggests that the discussion will focus on the cognitive processing of incongruities, it is important to stress that Brock (2004) here speaks of *starting-points* for incongruities, which are textual elements or stimuli. On the one hand, different areas of knowledge are thus relevant for the processing of any incongruity in the cognitive sense, on the other hand, the stimuli as starting-points for incongruities need to be thought of as situated on a particular level of discourse and as (external) stimuli rather than (cognitive) concepts. This explains why Brock (2004: 225) in the case of those incongruities that belong to the domain of language knowledge arrives at a list of language-related phenomena, which contains – among others – the following items: completeness and order of linguistic signs, phones, orthography, polysemy, homophony, paronymy, grammatical ambiguity, register and style.

The items in the list, i.e. the language-related starting-points of incongruities that Brock finds, indicate with what aspect of language any stimulus may be incongruous. Be it unorthodox spelling, non-standard pronunciation of a phoneme, non-systemic word formation (see also Brock, 2009) or the use of an unexpected register, all of the examples Brock (2004) discusses point to tacit viewer expectations that the dialogue onscreen be conform – phonetically, orthographically, semantically, syntactically, pragmatically, and so on – to the way in which similar speech events are usually linguistically realised. The stimuli themselves are thus firmly part of the text, and the viewer's knowledge about language is activated in order to decide whether they can be seamlessly integrated into existing predictions, or whether there is a mismatch that will then lead to humour.

In his discussion of different forms of incongruities, Brock (2004: 227) stresses that there are overlaps between the different areas of knowledge in his categorisation and in particular between *language knowledge* and *knowledge about communication*. For instance, he points out that some incongruities are triggered by linguistic phenomena but are directly linked to viewers' knowledge of communicative processes and the pragmatic use of linguistic signs. Based on his examples, this categorisation problem can easily be resolved by simply understanding knowledge about communicative situations as pragmatic knowledge and thus as part of knowledge about language. It also needs to be added that the categories Brock (2004) lists are incomplete, for if knowledge about non-comedic genres needs to be distinguished from knowledge about the comedy genre, there surely is also knowledge that has been established not by the comedy generically, but – in the case of a television series – by the particular series or even by the episode one is currently watching. More than that, individual viewers may have knowledge of the comedies of a particular studio, producer, or director. For instance, the humour in a particular Woody Allen comedy may be connected to knowledge about the humour in other Woody Allen comedies. Nonetheless, the examples Brock (2004) presents clearly show just how many types of knowledge may be relevant for any given humorous event. As a result, stating that humour requires a surprising stimulus, unexpected by viewers based on their knowledge, becomes a much more complex premise in its telecinematic realisation.

Returning to the first humorous instance in excerpt 4.1 – “Come on, let me see that sweet face, come on.” – we may, as I have done above, simply explain viewer expectations based on their world knowledge of sweet faces and what needs to be accessible perceptually to a speaker for them to actually be able to see such a sweet face. However, it is more realistic to assume that given the frequency of humorous instances in sitcoms and the build-up to this scene, with Katie facing away from David, many viewers will expect based on their

generic sitcom knowledge that an incongruity will follow. In either case it is crucial that the actual stimulus be surprising, i.e. that even the viewers expecting an incongruous element will not be able to predict what exactly they will see once Katie turns her head. That portion of the viewership that has seen this exact episode before, on the other hand, will be able to predict not only that there will be an incongruity, but the precise nature of the stimulus, which is then no longer surprising. Following the definition put forward by Suls (1972), this would result in failed humour, and that failure would be caused by the viewers' knowledge not of the world, nor of the genre, but of the particular events that they have seen before. While cases such as the repeated reception of an identical television scene need to be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on repetition, we can simply note here that different areas of knowledge, both for the collective viewership and for the individual viewer, are essential to the understanding and explication of telecinematic humour.

This discussion has largely focussed on how incongruities and the surprising stimuli that serve as starting-points for them need to be understood conceptually, but some observations need also be made about the specific signs that communicate these conceptual incongruities. While I have so far rather unspecifically talked about stimuli, it comes as no surprise that within the multi-layered, multimodal and multimedial context of telecinematic discourse, incongruities can in fact be constructed using stimuli in the form of linguistic signs, but also with the help of the entire gamut of what is at the disposal of telecinematic meaning-making, including multimodality in the performance and in the product (Bednarek, 2013). The narrative schema and the resulting expectations may be dependent on what has been said on screen as well as on the sounds and images of which the narrative is composed, and the same holds true for the surprising elements. The result is a range of different combinations of expectations raised by one mode or medium and those expectations being broken on the same level or a different one.

At least in the reading based on world knowledge, the “sweet face” example, for instance, creates expectations mainly verbally, and breaks them visually. It is also clear, however, that the relevant frames are often not only evoked by one of the sign systems in isolation, but are activated and reinforced on several levels. David’s teasing comment, “Oh wait, you thought I was talking about me? (.) This is awkward.” is a case in point because it breaks with the expectation of how a father-daughter bonding moment develops, which in turn was established by the dialogue and the character actions (a hug), as well as extradiegetically by the music and by the studio audience’s reaction (“Aaaaaaaaaah”).

4.6 Resolution of humorous incongruities in TCD

The final question asked above refers to the resolution of incongruities. This question can be rephrased by returning to Suls’ (1972) conceptualisation of the processes of resolution, which is to ask: What are the rules that telecinematic discourse wants its viewers to find in order to resolve the humorous incongruities that it presents? Similarly, it can be approached with the help of Logical Mechanisms, which are the GTVH’s attempt at formalising the way in which a joke “provide[s] a logical or pseudological justification of the absurdity or irreality it postulates” (Attardo and Raskin, 1991: 307; see also Section 3.4.2). As Attardo, Hempelmann, and Di Maio (2002: 5) point out, the types of LMs in jokes range from simple *juxtaposition* or *analogy* to more complex patterns, such as *garden-path* phenomena, *figure-ground reversals*, *faulty reasoning*, or *chiasm*. Based on further research on LMs, e.g. by Paolillo (1998), who studied the LMs of Gary Larsson’s *Farside* cartoons, mechanisms such as (*correct*) *reasoning from false premises*, *missing link*, *coincidence*, *ignoring the obvious*, *exaggeration*, *verbal humour* or *meta-humour* were later added (see discussion in Attardo et al., 2002: 9–17). Despite such attempts at establishing a comprehensive list of items and steps towards a

formalisation in Attardo et al. (2002), LMs ultimately remain an open category that contains as many members as there are ways to conceptually link two incongruous ideas, which is to say that their value as a heuristic tool to analyse humour is limited. However, looking at LMs in different types of humorous texts can reveal striking differences between different humour genres.

In the case of TCD, the 29 LMs that are listed in Attardo et al. (2002: 18) would need to be further disambiguated in order to take into account the communicative framework as it has been described in Chapter 2, and the construction of humour therein that is subject of the current discussion. Moreover, different genres' particular realisations of the LMs already listed there need to be taken into account. For instance, simple juxtaposition can be realised in TCD in a range of different forms, from a sequence of utterances by the same speaker or by different speakers to the simultaneous presentation of incongruous verbal and visual elements, which may include character actions, the setting of a given scene, camera movements, subtitles, and so on.

An example that serves to illustrate a telecinematic way of juxtaposing incongruous elements and thus a specifically telecinematic logical mechanism is the alien scene in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979). Brian, the main character whose life intersects with that of Jesus at various points, is fleeing from a group of Roman soldiers who want to capture him. The characters and settings in this diegetic world, which parodies sword-and-sandal epics such as *Ben Hur* (1959), stay true for the most part to the film representations of the Judeo-Roman world with which the viewers may be familiar. However, when Brian, driven by his pursuers, runs up the unfinished stairs of a tower and falls to what would surely be his death, a spaceship appears out of nowhere and catches him in mid-fall. This humorous scene can be analysed as follows: The previous stimuli, i.e. the narrative of the film up to this point, including its characters, settings and the humour that it entails, will have evoked knowledge frames in the viewers, which will lead to

expectations as to the further development of this scene. In accordance with Suls' (1972) model, viewers will compare new events to these expectations and, at the moment when the spaceship appears, will find the inclusion of aliens into this Judeo-Roman world surprising and incongruous. Since the frequent humorous events before that have firmly framed the ongoing communication between collective sender and viewers as humorous, the scene is humorous if the incongruity is resolvable, i.e. if a rule or logical mechanism can be found that would plausibly explain the connection between the evoked frame and the incongruous stimulus. What *Life of Brian* offers here is the integration of the (literally) alien element into the *mise-en-scène*, which needs to be understood as a telecinematic way of juxtaposition. This is to say that it is not just one narrative event following another, i.e. juxtaposition in a linear sense of element B following element A – the viewers actually see how the alien spaceship flies past that tower and how Brian falls into it. In other words, insofar as fictional film and television use their *mise-en-scène* to construct a fictional world, the alien spaceship, when it appears, is not only next to the world of Brian and the Romans, but it is fully integrated in it. The narrative implausibility and the breach of genre, from historical parody to science fiction or fantasy, are thus presented in an audiovisually unified manner, which is able to resolve the incongruity in the sense of Suls (1972).

4.7 Laughter as a humour cue

While the example from *Life of Brian* presented in the last section leaves it up to the audience to recognise the humorous intent behind the juxtaposition of aliens and Romans, the sitcoms that are analysed in Chapters 6–11 of this study help these humour-recognition processes along by including a laugh track. Laughter on this laugh track is understood here to mark what it follows as intended to be humorous, which – as will be discussed in Chapter 6 – was used as a methodological tool to distinguish humorous from non-humorous turns

in the empirical analyses in this study. To pre-empt what would be justified criticism of the oversimplified assumption that what is followed by laughter must be humour and what must follow humour is laughter, this section offers a brief discussion of humour markers and more particularly of the relation between humour and laughter. In so doing, it also provides support to the view that extradiegetic laughter as it occurs on the laugh track of a sitcom can be utilised as a heuristic for the identification of humorous sequences.²⁷ This discussion will start by returning to the viewers' reading of – in this case humorous – intentions.

Based on the presentation of the communicative setting of TCD in Chapter 2 and the way humour in TCD has been described in the current chapter, it is clear by now that this study assumes viewers of sitcoms to know that the artefact that they are watching and listening to has been made with the goal to amuse them. Section 4.3 has highlighted some of the cues that are instrumental in establishing a play frame, but within that humour-facilitating frame, humour can nonetheless be distinguished from non-humour: Viewers will be able to distinguish first of all what they find funny from that which does not amuse them, and secondly what is intended to be humorous from that which is not. On the production side of TCD, the collective sender designs a sitcom in such a fashion that viewers recognise what they should laugh at and what is not meant to be funny.

From the position of Relevance Theory, Yus (2016: 121) describes this ability of humourists and in this case collective senders as *mind-reading*, i.e. they know that in the processing of humour “certain inferences are more likely to be performed [...], and that a number of assumptions will necessarily be entertained by the audience in their search for the most relevant interpretation.” Viewers on the other hand are aware of the communicative intent and typically

²⁷ An abbreviated version of this section has been published in Messerli (2016: 82).

understand the humorous incongruities that the collective sender intended. Following what Haugh (2013: 43) calls the “received view of speaker meaning,” *understanding* here refers to the way in which viewers recognise and infer intended meaning based on the utterances of their interlocutors, in this case the collective sender’s. For humour in sitcoms, this means that “the viewers’ inferential processes within an established play frame lead them to an incongruity which they assume was intended by the collective sender to be perceived as humorous” (Messerli, 2016: 81). It needs to be added that the postulated humorous intentions of the collective sender are reconstructed based on the assumption that telecinematic production is governed by a conglomerate of agents that cannot easily be separated. In other words, based on the artefact the viewers engage with, they have no way of experientially disambiguating whose actions are ultimately responsible for the humour they perceive. At the same time, however, it is equally clear that based on their knowledge that fictional film and television is scripted, viewers will typically assume that any humorous instance they encounter is intentional.

The viewers’ interpretative processes that lead them to the recognition of the humorous incongruities constructed by the collective sender are aided by humour markers, which serve to communicate humorous intent (Attardo, Wagner and Urios-Aparisi, 2011: 197). Research on how humour may be marked prosodically and multimodally has provided empirical evidence that refutes some of the theoretical assumptions about how humour is marked in interaction (Attardo, Wagner and Urios-Aparisi, 2011). Attardo, Pickering, and Baker (2011), for instance, focus on differences in prosody between humorous and serious turns in conversation. In a small sample of dyadic conversation in an experimental setup mimicking online video-chats, they find no differences in speech rate between humour and non-humour. With regard to pauses, their data adds further evidence to findings made in Attardo and Pickering (2011) and Pickering et al. (2009) that contrary to what many humour scholars presume based on

anecdotal evidence (see overview in Attardo and Pickering, 2011: 234), there are no pauses (e.g. before the punchline of a joke) that would reliably signal humorous events. Furthermore, while they discovered slightly higher pitch in humorous turns and slightly higher volume in punch lines, both increases were statistically insignificant and could also not be reliably tied to the occurrence of humour. Smiles and laughter, on the other hand, were found in the same study to co-occur with the delivery of conversational humour (as opposed to canned humour such as narrative jokes). The authors conclude:

This leads us to reiterate the consideration we expressed before concerning the usefulness of multimodal analysis: so far, we have identified only one fairly reliable marker of humorous intention, a smiling or laughing expression, with the proviso that potentially canned, narrative jokes are the exception to this. (Attardo, Pickering and Baker, 2011: 242)

Based on these findings, it seems that there is no prosodic feature that could reliably identify humour, and thus prosody cannot be assumed to be instrumental in the viewers' interpretation processes when it comes to recognising humour.

Smiling and laughter, on the other hand, seem to be able to contribute to the recognition of humour. Haakana (2010), for instance, looks at the sequence of smiling and laughter in interaction and finds a pattern in institutional encounters of smiling occurring before laughter: "the smiling in these cases can be seen as a device that indicates the participant's orientation to a certain interactional mode but leaves it to the co-participant to decide whether this mode is taken up and developed further" (1505). In these cases, smiling by the speaker and/or addressee is instrumental in establishing a play frame, and it leads to laughter when that humorous mode is ratified by the other participants by returning the smile. Haakana's (2010) study indicates that at least in

his data smiling and laughter can be regarded as cues that establish and maintain the play frame.

That a smiling or laughing expression is fairly reliable as a humour marker (Attardo, Pickering, and Baker, 2011: 242) and that smiling and laughing serve the establishment of a play frame (Haakana, 2010) does of course not mean that either can be claimed to unambiguously mark humour. The same or similar bodily reactions may be triggered by non-humorous stimuli and the realisation of humorous intentions may cause different reactions (see discussions in Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1974; Attardo, 1994; Hay, 2001; Vandaele, 2002; Bell, 2009). For laughter in particular, however, it can be said that while it cannot be regarded as necessary or sufficient when it comes to identifying humour, it is still what humourists and by extension sitcom creators hope for, because – as Kuipers (2006: 8) puts it – it needs to be understood as “the idealtypical expression of the emotion of amusement.” The notion that laughter can be understood as the preferred response to humour is supported by Norrick (1993: 23), who approaches the relationship between humour and laughter in Conversation Analytic terms and states that “joking and laughter are linked as two parts of an adjacency pair.”

From a pragmatic perspective, the notion of adjacency has been challenged by Mazzocchoni et al. (2020), who find based on their assessment of existing classifications of laughter and their own empirical corpus study that while laughter typically follows what they term the *laughable* directly, it often also occurs in different interactional positions. More importantly, Glenn's (2003) review of psychological research highlights that laughter is not only a response to a laughable, but can itself be an instigator of more laughter. Similarly, Morreall (1983: 55) already speaks of a “two-way causality between our feelings and the behavior expressing those feelings” (55).

Laughter can thus itself “lead to perceptions of pleasure or humor” (Glenn, 2003: 24), which also implies that it needs to be

understood as a social practice in the sense that “people are more likely to laugh when others around are laughing” (26). Evidence for the fact that laughter is just as much a social cue as a reaction to humorous incongruity has been brought forward in psychological research, where Provine (e.g. 1992; 1996; 2004; 2005; 2014) in particular has shown laughter to be a type of social behaviour that in itself leads to smiles and more laughter. Laughter in response to laughter in this view is an automatic response that does not indicate a shared stance or evaluation and as such is comparable to social yawning. However, whereas this type of yawning is based on the visual cue of seeing someone else yawn, the mirroring of laughter is primarily caused by auditory cues (see e.g. Provine, 2005). The sense of community and more generally the social importance of laughter is also illustrated by Kesseling and Unteregger (2011), who present a cross-disciplinary overview of laughter and humour in terms of their biological, evolutionary, cultural and social contexts.

While laughter can then be assumed to indeed be contagious, it is important to distinguish between different types of laughter: Alter and Wildgruber (2018) summarise studies on laughter production and perception to point out that laughter can serve a range of functions, from friendly to more hostile. These functions of laughter are also supported by Etihofer et al.’s (2020) experimental study based on actors’ performances of friendly, tickling and taunting laughter and using fMRI to measure participant responses. While their study confirms the distinguishability of laughter with positive and negative intent and the resulting feelings of social rejection or social inclusion, they find a statistically significant positivity bias for visual laughter, which is more readily interpreted as socially accepting than the auditory cue based on the same actor performance (Etihofer et al., 2020: 358).

Despite the proviso that laughter may also indicate negative intent and that visual stimuli are more likely perceived as positive than are auditory stimuli, these findings indicate that positive laughter

spreads to others and may result in social bonding. The methodology employed by some of the studies also indicates that the contagiousness of laughter persists even when it is recorded by actors. It follows then that extradiegetic laughter, i.e. recorded studio-laughter that is broadcast as part of a sitcom, is also likely to facilitate audience laughter.

The discussion so far indicates that laughter in TCD can be assumed to (1) serve the establishment of a play frame; (2) reinforce the humorous effect by facilitating viewer laughter; and (3) be the typical or preferred reaction to humour and thus potentially a humour marker. This third function also depends on the different communicative levels on which laughter occurs. In the data that is analysed in this study, which entails solely sitcoms that are broadcast with a laugh track (see Section 6.2.2), laughter may first of all occur in the form of character laughter, i.e. laughter on CL2. In this case, laughter potentially signals whether or not something is meant to be humorous to the fictional characters and therefore facilitates viewer access to character understanding. Since character dialogue is designed for television audiences by the collective sender, character laughter is also planned and controlled. It can be understood as an implicit characterisation cue (Bednarek, 2010: 101–102), which is to say that it is not only a response to humorous turns by other characters, but also influences the recipients' formation of mental models of the characters and situations of the fictional CL2. Mental models have to be understood as “cognitive representations of our experiences” (van Dijk, 2008: 61), which in the case of sitcoms refers to the fictional reality in which recipients imagine the characters to interact. Since CL2-participants have no access to CL1, character laughter cannot in itself mark the collective sender's humorous intentions, but it serves to give the recipients clues about character intentions, as when a speaker laughs while making an utterance, or about character assessment of the previous turn. Character laughs thus also allow viewers to infer

humorous effects that are not only perceived by them, but also by characters on the fictional plane.

In the case of the data analysed in this study, laughter also occurs on the communicative level between the collective sender and the viewers (CL1) in the form of the laugh track which is broadcast as part of the sitcom. I use the term ‘extradiegetic laughter’ to refer to laughter which occurs as part of the laugh track. Typically, extradiegetic laughter “is a record of the ‘live’ responses of those who witnessed the event” (Mills, 2009: 14), but it may also be produced differently (see overview in Smith, 2005), as for instance in the US sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005–2014), which was filmed without a studio audience, but included in its broadcast a laugh track which was recorded during screenings (Becker, 2008; Bore, 2011).²⁸ Mills (2009) sees in the laugh track “the aural embodiment of the audience” (102), which means that television viewers in the process of watching witness that the collective sender’s humorous intentions are being ratified by another audience. This other audience makes audibly manifest that they are reacting in the preferred manner to the occurring humorous instances, i.e. they laugh. Similarly, Brock (2015: 36) incorporates the studio audience into his sitcom participation model, aligning it with the television audience in terms of the position on CL2 on the one hand, and positioning it as part of the televised programme on the other.

²⁸ In terms of terminology, it has to be noted here that some authors (e.g. Smith, 2005) use the term ‘laugh track’ in opposition to laughter of a live audience, and thus reserve it exclusively for pre-existing records of laughter that are added to the audio of a film comedy after it has been filmed. Here, however, the term ‘laugh track’ is used in a broad sense to refer to that audio track that contains extradiegetic laughter, irrespective of how it was produced. This terminological choice was made because it cannot be assumed that television viewers have sufficient information about how the extradiegetic laughter they hear was produced. Accordingly, pre-recorded laughter and live-audience laughter recorded together with the filming cannot reliably be distinguished.

In Example 4.1, for instance, the laugh track identified that the surprising non-revelation of the daughter's face when she turns around (because her face remains hidden inside the hood of her sweater) led to a humorous response by that disembodied audience whose reactions are broadcast with *See Dad Run*. We, the television audience, are then not unbiased viewers of the comedy that is unfolding, but instead engage with an artefact whose humorous moments have been tagged for us so that we can laugh along with those other laughs that are already there.

As the reaction of another audience, the laugh track can be understood as contagious and thus as facilitating viewer laughter. Since laughter is also instrumental in the establishing and maintaining of a play frame, the laugh track also serves to reiterate the humorous intent by the genre of the sitcom (Mills, 2009: 93). Most importantly, however, the laugh track as part of the sitcom text marks the intentions of the collective sender as humorous. Its presence must always be understood as planned and therefore as directly pointing to the collective sender's humorous intentions. This is so because even if we take studio audience laughter as "real and genuine" (Brock, 2015: 36), there are a number of editing processes between that reaction and its broadcast as part of the sitcom, which means that irrespective of whether the laugh track is based on authentic audience reactions or is fabricated (e.g. to feign such authenticity), its being broadcast as part of the audiovisual artefact is the result of an authorial decision and therefore subject to collective sender intentions. Accordingly, the laugh track is much less ambiguous as a marker of CL1-humour than laughter would be in spontaneous face-to-face communication. Its presence must always be understood as planned and therefore as directly pointing to the collective sender's humorous intentions.

4.8 Humour constellations in sitcoms

The final section in this chapter summarises the results of a case study (Messerli, 2016), which analysed humorous instances in an episode of

the US Sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (CBS, 2012) and serves to illustrate some of the ways in which humorous incongruities have been found to be constructed in TCD. While a particular focus is given to different forms of laughter and their function in positioning viewers, reiterating these findings at this point more generally serves the purpose of bringing together and exemplifying some of the issues that have been discussed in Chapters 2 to 4.

Based on the understanding of telecinematic discourse as multi-layered communication, humour in an episode of *2 Broke Girls* was analysed with a focus on the presence or absence of extradiegetic and diegetic laughter as humour markers. The laugh track was also used to identify the collective sender's humorous intentions (CL1), which is to say that whenever a turn was followed by extradiegetic laughter that turn was labelled a humorous turn. While all non-humorous turns were excluded from further analysis, humorous turns were subsequently categorised according to whether or not character laughter was visible and/or audible. More precisely, absence of laughter (no laughter) was distinguished from laughter and further from fake laughter, i.e. from laughter that is not just performed, but performed in a fashion that identifies it as non-genuine within CL2.²⁹ Furthermore, laughter of the speaking character was distinguished from that of other characters present in the scene.

The results of the categorisation can be seen in Table 4.1. They indicate that based on extradiegetic and character laughter as markers on the two levels of communication, five different humour constellations could be distinguished within the single episode of *2 Broke Girls* that was analysed for the study. The dataset of a single

²⁹ Distinguishing fake from genuine laughter may be difficult in some settings. In the case of this episode of *2 Broke Girls*, however, the context in which it occurs and its markedness in the audiovisual performance allow the unambiguous identification of what is intended to be understood as a character feigning amusement.

	humour constellation	laugh track	speaking character	other characters	n	
1	CL1-humour without marked CL2-humour	laughter	no laughter	no laughter	95	53.4%
2	CL1-humour without marked humorous intent of CL2-speakers, but with marked humour uptake by other characters	laughter	no laughter	laughter	4	2.2%
3	successful CL2-humour	laughter	laughter	laughter	65	36.5%
4	failed CL2-humour	laughter	laughter	no laughter	9	5.1%
5	CL2-humour involving fake laughter	laughter	laughter	fake laughter	5	2.8%
	Humorous turns				178	100.0%

Table 4.1: Humour constellations in S02E05 of *2 Broke Girls* (adapted from Messerli, 2016: 83)

episode does not allow for any claims with regard to the typicality of the different patterns. However, it can be cautiously assumed that there may be two default strategies in which humour is constructed in a sitcom such as *2 Broke Girls*. The first one, labelled *CL1-humour without marked CL2-humour*, has the collective sender construct a humorous event for the benefit of the audience without it being acknowledged by the characters within the diegetic world. While this type of humour is mediated through the fictional plane (CL2), it is itself situated on CL1 and can be broadly conceptualised as the collective sender telling an audiovisual joke to the viewership. The other type (3 in Table 4.1) is *successful CL2-humour*, which describes instances in which humour occurs not just on CL1, but also between characters. In this case the collective sender can be thought of as audiovisually showing to the viewers how one character tells a joke to another character.

In the case of *successful CL2-humour*, character reactions and intentions are aligned with CL1-humour markers, which means that the humorous incongruities processed by the viewers are the same the

characters presumably laugh about. The two communicative levels in this case reinforce each other, and the sequence of character laughter and extradiegetic laughter directly following the incongruity functions as a representation of contagious laughter. In terms of participant roles (Chapter 2), this humour constellation comes closest to positioning the viewers as overhearers.

CL1-humour without marked CL2-humour on the other hand constructs humorous incongruities on CL1 with the help of CL2-discourse that is framed as serious. This means that in addition to semantic and other mismatches, incongruities in this case are also constituted by a clash of intentions in the sense that, e.g., incongruous character actions are funny to the viewers among other things because they are done innocently, i.e. without humorous intentions, by the characters. This constellation also has implications for the participant role of the viewers, who must be present on both communicative layers at once (Brock, 2015: 31): on CL2 in order to follow processes of imagination and engaging in the joint pretence of fiction; on CL1 to follow the extradiegetic humour cues that allow them to recognise humour where none is recognised by the characters. As I put it in Messerli (2016: 85):

In terms of incongruity, CL1-humour is thus characterised by two co-existing viewer roles that follow two incompatible sets of intentions: The viewers in their role as primary ratified participant of CL1 infer humour based on CL1-markers of CL1-intentions; in their role as pretend-witnesses of the fictional world, they are an unrated part of the serious interaction on CL2.

The first of the other three types that occurred in the data was *CL1-humour without marked humorous intent of CL2-speakers, but with marked humour uptake by other characters*, which needs to be understood as a telecinematic representation of accidental humour: Whereas laughter by non-speaking characters indicates humour uptake,

the absence of smiles and laughter in the speaking character indicate no inferable humorous intent. Accordingly, there is in this case no conflict between intentions. A first turn, which is understood as serious on both levels by the viewers, is followed by another character's reaction which is marked as humorous on both levels. There is thus a clash on CL2 between the frame that the speaking character attempts to establish (a serious one) and the play frame that the reacting character erroneously infers.

The remaining two constellations are subtypes of CL2-humour. In the case of *failed CL2-humour*, an initial turn that is marked as intended to be humorous is followed by a dispreferred reaction, for instance if one character tells a joke that fails to elicit laughter from other characters. In this case the incongruity occurs between the inferable humorous intentions by the speaking character and the dispreferred reaction by the other characters. The surprisingly incongruous reaction on CL2 (failed humour) is precisely what constitutes the humorous incongruity on CL1. Finally, *CL2-humour involving fake laughter* operates similarly in that it also involves a failed attempt at humour on CL2. However, in this case the character response is not merely absence of laughter, but instead fake laughter. Interestingly, fake laughter does not only indicate that humour has failed, but also that the responding character has successfully inferred humorous intentions and at the same time is not amused. Fake laughter is then a failed attempt to feign the preferred response to humour, and accordingly it does not mark the attempt at humour as humorous, but – quite to the contrary – indicates a perceived lack of humorousness in the performance which makes it impossible to react in the preferred fashion.

The different humour constellations that were found in the episode of *2 Broke Girls* analysed in Messerli (2016) indicate first of all how laughter on different levels can be understood as a marker of humorous intentions by the collective senders or by characters and are

thus an illustration of the discussion in 4.7. Furthermore, they underline the dynamic nature of participant roles in TCD, with viewers both being situated on CL1 as ratified participants in communication with the collective sender and at the same time being positioned in different roles on CL2. Depending on the type of humour that is employed, viewers align with speaking characters or reacting characters, or they observe – in virtual community with the collective sender – humour that occurs in spite of character intentions. It exemplifies furthermore that telecinematic realisations of incongruity-resolution in the sense of Suls (1972) do not only rest on incongruities constructed within character dialogues, even if multimodality in performance is included. Instead, they are often tied to the full multimodality in product, i.e. on the employment of the entire telecinematic apparatus including the communicative setting of TCD itself.

The list of humour constellations presented in Messerli (2016) and in the summary in this section is incomplete, as is the discussion of humorous phenomena that was undertaken in this and the preceding chapter. However, the skeleton of a theory of telecinematic humour as it was provided here will serve as a framework for the empirical analyses of repetition in TCD, and will be taken up again in Chapter 12, where the general discussion of the empirical findings will provide a comprehensive overview of how repetition is employed in telecinematic humour.

4.9 Telecinematic humour: A working definition

In the last two chapters, I have outlined the defining and contributing elements to humour in general and to telecinematic humour in particular. Before shifting focus to repetition and its role in sitcom humour, I will use this section to briefly reiterate some of the most important characteristics of telecinematic humour in the form of a working definition that will guide the analyses presented in the following chapters.

In Section 4.2, I have defined humour in general as:

the result of a complex set of cognitive processes which (a) are triggered by a stimulus that does not fit expectations (formed based on previous stimuli) and is therefore surprising (incongruity-stage); (b) lead to the discovery that the new stimulus is understandable or resolvable in the sense that a rule can be found that explains the connection between the previously evoked schema and the unexpected elements; and (c) occur within a humorous frame in which it is permissible to be amused or indeed to laugh.

Telecinematic humour, specifically, is a type of humour and thus inherits a–c. However, in addition it is dependent on cognitive processes in film and television viewers that roughly follow what is intended and anticipated by the collective sender. Viewers form expectations about likely events and actions based on the knowledge they have about the world, and about general and specific aspects of the fictional artefact they engage with. Incongruities in telecinematic discourse are the result of viewers encountering an event on CL2 – verbal, visual or auditory – which does not fit their expectations, but is resolvable, e.g. because its presence is narratively or aesthetically made plausible. If such incongruity occurs within a humorous frame, i.e. if the metacommunicative cues read by the viewers have successfully communicated that understanding the events on CL2 as humorous is intended or at least permissible, the effect on an idealised viewer will be humour. I will use telecinematic humour to refer both to the processing of humour that is triggered when engaging with telecinematic discourse and to the textual basis of these processes within the televisual artefact, i.e. to the incongruity-creating stimuli that are presented to the viewers.

While this definition can be regarded as sufficient for telecinematic humour, some genres of television comedy facilitate the

recognition and perhaps the appreciation of humour by including extradiegetic laughter as a cue to signal humour. Such laughter, as it occurs for instance on the laugh track of multi-camera sitcoms, does not provide information about the actual occurrence of humour, but it allows the identification of those segments of the artefact that are intended as humorous by the collective sender. These segments, which will be referred to here as humorous turns, are particularly suitable as data for the analysis of telecinematic humour because their identification as potentially humorous does not depend on the analyst's humour competence, but rests on the reaction of a real or artificial second audience that ratifies the collective sender's humorous intent.

5 Repetition and Humour

5.1 Introduction

The interest of this study in the constitutive role that repetition plays in the construction of sitcom humour requires a discussion of what is meant by repetition, as well as of the different types and aspects of repetition that may occur in a telecinematic, multimodal and layered text. In order to develop the framework and categorisation for the subsequent empirical analyses, I will present in this chapter the research that has been done on repetition in humour specifically. However, since the literature on that particular topic amounts to only a handful of articles, it will later be necessary to broaden the scope and include relevant research on repetition more generally to arrive at an overview that is comprehensive enough for current purposes. This chapter will provide an introductory clarification of definitions and classifications of repetition and its main functions in order to explain and motivate the coding scheme discussed in Chapter 6 that was applied in the analysis presented in Chapter 7. This means then that in order to approach the role repetition plays in sitcom humour, this study will first turn to the data themselves and establish a typology of simple repeats as well as the typicality of each type of repeat for humorous turns in sitcoms, before returning to a broader theoretical discussion of the role repetition has been found to play within text cohesion and coherence in particular. In what follows, I will first offer a literature review of the studies that have been done on repetition in conversational and canned humour (5.2) as well as on existing terminologies and definitions of repetition (5.3), before then turning to an explanation of the classification and working definition of repetition that was chosen for this study (5.4). Finally, the last section of this chapter (5.5) will discuss the different types of repetition distinguished in this study. While these initial observations on repetition will be able to motivate and prepare the categorisation scheme presented in Chapter 6, Chapter 9 will return to

functions of repetition in particular and use the data analyses of Chapters 7 and 8 in order to shed light on how repetition functions in sitcom humour as it is represented in the corpus that was analysed for this study.

5.2 Repetition and humour: Literature review

There is to date no comprehensive and systematic discussion of the role of repetition in humour, but a number of studies from different branches of linguistics have discussed at least some of the ways in which humour is affected by repetition – most notably Norrick (1993, 1994b, 1996), whose work will serve as a starting point in what follows. This will be complemented with what other humour researchers have revealed about repetition in passing, and – vice versa – with the comments on humour that discourse analysts in particular have made when investigating the role of repetition in conversation.

Norrick (1993) is interested in the role repetition plays both in canned humour, such as jokes, and those forms of humour that occur within spontaneous conversation. One starting point for his exploration is the duality of automaticity and variation. Based on Bergson's (1900/2002) notion "that laughter results from the recognition of the mechanical encrusted upon the living" (Norrick, 1993: 386; see also Chapter 3 in this study), Norrick finds that due to the automaticity of repetition, the repeating person may appear to lack intelligence and thus become a target for humour.³⁰ Within the domain of canned humour,

³⁰ As an example, Norrick (1993) points to "self-incrimination tricks" (386) children play on each other. For instance, the victim of the game is instructed by the trickster to always respond to their utterances with the phrase "just like me": After a number of iterations of this back and forth – e.g. "I opened the door – just like me" or "I looked out the window – just like me" (387) – the trickster finally lands on "And saw a monkey, "to which the victim then also replies "just like me" (387). Thus the rhythmic repetition leads the victim to repeat the phrase again before they have fully considered the meaning that their

on the other hand, he discusses the role of repetition in establishing a pattern that can in turn evoke expectations in the listener or reader of a joke. The created pattern is then typically juxtaposed with variation, which leads to the cognitive processes of recognising an incongruity that Norrick himself ties in with Raskin (1985), but which can also be related to models of incongruity and resolution more generally. Based on the two premises, Norrick (1993: 387) speaks of a “dual nature of repetition”, in the sense that it both indexes automaticity and “sets the stage for abrupt variation” (*ibid.*). With regard to the former, both canned jokes and conversational humour use repetition to turn utterances against the speakers that used them. Norrick points out that the precise functions of each repetition depends on how exactly that repetition is performed. Whereas in some examples repetition with similar intonation creates the appearance of mindless echoing, which can lead to unanticipated humorous effects, in other cases the shift of scripts that is so typical for the incongruity-construction in jokes happens based on a change in rhythm or stress, which for instance manages to activate the “cat” in “categories” (Norrick, 1993: 393). In conversation, it also points back to the original utterance, thus serving as a metalinguistic comment. With regard to the second aspect of repetition and variation, Norrick finds that repetition in canned jokes also serves to establish a “background script,” which refers to what Suls (1972) would call the narrative schema on which the subsequent incongruity rests. While no classification of different types of repetition is offered there, it is worth noting that Norrick (1993) not only discusses lexical repetition, but also explicitly highlights humour that is based on other forms of parallelism, such as the repetition of a morphological or syntactic pattern.

Later, Norrick (1994b, 1996) focuses entirely on conversational humour, but essentially reiterates the points made in the earlier

repetition encodes, and the victim has incriminated themselves to the trickster’s (and their own) bemusement.

publication as well as the same dual function that was established there. The last of the three publications (Norrick, 1996) pays more attention to the functions repetition has in (1) hyperbolic accumulation; (2) the signalling that something is intended as humorous; (3) wordplay; (4) making metalingual comments for the purposes of humour; and (5) establishing a humorous form of corrective sequence. In all these cases, the humorous potential of repetition is linked to its role as a facilitator of production (following Johnstone, 1987) and – together with variation – as a mechanism that can trigger a frameshift and thereby establish a humorous incongruity. This is reaffirmed later, when Norrick states that: “Jokes often use repetition of a scenario or formulaic phrasing to establish a pattern, only to skew it the third time around in the punchline” (2003: 1353). In his study of conversational joking, Norrick finds repetition and formulaicity to be central to the rhythm of joke performance and a tool at the disposal of joke tellers that facilitates production because it affords them time to plan the performance of the joke and the punchline in particular.

Coates (2007) also has a general interest in repetition and its contribution to the establishing and maintaining of non-serious talk. She finds repetition to be “a striking feature of talk in a play frame” (Coates, 2007: 42, see also excerpt 1 in Rees and Monrouxe, 2010: 3395) and distinguishes a range of different processes to do with lexical, semantic, syntactic and thematic repeats. She finds that once a play frame is established, particular words and phrases can become charged with humorous meaning and can later be repeated for humorous effect. In other examples, repetition itself seems to render ongoing talk more and more playful. Finally, Coates finds that different types of repetition contribute to cohesion and coherence of the conversation.

The further research contributions discussed here are all of a more specialised nature, i.e. they focus on one particular aspect in which repetition and humour interact and do not attempt to

comprehensively address the repetition/humour-interface. Attardo (1994), for instance, specifically discusses the humorous potential of the repetition of sounds as the basis for alliteration-based humour, but does not address other aspects of repetition in any detail. However, the same author's book-length analysis of humorous texts (Attardo 2001) dedicates a short subsection to the topic of repetition, which mostly points out that repetition has not attracted much attention in humour research (85). Attardo offers a brief summary of Norrick (1993), but then also emphasises the significance of repetition in longer texts, for which he names catch phrases in sitcoms as an example. Of most interest for this study is his quoting of Charney's (1978: 82) statement that "repetition may be the most important mechanism in comedy" and to call it "a big headache for theories based on surprise" (Attardo, 2001: 85–86). This potential conflict between repetition and humorous surprises will need to be addressed in Chapter 9, when discussing the functions of different types of repetition in sitcom humour.

In conversation and discourse analysis, Tannen's (1987b, 1989) seminal work on repetition discusses humour as one of the functions of repetition with variation in particular. She notes on the one hand that humour can be created through repetition, and on the other hand that humour appreciation can be realised by repeating, which she terms *savouring* (Tannen, 1989: 64). This is taken up in Everts' (2003) sociolinguistic research on family humour styles, in which she finds repetition to be an important resource for humour. In her analysis of one family's talk, she discusses cases of family members imitating and impersonating each other as well as savouring repetitions as a form of humour support. In line with Tannen's savouring repetitions, Hay (2001) discusses echoing the words of a speaker as a form of humour support.

The imitations and impersonations that Everts (2003) found, on the other hand, tie in with research on mocking, e.g. when speakers repeat an offending construction in order to make fun of the preceding

speaker (Norrick, 1994a: 422). Haugh (2010; see also Haugh and Bousfield, 2012), for instance, includes repetition in his account on jocular mockery, which he defines as a form of non-serious teasing. Cekaite and Aronsson (2004) also find that in the context of second language acquisition, children playfully recycle previous utterances to achieve parodic imitations, which the authors relate to the repetition in children's arguments that Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) termed *format tyings*. The recyclings of both the register and particular utterances of teachers are seen as “[a]ppropriations of teacher talk” (Cekaite and Aronsson, 2004: 387) in a playful manner, which in their study enabled children with limited linguistic resources in their L2 to nonetheless actively and creatively participate in the ongoing conversation. In political speeches, Mueller (2011: 54) similarly finds multimodal repeats with variation – of both words and of gestures – to be one of “the three prominent patterns in amusing interaction.” Rossen-Knill and Henry (1997), on the other hand, discuss prosodically altered repetition as part of verbal parody, where it constitutes “an intentional verbal representation of some prior action or event” (750) that is then flaunted, criticised and made fun of (see also Hutcheon, 1985).

Shepherd (1985) in her research of Antiguan Creole morphology assigns a humorous function to repetition. While she does discuss how this humorous effect of repetition is achieved synchronically, she ventures on an interesting, if somewhat anecdotal, diachronic path to explain its emergence. Starting from the repetition of creole utterances to standard English speakers who fail to understand them (which according to her is amusing to observers), she assumes that the humorous potential of this kind of repetition could have originated when slaves made fun of their overseers in Antiguan creole and upon requests for clarification simply repeated the same creole utterance (543). Speculative as this historical explanation might be, it certainly fits Coates' (2007) findings of repetitive practices being charged with humorous meaning over time.

Complementing the findings on the function repetition can play in successful humour, Bell's (2013) research on failed and incomprehensible humour elaborates on the function of repetition as a strategy to signal that humour has not been understood (already mentioned in Bell, 2007). In particular, she finds repetition of the punch line as well as requests for repetition, i.e. attempts to elicit a reiteration of the punch line or the entire joke in order to have a second chance at understanding it.

A further area of the study of repetition in humour is psychological research on humour appreciation, where repetition can be discussed from the perspective of arousal and habituation. Pistole and Shor (1979) find that repetition has a decreasing effect on humour appreciation especially when humour is received in a group – an effect that interestingly can be softened with the help of recorded laughter. Deckers, Buttram and Winsted (1989) presented participants with a series of cartoons and discuss their findings based on three competing hypotheses: (1) the arousal hypothesis would predict that since the punchline of a joke produces arousal, several cartoons in a row could lead to an accumulating effect, which means that they would find an increase in funniness ratings in subsequent cartoons. (2) The salience hypothesis would also predict an increase in humour appreciation: In an earlier study, Goldstein, Suls and Anthony (1972) found that making salient the theme of a joke by preceding it with thematically related photographs led to increased funniness ratings. Accordingly, Deckers and colleagues assume that thematically related cartoons in a series will lead to humour-creating stimuli being more salient to participants, which will enhance humour comprehension and therefore could also increase humour appreciation. (3) The third hypothesis, on the other hand, would predict that habituation could counteract such appreciation-enhancing effects and lead to a decrease in humour responses. This view has been supported by a range of earlier studies, including the one by Pistole and Shor mentioned above (for overviews of habituation theory see e.g. Thompson, 2009; Rankin et al., 2009).

Interestingly, the results of Deckers et al.'s study suggest that humour appreciation increases initially (in the first three to five cartoons), and does not drop substantially even towards the end of the series of cartoons. The authors explain the surprising lack of any significant habituation effect with the high variability of the stimuli (Deckers et al., 1989: 80), i.e. the participants were not faced with exact repetition of cartoon humour, but merely with a series of related cartoons. Research in this area would thus indicate that participants are not likely to tire of particular humorous incongruities very quickly, at least when it comes to thematically similar, but not identical stimuli; that at least initially, similarity between humorous instances leads to an increase in humour appreciation; and that possible negative effects of habituation on humour responses could be counteracted by the presence of recorded laughter.

Contrary to this, Morreall (1983: 50) assumes that "most pieces of humor will have their full effect on us only once" and that if a listener laughs a second time at the same joke at all, it will only be for social reasons, i.e. "to feign amusement for the benefit of the person telling the joke" (ibid.; see also discussion of fake laughter in Section 4.8 of this study). Morreall immediately admits, however, that he has repeatedly laughed at the same scenes in some of his favourite sketches, but explains this quality of some humorous texts, that they "maintain a good share of their freshness even with numerous repetitions" (ibid.) through an overload of humorous incongruities. This means that, whereas the stimuli themselves are in fact identical in each viewing, they are so rich that they are never perceived in full and therefore can be viewed differently each time. As a result, Morreall postulates that despite identity of stimulus there may be variation in the cognitive processing of the incongruities it contains. Later in his book, Morreall (1983) adds that repetition itself can be unexpected and thus create a humorous effect. In this case, there is nothing inherently funny in the presented events or things themselves, but it is their juxtaposition that is incongruous (69).

The complex relationship between repetition and incongruity is also mentioned in Forabosco's (2008) pragmatic research. He names repetition as a factor potentially conflicting with incongruity and points to increased *familiarity* through repetition on the one hand, and to the reduction of incongruity through repeated exposure on the other, which summarises the psychological findings I have discussed above (Forabosco, 2008: 56).

This conflict between repetition and incongruity is also already addressed by Suls (1972), who offers a number of possible explanations why the same incongruity may retain its humorous potential even after repeated exposure to it. The first explanation somewhat paradoxically assumes that funnier jokes would be more memorable and therefore less funny in their second telling than jokes that are only moderately funny. The second explanation is similar to Morreall's hypothesis of his favourite sketches offering an overload of stimuli and assumes different levels of interpretation for some jokes. The third explanation is a version of Coates' (2007) findings that when uttered in a play frame, the repetition of particular words and phrases may associate them with the humorous framing, and these elements thereby become charged with humorous meaning. In this case this would mean that "the joke has been associated with the positive emotional response that the recipient experienced after comprehending the joke on its first exposure" (Suls, 1972: 94). Finally, Suls states that jokes could get funnier in subsequent tellings because increased familiarity may lessen tension. This aspect of familiarity had previously been found to have a positive influence on affect with different types of novel stimuli (Zajonc, 1968). In this interpretation, repetition would then not affect the humorous potential of a joke per se, but would facilitate a positive response to humour by increasing familiarity.

The summary of this initial discussion of the extant research on humour and repetition reveals a somewhat vague picture of what effects repeats may have on the conversation or text in which they appear.

There seems to be a consensus that repetition of another speaker can be used as a form of imitation, impersonation, (jocular) mockery or parody, and several researchers have confirmed that repetition can be humorous because the repeated items may have previously been charged with humorous potential when being used within a play frame. The general assumption based on an incongruity-approach to humour is that repeated exposure to an identical incongruity should lead to a reduction of humorous effect, which can also be understood as a particular form of habituation. However, the contrary findings that at least some humour retains its humorous potential after repeated recurrences have led to a number of potential explanations, of which the pleasure of familiarity, i.e. the particular stimulus becoming indexical of positive emotions, is perhaps the most convincing one. Furthermore, repetition is discussed in this context as a multifaceted phenomenon that centres on complete lexical repetition as its prototype, but includes other forms of formal recurrence of the same unit (gestures, morphological and syntactic structures, etc.).

In addition to this lack of consensus when it comes to the interaction between repetition and humour, the literature also approaches repetition and similar phenomena with a wide range of different terms and definitions. It is therefore necessary to disambiguate the existing terminology and establish in what way relevant terms are understood in the current study.

5.3 Existing terminologies and broad definitions of repetition

There are – as Aitchison (1994: 16) points out – a vast number of related terms in use that refer to the sum of repetitive phenomena (e.g. reiteration in Halliday and Hasan, 1976) or a subset thereof (e.g. parallelism, reduplication), to one of its functions (e.g. cohesion, parroting) or causes (e.g. stuttering). I will broadly follow a discourse analytic tradition (Tannen, 1987a, b, 1989; Norrick, 1987; Johnstone,

1994a, among others) and use *repetition* as an umbrella term for all the repetitive phenomena I describe in this and the following sections.

The broad concept of repetition I start from subsumes recurring form, structure or meaning, which includes what Bennett-Kastor (1994: 156) calls “subtler forms of repetition” – i.e. pronominalisation, ellipsis and parallelism. As is illustrated by Johnstone (1994a) and Tannen (1987b) among others, repetition, if understood broadly, is pervasive in many types of discourse including spontaneous face-to-face conversation. More than that, the fact that language is for the most part based on symbolic signs, on arbitrary (but not necessarily unmotivated) links between form and meaning, and thus on convention, means that almost any utterance repeats elements from other utterances. As Tannen (1987a: 216) puts it: “That is, individuals say particular things in particular ways because they have heard others say similar things in the same or similar ways.” The same notion is discussed in terms of dialogic syntax and as a constitutive feature of dialogicality by Du Bois (2007):

Dialogicality makes its presence felt to the extent that a stancetaker’s words derive from, and further engage with, the words of those who have spoken before – whether immediately within the current exchange of stance utterances, or more remotely along the horizons of language and prior text as projected by the community of discourse.

(Du Bois, 2007: 140, his emphasis)

The use of identical words and parallel syntactic structures thus creates a “resonance of forms and meanings” (Du Bois, 2014: 359), which is as important for the structuring of meaning as it is for the involvement or engagement of interlocutors with each other (see also Sakita, 2006).

This fundamental role of repetition for language is addressed from a different perspective in usage-based grammar. The frequency of

use central to this understanding of grammar entails repetition of words and other constructions, which can result at least in conventionalisation and sometimes even in grammaticalisation (Bybee, 2006). In other words, grammar itself is largely based on the repetition of particular structures until they are no longer presented or combined ad hoc, but used in situated language as pre-patterned chunks.

Of course, stating that language itself is pre-patterned and repetitive does not mean that some utterances are not more repetitive than others, and it makes sense to include in a working definition the aspect of salience: What I call repetition here is that which is notably repeated. In this regard, it is important to include Johnstone's (1994b: 3) point that in many cases the decision as to what is and is not repetition cannot be made independently of the recipient of the respective text. She exemplifies this with an instance of intertextuality: "If I say 'We deserve a break today,' that will be a repetition for some people, who associate it with McDonald's, but not for others" (Johnstone 1994b: 3). In other words, calling a token a repetition of something depends on recognising it as an instance of a type of which another token has occurred elsewhere. For the methodology of this study, this means that what will be discussed as notably repeated in Chapter 7 was identified as notably repeated by two trained coders (one of them myself). The coding was done systematically based on criteria described in Chapter 6 and validated by inter-coder agreement.

The caveat that repetition first needs to be recognised as repetition applies more obviously in some cases than in others. For instance, it would be feasible to analyse the transcripts of all episodes in the corpus with corpus linguistic tools and to objectively identify how many times a particular word (syntactic or lemma) or n-gram, or a particular syntactic pattern is repeated within any given sitcom episode. It would seem then that this method of identifying repeats in a corpus would be independent of the recipients. However, this type of approach would first of all limit what aspects can be operationally defined as

repetition, and secondly even for those aspects that it could identify, would not yet include the viewer's perspective on which this study is modelled. This is because it would not take into account whether or not any objectively identified repeat will likely be identified as such by the viewers. In other words, even a more quantitative first step of analysis would require subsequent qualitative steps to disambiguate more relevant from less relevant repeats. Based on these two aspects, I have chosen to base this study on manual identification of repetition, and I will further elaborate on my methodological choices in Chapter 6. Having defined repetition broadly as any notable recurrence of form, meaning or structure, I will now move on to narrow down that understanding by discussing different types of repetition.

Repetition can be formally distinguished with regard to what and how much is repeated by who and at what distance from the original unit. Moreover, repetition also affects different processes in discourse and in interaction, which concern speakers and listeners, as well as the structure of the respective text itself. I will return to such effects in Chapter 9, when I discuss the functions of repetition in the AMSIL corpus. For now, however, I will focus on formal taxonomies of repetition in order to develop my own classification of repetition types in sitcoms.

5.4 A first classification and working definition of repetition

Repetition has been distinguished at different levels in many different research traditions, but I will focus here on considerations from discourse analysis and text linguistics, which – as mentioned before – are particularly relevant when approaching telecinematic discourse (TCD) as a type of audiovisual text that centres on mediated fictional face-to-face interaction.

A good starting point is Aitchison's (1994) article on how repetition has been treated in linguistics, because it systematically discusses the different variables that have been considered in the literature. She first of all calls "straightforward variables" those objective criteria that directly characterise the repeated units rather than the motivations and purposes that may have triggered their presence. In this vein, she lists (1) medium (spoken or written); (2) participants (self-repetition or other-repetition); (3) scale of fixity (exact or partial); (4) temporal scale (immediate or delayed); and (5) size of unit (e.g. phoneme, morpheme, word, etc.; Aitchison, 1994: 18–19). It is worth discussing aspects 1–5 in detail at this point and to consider their expected realisation in telecinematic discourse and in sitcoms in particular.

Based on the earlier discussion of the communicative framework of telecinematic discourse (see Chapter 2), it will be clear that the first aspect, the medium in which repetition occurs, is not simple and clear-cut in the case of TCD. Its complex setup and production mean first of all that TCD may feature both written and spoken repetition, even though it is to be expected that the prominent medium in the sitcoms that are analysed here will be spoken, which will however have to be regarded as part of a multimodal performance that includes repetition not just in language per se, but also in prosody, gestures and facial expressions. Even if we simplify medium to a binary decision between speaking and writing, and if we assume that writing is largely absent from the final artefact, the authorship of the performed dialogue, which has been ascribed here to the concept of the collective sender, is divided between various sublevels – from the scriptwriters to the performing actors. The resulting medium can be rendered accordingly in Gregory's (1967: 191) early description as "written to be spoken as if not written," which also means that TCD can be regarded as both written **and** spoken and exhibits features of both media. Furthermore, the duality of communicative levels also means that the focus can be located on either of both levels. On the one hand, repetition can be regarded as part of

the represented dialogues, which means that those typical characteristics and functions of repetition in spoken interaction might also be observed in sitcom data as fictional representations of those same aspects. On the other hand, repetition can be seen as part of the communication between collective sender and the television audience, as a planned and intentional feature of the narrative audiovisual text through which this communication occurs.

These aspects also have an effect on the second variable of participants, which most analysts of spoken conversation include as a criterion in their classification of different repeats.³¹ It is worth noting that in the case of TCD, the distinction of the two communicative levels is again crucial, because whereas characters can repeat themselves or other characters on CL2, CL1 is based exclusively on the communication from the collective sender to the receiving audience, which means that any repetition is by definition a form of self-repetition on CL1.

The third aspect of fixity is a gradual one in several respects. First of all, the notion of exact repetition (e.g. Tannen, 1989), also referred to as full repetition (e.g. Kim, 2002), verbatim (e.g. Norrick, 1996), or total recurrence (Hoffmann, 2012) can be defined only theoretically as occurring “when the original form and meaning is not changed at all” (Lichtkoppler, 2007: 43). Strictly speaking, however, Johnstone (1987: 211) rightly states that: “Repetition is never exact; it always involves some sort of similarity and some sort of difference, whether the difference be linguistic, as in alliteration or syntactic parallelism, or contextual, as when the same thing is said in different situations.” This includes the fact that within the chronological and linear processes of

³¹ Apart from the term *other-repetition* (used e.g. by Tannen, 1987a), the repetition of another speaker’s utterance (or an element thereof) is also referred to as *allo-repetition* (e.g. Tannen, 1989) or *second-speaker repetition* (e.g. Norrick, 1987).

listening and reading, repeating a unit as exactly as possible still leads to the inherent difference that the first occurrence was novel, whereas the recurrence is a repeat.

Leaving such ontological concerns aside, and distributing the criterion of fixity across different linguistic levels, however, it is possible to more confidently label repetition as exact on some levels than on others. For instance, exact lexical repeats can be distinguished from partial lexical repeats based on whether or not the repeated words, irrespective of the prosody of the utterance in which they occur, match previously occurring ones. Aspects such as gestures, facial expressions or intonation contours on the other hand can always only be perceived as similar enough to be considered tokens of the same type. Whereas in the sense of *langue*, “[l]anguage itself imposes an either-or categorization” (Taylor, 2003: 78) and is in that sense digital, these other repeatable units are analogue in the sense that there is no hard boundary between different hand gestures or smiles and they can only be categorised based on a relative degree of similarity and thus as part of prototype categories. While partial repetition could technically be defined in the same manner, it is difficult to imagine how partially matching hand gestures could be reliably distinguished from exactly matching ones at one end of the scale and from non-matching ones at the other. As will be discussed further down, I have therefore not distinguished between partial and exact repetition in those categories that I have referred to as prototypical here. This concerns all aspects of multimodality as well as repetition in structure and prosody.

The notion of temporal scale can be addressed with the question asked by Johnstone (1994b: 3): “How far apart can the model and the copy get before we don’t call it a repetition?” As Johnstone points out herself, there needs to be some form of restriction to more local recurrences in order not to make the concept of repetition meaningless (1994b: 5). The decision to manually categorise only those recurring units as repetition that are deemed noticeably repeated by the coders

already alleviates this problem, and furthermore the coding here followed Johnstone's advice and left aspects of intertextuality aside. However, the issue of distance between occurrences of the same unit will be returned to in Chapters 10 and 11, where I address cohesion and coherence in sitcom humour, which – among other aspects – is influenced by the links between adjacent and distant turns that are established through repetition. The aspect of distance also results in the distinction between more adjacent repeats within conversational turns and more distant repeats that span across humorous turns in the data. This primary distinction structures the discussion of the typology of repeats in US American sitcoms that will follow in Chapter 7.

The fifth criterion of the size of unit is again best addressed on different levels of language. Whereas repetition of individual words or syntactic groups can be distinguished on the lexical level, phonetic repetition can also address the repetition of specific phones, which may lead to alliterations and rhymes, for instance. In other cases, the individual gesture, the individual facial expression or the individual camera movement serve as the relevant repeatable unit.

Apart from these central and essentialist aspects of repetition, Aitchison (1994) mentions three further axes along which different forms of repetition can be distinguished: they are function, optionality and intentionality. The functions of the repeats found in the data are of central interest to this study, which asks as its main research question what role repetition plays in sitcom humour construction. As discussed, this will be addressed in Chapter 9, based on the repetition patterns in the data that are presented in the first data analysis in Chapter 7. With the criterion of optionality, Aitchison distinguishes grammaticalised repetition, e.g. reduplication in Tagalog, from more optional cases. While she lists a few examples in English which illustrate cases where repetition is obligatory or at least preferred, these examples seem to be few and far between, and generally repetition can be considered optional in English (Aitchison, 1994: 24). It is worth noting, however,

that in the case of TCD it is not just the language system that may make repetition obligatory or the preferred option, but also the conventions of telecinematic storytelling. These narrative pressures for the collective sender to repeat certain aspects of the text do not influence the identification and classification of individual repeats, however, and will instead be addressed in Chapter 11.

Finally, intentionality is also a criterion that deserves particular attention within the setting of TCD. In conversation, Norrick (1987) distinguishes significant repeats, which perform “an identifiable operation on its original” (247) from random repetition, and a similar distinction between automatic and deliberate repetition is made by Ferrara (1994), who investigates therapeutic discourse. She finds that deliberate repetition, which is identifiable based on prosodic markers, signals attentive listenership or emphatic agreement, depending on the length of the repeated unit and the role of the repeater (therapist or client). Tannen (1987b, 1989) more generally shows that repetitiveness in language is an indicator of its automaticity, and that much repetition occurs automatically, both when it comes to self- and other-repetition. In TCD, on the other hand, it is again important to make a clear distinction between CL1 and CL2. While the latter represents dialogue between characters and can include automatic and deliberate repeats, the same conversations are always governed by the collective sender on CL1, who oversees and designs all communicative acts directed at the television audience. Accordingly, the viewers can normally infer repeats as unintentional only on CL2 and will assume that the final product they receive on their screen is planned and therefore intentional in most aspects, including its use of repetition.

The categorisation scheme for simple repeats in the AMSIL corpus that will be presented in Chapter 6 is based on the criteria and considerations discussed in the previous sections and their application to the particular setting of TCD. Repetition will be addressed on the level of language in terms of the partial or total recurrence of one or

multiple lexical items, as well as on the level of morphosyntactic structure. Taking into account the multimodal aspects of sitcoms, repetitive patterns will also be located on the level of prosody and more generally based on the performance of the actors/characters. Finally, repetition will also be considered with regard to the apparatus that is employed for the construction of the audiovisual text, viz. the camera, lightning, *mise-en-scène*, etc.

Aspects of fixity and size of unit are distinguished on the lexical level, but not on others, whereas the notion of distance will indirectly influence the primary distinction between repetition within and across interactional turns. All these different types of repetition used in the first part of the empirical analysis can be summarised as *formal repetition*, i.e. they repeat an element at the text surface, be it a particular unit or structure. This means that the fuzzy notion of *semantic repetition* in the sense of Merlini Barbaresi (1996) is excluded from the typology of simple repeats that is presented in Chapter 7 as well as from Chapters 8 and 9, which will address the correlations between formal repeats and the functions of formal repetition. However, given the semantic focus of incongruity-based approaches to humour, it seems crucial to broaden the scope again and separately address such relations of meaning in a second step. This will be discussed in Chapter 10 based on a text linguistic understanding of cohesion, and illustrated in a case study in Chapter 11. Together, these chapters will present a full picture of instances of repetition in sitcom humour.

The introductory remarks on repetition made in this chapter are sufficient as background for a typology of sitcom repeats that is informed by empirical data. Existing classifications of repetition have purposely not been included at this point, since they typically consist of a combination of aspects that go beyond Aitchison's (1994) *straightforward variables*, and often focus on functions of repetition in texts and in conversation. While Chapter 7 only illustrates the patterns of formal repetition that occur in AMSIL, without systematically

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addressing their role in sitcoms and in sitcom humour in particular, one of the results of that first analysis will precisely be the presentation of occurring patterns whose functions can subsequently be discussed and theorised in more detail.

6 Data and Method: The AMSIL corpus

6.1 Introduction

It is the goal of this study to analyse repetition as a constituting factor to humour in general and telecinematic humour in particular, and at the same time to establish a comprehensive description of the humour that occurs in US American sitcoms with a laugh track. The preceding chapters have established the communicative setting of telecinematic discourse (TCD), of which these sitcoms form a part; they have shown the relevant patterns of how humour is constructed both generally and using the particular affordances of sitcoms; and they have provided a first overview of the types of repetition that have been distinguished in the literature and that, I hypothesise, are instrumental in the construction of sitcom humour. Based on the premises that have thus been laid out, the empirical analyses in this study are carried out on a sample of US American sitcoms in English. It is the purpose of this chapter to describe this sample, the selection processes that produced it and the qualitative content analysis that is the backbone of the typology of simple repeats in sitcom humour as it is presented in Chapter 7, as well as of the subsequent more complex findings that build on this initial categorisation.

The extensive study of the extant literature on TCD and humour that was done in preparation of this study has revealed what I believe to be a problematic bias in data selection towards the exceptional. At least in the case of the few studies that address humour and comedy in film and television, there is very little systematicity to be found in terms of the empirical data that form the foundation of each of those studies. This is not a reproach of the respective scholars, who do not claim that the data they analyse are in any way representative of the text genre they are investigating. As an interested reader of their research, one cannot be but intrigued by the extraordinary patterns they find in their

data. At the same time, however, the extraordinary, carefully selected by the researcher as a prototype that can so aptly illustrate her or his point, begs the question to what extent the discovered occurrences are to be seen as idiosyncratic or as examples of more pervasive patterns. Accordingly, the data on which my empirical research was carried out were selected based on the ideal of ordinariness, and Section 6.2 will illustrate the respective selection processes and the data the corpus is made up of. I will then move on to describe in detail the characteristics of the data that is represented in the corpus (6.3), the data preparation (6.4) and subsequently the methodological steps that were taken in the process of arriving at the results and interpretations that form the centre of the empirical part of this study as it is presented in Chapters 7 to 11 (6.5).

6.2 Data selection: American television sitcoms in AMSIL

6.2.1 Introduction: Sitcoms and repetition

Given that the main aim of the research presented here is to study the role repetition plays in the construction of humour, the television sitcom genre presents itself as a valuable data source for a number of reasons. Despite the fact that it is only rarely the object of humour studies, it is first of all a central humour genre within the domain of scripted or canned humour. US American sitcoms, especially, reach millions of people in the USA everyday. They are also broadcast in many other countries and reach other English-speaking communities, and they are translated into other languages and thus made available to even greater numbers of recipients. The popularity of sitcoms suggests that whatever humorous events are constructed by their collective senders must appeal to a broad audience and cannot be dismissed as belonging to a quirky niche of humour. There is to my knowledge no data available that would demonstrate the average number of jokes a member of any given cultural community is likely to encounter on any typical day. It

seems plausible to assume, however, that this number would pale in comparison to the hundreds of humorous events that occur within a single sitcom episode. In other words, and as the empirical analyses will demonstrate, sitcoms display a high density of humorous incongruities that makes them an ideal subject for a study on humour generally and telecinematic humour specifically.

US American sitcoms are not only popular, they are also repetitive, and therefore are especially likely to employ repetition as a tool in the construction of humour when compared to other, less repetitive genres (e.g. comedy films). This repetitiveness of the sitcom is manifest on different levels and motivated by a range of different factors. Savorelli (2010), for instance, addresses the aspect of space and states that in situation comedies, “the scenes are confined to enclosed, repetitive places” (23). Staiger (2000) on the other hand, points to the sense of familiarity television viewers establish with repetitive television programmes: “The promise of repetition of the pleasure from last week is why the set is turned on to the particular channel at a specific time” (169) – or, to be more in tune with current viewing habits, why they start streaming the next episode. Repetition in this view is desirable commercially because it manages to bind a viewership to a particular television series, or even to the company that produces the series. Focusing on the role of repetition for successful writing and production in her guidebook for television writers, Aronson (2000) adds that a crucial element is “[a] formula that is capable of repetition each week – so that the writing team can ‘bake the same cake’ each week” (3), which is to say that repetition potentially improves production efficiency. Such remarks are made in passing by many scholars and authors that address the television sitcom, and there seems to be a consensus that comedic repetition is one of the typical features of the television sitcom. At the same time, however, the relationship between recurrent elements on different levels and humour in sitcoms has yet to be explored comprehensively. In sum, sitcoms provide data that promise to be rich in examples of repetition-based humour, and

they are therefore good data to illustrate the range of ways in which repeats form part of the construction of humorous incongruities, and more generally a good starting point for a typology of repetition-based humour.

Of the bulk of American sitcoms that have been produced up to date, this study limits itself to recent productions and asks how humour is constructed in sitcoms between 2010–2016, i.e. in the first part of the 2010s up until the time when the data was collected. This synchronic approach will allow a more thorough examination of repetition in contemporary sitcom humour. On the one hand, it can be assumed that many of the observations made for this subset of sitcom production could also hold true for sitcoms that were produced similarly in earlier decades. On the other hand, it seems likely that sitcom language and language-related practices as well as some of the conventions of sitcom production have changed over the years. Replicating the research steps described here on a different dataset, produced at a different point in time, could clarify if the repetitive patterns found to be constitutive of sitcom humour in this study have been used similarly by collective senders of past productions.

6.2.2 Data selection: US American sitcoms in AMSIL

Up to this point, I have used the term *sitcom* without defining it, assuming that most readers will have a few typical representatives of television sitcoms in mind, and orienting my understanding of communicative setting and repetition on telecinematic discourse more generally, rather than on television sitcoms specifically. In order to describe the data selection, however, it is necessary at this point to present the working definition that served as the basis for these selection processes.

It needs to be noted first of all that it is difficult to accurately define the genre of the sitcom based on a set of necessary and sufficient

conditions. Like other film and television genres, the sitcom can be thought of as prototype category for which it is much simpler to find an exemplar, i.e. a series that is a prototypical representative of the genre, than to establish a set of criteria that could identify and delimit it. Scholars of film genre have addressed this difficulty in the definition of genre, the fuzzy borders between genres, and that the criteria for the categorisation of individual works varies greatly from genre to genre as well as over time (e.g. Schweinitz, 1994; Altman, 1999: 16–20; Giltrow, 2017). Accordingly, there is no generally accepted definition of the genre of the sitcom that would serve as a satisfactory heuristic for the identification of the data that qualifies for analysis in a study on repetition in sitcom humour, even though most readers will agree that *Seinfeld* (1989–1998), *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–) and *Cheers* (NBC, 1982–1993) would be prototypical sitcoms that would therefore be valid candidates. Basing the selection criteria on prototypes is not practical, however, and instead I will offer my own working definition of what I have considered a US American sitcom, which is informed by first-order categorisation done by television networks themselves and crowdsourced articles on Wikipedia.

I thus define US American sitcoms as comedic fictional live-action narrative series that are produced for television by an American television network (even though they may be viewed through a variety of different channels both in the US and worldwide) and are composed of a number of episodes roughly half a television hour in length (i.e. of a length that together with commercial breaks amounts to 30 min). As a result of this definition, animated shows, stand-up shows, sketch shows, talk shows and parodies of talk shows were ineligible for the corpus, as were web-only series substantially shorter in episode length (e.g. the web-series *Verdene and Gleneda*, Margaret and Margaret Productions, 2013–2014). In terms of production countries, the focus on US American sitcoms meant that sitcoms produced or co-produced elsewhere were excluded (e.g. *The Increasingly Poor Decisions of Todd Margaret*, More 4, 2009–2016). Regarding target audience, only those

sitcoms were included that are designed for a general audience, which means that programmes specifically aimed at children were not considered. This involves mainly productions by Nickelodeon and Disney Channel (e.g. *100 Things to Do before High School*, Nickelodeon, 2014–2017).³² With regard to genres, musicals and hybrid series like action-comedies or dramedies, e.g. *How to Make it in America* (HBO, 2010–2011), were excluded. Sitcoms for which only a pilot episode was ever produced were also omitted.

The final restriction for the selection of data for the empirical analyses of this study concerns the presence of studio audience laughter. While the sitcom genre can be subdivided into subgenres according to a range of different criteria, from aspects of telecinematic production (e.g. single-camera or multi-camera) to the relationships between the main characters (the family sitcom, the friends sitcom, the workplace sitcom, etc.), perhaps the most striking division is that between those series that include a laugh track, i.e. recorded studio laughter, as part of their broadcast, and those that do not. As the name of the corpus already indicates, all sitcoms included in AMSIL (AMERICAN SITCOMS WITH A LAUGH TRACK) contain audience laughter, which on the one hand facilitates comparability between individual sitcoms, and on the other hand is motivated by methodological considerations that will be explained in Section 6.4.

Since no list of those sitcoms that fit all the criteria is readily available, three lists of American sitcoms and television shows collected on Wikipedia were cross-checked and consolidated into a list of 74 US American sitcoms with a laugh track that were in production between January, 2010 and April, 2016.³³ In terms of the amount of

³² Sitcoms produced by *Nick at Nite* were included, however, since this channel that shares its space with *Nickelodeon* is aimed at adults and adolescents.

³³ The lists that served as the source material were the Wikipedia category “American television sitcoms” (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Category:American_television_sitcoms), the Wikipedia list of “American

data that was eligible for the corpus, it can be added that there is great variation in the number of episodes that was broadcast for each sitcom, from 4 to 254 episodes. As the goal was to arrive at a representative sample of current US American television sitcoms that feature a laugh track, I decided to randomly select at least 10% of sitcoms on the list – which resulted in eight different sitcoms being included in AMSIL – and to include the first two episodes of each of the random sitcoms in the corpus. Based on the assumption that the format of each individual sitcom will remain relatively stable over the course of its runtime, two episodes were selected to represent the humour construction patterns of any particular sitcom.³⁴ Selecting the first two episodes of each sitcom has the advantage of limiting how much context is necessary to introduce the examples that are presented in subsequent chapters and improve the comprehensibility for those readers that are not avid followers of the sitcoms presented here. While this leaves open the possibility that the first, pilot, episode of a series may differ from subsequent episodes because it needs to present the premises, characters, settings, etc. on which the entire sitcom is built, it nonetheless seems likely that in an attempt to build a followership, sitcom pilot episodes will also establish patterns for the construction of humorous incongruities that are continued over the rest of the season(s).

Finally, the limitation to two episodes per sitcom means that the study ignores any long-term developments that may occur in the

television shows currently in production” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_American_television_shows_currently_in_production#2016) and the Wikipedia category “2010s American comedy television series” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:2010s_American_comedy_television_series).

³⁴ Mills (2009: 28), for instance, discusses the recurring nature of sitcom’s settings and narratives that is included by some scholars in a definition of the sitcom genre even though it is shared by other serial forms of television. Bednarek (2011: 187) discusses this recurrence in terms of the stability of characters, which show little development over the course of a sitcom.

humour of each sitcom.³⁵ At the same time, however, this limitation improves comparability between the different sitcoms and allows investigating repetition across episode boundaries based on a sequence of two episodes.

6.3 The AMSIL corpus: Description of the data

As a result of the data selection processes described in the previous section, the AMSIL corpus is made up of 16 episodes from eight US American sitcoms, which amounts to 337 minutes of video (with individual episodes being fairly homogenous in length with a runtime between 20 and 21.5 minutes). All eight sitcoms represented in the corpus were produced in the USA at some point between 2010 and 2016 (Table 6.1), and they were broadcast in the same period of time on an American television network. That all episodes were broadcast with a laugh track means that extradiegetic laughter of an audience not visible on screen accompanies the audiovisual narrative (see Section 4.7). Aside from featuring audience laughter, the different series share a number of properties that I will outline in Section 6.3.9. Before that, however, I will offer a brief overview of the setting and characters that populate the sitcoms that are part of AMSIL (Section 6.3.1–6.3.8), as well as a summary of key information about the data in Table 6.1.

³⁵ A longitudinal investigation of particular humorous patterns and their occurrence over the months and years of the sitcom's run would be an interesting addition to this study. A similar approach has been used by Demjen (2017) for repeated humorous episodes on an online forum.

Sitcom	Episodes	Broadcast year(s)	TV Network
Anger Management	S01E01, S01E02	2012–2014	FX
Better with you	S01E01, S01E02	2010–2011	ABC
The McCarthys	S01E01, S01E02	2014–2015	CBS
Retired at 35	S01E01, S01E02	2011–2012	TV Land
Romantically Challenged	S01E01, S01E02	2010	ABC
See Dad Run	S01E01, S01E02	2012–2015	Nick at Nite
Sullivan & Son	S01E01, S01E02	2012–2014	TBS
Undateable	S01E01, S01E02	2014–2016	NBC

Table 6.1: Sitcom episodes in AMSIL

6.3.1 Anger Management

Anger Management ran for 100 episodes from 2012 to 2014 on FX. It follows the life of an anger management therapist and former baseball player, Charlie, and includes his ex-wife and daughter, his neighbour, his female friend, fellow-therapist and sexual partner Kate as well as a number of clients as regular characters. Most of the sitcom is set in a number of rooms in Charlie's house, where both his private life and his therapy sessions take place. In addition, some scenes are set at a prison, at the house of Charlie's ex-wife, and in Kate's practice. The main themes are Charlie's past and present dating behaviour as well as the problems he and his patients encounter in life.

6.3.2 Better with you

Better with you ran for 22 episodes from 2010 to 2011 on ABC. Its main characters are three couples, two sisters with their partners and the sisters' parents, and its main settings are the living rooms of each of the three couples. One of the main themes are the three couples' romantic relationships, which range from a few months in the case of one sister to several decades of marriage in case of the parents.

6.3.3 The McCarthys

The McCarthys is a Boston-based sitcom about a basketball family, in which the gay son takes on the position of assistant coach to his father's school basketball team. 15 episodes were broadcast from 2014 to 2015 on CBS. The main characters are Ronny, his sister, two brothers and his parents. The series is mainly set at the family home.

6.3.4 Retired at 35

Retired at 35 aired for 20 episodes from 2011 to 2012 on TV Land. A 35-year old son visits his parents in his native Florida and decides to quit his job in New York and stay there. The main characters are the homecoming son, his sister and his parents as well as his school friend who never left Florida. The events mainly play at the parents' home as well as in a local bar.

6.3.5 Romantically Challenged

Romantically Challenged is a sitcom that was cancelled after the broadcast of four episodes in 2010 on ABC.³⁶ The main character, Rebecca is a recently divorced single mother who is trying to build a

³⁶ The case of *Romantically Challenged* makes it particularly clear that commercial success was not a criterion for the inclusion in the corpus. This is so, first of all, because success measured in number of broadcast episodes ranges gradually from cancellation after one aired episode to runs of hundreds of episodes. There is thus no clear border between successful and unsuccessful sitcoms, and I have chosen to make the availability of two successive episodes the only selection criterion that relates to commercial success. More importantly, all sitcoms in the AMSIL corpus can be assumed to have been produced by the studios based on similar commercial premises, i.e. based on the belief that they would find a large enough audience to justify their production costs. There is thus no reason to assume a difference in principle in the production or in the construction of humorous incongruities between commercially more and less successful series, and they seem equally apt as data to examine the role of repetition in humour.

new life and find new love with the help of her sister and two of their close friends. The series plays in Pittsburgh, and its main settings are the flats of Rebecca and her friends as well as a local restaurant.

6.3.6 See Dad Run

See Dad Run ran for 48 episodes between 2012 and 2015 on Nick at Nite. It tells the story of a television star who played the dad of his TV family and now retires from television to be a better father for his real-life children. The main characters include himself, his wife and son and daughter, a close friend from television, and his former assistant. The majority of scenes take place at the family home, but other venues include the television studio and locations at the children's school.

6.3.7 Sullivan & Son

Sullivan & Son is a TBS sitcom that was broadcast from 2012 to 2014. Its 33 episodes focus on Steve, an attorney who returns from New York to Pittsburgh and decides to take over his father's bar. The other main characters are his Korean-Irish family and the customers of the bar.

6.3.8 Undateable

Undateable ran for 36 episodes between 2014 and 2016 on NBC. Its main character Danny is a perennial bachelor in his mid-thirties, who in the first episode finds a new flatmate in Justin, a bar owner in love with his co-worker Nicki. The main theme of the sitcom is dating, with Justin and his friends being presented as unsuccessful at romance, while Danny is afraid of commitment.

6.3.9 Common features of the sitcoms and sitcom episodes in AMSIL

The sixteen episodes from the eight sitcoms described in the previous section share a number of features, which include the formal properties that describe the episodes as audiovisual artefacts themselves, as well as the settings, characters and themes on which each sitcom's narrative centres. All sitcoms in AMSIL have a limited number of main characters, which ranges from five to ten, and a limited number of settings in which scenes take place. These settings are either mainly the home(s) of the characters (*Anger Management*, *Better with you*, *The McCarthys*, *Retired at 35*, *See Dad Run*) or a café or bar (*Romantically Challenged*, *Sullivan & Son*, *Undateable*) whose owner may be one of the protagonists (as is the case in *Sullivan & Son* and *Undateable*). Not surprisingly, the group of main characters are thus typically either friends or family, even though exceptions occur (therapist–patient in *AM*; Bar owner–customers in *Sullivan & Son*). *The McCarthys*, *Retired at 35* and *See Dad Run* are set in family homes and accordingly have the family as the main locus of their scenes, but familial relationships also feature centrally in all the other sitcoms in the corpus: Without exception, at least two of the main characters in each sitcom are directly related to each other (i.e. siblings and/or parents and their children are among the group of protagonists).

There are a range of other commonalities that could be discussed at this point, but since they are of limited relevance to a discussion of the use of repetition in sitcom humour construction, I will only briefly outline some of them here. It is noteworthy thematically first of all that all eight sitcoms are triggered by a life-changing event in the biography of the main or one of the main characters. One central motif in this context is that of the outsider that returns home, which is present in four of the eight sitcoms. This happens either literally, as is the case in *Retired at 35*, *See Dad Run* and *Sullivan & Son*, or figuratively in *The McCarthys*, where the main character announces in the first episode that

he will leave Boston, but then not only decides to stay, but also to have a closer relationship to his basketball-loving family by becoming the assistant coach to his father. The other four sitcoms are propelled into action by a combination of external and internal changes: In *Undateable*, the arrival of a new flatmate brings about the search for more meaningful interpersonal relationships in the protagonist's life; in *Romantically Challenged*, a recent divorcee decides it is time to look for a new romantic relationship, in *Better with you*, the surprise announcement of the engagement of one sister not only puts focus on her romantic relationship, but also of that of her older sister; and in *Anger Management*, an anger management therapist admits to himself that he needs anger management therapy himself.

While the details of each of these stories may not be important themselves, they suggest that sitcoms may not be understood as a string of loosely connected multimodal jokes, but as coherent narratives whose structure is at least partially generic and which provides motivation for the diegetic events that occur in the first and the following episodes. This is important because it already suggests that the humorous incongruities that occur in each sitcom episode may also be cohesive and coherent, and that repetition may play a crucial role in establishing and reinforcing that cohesion (see Chapters 10 and 11).

6.4 Data preparation

All sixteen episodes in the AMSIL corpus were transcribed using ELAN³⁷. Developed by the Max Planck Institute in Nijmegen, ELAN is described by its creators as “a professional tool for the creation of complex annotations on video and audio resources” (ELAN description, 2017). This freeware tool was chosen for transcription among other things because it allows linking conversational turns to the particular event in the video and audio channels. This facilitates the

³⁷ For this study, different versions of ELAN up until 4.9.4 were used.

inclusion of aspects of multimodality into the transcripts. It is important to reiterate at this point that the transcripts of the data that will be presented throughout this study are always understood to be representations of the multimodal events in the sitcom, i.e. they encode in written text as aptly as possible what can only be grasped in full when viewing and listening to the source of the transcription. ELAN thus allowed a constant back-and-forth between transcripts and audiovisual data during the analysis. Transcribing in ELAN involved importing the video of each file as well as the audio in .wav format, which had previously been extracted using Audacity (2.1.2). This second step allowed ELAN to also display the waveform, which was used to assist the transcription of the spoken dialogue. Subsequently, the dialogue was transcribed manually on a turn-by-turn basis and by creating separate tiers for each speaker. Studio laughter on the laugh track was annotated on a separate tier.

Each turn in the sequence of turns that was the result of the transcription in ELAN was further labelled a humorous or a non-humorous turns based on studio laughter on the laugh track: If laughter followed immediately after the turn, it was labelled humorous, if there was no laughter, it was labelled non-humorous. While identifying studio laughter was unproblematic in most sitcom episodes, there are a few instances where instead of the generally uniform laughter, individual laughs can be heard. These individual laughs were ignored in the transcripts. A prototypical waveform of homogenous group laughter by the studio audience can be seen from the crosshair onwards in Figure 6.1.

These homogenous laughs were used (1) as turn boundaries, i.e. even if the previously speaking character continued speaking after the studio laughter, that continuation was labelled as a new turn by the same speaker. Such an understanding of studio laughter is warranted by the fact that characters generally interrupt their utterances when audience

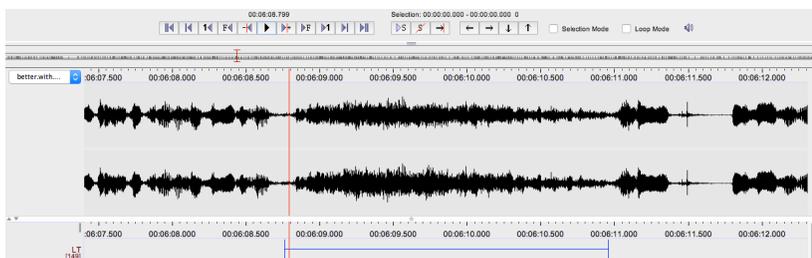


Figure 6.1: Waveform of studio laughter in *Better with you* S01E01

laughter sets in. Studio laughter was also used (2) to signal humour. As discussed earlier, studio laughter can either be understood as a second audience (the studio audience) ratifying sitcom humour, or as the collective sender marking what parts of the sitcom they want to be understood as humorous. In either case, laughter on the laugh track signals to the television audience that what it immediately follows is intended to make them laugh. Accordingly, I have used the laugh track as a methodological tool to more objectively define what parts of the sitcom text I treat as containing humour. Example 6.1 below illustrates this: Since David's turn at 11:45 is followed immediately by laughter, it was regarded as a humorous turn (HT). The previous turn by Joe, however, was not followed by laughter and is therefore treated as a non-humorous turn. (For further discussion of the example see Section 6.5.1.)

Example 6.1: Repetition and laugh track in *See Dad Run*, S01E01

David has just told his twelve-year-old son Joe he should wash the Roman tunica he is wearing.

(SA: Studio audience)

[11:43] Joe: I'm +little. I don't know how to wash stuff.+
+hand gesture palms upwards-----+

[11:45] David: I'm big, £ I don't know either, £ % check the
HT93 £shrug and palms upwards£ %points to
book!%=
kitchen%

[11:47] SA: =hahahahaha

As a first-level structure, each episode was thus segmented horizontally into a succession of humorous and non-humorous turns, which led to a total of 2351 HTs in the corpus. Typically, there is one speaking character per turn, but there are also some instances where several characters speak simultaneously, and a few cases of silent turns, where a character is telecinematically marked as the speaker through framing and editing, but performs a gesture or simply stays silent – such cases were also labelled turns. Since this study has a clear focus on humour, only those turns that were annotated as humorous based on the methodology I have just explained were further analysed and annotated in full. Non-humorous turns on the other hand were only of interest as origins for repeats that occurred in humorous turns. This can again be illustrated using Example 6.1 above: While Joe’s turn starting at 11:43 is of no interest to the analysis per se, David’s humorous turn (HT93, starting at 11:45) repeats a gesture from that earlier turn, while also establishing a semantic contrast between “little” and “big”. In other words, HT93 employs repetition for the construction of a humorous incongruity by repeating an element from a non-humorous turn.

6.5 Data analysis: Methodological steps

Having presented the selection criteria and the composition of the sample of television sitcoms that are analysed in this study, I will now describe the analytical steps that were taken in order to arrive at the results that are presented in Chapter 7 and the subsequent chapters. I will first reiterate the research questions (RQ 1–5), before discussing the methodological steps employed in answering each RQ in the subsequent section:

- (1) What types of simple repeats occur in the AMSIL corpus (a) within individual humorous turns and (b) across humorous turns?
- (2) Given the occurrence of many-to-one relationships between individual humorous turns, i.e. the co-occurrence of several

repeats within a single humorous turn, how do humorous turns in sitcoms construct incongruities with the help of complex repetition?

- (3) What are the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour when it comes to (a) the construction of incongruities based on frames and incongruous elements, and (b) the links between individual instances of humour?
- (4) How does inter-turn semantic repetition contribute to humour cohesion in AMSIL?
- (5) What is the role of repetition in the larger narrative structures of sitcoms, such as scenes, sequences and entire episodes?

The empirical chapters of this study are ordered according to the size of text chunk in which repetition is examined in each section – from the microlevel of simple repeats in individual humorous turns to the macrolevel of the structuring of sitcoms episodes based on repetitive patterns. As the following subsections will discuss in more detail, RQ1 will be addressed in Chapter 7, whereas Chapter 8 demonstrates how humorous turns are constructed using complex repetition patterns, thus addressing RQ2. The functions of formal repetition and RQ3 are the topic of Chapter 9, before Chapters 10 and 11 turn to semantic repetition and provide answers to RQ4 and RQ5. Chapter 10 uses illustrative examples to discuss smaller narrative segments, Chapter 11 presents a case study of an entire episode in order to look at cohesion and narrative structure more macroscopically.

6.5.1 Identifying and categorising simple repeats

RQ1 asks in what shape or form repetition occurs in sitcoms:

- (1) What types of simple repeats occur in the AMSIL corpus (a) within individual humorous turns and (b) across humorous turns?

Answering this research question will result in a typology of the different types of simple repeats that occur in sitcom humour. In order to describe the methodology that leads there, a few preliminary definitions are necessary. First of all, I use the term **simple repeat** to refer to any individual instance of one type of repetition of form, for instance when a lexical word or a particular gesture is repeated.

Example 6.2: Simple repeat in *Better with you*, S01E01

At the restaurant, Ben has just shaken hands with Casey who he is meeting for the first time. Casey calls him 'tough guy'.

[02:58] Ben: oh-hoh tough- **tough**? I'm not **tough**. uhuhuhm I mean, I
HT19 work out a little.

In Example 6.2, for instance, the lexical item *tough* is repeated and I will refer to the second and third tokens of *tough* as simple repeats.³⁸ This distinction between simple repeats and more complex repetition patterns is introduced here, because Chapter 9 will address the role of repetition in the composition of humorous turns, which is often comprised of interacting simple repeats. For instance, a humorous turn may be repetitive in terms of lexis and at the same time repeat gestures from an earlier turn and repeat the syntactic structure of yet another previous turn. In that case, a variety of simple repeats constitute a complex repetition pattern.

To illustrate this, Example 6.3 presents a complex repetition pattern from *Sullivan & Son*. Apart from the highlighted simple lexical repeat of *you're right*, the stress on the subject of each clause is an instance of a simple prosodic repeat, and the repeated pattern *[NP] KNOW you're right* is a simple repeat of the type 'structural parallelism' (see Section 8.3.1.1 for a more detailed discussion of this

³⁸ Here and in subsequent examples, relevant repeats are highlighted in bold print when possible.

example). The co-occurrence of the three types of simple repeat means that I will regard HT92 as an example of complex repetition.

Example 6.3: Intra-turn exact multi-word repeat, structural parallelism, and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E02

Steve has been arguing with his mother. In this scene his father, Jack, tells him to go and apologise to her.

[13:41] Jack: I know **you're right**, your sister knows **you're**
HT92 **right**=everyone here knows **you're right**. now go
to your mother and tell her you're wrong.

Based on the theoretical considerations presented in Chapter 5 and on non-systematic preliminary viewing of the data, I proceeded to analyse and classify simple repeats in each turn according to the type of unit or structure that is repeated as well as according to the locus of the recurrences.³⁹ The latter aspect was realised in a top-level distinction between intra-turn and inter-turn repetition. This decision was informed by similar distinctions between intra- and inter-sentential repetition (e.g. Hoffmann, 2012), and adapted to the unit of analysis of the turn. While the process of delimiting turns and labelling them as humorous or non-humorous has already been covered, the choice of the turn as the relevant unit in this stage of the analysis needs to be explained at this point. Using studio laughter as a marker of humour works well when it comes to establishing that what preceded that laughter was intended to be humorous by the collective sender. However, it leaves open where the identified humorous instance begins. On the basis of the analyst's humour competence, it would in most cases be possible to intuitively identify what constitutes the particular humorous instance that made the studio audience laugh. However, studio audience laughter was precisely introduced as a criterion in order

³⁹ The segmentation of the data into humorous and non-humorous turns is presented in Section 6.4

to reduce the subjectivity involved in the identification of humour. Rather than deciding on a case by case basis what is and is not part of the incongruity that triggered the reaction on the laugh track, the more objective measure of the conversational turn was chosen to delimit humorous instances, and the starting point of the humorous turn is thus simply the moment the respective character takes the floor.

The advantage of using character turns as the unit of analysis is thus the unambiguous identification of the locus in which the humorous incongruity is constructed (the humorous turn), without the necessity for any researcher intuition. At the same time, this means that any element that appears before the humorous turn is only regarded as context to the humorous incongruity rather than as part of the incongruity proper. Returning to Example 6.1 (included again below), for instance, the methodology employed here treats Joe's turn as external to humour and only HT93 as the locus in which the humorous incongruity is realised. Joe's humour-external gesture has importance for HT93, however, because it serves as one of the sources for David's repeat.

Example 6.1: Repetition and laugh track in *See Dad Run*, S01E01

David has just told his twelve-year-old son Joe he should wash the Roman tunic he is wearing.

(SA: Studio audience)

- [11:43] Joe: **I'm +little.** I don't know how to wash stuff.+
+hand gesture **palms upwards**-----+
- [11:45] David: **I'm big.** £ I don't know either, £ % check the
HT93 £shrug and **palms upwards** £ %points to
book!%=
kitchen%
- [11:47] SA: =hahahahaha

The consequence of limiting the unit to one character turn is that in a first step the analyses in this study treat sitcom humour as a sequence of separate units that can be analysed individually with

respect to the construction of humorous incongruities. However, as the discussion of inter-turn repeats in Chapters 7 and 8 will highlight, repetition can precisely establish links between these separate turns and thus establish a cohesive network of sitcom humour.

Having defined the humorous turn as the unit of analysis, I will now move on to the identification and categorisation of repetition. Repetition can be regarded as subjective (see Chapter 5), which is to say that what may be recognisable for one viewer as a recurrence of something that has occurred before, may appear as new to another viewer. At least for some types of repetition, it would of course be possible to again objectively distinguish repeats from non-repeats – for instance, any text analysis software will easily provide a list of recurring lexical items in a text. However, such automatic recognition of repetition would ignore the audience-centred perspective that this study strives for. The question what role repetition ultimately plays in the construction of sitcom humour aims at the identification of repetition as part of the incongruous stimuli that trigger the cognitive processes of humour comprehension in the television audience. Repetition is only relevant for the triggering of these processes insofar as it is recognisable as repetition for the audience. Therefore, the identification and categorisation of repetition in this study was done manually and under the instruction that only what is notably repeated will be labelled a repeat.

The validation of this method through inter-coder agreement will be addressed briefly in the following section, but I will first focus on the individual steps and the results of the coding scheme. In accordance with the considerations of Chapter 5, Tables 6.2 and 6.3 present the types of repetition that were distinguished in the data.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Tables 6.2 and 6.3 only provide brief examples devoid of context. For proper exemplifications of the same categories see Chapter 7.

Intra-Turn Repetition Type	Example
lexical repetition	
<i>exact single word</i>	Ferrari → Ferrari
<i>exact multi-word</i>	around nine → around nine
<i>single word, partial</i>	wives → wifing
<i>multi-word, partial</i>	I'll just call you back in one minute → I'll call you back in, in just a minute
structural parallelism	she's older than she looks. → and acts. → and is.
phonetic repetition	<i>pewng</i> → <i>pewng</i> (making a bullet sound)
prosodic repetition	a big <u>lo:ft</u> → an old <u>chu:rch</u> (stress and lengthening)
kinesic repetition	
<i>character gestures</i>	moves hand up and down → moves hand up and down
<i>facial expressions</i>	raises eyes → raises eyes
telecinematic repetition	
<i>visual</i>	mixer overflows → mixer overflows
<i>audio</i>	sound of door lock opening → sound of door lock opening

Table 6.2: Repetition categories intra-turn, sorted from more linguistic to paralinguistic and non-linguistic features

Inter-Turn Repetition Type	Example
lexical repetition	
<i>exact single word</i>	mad → mad
<i>exact multi-word</i>	it's a valid life choice → it's a valid life choice
<i>single word, partial</i>	cool → cooler
<i>multi-word, partial</i>	it's a valid life choice → is my life choice not valid?
structural parallelism	stop pumpin' on the brakes so much → stop being legally unable to drive at night so much
prosodic repetition	<u>that's</u> the rink... → <u>le:ed</u> the league... (stress on first syllable)
kinesic repetition	
<i>character gestures</i>	hand gesture palms upwards → hand gesture palms upwards
<i>facial expressions</i>	raises eyebrows → raises eyebrows
telecinematic repetition	
<i>visual</i>	burned piece of bacon is held up → burned piece of bacon is held up
<i>audio</i>	ringing mobile phone → ringing mobile phone

Table 6.3: Repetition categories inter-turn, sorted from more linguistic to paralinguistic and non-linguistic features

Since the typology of repetition in Sitcom humour is in itself a result of the analysis, the exemplification and discussion of each type of repeat will be presented in Chapter 7. Further information about the coding at the basis of these categories can be found in the codebook in Appendix B, which includes definitions as well as instructions for the categorisation of repeats.

Besides the top-level distinction of more adjacent repeats within turns (intra-turn) and more distant repeats across turns (inter-turn), I have distinguished repetition on six different levels, which are lexis, phonology, morphosyntactic structure, prosody, aspects of character multimodality, and aspects regarding the production of telecinematic discourse. Lexical repetition was further disambiguated based on the size of unit that was repeated, i.e. based on whether a single word or syntactic group was repeated, and dependent on whether those lexical items recurred partially or exactly. Subdivisions were also made with regard to kinesic and telecinematic repetition. Phonetic repetition was added to the coding scheme for those cases where individual sounds are repeated e.g. for reduplication, alliteration or rhyming. What all distinguished types of repetition share is the fact that they are variants of formal repetition, which is to say that they repeat a unit or structure manifest at the text surface. It is important to note, however, that semantic aspects of repetition even in the absence of any recurrence of form are also of interest when examining the role of repetition in sitcom humour. Accordingly, Chapters 11 and 12 will look at the role repetition of meaning plays in the cohesion of sitcom episodes.

With the categorisation in place, each of the total of 2351 humorous turns were coded for presence or absence of any of the 21 distinguished types of repeat. This involved careful repeated viewing of the entire episode up to the respective turn and comparing the transcript as well as the audio and video channels of the turn with those earlier turns to which it seemed to bear any form of resemblance. The coding was done exhaustively and allowing for multiple coding of the

same humorous turn, i.e. the individual codes were not mutually exclusive. One exception to this is the coding of lexical items into the four subcategories. While the same turn can contain all four types of lexical repeats, or indeed all eight types if intra-turn and inter-turn repeats are all counted, individual words that were part of multi-word unit repeats were not also coded as single-word repeats. For instance, HT15 in *Better with you*, S01E01 repeats “sad eyes” from an earlier turn. Accordingly, this was categorised as exact repetition of multiple words, but not also as repetition of a single word. The result of these steps is a typology of the types of repetition that appear in sitcom humour as well as the frequencies of each type of repeat in the corpus, which allow conclusions about the typicality of repetition on any given level in current US sitcoms with a laugh track. These findings will be illustrated and discussed in Chapter 7.

6.5.2 Coder agreement

In order to make sure that the identification and categorisation presented in 6.4.1 was based on valid and reliable criteria, agreement was established with a second coder. That coder was trained in several cycles based on a continuously adapted codebook. After several trial runs and the finalisation of the codebook and training, the two coders analysed 236 humorous turns from data of the same type as the data in AMSIL.⁴¹ Even in the earliest cycle, inter-coder agreement was excellent when measuring percentage agreement. However, as Krippendorff (2004: 413) points out, percentage or raw agreement has a number of undesirable qualities, most important of which is the fact that it does not take into account chance. Accordingly, the guidelines of Krippendorff (2011) were followed in order to calculate Krippendorff’s alpha, and the final inter-coder reliability calculations

⁴¹ The sample used for inter-coder reliability consisted of *2 Broke Girls*, S02E05 and part of *The Big Bang Theory*, S01E01. The analysed 236 HTs amount to 10% of the 2351 HTs in AMSIL.

were done with the use of ReCal2, the online reliability calculator developed by Deen Freelon (see e.g. Freelon, 2013). Krippendorff's alpha takes into account the probability of agreement and disagreement based on chance, and it simply calculates a reliability figure between 0 and 1 by dividing disagreement between two coders by expected disagreement and subtracting the result of that division from 1. This means that the lower disagreement is relative to what was expected, the closer the resulting reliability will be to 1 (Krippendorff, 2011). Despite its disadvantages, I will also report simple percentage agreement because of the ease with which it can be interpreted. The results of the calculated inter-coder reliability can be seen in Table 6.4.

Variable	Krippendorff's α	Percentage
intra-turn lexical exact single word	0.93	98.73
intra-turn lexical exact multi-word	1.00	100.00
intra-turn lexical single word, partial	1.00	100.00
intra-turn lexical multi-word, partial	1.00	100.00
intra-turn phonetic	0.92	98.31
intra-turn structural parallelism	0.82	98.31
intra-turn prosodic	0.95	99.15
intra-turn character gestures	0.89	95.34
intra-turn facial expressions	0.92	99.58
intra-turn visual telecinematic	1.00	100.00
intra-turn lexical exact single word	0.93	98.73
inter-turn lexical exact single word	0.94	97.46
inter-turn lexical exact multi-word	0.86	98.73
inter-turn lexical single word, partial	1.00	100.00
inter-turn lexical multi-word, partial	0.92	99.15
inter-turn structural parallelism	1.00	100.00
inter-turn prosodic	0.83	97.88
inter-turn character gestures	0.91	98.31
inter-turn facial expression	0.89	98.31
inter-turn visual telecinematic	0.96	99.15
inter-turn audio telecinematic	undefined	100.00

Table 6.4: Inter-coder reliability per variable

Table 6.4 shows that reliability for 20 out of 21 variable ranges between 0.82 and 1, which means that even for the binary data that is

analysed here, these 20 variables can be regarded as sufficiently reliable. For the final variable, which concerns repetition of audio aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, Krippendorff's alpha could not be calculated because both coders agreed that no such cases occurred in the sample. Given the fact that the same category was reliable across turns, it seems nonetheless acceptable to include this category in further analyses, where – due to its infrequency in the data – it will however play only a minor role.

6.5.3 Further analytical steps based on the typology of simple repeats in sitcom humour

The methodology presented in the previous sections described the identification and categorisation of repeats in the AMSIL corpus. In this section, I will address the implementation of RQ 2–5 and the methodological steps that led to the results presented in Chapters 8 to 11. Chapter 8 will shift focus to the construction of humorous turns in AMSIL and will answer RQ2:

- (2) Given the occurrence of many-to-one relationships between repeats and individual humorous turns in sitcoms, i.e. the co-occurrence of several repeats within a single humorous turn, to what extent is complex repetition constitutive for the construction of incongruities in humorous turns?

A first starting point for this exploration of complex repetition are the correlations between simple repeats established based on the coding. These co-occurring repeats of different types in a humorous turn reveal dependencies between individual variables, and it will be shown that many humorous incongruities are constructed as a patchwork of previously established structures and units.

The discussion of these complex repetition patterns in Chapter 8 will already reveal some of the functions that formal repetition has in

sitcom humour. These functions will be systematically addressed and discussed in Chapter 9 in order to answer RQ3:

- (3) What are the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour when it comes to (a) the construction of incongruities based on frames and incongruous elements, and (b) the links between individual instances of humour?

The functions of repetition in humour are determined bottom-up by qualitatively analysing the construction of the humorous turns in AMSIL. This will also allow a further discussion of the tension between expectedness of repetition and the notion of the surprising incongruity at the heart of this study's understanding of humour.

Having established the occurrences and functions of formal repetition in simple and more complex patterns in Chapters 7 to 9, I will move on to RQ4:

- (4) How does inter-turn semantic repetition contribute to humour cohesion in AMSIL?

The premise of this question – which will have already been supported by the examples of formal repetition in the previous chapters – is that due to the narrative structure in which it is embedded, sitcom humour is coherent, and that repetition may play an important role in establishing text and humour cohesion. Thus, Chapter 10 will illustrate with a qualitative analysis of corpus examples how semantic repetition in the sitcom episodes in AMSIL occurs as a structuring device that, together with formal inter-turn repeats, establishes cohesive ties between humorous turns in sitcom scenes. These ties, as will be shown, are established on different levels of sitcom meaning, which include contextual factors like character and setting, as well as the humour-constitutive aspects of activating the relevant frame and the incongruous element in any given humorous turn.

The focus on the macrostructural features of the sitcom episode as audiovisual text will be expanded in Chapter 11, which offers a case study on the distribution of all of the repetitive patterns discussed so far as it occurs in one exemplary sitcom episode in the corpus. This focus on the larger narrative structures of a sitcom episode will illustrate how a network of humorous turns as nodes is established through simple repeats, complex repetition and repetition of repetition and it will provide an answer to RQ5:

- (5) What is the role of repetition in the larger narrative structures of sitcoms, such as scenes, sequences and entire episodes?

Finally, Chapter 12 will bring together the full gamut of simple and complex, formal and semantic, microscopic and macroscopic repetition patterns that were observed and exemplified in earlier chapters. It will offer a comprehensive description of the particular way in which repetitive patterns occur in sitcom humour, it will revisit some of the functions these repeats have in the construction of humorous incongruities, and it will open the scope to variation within the AMSIL corpus and to repetition in humour outside of the corpus.

7 Typology of simple repeats in the AMSIL corpus

7.1 Introduction: Intra- and inter-turn repetition

As explained in the previous chapter, this study distinguishes between two broad cases of repetition when it comes to the relative location of the source of the repeat and the repeat itself. Since for the most part language in sitcoms is a mediated and fictional representation of face-to-face interaction, this distinction was made on interactional rather than textual grounds, which is why rather than speaking of intra- and interclausal or -sentential repetition, as is done for instance by Hoffmann (2012), I discern intra-turn from inter-turn repetition (see Section 6.5.1). It follows that there is on the one hand self-repetition by the speaking character within a given turn; and on the other hand self- or other-repetition from a prior turn in the same sitcom. As a reminder, I have demarcated turns here not only based on the interacting characters, whereby the start of another character's utterance signals the end of this character's turn, but also based on the studio audience's laughter, which was also thought to indicate a turn boundary, i.e. the studio audience was in this respect treated as a participant within the ongoing onscreen-interaction (see 6.4). This distinction between relatively distant repeats that occur across turns and relatively adjacent repeats that occur within the same turn will also be used to structure this chapter, which will start by discussing intra-turn repetition patterns.

Before even focusing on the different types of repetition in the corpus, a first finding of the analysis of AMSIL is that repetition is indeed pervasive in the humorous sitcom turns analysed here (see Table 7.1 below). Even though semantic repetition in a broad sense was left out of the exhaustive categorisation of each humorous turn (HT) and accordingly was also omitted from the quantitative overview I present here, 68.9% (1620) of the 2351 HTs that constitute the corpus featured repetition in some form, i.e. at least one instance of a lexical, structural,

prosodic, kinesic or telecinematic recurrence of a prior unit from within the same or a different turn. Roughly a third of all HTs (37.5%, 881 HTs) contain intra-turn repetition, and more than half of all HTs (51.9%, 1221 HTs) repeat from earlier humorous and non-humorous turns.

Humorous Turns (HTs)	HTs	Percent of all HTs
all HTs	2351	100.0%
contains repetition	1620	68.9%
does not contain repetition	731	31.1%
intra-turn repetition	881	37.5%
Inter-turn repetition	1221	51.9%

Table 7.1: Humorous turns in AMSIL containing repetition

On the one hand, the frequent occurrence especially of inter-turn repetition is to be expected based on the fact that sitcoms are cohesive narrative texts and that lexical repetition has been observed in the literature as one key component of textual cohesion (see Chapter 10). In this regard, a detailed analysis will have to reveal if the observed frequency is indeed linked to cohesion only, or if repetition also serves other purposes. Regarding television sitcoms as a particular type of humorous text, it is nonetheless noteworthy that the turns in which humorous incongruities are situated form so many ties with previous turns. Be it for reasons of cohesion or not, this suggests that sitcom humour is linked closely to the context in which it occurs and is therefore not simply a series of loosely connected performed jokes. In what ways exactly these links between HTs are formed, will be explored in the following sections. They will present a typology of what are understood to be typical repetition patterns in the humour of US sitcoms with audience laughter. The typicality of these different types of simple repeats will also be addressed based on simple frequencies of

each type in the corpus. Finally, selected examples will illustrate how the types of repeats are realised in the different sitcoms.

These findings will demonstrate how repetitive patterns are used by collective senders to construct humorous incongruities and in so doing will also provide insights into how sitcoms typically achieve humorous effects on a microlevel – i.e. without yet fully exploring the context in which each humorous instance occurs. This also means that the role of repetition in each example will be discussed, whereas the construction of the humorous incongruity cannot be fully explained in all examples. This is so due to the limited context, but also because repeats play different roles in HTs (see Chapters 8 and 9). It is also important to repeat here that all HTs were identified based on the external criterion of the laugh track, rather than on the analyst's observation that the respective turn is indeed humorous. Despite this proviso, the humorous incongruity at the heart of the HT will be made apparent in the discussion where it is possible.

The typology of humour-related repeats will also inform the subsequent chapter, which broadens the scope and changes the perspective to the humorous turn rather than the occurring repeat. As will be seen already in this chapter and explored more fully in the next one, many of these HTs do not simply repeat one aspect from one prior turn, but are linked to different turns through co-occurring recurrences, thus forming many-to-many links between humorous turns and humorous instances. Given the fact that the same turn or sequence of turns will often include different types of repetition, some of the examples will be presented more than once, each time with a different focus. In such cases, I will indicate in brackets in what section the example was first introduced.

7.2 Intra-turn repetition

As discussed in Chapter 5 and illustrated in the previous sections, cohesion between individual humorous events is an important function of repetition across turns. This will be further discussed when addressing inter-turn repetition in Section 7.3 and in Chapters 10 and 11, which focus on the role of repetition in the narrative structure of sitcom scenes and sitcom episodes. Before looking at repetition across larger distances, however, the focus will be on more local repeats that occur within a single turn. This form of repetition within turns is by definition limited to the turn in which it occurs, which also means that it does not in itself contribute to text cohesion on a macrolevel – this could be one reason why intra-turn repetition is less frequent overall than inter-turn repetition in HTs. However, that intra-turn repetition does nonetheless appear often in the corpus is a clear indicator that repetition in sitcom humour also serves other, non-cohesive, functions (see Chapter 9).

Table 7.2 illustrates what types of intra-turn repetition are found in AMSIL. On the linguistic level, they include lexical and phonetic repetition as well as structural parallelism; in terms of para- and non-linguistic features they span prosodic repetition as well as multimodal aspects, which are categorised into aspects that concern character multimodality (kinesic repetition), and those that concern the film-/television-making apparatus (telecinematic repetition). For *phonetic repetition*, it has to be added that it captures those cases of recurring sounds that can be said to be poetic in nature: by being part of salient cases of alliteration, by occurring in the context of false-starts, or when characters repeat sounds rather than words or structures. It may seem counterintuitive at first glance to join these aspects in the same category. However, given the creative control held by the collective sender and the fact that character dialogue is ultimately designed for an audience, I argue here that hesitation markers and false starts are intentionally created or at the very least tolerated. This means that they

are not typically indices of difficulty in speech production or hesitation, but stylised representations of hesitation, which may contribute to an effect of realism.

In terms of typicality of the individual repetition types, it can first of all be observed that repetition of character actions (kinesic repetition) is by far the most important way in which repetition occurs intra-turn within individual turns. This means that character gestures and facial expressions are often repetitive in humorous turns. However, there are also a substantial number of HTs that feature lexical repetition or prosodic repetition. The individual types of repeat are discussed from more linguistic to more paralinguistic and non-linguistic types in the following sections.

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
Intra-turn repetition	881	37.5%
lexical repetition	258	11.0%
phonetic repetition	118	5.0%
structural parallelism	121	5.2%
prosodic repetition	245	10.4%
kinesic repetition	587	25.0%
telecinematic repetition	18	0.8%

Table 7.2: Intra-turn repetition in AMSIL, from more to less linguistic

7.2.1 Intra-turn lexical repetition

More than 10% (258) of HTs feature intra-turn lexical repetition, which is to say there is partial or total recurrence of one or several lexical items within that HT itself. As Table 7.3 illustrates, the repeated unit is often a single lexical word that recurs in identical form, and less frequently a multi-word unit that is repeated exactly. Partial intra-turn repetition is much rarer and only occurs in a handful of HTs in each episode.

<u>Type of repetition</u>	<u>HTs</u>	<u>Percent of all HTs</u>
Lexical repetition	258	11.0%
Lexical: exact single word	181	7.7%
Lexical: exact multi-word	58	2.5%
Lexical: single word, partial	29	1.2%
Lexical: multi-word, partial	21	0.9%

Table 7.3: Intra-turn lexical repetition in AMSIL

7.2.1.1 Exact single word lexical repetition within turns

Single word lexical repetition within turns occurs in many different forms in the corpus and often also interacts with inter-turn lexical repetition. This is illustrated in Examples 7.1 and 7.2, which are typical for how this type of repeat functions in sitcom humour.

Example 7.1: Exact single word lexical repetition within turns in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Talking to his daughter Sam, Charlie has been making the point that going to college (like he did) is more fulfilling than buying a nice car (like the new boyfriend of Sam's mother did.)

[06:25] Sam: It's a Ferrari.
 [06:26] Charlie: +Yeah, s(sh)ure, a **Ferrari**- + %a **Ferrari?** %
 HT47 +turns head away from Sam+ %quickly turns head
 towards Sam-----%

In Example 7.1 from *Anger Management*, Charlie and his daughter are discussing college, and more specifically the fact that she has come to the conclusion that further education is pointless. The discussion also positions Charlie opposite his ex-wife's new boyfriend, who is wealthier than Charlie despite the fact that he did not go to college. Charlie has argued before that having a nice car is not as important as a good education, and now Sam responds that it is not just any car he owns, but a Ferrari. Charlie repeats the same lexical item with falling intonation in what can be understood as a form of shadowing, i.e. as

(represented) automatic repetition with which Charlie claims the floor. However, he interrupts his turn and repeats the same lexical item, this time with rising intonation. Without the former instance of shadowing, this second “Ferrari?” would simply be an example of second-speaker repetition employed in order to question the previous speaker’s statement. In this case, however, it is at the same time part of self-correction: Whereas the automaticity of the first instance of *Ferrari* in HT47 also indexes that the type of car is unimportant for the point that Charlie is trying to make, the intra-turn repeat establishes the opposite, namely that Charlie is impressed despite his earlier statements and therefore directly contradicts himself. Thus, the repetition here introduces unexpected self-contradiction that creates a humorous incongruity between the two worldviews that are being discussed in the scene.

Example 6.2 (introduced in Section 6.5.1) is similar in its combination of inter-turn and intra-turn lexical repetition.

Example 6.2: Simple repeat in *Better with you*, S01E01

At the restaurant, Ben has just shaken hands with Casey who he is meeting for the first time. Casey calls him ‘tough guy’.

[02:58] Ben: oh-hoh tough- tough? I'm not tough. uhuhuhm I mean, I
HT19 work out a little.

Here, Ben first echoes “tough” from the previous turn and then repeats it with rising intonation to question whether this is an accurate description of him. Finally, he answers the question himself by repeating the same word again, this time using negation to dismiss the compliment. After the final repeat, he continues the turn and states that he works out, implicating that he has changed his mind and now at least tentatively accepts the compliment. In this case, the repeats of the same lexical item index the incongruity between being very obviously

pleased with the label “tough guy” and at the same time feeling that politeness norms require the dismissal of the compliment.

7.2.1.2 Exact multi-word lexical repetition within turns

There are fewer cases in AMSIL in which a character repeats a multi-word unit within the same turn, which is likely a consequence of the fact that HTs are very short on average. This is substantiated by a comparison of the average HT lengths of different subsets of the corpus, as is visible in Table 7.4. While the average length of an HT in the entire corpus is around 4 seconds ($\sigma=2.61$), and that of an HT including intra-turn repetition is 5.5 seconds ($\sigma=3.09$), HTs in which exact multi-word repetition occurs intra-turn are on average 6.5 seconds long ($\sigma=3.90$). Put simply, this indicates that repetition of several words obviously takes time, and that given the high frequency of humorous instances that collective senders of sitcoms quite clearly aim for, there is pressure to keep HTs short, which in turn makes multi-word repetition less likely than single word repetition.

Humorous turns (HTs)	HTs	Avg. length of HT	Standard deviation
HTs in AMSIL	2351	4.06s	2.61
HTs with intra-turn repetition	881	5.53s	3.09
HTs with exact intra-turn multi-word repetition	58	6.50s	3.90

Table 7.4: Average length of HTs in AMSIL

Example 7.2 from the second episode of *Undateable* illustrates, however, that such multi-word repetition nonetheless occurs in the data. In HT87, Danny first quotes his own text message, which he has written on Justin’s phone. His earlier attempts to make Justin produce his imaginary friend ‘Nick’ have led Justin to invent a number of facts that he used as an excuse why his friends could not meet this mysterious

Nick (“old blind Nick”). However, Danny here returns to the original text message and emphasises with the repeat that, in spite of all the reasons why Nick would not come to a bar, the text message clearly states that he will show up at nine. This is further emphasised with the use of prosodic repetition – note the intonation of “nine” in both cases.⁴² The importance of repetition in this case lies on the emphasis on the commonality between the two spaces in which each occurrence of the items in question took place: the text (imaginary) and the future experiences of the characters that are now gathered at the bar (diegetic reality). These two spaces are emphatically connected through the multi-word repeat, which highlights the contrast between the real and the imaginary at the heart of the humour of this and the surrounding HTs.

Example 7.2: Exact multi-word lexical repetition within turns in *Undateable*, S01E02

Danny has sent a text from his friend Justin’s phone to ask his co-worker Nicki out for a movie. Afraid she might say no, Justin has invented an old friend he claims the message was intended for, which leads to a back and forth between him and Danny, who takes full advantage of the situation by forcing Justin to invent more and more details about this imaginary friend ‘Nick’. Danny addresses Justin in his bar, while Nicki and some of Justin’s friends are side-participants of the conversation.

⁴² In terms of intra-turn repetition, this example is quite clear as both instances of “nine” are manifest within HT87. The repetition that the character Danny explicitly refers to here (“in the text you said”), however, deserves a side note: In an earlier scene, the viewers see Danny take Justin’s phone and type the message he now refers to. However, the viewers do not in fact see enough of the phone’s screen to read the message, which means that now, in HT87, they have to take Danny’s word and Justin’s reaction as indicators that Danny in fact accurately repeats something from that text. With regard to inter-turn repetition, which will be discussed in Section 7.3, “nine” would not be coded as repetition across turns, because it is only in fact uttered in HT87 and not in any other turns in this episode.

[10:39] Danny: it's still so weird to me because in the te-ext, you
HT87 said (0.7) let's (.) leave from the bar around ↑nine.
so:: I guess we can expect old blind Nick here
around ↑nine.

7.2.1.3 Partial lexical repetition within turns

Notable partial lexical repetition within turns is comparatively rare in AMSIL, and I will only present two brief examples here to illustrate both partial multi-word (Example 7.3) and partial single-word repetition (Example 7.4) within turns.

Example 7.3: Partial multi-word lexical repetition within turns in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

David is on the phone with his superior at work.

[10:30] David: Donald, I'll just call you back in one minute, uh-
HT79 (0.5) Donald, I'll call you back in, in just a
minute. Don- >w-well it's 55 seconds now, Donald.
we're wasting time.< hehe so-

In HT79, a number of repeats occur at the same time, but perhaps the most notable repetition is that of “I’ll just call you back in one minute,” which partially recurs as “I’ll call you back in, in just a minute.” This repetition, and HT79 more generally, is part of a scene in which David is celebrating his mother’s birthday and therefore tries to convince his superior Donald, who keeps calling him on the phone, to postpone the business call to a time that is more convenient for him. These attempts become more and more frantic, and even though the viewers only get to hear David’s side of the phone call, it is clear that David’s requests are not received favourably by Donald. Encoded in the repetition here is the fact that David’s requests are unsuccessful, as well as his ever more desperate attempts to get the floor in this interaction. Mostly, however, the repeats create the setup for the

incongruity with “55 seconds” and “wasting time.” The expression *to be back in a minute*, which indicates vaguely a short period of time rather than precisely the duration of one minute, is thus juxtaposed with the precise count of seconds mentioned in the same turn.

Example 7.4: Partial single word lexical repetition within turns in *Retired at 35*, S01E02

David’s dad Alan is enjoying the freedoms of living without his wife who has left him and gone to Portugal.

[00:34] Alan: ashtrays are for wi:ves, David. stop wifing me.
HT6

Example 7.4 from the second episode of *Retired at 35* illustrates partial repetition of a lexical word. Alan’s mention of “wives” points to his recent separation from David’s mother and serves as a motivation for the linguistic creativity in the second clause. In a playful instance of conversion, Alan turns the noun into a verb and asks his son to stop “wifing” him. The humour in this case resides in the term “wifing”, which is unexpected both as a term in itself, as well as in its association of son and wife (a theme that recurs several times in this episode). From the context, it becomes clear that “wifing” is used similarly to ‘mothering’ here, i.e. it refers to instructing Alan to behave like a sensible adult and to keep the apartment tidy (instead of dropping cigar ash on the carpet). One of the functions of this presentation of the “wifing”-joke as a partial repeat that refers back to “wives” is the facilitation of humour comprehension. The meaning of “wifing” cannot only be inferred based on the context in which it occurs, the viewers are also primed to understand Alan’s conversion by means of the juxtaposition of the two terms.

7.2.2 Intra-turn phonetic repetition

Notable repetition within turns also occurred on the level of phonology. Phones in these cases are repeated in close proximity of each other and are typically even adjacent, which also explains why this category was not observed across turns. One example of repeated phones is alliteration, which is ostensibly intentional and a result of the plannedness of telecinematic discourse. False starts and hesitations, on the other hand, are representations of patterns that are also repetitive when they occur outside of a fictional context. However, as explained in the introduction to this section, even these cases of seemingly automatic repetition are in fact subject to the creative control of the collective sender. The same is true for the repetition of onomatopoeic sounds illustrated in Example 7.5:

Example 7.5: Phonetic repetition within turns in *Undateable*, S01E01

Danny illustrates that he is immune to negativity by imitating bullets ricocheting off him.

[7:11] Danny: psh. pew-pewng-pewng-pewng-pewng. (.)
HT74 negative thoughts just bounce right off me, brah.

Here, Danny asserts his immunity to negative thoughts by metaphorically and multimodally enacting it. The later explication that negative thoughts “bounce right off” him is preceded by a multimodal display of imaginary bullets ricocheting off Danny, which he realises through gestures as well as through the repetition of onomatopoeic sounds. Humour in HT74 is the result of this incongruous behaviour, which is unexpected for an adult man trying to make a serious point about optimism. Once established, similar flurries of sounds recur at later stages within the same episode to reproduce the same humorous effect.

7.2.3 Intra-turn structural parallelism

As discussed in Chapter 6, this study is based on non-automatic recognition of repetitive patterns in all of the repetition types it distinguishes. Despite the manual coding, the lexical categories that have been discussed so far were objectively defined and rested on the partial or total identity of one or several lexical words. Structural parallelism and all subsequent categories of intra-turn repetition, however, are fuzzier categories. In the case of structural parallelism, this is so because most utterances in English will be structurally similar to some extent, in the sense that they all are part of the same language system and generally conform to the grammatical structures that one would expect based on knowledge of Standard English grammar and syntax. The question what is similar enough to be counted as a repeat of a morphological or syntactic structure is again answered subjectively: Structural parallelism is what was thought to be (a) structurally similar and (b) notable enough in consistent coding that it was categorised as such. Accordingly, the codebook instructed coders to code an HT for presence of intra-turn structural parallelism if they found “that there is a notable similarity in syntactic or morphological structure between two or more units (words, syntactic groups) in this turn” (Appendix B.2).

Example 7.6 presents HT10 in the second episode of *Anger Management*, which makes use of a very simple type of structural parallelism.

Example 7.6: Structural parallelism within turns in *Anger Management*, S01E02

Charlie responds to the barkeeper's jibes at his date.

[00:35] Charlie: Hey, she's older than she **looks**. (0.4) **and acts**.
HT10 (0.4) **and is**.

Charlie here defends his date, who is much younger than him, and establishes a list of arguments to emphasise that she is in fact not as young as it may seem. In this vein, Charlie repeats the same morphosyntactic structure, “and + [verb]-s” and accentuates the similarity in structure with the help of prosodic rhythm (the two 0.4 second pauses, which are themselves an instance of prosodic repetition). On the level of semantics, this is again a case of presenting two similar ideas followed by an apparently similar, yet incongruous one: While one may be older than one acts or looks, stating that someone is older than they are is of course paradoxical.

7.2.4 Intra-turn prosodic repetition

Prosodic repetition refers to notable recurrences of a particular voice quality or intonation pattern, which includes such aspects as volume, stress or pitch. One case of intra-turn prosodic repetition was already presented in the previous section, where it co-occurred with structural parallelism. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, the co-presence of these two types of repetition is frequent, and Example 7.7 presents another typical case from the second episode of *Better with you*.

Example 7.7: Prosodic repetition within turns in *Better with you*, S01E02

Casey explains what kind of place he would like to move to.

[03:52] Casey: I want a space that says something about us.
HT33 someplace cool like, u:h, (0.5) a **big lo:ft**, an old **chur:ch-**

In HT33, Casey, who has been characterised as unorthodox when it comes to his accommodation preferences, explicates what kind of place he envisions for him, his fiancée and the baby they are expecting. Again, the result is a list, in this case of options, which is realised in structurally and prosodically similar terms. The two noun phrases

before the audience laughter are both of the structure [Det+Adj+N], and they are realised in three syllables, with the last syllable, the head of the phrase, both stressed and lengthened. Here, too, prosodic and morphosyntactic similarity reinforce each other and set up the semantic contrast between a perfectly ordinary member of the category *housing*, “a big loft”, and the unconventional “an old church” which is incongruous in this context.

7.2.5 Kinesic intra-turn repetition (character multimodality)

Kinesic repetition refers to the repetition of either gestures or facial expressions and thus to aspects of character multimodality. As Table 7.5 illustrates, there is little repetition of facial expression within turns, whereas roughly one in four turns features repetitive gestures or character actions. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First of all, there are few close-ups of character faces in any of the sitcoms in AMSIL, which means that facial expressions will be less conspicuous than gestures such as arm movements. Accordingly, some repetitive moves on character faces may simply not be notable enough to be coded as such in the analytic scheme employed here. Secondly, repetition requires a minimum of two distinguishable units. However, during the mostly short HTs, character faces – at least at the distance from which they are perceived by the viewers – often remain fairly constant, i.e. they display one, rather than several facial expressions per turn. In the case of character gestures, on the other hand, there are a large number of HTs that involve quick repeated movement especially of hands and arms.

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
kinesic repetition	587	25.0%
repetition of character gesture/action	577	24.5%
repetition of character facial expression	30	1.3%

Table 7.5: Intra-turn repetition of character multimodality

7.2.5.1 Intra-turn repetition of character gesture/action

There are broadly two different subtypes of repeated character gestures and actions that can be distinguished in the data. They are the telecinematic representation of typically repetitive movements, such as repeated nodding or headshaking as well as repetitive hand movements; and the inclusion of several singular gestures or actions that recur within the same turn. The latter case is represented in Example 7.8, where the same hand gesture occurs three times and emphasises what the speaking character is saying during each of the hand movements.

Example 7.8: Repetition of character gesture within turns in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E01

Rebecca tells her friends about a date the viewers saw in an earlier scene. During that date, she showed her date a picture of her son and claimed it was her ex-husband (as a white lie to conceal the fact that her son is in fact much older than she had previously claimed). Rebecca in this scene leans over a stair rail and holds her hands about a foot apart, palms facing each other.

[11:27] Rebecca: (u)hh.
 HT74 I +told + him =
 + **quickly moves both hands up and down** +
 = I'm di±vor _____ ±ced from my=
 ±q. **moves hands up/down--±**
 = +son! +
 + **quickly moves both hands up and down** +

Rebecca in this scene from the first episode of *Romantically Challenged* explains to her friends the absurdity of some of the lies she told her date. In HT74, she summarises the son/ex-husband clash that was already exploited for humour in an earlier scene (during the actual date). Emphasising just how inept her fibs were, she realises her turn in a notable stress-pattern that foregrounds her telling the lie as well as the incongruity between ex-husband and son. These aspects are further

reinforced by the hand gesture that occurs each time a syllable is stressed. As is often the case, repeated character gestures are thus complementary to repeats on a different level, which also means that their function for humour construction proper can only be discussed in context, i.e. from a perspective that includes all present repetitive aspects, as will be done in Chapter 8.

7.2.5.2 Inter-turn repetition of character facial expression

The comparatively insignificant case of inter-turn repetition of facial expressions can be illustrated briefly in Example 7.9 from the second episode of *Undateable*:

Example 7.9: Repetition of facial expression within turns in *Undateable*, S01E02

Justin explains to Nicki that the text she just received was intended for someone else (see Example 7.2). The two stand facing each other in Justin's bar, where they both work.

[9:08] Justin: actually that (.) text was meant for a+nother friend=
HT73 +*raises his*---->
=of mine, named+ Nicki. =
----*eyes*----- +
= +Nick. + not %Nicki, % you=
+*raises his eyes*+ %*raises his eyes*%
=know. I mean, it jus&t (.) aut &ocorrected.=
&*raises his eyes*&
=you know, must have removed the I. hehe

Example 7.9 presents Justin's invention of an imaginary friend, which also forms part of the context for Example 7.2 presented earlier. That he repeatedly raises his eyes and looks at the ceiling during this turn serves as the representation of a stereotypical tell, i.e. it signals to others that he is lying. Even though the stress pattern here is less pronounced than it was in Example 7.8, and the stressed syllables seem overall less essential for the humour that is constructed here, it is

noteworthy that the facial expression in question nonetheless always occurs together with stressed syllables. However, the purpose of the repeated expression is to encode on a visual level the fact that Justin is quite obviously not telling the truth, which is also realised in the overly elaborate explanation he provides for the Nick/Nicki mistake he claims to have made. This reality/imaginary incongruity is exploited multiple times during this scene.

7.2.6 **Telecinematic intra-turn repetition (telecinematic multimodality)**

Telecinematic repetition refers to those visual and auditory aspects that are not directly tied to the characters' utterances and actions and are instead to do with the staging, filming and editing of the sitcom. Within turns, only very few cases of this type of repetition were found in AMSIL (see Table 7.6).

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
telecinematic repetition	18	0.8%
repetition of visual aspect	12	0.5%
repetition of auditory aspect	7	0.3%

Table 7.6: Intra-turn repetition of telecinematic multimodality

A likely explanation for the infrequency of telecinematic intra-turn repetition is, as it already was in the case of facial expressions, the combination of short turns and the comparatively static nature of the aspects that could be repeated. Camera position, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, etc. will usually remain unchanged for the length of the entire HT, which precludes any repetition. The exceptions to this observation all concern the *mise-en-scène* and in particular visual humour involving props.

For instance, HT7 in *See Dad Run*, S01E02 shows David trying to make a smoothie for his children. In a classic bit of slapstick, the mixer overflows in repeated spurts, contributing to the comedy of escalation that the entire scene creates. Similarly, but working on the auditory level, is HT38 in the first scene of *Anger Management*. The camera shows a dialogue between Lacey and Nolan, who are talking about their therapist Charlie's daughter Sam and her obsessive-compulsive behaviour. The viewers saw earlier how she repeatedly opened and closed the lock of the front door – now the same repeated behaviour is only audible. In this case the repetition of an auditory aspect serves as a call back to an earlier incongruous event that is now reactivated for humorous purposes. This is also an instance where intra-turn and inter-turn repetition of the same type are combined, since there is both the repeated sound of locking and unlocking a door in each turn, and the repetition of that (repeated) sound across turns. Repetition of music could also have been expected within humorous turns, but did not appear in the corpus. In the sitcoms analysed here, music is almost exclusively extradiegetic and presented separately from the sitcom narrative, in which all humorous turns (and turns generally) are situated. The few examples in which music appears in humorous turns rely on inter-turn rather than intra-turn repetition (see Section 7.3.5).

7.3 Inter-turn repetition

Repetition across turns is first of all a way of establishing cohesion both within and between the conversations that are represented in a sitcom and within the audiovisual text. Recurring items establish links between the two (or more) places where they occur and are thus important tools when it comes to the coherence of the story that is told in a sitcom episode and also of the humour that is tied to that story. The distribution of the five different levels of inter-turn repetition that will be discussed and illustrated in the following sections can be seen in Table 7.7, which presents both the absolute frequencies of HTs that contained any of the

given repeats and the relative proportion of all HTs that this frequency amounts to.

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
Inter-turn repetition	1221	51.9%
lexical repetition	786	33.4%
structural parallelism	60	2.6%
prosodic repetition	251	10.7%
kinesic repetition	257	10.9%
telecinematic repetition	358	15.2%

Table 7.7: Inter-turn repetition in AMSIL

7.3.1 Inter-turn lexical repetition

The prototype of repetition is lexical repetition, i.e. the total or partial recurrence of a lexical word or a group of lexical words.⁴³ As can be seen in Table 7.8, roughly a third of all HTs contained at least one instance of inter-turn lexical repetition, which makes it the most frequent repetition category in the eight sitcoms represented here. Put differently, if an HT made use of repetition at all, it was very likely to (also) feature lexical repetition. In 19.4% of all HTs (456), a single lexical word recurred in identical form, whereas exact repetition of multiple words was found in 8.2% (193) of all HTs. Partial repetition on the other hand was less frequent, but also featured in a substantial number of HTs, with partial repetition of multi-word units being more frequent than that of individual lexical words. One explanation for this finding is quite simply that the more lexical words a repeated unit consists of, the more opportunity there is for variation (i.e. non-exactness) in the way it is repeated.

⁴³ Halliday and Hasan's (1979) terminology, which refers to lexical repetition merely as *repetition*, is evidence for the centrality of the lexical subcategory within a broader understanding of repetition (their *reiteration*).

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
Lexical repetition	786	33.4%
Lexical: exact single word	456	19.4%
Lexical: exact multi-word	193	8.2%
Lexical: single word, partial	71	3.0%
Lexical: multi-word, partial	118	5.0%

Table 7.8: Inter-turn lexical repetition in AMSIL

7.3.1.1 Exact single word lexical repetition across turns

Example 7.10, taken from the first episode of *Retired at 35*, is a typical instance of an exact single-word repeat across turns, which occurred in similar form in all 16 episodes in the corpus. In this case, the word ‘mad’ is first used by David in a non-humorous turn to describe the character Susan’s anger at being stood up. It is then repeated by Alan in HT149 to contradict David and state that Susan was in fact not angry. While the two occurrences are only about 40 seconds apart, they happen in separate scenes at separate locations (at home; at the local bar), which are up to this point only connected chronologically (i.e. through conventions of continuity, see Section 10.4).

Example 7.10: Exact single word lexical repetition across turns in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

In an earlier scene, Alan has stood up his date, Susan, and left her with his son David. Later he has a change of heart and asks David for her number. However, since – unbeknownst to Alan – David has slept with Susan, he is hesitant to share the number and tries to convince his dad that it would not be good idea.

[19:28] David: that's a ba:d (h)idea. I- she was really, really ma:d.

[...]

Alan and Susan, who have been on a date despite David’s hesitation, run into David at the local bar.

[20:07] Alan: SHE'S NOT MAD AT ME AT A:LL!(.)

HT149 uh- I don't know what you said to her, but it really worked.

This instance of lexical repetition first of all establishes a stronger link between the two scenes. This does not just serve the cohesion of the episode, it is also of importance for the humorous incongruity in HT149. It is part of the viewers' and David's common ground that David and Susan slept together after Alan had stood her up. This gives them a privileged position compared to the character Alan, who does not have access to that knowledge. Accordingly, there are two mental models of Susan's reaction: (1) She is angry because she has been stood up ("she was really, really mad"); (2) she is happy because she slept with David ("SHE'S NOT MAD AT ALL"). The first occurrence of 'mad' establishes (1) as common ground between David, Alan and the viewers in the sense that we subsequently all assume that Alan thinks Susan is angry. The repeat communicates that Alan has learned Susan is in fact not angry, and he then expresses surprise and even gratitude towards Alan that he managed to calm things down.

There is thus a clash between the naïve joy Alan expresses at not being the object of Susan's anger, and the actual events that the viewers and David experienced – a clash which is realised in the mad/not mad dichotomy exact single word lexical repetition establishes across the two turns here. In terms of the participation structures of the sitcom, this also points to the duality of communicative levels. While it is unclear in this example whether the single-word lexical repetition is notable only on CL1 (the communicative level between collective sender and television viewers) or also on CL2 (the character level), i.e. whether or not repetition is also part of the diegetic world, the humorous incongruity is dependent on the viewers' adopting the viewpoints of both characters and then – from a distance – to laugh about the naïve Alan who is placed in an inferior position by the narrative here.

In Example 7.11, repetition of the compound 'gas station' establishes a similar contrast between two turns in the first episode of *Sullivan & Son*.

Example 7.11: Exact single word lexical repetition across turns in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

Ashley explains to Steve why she wants to go back to New York rather than to stay in Pittsburgh.

[14:49] Ashley: see this coffee I'm drinking? (1.0) there is no Starbucks in this neighbourhood. (0.9) I bought this at a **gas station**. (0.9) a **gas station**, Steve=it cost one dollar.

[...]

Later Steve works at the bar that he just bought from his parents.

[18:16] Steve: ah, drinking coffee?

[18:17] Melanie: yeah, I get it at the **gas station**. expensive, but it's good.
HT98

In this example, there are three occurrences of the repeated unit. The first two occur within the same turn and are only of concern in this discussion of inter-turn repetition because they foreground the lexical item that will be repeated in the later turn (HT98). The turn of the first (twofold) occurrence of 'gas station' (where the cups of coffee were bought) and the HT where the repetition occurs are more than three minutes apart, and they are linked to two opposed viewpoints and two opposed characters. In the earlier scene, the main character's girlfriend Ashley stresses (among other things by using intra-turn lexical repetition) how cheap the coffee is compared to New York, and she metonymically defines Pittsburgh as a place that for her as a New Yorker has little value. Between the two turns that feature the token 'gas station', Steve breaks up with her because he decides to buy his parents' bar and stay in Pittsburgh, whereas Ashley returns to her hometown New York. Melanie, an old friend of Steve's who is already established as his love interest in this first episode, is positioned as an opposite to Ashley in this scene. She is a local in Pittsburgh, a regular at the bar Steve just bought, and in this case, she shows appreciation for the coffee that Ashley disliked and thinks it is expensive rather than cheap.

The repeated lexical unit in this case serves a referential purpose, since it makes clear that the cups of coffee the two women are drinking are from the same gas station and therefore two tokens of the same type. Anchored on this link between the two women, the episode can establish them as opposites, while creating a humorous incongruity between viewer expectations based on the earlier voiced assessment of the coffee and the way it is described by Melanie in HT98. Even though Steve is part of both conversations, there is no clear indication in this case that either of the two characters that interact in HT98 would be aware of the repeated compound or more generally of the similarity of their conversation to the earlier interaction between Steve and Ashley. This then points to repetition as well as the incongruity that it facilitates being firmly situated on CL1: whereas the studio audience laughs, the characters show no signs of humour support and simply continue with their conversation.

7.3.1.2 Exact multi-word lexical repetition across turns

Multi-word lexical repetition across turns establishes similar links between the turns in which it occurs – if anything, these links are more pronounced as the repetition of multiple words is by definition always also an accumulation of single-word repetition. Moreover, multi-word repeats occur as character quotes that are not only noticeable to the television viewers, but also to other characters. Such a case is illustrated in Example 7.12:

Example 7.12: Exact and partial multi-word lexical repetition across turns in *Better with you*, S01E01

Maddie, standing next to her partner Ben, explains their living situation to the reception head waitress at a restaurant.

[02:11] Maddie: mhhmm neither of us want to be married, but we love
HT14 each other. we're very happy. (.) **it's a valid life choice.**

[...]

Later, Maddie again talks to Ben about their relationship status.

[05:43] Maddie: **no::** I know why we aren't married. **it's a valid life**
HT38 **choice.**

[...]

In a later scene, the family is discussing Mia's engagement and the fact that Maddie is not married at the restaurant.

[14:55] Maddie: hey, our not being married **is a va[lid-]**

[14:57] Vicky: **[valid] life choice.**

HT111 okay, she said it. everybody has to drink.

[...]

Towards the end of the episode, Maddie asks her sister Mia for relationship advice in a taxi.

[19:25] Maddie: Maddie: should Ben and I have gotten married a long
HT137 time ago? (1.4)

↑**is my life choice (.) not valid?**

The first episode of *Better with you* establishes the contrast between three different relationships as one of its central themes. Whereas the parents have been married for a long time, the two sisters that are also main characters of the series are both unmarried. The younger one, Mia, surprises everyone in this episode by announcing her engagement. The older one, Maddie, is in a long-term relationship but has never gotten married. HT14 establishes the phrase '(it's) a valid life choice' as the way Maddie encodes her state of being unmarried in language when she is asked about it. The same phrase is then repeated several times in later HTs in this episode. HT38 is the first time Maddie repeats her mantra, in an attempt to convince Ben that she is not upset and to provide a good reason why they are not married. Apart from the cohesive function that the multi-word repetition has here, repetition as a pattern is foregrounded in this instance. The formulaicity of Maddie's phrase is indexical here of the automaticity of repetition that Tannen (1989), Norrick (1993) and others have noted (see Chapter 5). Based on the assumption that a convincing argument is persuasive not only due to its phrasing, but because it presents a plausible reason for a course of action, the total recurrence of 'a valid life choice' seems to indicate that Maddie is mindlessly reiterating the same phrase rather than to appear

confident that her choice is indeed valid. It is then precisely the repetition of the phrase ‘a valid life choice’ that makes that life choice seem less valid, at least to the person who utters it.

The third aspect that needs to be highlighted in HT38 is similar to what has been said about intra-turn repetition in Example 7.2. The later instance of the same phrase in HT111 makes clear that HT38 and later repetitions of ‘a valid life choice’ are not just significant in terms of the re-uttered words themselves, but also as instances of repetition. This is to say that the television viewers do not just hear the phrase itself repeatedly, they are also made aware that Maddie repeats herself. This knowledge becomes crucial in HT111, when Maddie is apparently about to repeat the same phrase yet again, but is this time interrupted by her mother, Vicky, who finishes the sentence for her. The subsequent comment, “okay, she said it. everybody has to drink,” implicates that this repetitiveness is not only noticed on CL1 by the viewers, but also on CL2 by the other characters of the series who are certain enough that Maddie will repeat that mantra sooner rather than later that they have created a drinking game around it (at least if we take Vicky’s word for it). While only a limited number of repeats are realised in the dialogue of this sitcom episode, we can also infer as viewers that on CL2 there must have been more instances of the same phrase – so many that the mother can now complete her daughter’s sentence. This repeat is then on the one hand another token of the same phrase, this time uttered by a different character, and on the other the acknowledgement and negative evaluation of the fact that Maddie is repeating the same mantra over and over. This criticism is plausible to the viewers precisely because they share the experiential knowledge that Maddie does indeed repeat herself.

7.3.1.3 Partial multi-word lexical repetition across turns

Partial repetition is of course less notable than total recurrence, and it can be assumed that what I have coded here as instances of this repetition pattern is only a relatively small subset of what would be found if a categorisation were to be made automatically, with the tools of corpus linguistics. This is especially true for partial single word repetition, which I will come to shortly, but also for multi-word repetition, where salience of partial repetition will depend on factors such as the distance of repeats and the foregrounding that the repeated unit receives. Example 7.12 has already shown how repetition itself may lead to the foregrounding of a particular lexical item – in this case the phrase ‘a valid life choice’. Thus, when Maddie asks “is my life choice not valid?” in HT137, the partial repetition, i.e. the repetition of both the attribute ‘valid’ and the compound ‘life choice’ in inverted order, is notable because of the repeated recurrence of the original phrase that has occurred before this humorous turn. It is at the same time repetitive in the sense that Maddie sticks to the exact words she has been using throughout the episode, yet novel because it introduces variation in word order in order to rephrase the earlier assertion as a question. Maddie first of all expresses the doubts she has as to whether the choice she and Ben have made is the right one. But even at this point, when she questions her own values and decisions, she apparently can only do so by using the same lexical items. It is this limitedness expressed through formulaicity that is unexpected in this case and that leads to the construction of the incongruity here.

7.3.1.4 Partial single word lexical repetition across turns

When it comes to partial repetition of a single lexical word, the difference between basing a categorisation on what coders notice or on automatic recognition is perhaps most striking. Such repetition will only be noticed and thus relevant for this discussion if it is either foregrounded in some fashion (for instance through intra-turn

repetition), or if the two occurrences are in close proximity. Example 7.13 is typical in this regard because it combines both aspects by emphasising the lexical word that will be repeated and by positioning the recurrence in an adjacent turn:

Example 7.13: Partial single word lexical repetition across turns in *Undateable*, S01E02

Danny asks his roommate Justin to “keep it cool” around the woman he had a one-night stand with. Instead Justin invites her to join them for breakfast.

[04:25] Danny: I TOLD YOU TO KEEP IT COOL.

[04:26] Justin: Danny, there is nothing cooler than hospitality.

HT34

As can be seen, Danny’s turn ends emphatically on the word ‘cool,’ which is then taken up in HT34 by Justin. Realised in the comparative form ‘cooler’, the repeat establishes cohesion with the previous turn and has Justin coherently refer to the theme set by Danny. The two turns function as an adjacency pair, with HT34 establishing humour by presenting an unexpected collocation between ‘cool’ and ‘hospitality’. Whereas the incongruity of the surprising juxtaposition of the two lexical items with the help of the construction ‘there is nothing [adj-comp.] than [NN]’ is not itself dependent on repetition, its utterance by the character is directly motivated by the repeat.

7.3.2 Inter-turn structural parallelism

As was the case within turns, repetition across turns does not only concern lexical items, but also morphosyntactic structure. Example 7.14 provides an instance of parallel syntactic structures in adjacent turns:

Example 7.14: Structural parallelism across turns in *The McCarthys*, S01E01

It's night time and while Marjorie is at the wheel, her husband Arthur is backseat-driving.

[11:27] Arthur: **Marjorie, stop pumpin' on the brakes so much.=**
 [11:29] Marjorie: **=Arthur stop being legally unable to drive at
 HT91 night so much.**

In this example from the first episode of *The McCarthys*, the two turns both follow the structure '[PN] stop [VP with V-prog.] so much'. The similarity in structure is noticeable first of all because it is accompanied by lexical repetition ('stop' and 'so much'), and secondly because the repeat realises the same construction with lexical items that do not conventionally qualify to fill the respective slots. The verb phrase that would typically be used is exemplified in the first occurrence, which describes an activity that is both repeatable and can be performed at different intensities. Arthur's backseat-driver comment that his wife should 'stop pumpin' on the brakes so much' can be read either as a request for her to break more gently or to refrain from breaking with such force so often. The repeat, on the other hand, puts 'being legally unable to drive at night' in the same slot, which describes an ability rather than an activity and can neither be qualified in terms of frequency or strength, since it is not susceptible to volition. As such, it serves as an indirect criticism of Arthur that may refer to his drinking habits or perhaps his eyesight that would prevent him from driving at night. The same unexpected combination of the grammatical construction and the lexical items that are used to fill the slots it presents is also the basis for the incongruity that is constructed here for the purposes of humour. Marjorie's witty retort is an example of apparently non-systemic humour analogous to the lexical examples that Brock (2011) presents. As was the case in previous examples, HT91 at the same time also motivates its humour by linking it to the previous turn through repetition.

Example 7.14 illustrates a typical pattern of repeating a syntactic structure while at the same time foregrounding it. It also shows different mechanisms that serve the purpose of making salient the parallel structures, which are the mismatch between lexical items and the construction in which they are used as well as the co-occurrence of structural parallelism with several instances of lexical repetition. This latter accumulation of different repetition types occurs frequently in the data and is a key property of the way humorous incongruities are constructed in the sitcoms of the AMSIL corpus. The architecture of HTs based on repetitive patterns and links to other turns will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

7.3.3 Inter-turn prosodic repetition

Prosodic repetition establishes a link between two turns by having a character deliver a particular turn in a strikingly similar way to a prior turn. This notable resemblance is established through intonation patterns, which involve volume, stress, pitch, speed of delivery, etc. or through a notable voice quality that is repeated in the second turn. Note again that the salience of prosodic features for any given character was understood relatively rather than absolutely, which is to say that notable prosody marks a deviation in some form from the way in which the respective character usually performs their turns. This focus on the actor/character performance may also mean that in terms of the production of the sitcom, repetition was in some cases introduced at a later stage than the previous two types. Whereas repeated salient lexical items and morphological or syntactic structures are typically already part of the script and therefore created by the writers, it can be assumed that the shooting script contained very little information about either prosody or character multimodality.⁴⁴ Assuming that humorous

⁴⁴ The assumption that scripts will not have contained clear instructions for actors as to how they need to perform the lines their characters produce in the sitcom is based on pilot scripts of six of the sitcoms, which were analysed for

incongruities are typically written and thus constructed before the filming of the episode in the studio, this would indicate that the humorous incongruities in HTs that contain prosodic repetition cannot be based on prosody alone, but must contain incongruity on an additional level that is supported in some form by the prosodic performance. Example 7.15 presents such a case, in which repetition is based on rhythm and stress; Example 7.16 on the other hand illustrates repetition of voice quality.

Example 7.15: Prosodic repetition across turns in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

In a taxi, Steve shows his girlfriend Ashley the buildings in Pittsburgh that were significant in his youth.

- [00:03] Steve: yeah. **that's** the rink where I played high-school **hockey**.
- [00:06] Ashley: ohh.
- [00:06] Steve: **l:ed** the league in scoring, just saying.
- [00:08] Ashley: .hh
- [00:08] Steve: and **that's** the house >where my< first **girlfriend** lived. (0.8)
HT1
not a lot of scoring there.

The scene in Example 7.15 is taken from the beginning of the first episode of *Sullivan & Son* and serves the purpose of familiarising both the character Ashley and the television audience with the surroundings in which the sitcom will be situated. In the dialogue, Steve shows and explains, whereas Ashley at this point only signals listenership with the help of backchannels. Repetition in HT1, the very first humorous turn of the entire sitcom, occurs on many different levels, which includes lexical repetition, structural parallelism and

stage instructions. For instance, the pilot script for *Sullivan & Son* contains a total of only 21 stage instructions that contain information about prosody, of which only 'sotto' and '[call] out' are instructions that occur more than once.

prosody. The performance of the parallel syntax of ‘that’s the [N] where [VP]’ followed by a clause which drops the subject pronoun is strikingly similar in a number of aspects. First of all, the first syllable (‘that’s’) is stressed in both cases; then there is the gap between the first intonation unit and the second clause, which in the first instance is filled by Ashley’s backchannel and in HT1 by 0.8 seconds of silence; finally, there are the matching intonation contours, with falling intonation in each intonation unit. This established similarity serves as the basis for the joke Steve makes around the polysemy of the word ‘scoring’, which is exploited for self-deprecating humour about his own lack of success with girls.

Example 7.16: Prosodic repetition across turns in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Perry just had a wisdom tooth pulled and is waiting for Shawn to pick him up. Since Shawn is not there, Perry tries to call him on the phone, even though he can barely speak.

- [04:40] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> (Sh)awn? </VQ>
HT27
- [04:43] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> (Sh)a:-aw:n! </VQ>
HT28
- [04:47] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> whe(r)e ↑a(r)e ↓you? </VQ>
HT29
- [04:52] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> whe(r)e a(r)e you, (b)u(dd)y?
HT30 </VQ>
- [04:55] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> you're a(lr)ea(d)y (t)en
HT31 minu(tes) la(t)e! </VQ>

Example 7.16 presents a character whose salient voice quality is narratively motivated: He has just been to the dentist and has cotton balls in his cheeks that make proper articulation challenging. As a result, most consonants are not fully produced and he nasalises his vowels. In addition, Perry is at this point frustrated that his friend Shawn is not keeping his promise to pick him up, which presumably

explains why he utters all turns in the example in a high-pitched whiny voice quality. The five HTs that are represented in this example are just an excerpt of a longer sequence that fully exploits this difficulty in articulation as a comic device. While the visual mode, which shows Perry with slightly puffed-up cheeks, is certainly not to be ignored here, it is nonetheless safe to say that the humour for the most part rests on Perry's notably different voice quality, which results in him sounding like a whimpering puppy. It can also be seen that the broad transcription of Perry's utterances reveals no humour, which is to say that the incongruities are not constructed on a linguistic level, but are directly tied to the performance by actor Kyle Bornheimer (Perry). Again, other types of repetition feature in some of the HTs here (HT28, HT30), but other cases (HT29, HT31) simply re-use the same comic voice quality again in order to reproduce the same humorous effect.

This is interesting since other than in the previously discussed examples, repetition here does not just affect part of the HT (some of its lexical items are repeated, others are not), and it is not only the basis for a humorous incongruity that would be constructed on a different level (as was the case in Example 7.15). Here, the entire humorous mechanism of the funny voice quality is simply repeated multiple times without notable variation on the same level.

7.3.4 Kinesic inter-turn repetition (character multimodality)

In terms of character multimodality, the data was coded for character actions and gestures as well as for facial expressions. As Table 7.9 illustrates, both types of repetition on this level were similar in frequency (5.8% and 6.3% of HTs).

Type of repetition	HTs	Percent of all HTs
Kinesic repetition (character multimodality)	255	10.8%
repetition of character gesture/action	136	5.8%
repetition of character facial expression	149	6.3%

Table 7.9: Inter-turn repetition of character multimodality

7.3.4.1 Inter-turn repetition of character gesture/action

Repeated character gestures mostly occurred in the form of salient hand gestures as is illustrated again by Example 7.17 (presented earlier as 6.1) from episode 1 of *See Dad Run*:

Example 7.17: Repetition of character gesture across turns in *See Dad Run*, S01E01

David has just told his son Joe he should wash the Roman tunic he is wearing.

- [11:43] Joe: I'm +little. I don't know how to wash stuff.+
 +hand gesture **palms upwards**-----+
- [11:45] David: I'm big, £ I don't know either, £ % check the
 HT93 £shrug and **palms upwards**£ %points to->
book! %
 ---kitchen%

Here, Joe, the primary school boy is asked by his father David to wash his Roman costume, on which fruit juice was spilt before. The scene contrasts the age difference between son and father while at the same time establishing a similarity in expertise when it comes to household chores. Essentially, the joke is that the adult David is about as competent at running his family as his young son would be. This is established on many different levels, including lexis and syntactic structure, but crucially also on the level of character gestures. In a gesture that expresses helplessness, Joe slightly extends his arms, with the palms of his hands facing upwards. In HT93, David repeats the same

gesture while stating that he doesn't know either how to wash clothes. As is generally the case with inter-turn repetition of gestures, the visual mode presents parallel actions in two different turns (in this case by two different characters), which establishes a link as well as similarity between the two turns and invites the television audience to compare the two. Here, the result of this comparison is the aforementioned reinforcement of the David-as-child incongruity.

Such multimodal repeats did not only include character gestures in a strict sense, but also more broadly character actions that were often linked to the *mise-en-scène*. Example 7.18 presents a scene from the second episode of *Romantically Challenged*, in which Shawn walks through the apartment he shares with Perry and picks up post-it notes that remind him he should pick up his friend after his dental surgery (one result of which was already illustrated in Example 7.16):

Example 7.18: Repetition of character action across turns in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Shawn is at the flat he and Perry share and picks up post-it notes that remind him he needs to pick up Perry from the dentist.

[02:26] Shawn: °what is that?° (0.4)
 + (1.1) dentist. +
 +**picks up post-it note** from kitchen counter+
 £yeah,£ I know..
 £nods£

[02:30] Shawn: u:h.= &(0.3) &=
 HT16 &**picks up note** from couch table&
 =%dentist.%
 %nods----%

There are two instances of repetition of character gestures or actions in this example. First of all, the whole short scene from which the example is taken is centred around the repeated action of Shawn picking up pink post-it notes off of furniture, while also repeating the

word 'dentist'. The repeated action in this case first and foremost represents the excessive number of reminders Perry has left for his friend, which leads to the accumulation of repeated actions as well as to the foregrounding of the fact that Shawn, who is earlier presented as an unreliable friend, is reminded without subtlety that he is expected to keep his promise and his duties as a friend this time. The repeated action is followed in both instances in the example by a nod, with which Shawn acknowledges the reminders, thus reinforcing as common ground between collective sender and television viewers that the character here is fully aware that he is expected to be at the dentist in a later scene. This is to say that, while the accumulation of notes is itself incongruous and exploited for humour, it also creates viewer expectations with regard to subsequent scenes, in which Shawn will yet again disappoint Perry.

7.3.4.2 Inter-turn repetition of character facial expression

Given the focus on dialogue in all sitcoms in AMSIL, it is not surprising that typically the camera will present the speaker centrally, which means that speakers' facial expressions are in most cases visible for viewers and an integral component of the actors' performance. Inevitably, actors will thus repeat their smiles and frowns over the 21 minutes of a sitcom episode. However, it seems implausible to suggest that the audience would consider every actor/character smile as a repetition of an earlier smile by the same or another actor/character, which is why in this case too understanding a facial expression as a repeated facial expression was tied to subjective notions of salience, i.e. to whether or not coders confidently identified a character facial expression as a notable recurrence of an earlier instance. It also needs to be mentioned again that there are almost no close-ups of character faces, which means that subtler facial expressions may not be noticed. It is worth pointing out furthermore, that some actors are much more expressive with their faces than others, which means that humorous incongruities that are based on or reinforced by facial expressions will

occur mostly within those turns where those expressive characters are speaking. In *Anger Management*, for instance, Patrick is such a character, and Example 7.19 illustrates a simple example of a repeated facial expression in a humorous turn:

Example 7.19: Repetition of facial expression across turns in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie, the therapist, sits opposite his clients and asks one of them, Patrick, how his weekend went.

- [00:23] Charlie: okay, our new member should be showing up any minute, so while we're waiting, (0.7) let's see how we all do with our assignment over the weekend. hh You were supposed to admit to a loved one that you're in anger therapy. Patrick, how'd it go?
- [00:32] Patrick: +not +well.
HT3 +*raises his eyebrows* +
- [00:34] Patrick: I: &told my & Dad (.) that I was=
HT4 &*raises his eyebrows* &
=coming here to change my passive-aggressive behavior and he said, while you're there, can you work on not being gay? hehe.

As can be seen in this example, Patrick is responding to Charlie's question by reporting a conversation he had with his father. The humorous incongruity in HT4 is in this case not simply an instance of CL1-humour: Based on Patrick's laughter, we can infer that he is reporting his father's utterance as a self-deprecating joke (about his homosexuality). The unexpected first answer in HT3 and the longer response in HT4 are both accompanied in their first syllables by an emphatic facial expression, with Patrick raising his eyebrows in what appears to encode being critical about the topic of conversation (Charlie's task in HT3, his father's answer in HT4). On a semantic level, there is no connection between the two utterance parts that are accompanied by this expression, 'not' and 'told my', but they are

clearly coherent, with HT4 being an explication of HT3. This coherence is reinforced by the multimodal link between the two turns that the facial expression establishes, which thus establishes cohesion on a visual level.

7.3.5 Telecinematic inter-turn repetition (telecinematic multimodality)

Inter-turn repetition on a visual level does also occur telecinematically, i.e. concerning aspects of the broadcast that go beyond character actions and have to do with the way the diegetic world is realised through parameters such as camera work, lighting, and most importantly the *mise-en-scène* which frames the character actions and dialogues. While such telecinematic repeats also occur on an auditory level, where they appear in the form of music or sounds, these were very rare in AMSIL, and Table 7.10 shows that in almost all cases of telecinematic repetition, visual aspects were involved.

<u>Type of repetition</u>	<u>HTs</u>	<u>Percent of all HTs</u>
telecinematic repetition	358	15.2%
repetition of visual aspect	351	14.9%
repetition of auditory aspect	14	0.6%

Table 7.10: Inter-turn repetition of telecinematic multimodality

7.3.5.1 Inter-turn repetition of visual telecinematic aspects

One typical way in which aspects of the *mise-en-scène* are repeated in the context of humour is illustrated by Example 7.20 from episode 2 of *See Dad Run*:

Example 7.20: Repetition of visual telecinematic multimodality across turns in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

David has made breakfast for his three children. They are sitting at the table and eating.

[00:11] Emily: %I think I could=
 HT3 >>picks up **black piece of bacon**% dangles bacon in
 =use this turkey bacon as a belt. (1.2) %
 front of her face-----%

[...]

David and his wife Amy are alone in the kitchen and talk about the earlier breakfast with the children (and the mess that David has made).

[01:35] Amy: >>reaches for something in the sink
 HT10 %is that a belt? (0.4) % & (0.5) &=
 %holds **black bacon** up% &turns it around-& >
 = £(1.1)
 ---£hits David with the bacon£

David: °that's° funny, honey, £ funny. I want them to
 have a healthy breakfast!

The two HTs illustrated by this example are a bit over a minute apart. In HT3, Emily holds up a burned strip of bacon, which is part of the mise-en-scène in this scene, which telecinematically encodes the frame of the family breakfast. The fact that the bacon is charcoal-black presents a simple incongruity on the visual level – it goes against what viewers will expect bacon consumed during a breakfast to look like. Thus, when Emily jokes that she could use it as a belt, she juxtaposes the breakfast frame with an incompatible frame, that of clothing, which is made plausible by the fact that this slice of bacon does not look like something that should be eaten, and by her gesture of dangling it in front of her face, which reveals that its texture is also quite different from that of an edible piece of bacon. In other words, Emily’s utterance concretises the incongruity that is established on the visual level by associating the surprising deviation from what this food item should look like with a second frame.

Later, in HT10, Amy picks the same piece of bacon out of the kitchen sink and presents a call back to HT3 by yet again associating the black slice of bacon with a belt. In terms of communicative levels, the visual repeat is notable to viewers and to David, who was present in both scenes. Amy, who picks up the piece of bacon in HT10, on the other hand, was not present in HT3 and is oblivious to the fact that the piece of bacon has been held up in a similar fashion by her daughter earlier. The visual incongruity of the black piece of bacon is thus accompanied by an element of superiority, i.e. by the viewers' awareness that they know more than Amy. This difference in knowledge is foregrounded precisely through the visual repetition that Amy unwittingly instigates.

7.3.5.2 **Inter-turn repetition of auditory telecinematic aspects**

The definition of telecinematic repetition states that it cannot only occur in the visual mode, but may also be based on a non-linguistic auditory signal that is either diegetic, which is to say that its source is identifiably part of CL2; or extra-diegetic, in which case sound that is not apparently linked directly to CL2 would be repeated. Within HTs, only the former category appeared in AMSIL, and even those repeated diegetic sounds were very rare, as was indicated in Table 7.6. Perhaps the most striking example occurred in the first episode of *Retired at 35*, where in HT74, 75 and 76 the family is gathered around the table to celebrate Elaine's birthday. A candle is burning on a cake in front of her, and the family starts to sing *Happy Birthday*. However, already during the first syllable, "ha-", the song is interrupted by the sound of David's mobile (Elaine's son and main protagonist of the sitcom). This exact turn of events is then repeated in HT75 and HT76, i.e. David apologises, they start singing again, and are again interrupted during the first "ha-" of *Happy Birthday*.

The cohesive function of repetition is again quite obvious in this example. Rather than being three isolated instances of sitcom humour, HT74–76 are part of a humour sequence that increases the rudeness of the interruption and thus the incongruity with every repetition of the ringing mobile. That this is a repeated event is also emphasised by the fact that the interruption occurs at the exact same moment of the song in every instance, as well as by repetition on various other levels, which accompanies the repeated sound.

7.4 General Discussion: Simple repeats in AMSIL

The typology presented in sections 7.1–7.3 illustrates the range of individual repeats that are used productively in the construction of sitcom humour. Individual humorous turns establish links to previous turns by repeating lexical items, structural patterns or aspects of the multimodal performances that enact them. Humorous turns are also repetitive themselves, i.e. even aside from the links they establish they employ repetition in their construction of humorous incongruities. The levels on which both types of repetition – intra-turn and inter-turn – occur are those of partial or exact repetition of one or several lexical words; the repetition of morphosyntactic structures; the repetition of prosodic features; and in terms of multimodal aspects the repetition of kinesic features of the actor/character performance, such as gestures and facial expressions, and the repetition of telecinematic aspects related to the actual production of any given sitcom episode.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this first part of the analysis are as follows: Repetition is frequent in sitcom humour both on the microlevel, within the individual humorous turn and humorous instance, and on the macrolevel, where it establishes links between individual segments of a sitcom episode. Repetition in sitcom humour is multimodal and includes simple repeats on many different levels of language and the performance more generally. It is notable, however, that the focus in the humorous turns of all sitcoms in AMSIL is on

repetition of language or of aspects of the actor/character performance, and less on the level of the telecinematic production. In terms of sublevels of the collective sender, repetition for humorous purposes seems to be created and performed based on scriptwriters and actors, and less by the directors who telecinematically compose the humorous performances in a particular way. This is not to say that the production mode of the sitcoms in AMSIL may not be repetitive, but that the repetition of individual camera shots and angles, the *mise-en-scène*, etc. is – with few exceptions – not foregrounded and not used as a resource for humour.

Furthermore, the discussion of examples has already hinted at a range of different functions of repetition in humour, linked for instance to the establishment of particular expectations or the juxtaposition of similarity and difference. However, no systematic discussion of functions has been done for each individual type of repeat. This is so because functions of repetition are of interest here with regard to their effect on the humorous incongruities each HT constructs, which are in many cases based on the co-occurrence of different repeats. It seems more productive then to analyse the overall effect the combination of repeats has for any given humorous turn rather than to assign individual functions to individual repeats, which will only be possible in some cases. This discussion of the role complex repetition, i.e. the combination of simple repeats, plays in sitcom humour will be the subject of the next Chapter 8.

8 The composition of humorous turns

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 has provided a typology of the simple repeats that occur in AMSIL and has illustrated the form these repeats take with examples. It has provided empirical support for the assumption that repetition in humorous turns of sitcoms is frequent and that it occurs on many different levels of language as well as within the visual mode in the form of character actions and to a lesser degree telecinematic aspects, which turned out to be less involved in the construction of humorous turns. Understanding how sitcoms employ repetition for the construction of humorous incongruities, however, necessitates a more contextualised view at how these individual simple repeats are embedded and combined into humorous turns. This research aim was addressed in the second research question, which I will repeat here:

- (2) Given the occurrence of many-to-one relationships between repeats and individual humorous turns in sitcoms, i.e. the co-occurrence of several repeats within a single humorous turn, to what extent is complex repetition constitutive for the construction of incongruities in humorous turns?

In order to answer this question, the chapter at hand will address complex humorous repetition patterns in two different ways. First, it will make use of the coding employed for the previous analysis and examine what correlations there are between the different types of simple repeats (8.2). In a second, qualitative step, it will take these correlations as a starting point and present a number of examples in context, which demonstrate the different humorous effects that collective senders achieve with the help of repetition (8.3). Combining the results of the two approaches will lead to a systematic overview of the functions of formal repetition in humorous sitcom turns in Chapter 9.

8.2 Correlations between simple repeats

Based on frequency of co-occurrence of individual types of repeats and simple testing of statistical significance of correlations, it can be established for each of the distinguished variables whether or not it tends to occur in isolation or together with one or more other types of repeat. On the one hand, this will establish if the types of repetition presented in Chapter 7 occur independently of each other; on the other hand, it will show what repetitive patterns are particularly likely to occur together. A number of observations can be made based on these quantified results alone, in particular when it comes to the comparison of intra-turn and inter-turn repetition. In addition, the results of this section will inform the qualitative analysis done in Section 8.3, which uses the quantitative findings as motivation for the selection of examples. This will make it possible for Chapter 9 to approach the functions repetition has in sitcom humour based on the qualitative analysis of examples that have been selected according to statistical criteria.

As was done in Chapter 7, the correlations between types of repeats will be separated according to the top-level dichotomy between repetition within turns and repetition across turns. The following subsections will show that the two supra-categories behave differently when it comes to correlations with other repeats, thus also retrospectively strengthening the intra-turn/inter-turn distinction that I follow here. In Sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2, individual repeats are first of all examined generally with regard to the frequency in which they co-occur with any other type of repeat, before the specific types of repeats that are likely to be combined in any given humorous turn are then looked at more closely. After the discussion of how intra-turn repeats correlate with other intra-turn repeats, and inter-turn with inter-turn repeats, respectively, Section 8.2.3 will address dependencies between intra-turn and inter-turn repeats. As explained in Chapter 6, this will be done in a first step by examining the correlations of individual types of

intra-turn repeats with the occurrence of any type of inter-turn repetition in the same humorous turn, and vice versa by examining the correlations of individual types of inter-turn repeats with the occurrence of any type of intra-turn repetition. In a second step, those types of specific intra-turn and inter-turn repeat that were found to significantly correlate with inter-turn or intra-turn repetition, respectively, were compared in more detail. Specific types of intra-turn repetition singled out in the first step were checked for correlations with each individual type of inter-turn repetition, and specific types of inter-turn repetition were checked for correlations with each individual type of intra-turn repetition (e.g. inter-turn prosodic repetition was checked pairwise for correlation with intra-turn structural parallelism, intra-turn prosodic repetition, intra-turn character gesture repetition, etc.). The results indicate what types of repeats are particularly likely to co-occur with other repeats and thus establish complex repetition patterns that will subsequently be discussed qualitatively.

8.2.1 Correlations of different types of intra-turn repetition

A first descriptive approach to correlations between types of intra-turn repeat is presented in Table 8.1 below. It asks quite simply what types of repeat are likely to occur on their own, or – on the contrary – are frequently present together with other types of intra-turn repetition in any given humorous turn (HT). Intra-turn repeats were categorised here as occurring on their own (‘no other type of intra-turn repeat in HT’); together with one other type of intra-turn repeat; or with at least two other types of intra-turn repeat. This general overview demonstrates that only intra-turn phonetic, gesture repeats and audio telecinematic repeats occur predominantly in the first configuration, i.e. in the

Type of repeat	number of other types of intra-turn repeats in HT						Total
	0		1		≥2		
intra-turn lexical exact single word	44	24.3%	68	37.6%	69	38.1%	181
intra-turn lexical exact multi- word	11	37.9%	10	34.5%	8	27.6%	29
intra-turn lexical single word, partial	10	17.2%	22	37.9%	26	44.8%	58
intra-turn lexical multi-word, partial	0	0.0%	5	23.8%	16	76.2%	21
intra-turn phonetic	61	51.7%	33	28.0%	24	20.3%	118
intra-turn structural parallelism	14	11.6%	37	30.6%	70	57.8%	121
intra-turn prosodic	55	22.5%	83	33.9%	107	43.7%	245
intra-turn character gestures	352	61.0%	127	22.0%	98	17.0%	577
intra-turn facial expressions	4	13.3%	4	13.3%	22	73.3%	30
intra-turn visual telecine-matic	2	16.7%	2	16.7%	8	66.7%	12
intra-turn audio telecine-matic	5	71.4%	1	14.3%	1	14.3%	7

Table 8.1: Co-occurrence of intra-turn repetition with other types of intra-turn repeats

absence of other intra-turn repeats. All other types of repeats seem to like the company of repetition. One way of conceptualising this finding is to state that collective senders when employing intra-turn repetition in HTs tend to encode that repetitiveness on multiple levels. This and the strikingly different distribution of phonetic and gesture repeats across these configurations needs to be looked at in more detail based on the subsequent steps and discussed with examples in Section 8.3.

Rather than interpreting these broad patterns in more detail, I will now narrow the focus by comparing the correlation of each type of intra-turn repeat with each other type of intra-turn repeat. As outlined in Chapter 6, this was done by comparing expected values for co-occurrence of any pair of variables in any given HT with the actual frequency of co-occurrence based on a re-examination of the entire population. The established differences in frequency were then checked for significance using p-values of Pearson's χ^2 (df=1). Differences were assumed to be significant where $p \leq 0.05$ and highly significant where $p \leq 0.01$. Negative correlation here means that the pair of repeats in question occurred significantly less frequently together than would be expected of fully independent variables. Positive correlation means that they occurred together significantly more often than expected. The resulting χ^2 -scores were then checked for effect size using Cramer's v . A correlation coefficient of $v=0.1$ was assumed to be a weak effect; 0.3 was assumed to be a medium effect; and 0.5 was assumed to be a strong effect. Together, these measures show if the number of HTs in which any pair of repeat types occur is within the expected range for entirely independent variables, and – where it significantly differs from chance – how strong the effect of the presence of any given type of repeat is on the presence of any other type of repeat.

While the correlations for all repeats are detailed in Appendix D.1, only those pairs of variables are discussed here that showed significant or even highly significant correlation in statistical tests. These pairs of repeats are also illustrated in Table 8.2. I will also refrain

Repeat type 1 (R1)	Repeat type 2 (R2)	N (R1 and R2 present)	correlation (χ^2)	effect size
exact single-word repeat	partial single-word repeat	9	highly significant*	weak
exact single-word repeat	partial multi-word repeat	13	highly significant*	weak-medium
exact single-word repeat	structural parallelism	34	highly significant	weak-medium
exact single-word repeat	prosodic repeat	56	highly significant	weak-medium
exact single-word repeat	character gesture repeat	96	highly significant	weak-medium
exact single-word repeat	facial expression repeat	8	highly significant*	weak
exact single-word repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	6	highly significant*	weak
exact single-word repeat	phonetic repeat	19	highly significant	weak
partial single-word repeat	prosodic repeat	8	highly significant*	weak
partial single-word repeat	facial expression repeat	2	highly significant‡	weak
exact multi-word repeat	partial multi-word repeat	3	highly significant*	weak
exact multi-word repeat	structural parallelism	13	highly significant*	weak
exact multi-word repeat	prosodic repeat	27	highly significant	weak-medium
exact multi-word repeat	character gesture repeat	36	highly significant	weak
exact multi-word repeat	facial expression repeat	6	highly significant*	weak
exact multi-word repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	2	highly significant*	weak
partial multi-word repeat	structural parallelism	7	highly significant*	weak
partial multi-word repeat	prosodic repeat	15	highly significant*	weak-medium
partial multi-word repeat	character gesture repeat	11	highly significant	weak

partial multi-word repeat	facial expression repeat	3	highly significant*	weak
partial multi-word repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	1	highly significant‡	weak
partial multi-word repeat	phonetic repeat	4	highly significant*	weak
structural parallelism	prosodic repeat	85	highly significant	strong
structural parallelism	character gesture repeat	57	highly significant	weak
structural parallelism	facial expression repeat	14	highly significant*	weak-medium
structural parallelism	visual telecinematic repeat	5	highly significant*	weak
structural parallelism	phonetic repeat	14	highly significant	weak
prosodic repeat	character gesture repeat	120	highly significant	weak-medium
prosodic repeat	facial expression repeat	22	highly significant*	weak-medium
prosodic repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	5	highly significant*	weak
prosodic repeat	phonetic repeat	23	highly significant	weak
character gesture repeat	facial expression repeat	20	highly significant	weak
character gesture repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	10	highly significant*	weak
facial expression repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	4	highly significant*	weak-medium

* χ^2 may be incorrect because the expected values are low. Significance was confirmed by Fisher's exact.
‡ χ^2 may be incorrect because the expected values are low. Fisher's exact showed no significant correlation.

Table 8.2: Significant correlations and effect sizes between types of intra-turn repeats

from reporting precise χ^2 , Fischer's exact and $v/\phi/r$ -scores in the main text and refer the reader to the same table in the appendix for more detailed statistical information.

Focussing on correlations between individual types of intra-turn repeats, Table 8.2 above shows that apart from the excluded category of auditory telecinematic repetition, only partial repetition of a single lexical word within turns occurs independently of some of the other types of repetition – all other types of repetition, when compared pairwise, correlate highly significantly. It is of course very tempting to immediately jump to conclusions at this point and to make statements about the probable causes for this finding that fit the research questions asked here.

However, before attempting an interpretation of these results, the potential for researcher bias when coding and annotating the corpus needs to be discussed. It is important to remember that the reported numbers are quantified based on qualitative coding and need therefore be interpreted with caution. Even though the categorisation was validated by making sure inter-coder agreement could be established, there is still the possibility that the methodological steps that led to the annotation of the data provoke the highly significant correlations. For instance, it may be the case that the coder when assessing each turn for the presence of any type of intra-turn repetition was made more alert to the presence of any other type of repetition when they found one type. This would mean that there is a bias towards finding multiple types of repetition in the same humorous turn. While this possibility cannot be discarded completely, there are two findings that indicate that this sort of bias is unlikely to have influenced the coding: The first is the fact that partial repetition of a single lexical item in a turn did not show the

same effect, i.e. it did not correlate with most of the other types of repetition. Secondly, the same potential bias does not occur in repetition across turns (see Section 8.2.2). It seems unlikely then that the coding would have been steered towards the presence of multiple types of repetition in one case, but not in others.

It seems more probable that the observed correlation of types of intra-turn repetition is a property of the data. However, effect size and the size of the expected values need to be included to make sure correlations are not only a result of the size of the data set. Doing so reveals first of all that, contrary to inter-turn repetition, all correlations had a measurable effect. In most cases, the $\sqrt{|\phi|/r}$ -scores were around the threshold for a weak effect, but there are also multiple cases in which the effect is between weak and medium, and one case – correlation between intra-turn structural parallelism and prosodic repeats – where the effect size is close to strong. For intra-turn repetition, which has been shown here to generally occur less frequently in AMSIL than inter-turn repetition, small expected values influence the reliability of the χ^2 -tests at the basis of the correlations more often than is the case for inter-turn repetition (as will be discussed in Section 8.2.2). In these cases, statistical values need to be interpreted with particular caution, and to improve reliability, Fisher's exact test was also run in order to accommodate to the small number of expected cases. With two exceptions, this test confirmed the significance established through χ^2 -testing (see Table 8.4). The reliably established correlations together with the clear tendency in the less reliable correlations, which was also confirmed by weak and weak-medium correlation coefficients, indicate that the different types of intra-turn repeat do generally not behave like independent variables.

This confirms the assumption made based on the broader initial overview that turns that are repetitive within themselves, i.e. those that feature intra-turn repetition, encode that repetitiveness with the help of

multiple types of repeat: the presence of one type of repeat makes that of another type of repeat statistically more likely. Based on this finding, it makes sense to speak of HTs that are intrinsically repetitive and of HTs that are not. Secondly it relativises the special status of phonetic and character gesture repeats to some extent. Both of them are comparatively frequent types of repeat that occur more often on their own than together with other repeats (see Table 8.3 above). However, when they are used by the collective sender together with another type of intra-turn repeat in the same HT, they correlate highly significantly with particular other types of repeat. In the case of phonetic repeats, these are exact single-word repeats, structural parallelisms and prosodic repeat; character gesture repetition correlates with the same repeats, and in addition also with both exact and partial multi-word repeats. This suggests then that intra-turn phonetic and gesture repetition occur in two configurations: (1) They appear on their own; (2) they support/are supported by the other types of repeat just mentioned. The actual composition of the relevant HT needs to be addressed qualitatively and based on examples in 8.3.

8.2.2 Correlations of different types of inter-turn repetition

Parallel to the first broad analysis of correlations between different types of intra-turn repeats, inter-turn repeats were also categorised here as occurring on their own ('no other type of inter-turn repeat in HT'); together with one other type of inter-turn repeat; or with at least two other types of inter-turn repeat. Table 8.3 shows that based on the relative frequencies for each type, inter-turn repeats vary substantially in this regard, from structural parallelism, which occurs on its own comparatively rarely (25.0%, see Table 8.3 below), to exact multi-word repetition, which often (69.0%, Table 8.3) occurs in absence of any other inter-turn repeats.

Type of repeat	number of other types of intra-turn repeats in HT						Total
	0		1		≥2		
inter-turn lexical exact single word	310	68.0%	107	23.5%	39	8.5%	456
inter-turn lexical exact multi-word	49	69.0%	18	25.4%	4	5.6%	71
inter-turn lexical single word, partial	115	59.6%	52	26.9%	26	13.5%	193
inter-turn lexical multi- word, partial	61	51.7%	41	34.8%	16	13.6%	118
inter-turn structural parallelism	15	25.0%	28	46.7%	17	28.3%	60
inter-turn prosodic	88	35.1%	103	41.0%	60	23.9%	251
inter-turn character gestures	86	63.7%	26	19.3%	23	17.0%	135
inter-turn facial expression	46	30.7%	62	41.3%	42	28.0%	150
inter-turn visual telecinematic	191	54.4%	104	29.6%	56	16.0%	351
inter-turn audio telecinematic*	5	35.7%	5	35.7%	4	28.6%	14

* for this category, inter-rater reliability could not be established. It is included for the sake of completeness, but cannot be used for any statistical testing.

Table 8.3: Co-occurrences of inter-turn repetition with other types of inter-turn repeats

Summarising these individual results, a clear pattern emerges: All types of lexical repetition occur on their own in more than half the cases, and the same pattern is shared by character gesture repeats as well as by visual telecinematic repeats. Structural parallelism, prosodic repeats and facial expression repeats, on the other hand, do more often occur together with other types of inter-turn repeats. One possible explanation for this finding is the type of the repeated unit that these two different groups concern. Whereas lexical repetition and character gesture repetition consists of recurrences of relatively short units (one or a few individual words, an individual gesture), the second group comprises units that need more time to unfold (facial expressions and recognisable syntactic and intonational patterns).

Table 8.4 makes apparent the pair-wise correlations between individual types of inter-turn repeat and thus presents a more fine-grained picture of the different types of inter-turn repetition that typically co-occur in any given HT.⁴⁵ There was first of all a highly significant negative correlation between inter-turn exact single-word repetition and inter-turn exact multi-word repetition in AMSIL. Even though the effect size of this negative correlation is only weak, this means that the occurrence of each of the two different types of exact lexical repetition resulted in a decreased probability for the other type to occur within the same HT. This finding is not unexpected, because, as specified in Chapter 6, single words that are parts of multi-word repetition were only included in counts of multi-word repeats, and were not included in single-word repeat frequencies. However, the negative correlation also suggests that if multiple words were repeated exactly across turns, it is less likely that the same HT would also repeat a single word exactly from the same or a different turn, and vice versa. Perhaps the more important finding in this regard is that no other cases of negative correlation were found with any pairs of repeats, inter- or intra-turn, in the corpus. This means that if repetition of any type occurs

⁴⁵ For a complete correlation table for inter-turn repetition see Appendix D.2.

in a HT in AMSIL, the likelihood of other types of repetition occurring in the same HT is generally either unaffected or increased.

This facilitation, i.e. positive correlation between types of inter-turn repeats, is a feature of aspects of multimodality in particular. Table 8.4 illustrates that in terms of inter-turn character multimodality, there is a highly significant correlation between gesture repeats and facial expressions, and each of the two also highly significantly correlate with inter-turn visual telecinematic repeats. Furthermore, inter-turn structural parallelism showed highly significant positive correlation with multimodal repeats (gestures, facial expressions, visual telecinematic), and also with prosodic repeats. Inter-turn prosodic repeats themselves highly significantly correlated with the same three types of multimodal repeat. As will be seen in 8.3, these correlations support the qualitative study of examples and the way repetitive patterns are constructed in HT – and some of these patterns were already hinted at in Chapter 7.

More surprising are the significant correlations that were found for inter-turn exact multiword repeats with both prosodic repeats and structural parallelism as well as for partial single-word repeats with visual telecinematic repeats. It is useful in both cases to again look at the actual effect sizes before attempting an interpretation of statistically significant correlation. Measuring $v/\phi/r$ -scores revealed that positive correlations were generally of weak effect size – the strongest effects were between measures of character multimodality (gesture and facial expression repeats, slightly above weak) as well as between inter-turn prosodic repeats and facial expression repeats (medium). In addition, the correlation between gesture repeats and visual telecinematic repeats was also between weak and medium. This is to say that in these cases there is a clear, albeit weak, influence of the presence of one type of repeat on that of other types of repeat. The inclusion of effect sizes further reveals that the surprising positive correlations between different types of lexical repetition on the one hand and prosodic,

Repeat type 1 (R1)	Repeat type 2 (R2)	N (HTs with R1 and R2)	Significance of correlation (χ^2)	effect size
character gesture repeat	facial expression repeat	28	highly significant	weak
character gesture repeat	prosodic repeat	34	highly significant	weak
character gesture repeat	structural parallelism	16	highly significant*	weak
character gesture repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	52	highly significant	weak-medium
prosodic repeat	exact multi-word repeat	29	significant	none
prosodic repeat	facial expression repeat	63	highly significant	medium
prosodic repeat	structural parallelism	16	highly significant	weak
prosodic repeat	visual telecinematic repeat	59	highly significant	weak
structural parallelism	exact multi-word repeat	11	highly significant*	none
visual telecinematic repeat	facial expression repeat	42	highly significant	weak
visual telecinematic repeat	partial single-word repeat	4	significant	none

* χ^2 may be incorrect because the expected values are low. Significance was confirmed by Fisher's exact.

Table 8.4: Significant correlations and effect sizes between types of inter-turn repeats, sorted alphabetically by R1 and then R2

structural or visual telecinematic repeats on the other hand are likely a result of the relatively large dataset: As the low correlation coefficients reveal, the effect size itself is negligible.

As discussed in Chapter 6, auditory telecinematic repeats are excluded here because they could not be validated in inter-rater reliability testing (they did not appear in the analysed data), and because they are employed very rarely in the HT in AMSIL. This exclusion notwithstanding, the most striking pattern of the statistical testing of correlations is still that inter-turn repeats concerning multimodal aspects tend to co-occur with other types of inter-turn repeats and other types of multimodal repeats in particular. First of all, this confirms the broad findings made before. It also demonstrates that when looked at in more detail, inter-turn character gesture repeats do not behave like lexical repeats. That they do occur on their own more often than not, yet significantly correlate with other types of repeat means then that on the one hand inter-turn gesture repeats are an important part of humorous sitcom turns themselves, but on the other hand also support those other types of repeats they frequently co-occur with. How exactly this reinforcement of other inter-turn repetition is realised will be discussed in Section 8.3.

8.2.3 Correlations between intra- and inter-turn repeats

So far, correlations between types of repeat have been kept separate for intra-turn and inter-turn configurations. In order to address the possibility that certain inter-turn repeats may correlate with certain intra-turn repeats, correlations were first of all established between individual inter-turn repeats and the presence of any type of intra-turn repeat and vice versa (see Chapter 6). The results of this first step can be presented in the form of a list, which names all those configurations that were found to be significant in χ^2 -tests:

Types of intra-turn repeats correlating with inter-turn repeats

- intra-turn exact single-word repeats (highly significant)
- intra-turn partial multi-word repeats (highly significant)
- intra-turn prosodic (highly significant)

Types of inter-turn repeats correlating with intra-turn repeats

- inter-turn exact single-word repeats (highly significant)
- inter-turn partial multi-word repeats (significant)
- inter-turn visual telecinematic repeats (significant)

Based on these correlations, two hypotheses present themselves:

- (1) Those intra-turn repetition types that correlate with inter-turn repeats and those inter-turn repetition types that do correlate with intra-turn repeats (see list above) generally behave differently to the other types, i.e. they are actually generally more likely to correlate with inter-turn or with intra-turn repetition, respectively.
- (2) The effect (i.e. the apparent correlation) is due to correlation between repetition of the same type across turns and within turns, which could indicate for instance that repeating a gesture from an earlier turn makes it more likely that this gesture is repeated again within the same turn.

In order to test the two hypotheses, it is necessary to look at the correlations of the six types listed as well as those between pairs of same-type repetition in both intra-turn and inter-turn configurations. This was done using the same methodology already employed in Sections 8.1 and 8.2, i.e. by comparing the relevant types of repeats pair-wise using a χ^2 -test and then measuring the effect size in $v/\phi/r$ -

scores. All significant and highly significant correlations are listed in Table 8.5 below (for a complete correlation table see Appendix D.3).

This table reveals a few interesting patterns. To begin with, intra-turn lexical repeats (exact and partial single-word and multi-word repeats) do correlate significantly only with lexical intra-turn repeats, and they only have a measurable effect size in the case of the correlation between the same repeat type in both intra-turn and inter-turn configurations (e.g. intra-turn and inter-turn exact single-word repetition). This is to say the two lexical patterns revealed by the broad analysis presented above (types of intra-turn repeats that correlate with inter-turn repetition of any type) are the effect of the special case of correlations between identical repeat types intra- and inter-turn. The same also holds true when looking at specific types of inter-turn repeats, where the measured effect is again the result of the same correlation between identical lexical repeats inter- and intra-turn. While the caveat of small expected values again applies in some cases, it seems nonetheless plausible to treat this as a rejection of hypothesis (1) and tentatively as a confirmation of hypothesis (2).

It seems then that individual inter-turn repeat types do not correlate with individual intra-turn repeat types, except where they are both of the same type. For example, HTs that feature inter-turn character gesture repeats are more likely to also feature intra-turn character gesture repeats. The same holds true for exact single-word repeats, partial multi-word repeats, partial single-word repeats, prosodic repeats and facial expression repeats. There is one notable exception to this rule, which concerns the correlation of intra-turn prosodic repeats and inter-turn exact single-word repeats. This exception will be addressed in Section 8.3.3.4. For the remaining types of repeats – exact multi-word repeats, structural parallelism, and visual telecinematic repeats – inter-turn and intra-turn configurations of each repeat did not correlate. However, each of them was only observed in a

Intra-turn repeat type (AR)	Inter-turn repeat type (RR)	N (HTs with AR and RR)	Significance of correlation (χ^2)	effect size
character gesture repeat	character gesture repeat	47	highly significant	none
character gesture repeat	exact single-word repeat	133	significant	none
character gesture repeat	partial multi-word repeat	40	significant	none
exact multi-word repeat	partial multi-word repeat	8	highly significant*	none
exact single-word repeat	exact single-word repeat	64	highly significant	weak
exact single-word repeat	partial multi-word repeat	16	significant	none
facial expression repeat	facial expression repeat	7	highly significant*	weak
facial expression repeat	partial multi-word repeat	5	highly significant*	none
partial multi-word repeat	exact single-word repeat	9	highly significant‡	none
partial multi-word repeat	partial multi-word repeat	8	highly significant*	weak
partial single-word repeat	partial single-word repeat	6	highly significant*	weak
phonetic repeat	partial multi-word repeat	16	significant	none
prosodic repeat	exact single-word repeat	69	highly significant	weak
prosodic repeat	partial multi-word repeat	19	significant	none
prosodic repeat	prosodic repeat	48	highly significant	weak

* χ^2 may be incorrect because the expected values are low. Significance was confirmed by Fisher's exact.
‡ χ^2 may be incorrect because the expected values are low. Fisher's exact showed no significant correlation.

Table 8.5: Significant correlations and effect sizes between types of inter-turn and intra-turn repeats, sorted alphabetically by intra-turn and then inter-turn repeat.

small number of HTs (between four and seven). While absence of significant correlation was confirmed by running Fisher's exact in these cases, this only confirms that a significant difference to chance cannot be reliably established for the number of found HTs that conform to these patterns. In other words, the findings do not permit the rejection of the null-hypothesis, which is that these types of repeat are entirely independent. It can thus be stated that these pairs of one inter-turn repeat and one intra-turn repeat of a different type co-occur only as frequently as can be mathematically expected and that in absolute figures there are only a handful of HTs showing the respective combination of repeats in the entire AMSIL-corpus.

With regard to the pairs of intra-turn/inter-turn repeats of the same type that do significantly correlate, the qualitative analyses of exemplary scenes will have to explain the co-occurrences. Example 7.2 already illustrated a case where an HT repeated a lexical item introduced in the previous turn ("tough") to start a sequence of exact lexical repeats, which in turn were used to construct a humorous incongruity. In this case, the HT based around the term "tough" is motivated by another character introducing the topic, creating a context that can justify the humorous line. Alternatively, intra-turn repetition could be used to make salient a particular item that has been repeated from an earlier turn, which would make sure that the call back to an earlier HT would not go unnoticed by the television viewers. These cases and possible interpretations will be addressed in Section 8.3.

8.3 Combining repeats into complex repetition

Based on descriptive and simple inferential statistics I established a number of correlations in 8.2 that will now serve to guide the qualitative analysis of how HTs are composed of repeats in AMSIL. I will reiterate each pattern I address here and illustrate it with the help of examples that were selected semi-automatically: A subset of all those HTs that fit the criteria for each correlation was created automatically, and out of

the resulting data set, illustrative examples that were thought both typical and understandable without an exceeding amount of context were handpicked. The discussion of these examples of complex repetition focuses on the interaction between the different repeats, but will also describe some of the functions in humour that are achieved through that combination of simple repeats. These functions will be addressed in more detail and more comprehensively in Chapter 9.

8.3.1 Complex intra-turn repetition

As discussed in Chapter 7, individual intra-turn repeats behave differently from inter-turn repeats. Instead of referring back to one or several earlier humorous turns in any given sitcom episode and serving the overall cohesion of the narrative, they present repetition in a more local sense, as a cluster of recurrences within the same HT. Moreover, intra-turn repetition has been shown in Section 8.2 to be more likely to consist of correlating individual repeats than inter-turn repetition, which is to say that this repetitiveness in a local sense is even more often encoded on multiple levels. In fact, only phonetic and character gesture repeats within turns appeared more often on their own, whereas repeats on all other levels correlated with other repeats more often than not. The following sections will illustrate typical cases for the different types of correlations and discuss their function.

8.3.1.1 Lexical repeats: Intra-turn exact and partial single- and multi-word repeats correlating with other types of repeats

As mentioned before, lexical repetition can be regarded as the prototypical type of repetition. This is supported by the fact that instances of intra-turn lexical repeats correlating with other repeats found in the corpus are typically cases where lexical repetitiveness is reinforced by one or multiple other types of repetition. Accordingly, lexical repetition can be regarded as the primary repeat here, and of the

other, co-occurring repeats as secondary. The first example, 8.1, illustrates one such case:

Example 8.1: Intra-turn exact single-word repeat and character gesture repeat in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

At the local bar, Jessica has been talking to David. Brandon has just interrupted them.

- [14:30] Jessica: look, Brandon, I was talking to David hhh.
 [14:33] Brandon: sorry,+I just thought you and I had something in+=
 HT106 +*extends right hand*-----+
 =common. (0.4) ±you're ado:pte:d, ±=
 ±*extends right hand*±
 =%my parents tell their friends I'm ado:pte:d.%
 %*points towards himself with right hand*-----%

In Example 8.1, Brandon tries to establish a connection between himself and Jessica, whom he fancies. That connection is made lexically, by repeating the word “adopted”, but also prosodically, by using very similar intonation. The right-hand gesture, however, does not connect the two occurrences of “adopted”, but links the first intonation unit that introduces the topic of Jessica and Brandon’s common ground and the second one that uses being adopted as a concrete example of that shared background. Humour here is the result of presenting a first utterance that provides a frame for the interpretation of the second, main utterance, and then following it up with a comparison between the two characters in question, with formal repetition establishing similarity where there is none on a conceptual level: The stark difference between actually being adopted and the implicature of Brandon’s parents telling everyone he has been adopted (i.e. they are embarrassed of him) clashes with Brandon’s apparent intention of using the link between the two as an exemplification of a similar background. Formal repetition is thus used to establish the clashing interpretations, and this formal repetition is encoded on a lexical and prosodic level. The link between theme and example on the

“yesterday” establish the link between today’s and yesterday’s statements, the stress patterns connect “older” to “old” and pitch links the second “yesterday” to “old”. These prosodically and lexically established links between the four lexical items encode a faulty argument in a very structured way, and indeed on the level of CL2, Ben retrospectively identifies it as “crazy Casey logic” – acknowledging that its presentation seems to follow a certain logic, and at the same time labelling that logic crazy. In this case, the responding character delivers an accurate interpretation of the preceding HT: humour is indeed constructed by juxtaposing apparently structured and logical form with the far-fetched argument that having aged by a day makes a difference when it comes to major life choices like buying a house. In this case, the prosodic secondary repeats put emphasis on the repeated lexical items and thereby also make sure that the “crazy Casey logic” does not go unnoticed by the television viewers.

Whereas the first example (8.1) in this section has illustrated the pattern of lexical and a secondary type of repeat co-occurring, yet serving different functions, the second example (8.2) has presented those cases in which lexical and secondary repeats jointly establish formal repetitiveness juxtaposed with semantic opposites.

Example 6.3: Intra-turn exact multi-word repeat, structural parallelism, and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E02

Steve has been arguing with his mother. In this scene his father, Jack, tells him to go and apologise to her.

[13:41] Jack: I know **you're right**, your sister knows **you're**
HT92 **right**=everyone here knows **you're right**. now go
to your mother and tell her you're wrong.

I include Example 6.3 again (introduced in Section 6.5) to illustrate the same joint function of lexical and secondary repeat for intra-turn multi-word repeats. These repeats are supported in this case

by both prosodic and structural intra-turn repeats. The character Jack establishes a group of similar items by repeating exactly the clause “you’re right” three times, which is supported by using the same syntactic structure *[NP]+[know]+“you’re right”*. Note that the two instances of repetition in this series of three can also be rendered separately as (1) *[Pers. Pron.]+[know]+“you’re right”* and (2) *[NP]+“knows you’re right”*, which does however not change its interpretation as an instance of exact multi-word repetition within an HT. Apart from structural parallelism and lexical repetition, the stress pattern that emphasises the last syllable of each of the initial noun phrases also supports the impression of repetitiveness in this case. The punch line then adds variation to the pattern by replacing the word “right” with the antonym “wrong”. Variation is also realised prosodically here, with the stress shifting to the last syllable.

What complex repetition does here then is to establish a pattern that consists of three occurrences and can be described as a progressive list of all those who know that the addressee, Steve, is right. Consequently, the next item in this list could still follow the same pattern, i.e. it could include yet another party that knows that Steve is right. However, the punchline does not simply alter the subject, but instead introduces a more significant, semantic change. The humorous line here is trivial in principle: Tell your mother she is right, despite the fact that she is wrong. It is essential for successfully constructing the humorous incongruity, however, that the setup of HT92 raise different expectations. This is achieved precisely by using complex repetition, which starts a list of items that trigger expectations for its continuation. The punch line then clashes with these expectations and thus introduces the incongruous element that successfully concludes the HT.

rules he teaches Casey and the overall enthusiasm he seems to have for his role as advice-giver.

It is not easy in this case to pinpoint how humour is constructed, but it would seem that the most central aspect is the clash between the two characters' attitudes toward the meeting they are currently having. Ben was asked by his long-term girlfriend Maddie to give advice to Casey, who is about to get married to Maddie's sister Mia. Whereas Casey is silent for the most part and later is seen to be disinterested in the advice he is presented with, Ben is shown to be passionate about his role. The teacher-student dynamic is established on different levels: in the positioning of characters, with Ben standing and thus looming over the sitting Casey; in the turn-taking, which has Ben hold the floor for the majority of the interaction, but mostly also in Ben's individual turns which multimodally construct him as the fervent teacher. It is this character behaviour, made up of linguistic and paralinguistic elements, which is metonymically created with the help of complex repetition. In other words, Ben's repeated gestures together with prosodic and structural repeats create a rhythm that is indexical of an enthusiastic stance, which in turn contrasts with Casey's lacklustre attitude.

8.3.1.3 Intra-turn prosodic repeats correlating with other types of repeats

The correlation between intra-turn prosodic repeats and exact single-word repeats has been illustrated in Example 8.2, and the previous Example 8.3 has also shown how prosody reinforces repetition that is encoded through gesture and structural parallelism at the same time. Example 8.4 presents an HT that is not different in principle when it comes to the interaction between multiple repeats, but has a different function:

Example 8.4: Intra-turn prosodic repeat and character gesture repeat in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Perry is talking to his friend Rebecca in his flat. She has just told him that his flatmate with whom he had a falling out thinks a make-up beer will remedy the situation.

[12:04] Perry: hm, +↑interesting. +=
 HT76 +**turns head away and nods**+
 =±o:kay,↑so he- ± %↑all right, yeah- %
 ±**turns h. back and nods**± %**turns h. away and nods**%
 that's good- ^↑so he: was just?- ^
 ^**turns h. back and nods**^
 # okay. (all right.) #
 #**turns h. away and nods**#

In the context of an argument between flatmates, Example 8.4 from *Romantically Challenged* shows Perry's reaction to his flatmate's assumptions about how the argument will be resolved. In this case, prosodic and gestural repetition together establish a series of false starts which in turn index the character's disbelief at what he is being told. Perry's multimodal performance is hyperbolic both with regard to the number of recurrences and the gestural emphasis each instance of a false start receives. The incongruity here lies precisely in the repetitiveness of the character actions, with Perry finishing his turn after no fewer than five false starts that are all accompanied by his turning his head away and back while nodding. This illustrates one way then in which repetition per se can be incongruous, because it goes against what could be plausibly expected in terms of an appropriate, conventional reaction at this point in the narrative.

8.3.1.4 Intra-turn character gesture repeats

Instead of adding further examples to illustrate how intra-turn character gesture repeats interact with other types of repeats, I will only refer back here to what has already been illustrated in earlier examples that featured character gestures. In the previous Examples 8.1 and 8.4, it

was apparent that hand gestures often support other types of linguistic and paralinguistic repeats and thus serve to visually accentuate the repetitiveness of the HT in question. Furthermore, similar inter-turn character gesture repeats will be illustrated in 8.3.2.2, and I will return to the role of gestures in Chapter 9, when I present an overview of functions of repetition in AMSIL.

8.3.1.5 Intra-turn phonetic repeats

The final type of correlations between different types of intra-turn repeats concerns phonetic repetition. The only significant correlation in this case was found to be with prosody, and Example 8.5 illustrates such a case:

Example 8.5: Intra-turn phonetic repeat and prosodic repeat in *Undateable*, S01E01

Danny speaks to his friend and flatmate Justin about helping him to improve his dating life.

[07:31] Danny: look, I get it you know. you're scared and change is
HT76 hard baby bird, but I'm gonna help you mend those
broken wings. I'm gonna be the father bird and just
feed you knowledge.
+UGH-U:GH-EHH +=
+moves head forward and sticks tongue out+
= ±U:GH-EHH ±
±moves head forward and sticks tongue out±
%U:GH-EHH %
%moves head forward and sticks tongue out%

In the first episode of *Undateable*, Danny frequently addresses his new flatmate Justin as “baby bird” and regards him as a protégé when it comes to dating women. In Example 8.5, he performs a physical rendition of the metaphor he has been establishing, by imitating a regurgitating bird with gestures and sounds. On a conceptual or semantic level, this can be simply called a repetition of the regurgitating

bird routine; on the formal level, this is constructed based on a correlation of repeated sounds and repeated gestures. In this case, repetition can perhaps be regarded as peripheral, because it seems that even the first occurrence of the regurgitating bird routine would be sufficiently incongruous to successfully create a humorous effect. However, at the very least, the two recurrences lend emphasis to the unexpected behaviour of the actor/character. This hyperbolic performance may be seen as a version of what Kozloff (2000) calls a 'star turn', which is to say that the actions performed on screen in this case seem not directly motivated by the narrative and by what would be plausible character actions, but by the actor performing a humorous scene for the benefit of the television viewers.

8.3.2 Complex inter-turn repetition

Based on the findings in 8.2, the discussion of complex inter-turn repetition will focus on aspects of multimodality as well as on prosodic repeats interacting with other types of repeats, since those were the aspects that showed significant positive correlations of measurable effect size.

8.3.2.1 Telecinematic multimodality: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeats correlating with other types of repeats

The first group of repeats that will be addressed here is that of correlations between visual telecinematic repeats with repetition on other levels. The three significant positive correlations were shown in 8.2.1 to be with facial expression repeats, with character gesture repeats and with prosodic repeats. In other words, it seems that repeats regarding the way in which a particular scene is filmed in terms of the props and settings are often accompanied by repeats to do with actor performance, including paralinguistic and extralinguistic aspects. The following examples will present typical cases that demonstrate how

these combinations of repeats are realised in AMSIL. Example 8.6 represents inter-turn visual telecinematic repeats accompanied by repeats of facial expression.

Example 8.6: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and facial expression repeat in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Having dated a woman who wants him to spank her and call her names during sex, Perry has found a way to trigger his angry side by having his friend Lisa imitate the Star Wars character Darth Vader. Here, he has rushed out of the bedroom and, dressed only in boxer shorts, called Lisa who obliged by imitating Darth Vader's voice and breathing on the phone.

- [16:36] Lisa: <deep voice> use some fo:rcē.
HT110 </deep voice>
[16:40] Perry: <deep voice> oh I will you heavy-breathing
HT111 bastard.</deep voice>.
[16:44] Perry: oh my god. thank you so much=bye, Lisa.
HT112

Example 8.6 illustrates a typical way of how facial expression repeats and visual telecinematic repeats are used to construct humorous turns. In this second episode of *Romantically Challenged*, the character Perry is shown to be a very friendly and kind person. This character trait is enacted on multiple levels in different humorous and non-humorous turns throughout the episode. As in earlier HTs in this episode, HT112 uses Perry's facial expression – which can be described as a gentle, kind smile – to yet again activate this part of his character. Both the facial expression and what it stands for are marked here based on the way they are narratively and telecinematically framed. On the one hand, Perry's kindness is juxtaposed with the aggressive and violent actions his sexual partner requests of him, with many scenes addressing the difficulties he has to be aggressive and forceful rather than kind and loving; on the other hand, the *mise-en-scène* here shows a man in his underwear, who has escaped the lover in his bedroom in order to call his friend and hear Darth Vader's voice, which he does

pressed against a wall, hiding in a corner. Accordingly, there are at least two different incongruities playing together in HT112: the thematic incongruity motivated by the narrative, between Perry's kindness and the requested anger that had just surfaced in HT111; and the local and physical incongruity of this scene, central to the humour in HT106 until HT112, which are all performed telecinematically with the same camera shot and setting. The visual telecinematic repeats are of course in this case owed in part to the conventions of continuity (see Section 10.4). But this in itself demonstrates an important way in which inter-turn repeats interact, with one repeat serving humour cohesion macrostructurally, i.e. by tying in HT112 with earlier humorous turns that addressed the kindness/aggression opposition, while the other one serves the microstructure of this scene and leads to a sequence of humorous instances that are linked through their temporal and spatial juxtaposition as well as their telecinematic performance.

Apart from illustrating the cohesive function of repetition, this example also demonstrates several other functions of repeats in telecinematic humour. The first humorous instance in HT110 is based on intertextuality, which was excluded from the working definition of repetition this study adheres to. It establishes a pun between the collocation "to use force", which here ties in with the physical violence that is asked of the character Perry in the bedroom, and the use of force in the context of the *Star Wars* films and more specifically as used by the character Darth Vader, whom Lisa impersonates on the phone. Joined by the pun are thus two frames – a sexual one, more specifically one of sadomasochistic sexual preferences, and a pop-cultural one, referencing a famous villain from a science-fiction film. What is interesting here is that Suls' (1972) linear model of incongruity and resolution has to be reconceived as a multilinear one of incongruities and resolutions: The *Star Wars* frame that has previously been evoked and is re-activated here through prosodic repetition in Lisa's turn HT110 serves as the frame that clashes with the telecinematically encoded setting of a man trying to create a particular mind-set for

himself – a mind-set which allows him to be the bedroom persona his partner wants him to be. On the other hand, the immediate scene and context can be said to serve as a frame of a particular sexual encounter, incongruous with the phone call to the friend and the request for ventriloquising Darth Vader. In other words, while it can clearly be established what semantic frames are contrasted in this HT, it is more difficult to decode the linear construction of humour, and it is likely that uptake of humour on CL2 will differ from viewer to viewer. At the same time, appreciation as a CL1-process also clearly influences humour here, with the reference to Star Wars serving as a metacommunicative wink by the collective sender to the television viewers who will take pleasure in understanding the pun.

Even in this initial humorous instance in Example 8.6, formal repetition plays its part in re-activating frames that were made salient by repeated activation in previous scenes, and is complemented by semantic repetition in the form of repeated referencing to character traits (Perry's kindness), character actions and situations in which they find themselves (Perry's sexual relationship), as well as to intertextual elements (Darth Vader).⁴⁶ The continuation of the scene then builds on the multimodally evoked frames, with Perry echoing the voice quality associated with Darth Vader, which is contrasted with the visually continuous encoding of the half-naked man outside of his bedroom. This is then followed by a shift in HT112, where Perry returns to encoding, prosodically and with his facial expression, the kindness which has been established as part of his character, and thus constructs a more clearly diachronic incongruity with the dark side he performed in HT111 and which serves as the first, expectation-evoking, frame of HT112.

The range of functions thus includes characterisation and the construction of narrative events that may both serve as frames or as

⁴⁶ Such aspects of semantic, i.e. non-formal, repetition will be explored in the Chapter 10.

incongruous elements for individual humorous instances. Repetition also more generally serves the establishment of patterns (e.g. using a deep, threatening voice) that are then broken for humorous effect, and it creates complete and partial call backs to earlier instances of humour (e.g. creating variations of the ‘STAR WARS/SEX’ and the ‘KIND PERRY/SPANKING’ incongruities). As mentioned above in Section 8.1, I will return to a discussion of the different functions I identify here in Chapter 9.

The second correlation of inter-turn visual telecinematic repeats with character gesture repeats is illustrated in Example 8.7:

Example 8.7: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and character gesture repeat in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

Emily stands opposite her father, David. She holds a shrunk pink sweater with torn off sleeves. (We saw her tear off the sleeves in HT57 and HT58).

[11:28] David: please, tell me that's not mom's favourite sweater.

[11:31] Emily: *nods four times.*

[11:32] David: *grabs a paper bag and loudly **breathes in and out***
HT79 ***into the bag.***

This is an instance of a typical interaction between character actions and a prop that is part of the *mise-en-scène*. In this case, the viewers had seen David's son Joe breathe into the paper bag that features in HT79 several times before. In the earlier HTs, this character action appeared as an overly stressed reaction of a small boy who hyperventilates at the sight of something as unimportant as a stain on his costume. Accordingly, breathing into the bag has become indexical of high levels of stress. In HT79, when David sees the remains of his wife's favourite sweater – an expensive piece of clothing she has been fervently looking for – he reacts by appropriating his son's behaviour. The correlation of repeats here is both trivial and typical: the foregrounded object, the paper bag, is being used for a particular character action, and accordingly both the visual telecinematic

representation of the object as well as the character action it is involved in are repeated together. This also means that the correlation of different types of repeat is different in principle from Example 8.6. There, the individual inter-turn repeats referred back to two different earlier turns and thus established cohesive links locally as well as across a greater distance in the text. Here, on the other hand, the two repeats both refer back to the same prior HT and reinforce the link to that earlier scene.

The functions of the complex repetition in HT79, apart from cohesion, is to construct a call back to the humour of the earlier scene it references. Like his son before, David now engages in a form of visual hyperbole, an externalisation of his levels of stress to an extent that goes beyond what can be expected as a plausible reaction in these circumstances: husbands do not typically hyperventilate when they learn that their wife's sweater has been destroyed. There is variation here as the action is performed in response to a different stimulus and by a different character, but on a higher level of abstraction, it constructs the same incongruity that the earlier HT it references had used to create a humorous effect.

Inter-turn repetitive telecinematic framing also accompanies and is accompanied by prosodic repeats across turns, which is illustrated in Example 8.8:

Example 8.8: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

Hank is giving a (casually racist) speech about ethnic changes in the neighbourhood of the bar where the scene takes place. He stands next to the bar, with a beer in his hand and oriented towards the other customers who listen to what he has to say and frequently cheer in response to his comments.

[05:24] Hank: **THEN THE Italians** moved in. and we all
HT32 thought, **oh**-oh, there goes the **neighbourhood** (0.8)
[05:29] Hank: b-but **Jack** said, **HA:NK**, simmer **do:wn**. (0.9)
HT33 technically Italians are white people **too**.

This scene from the first episode of *Sullivan & Son* is made up of a series of turns by Hank, who is holding a long speech about the neighbourhood of the bar that is the main location of this sitcom and also where the scene is set. A series of HTs are performed by the actor/character standing in the same position in the middle of an attentive and reactive audience, with a beer glass in his right hand and the bar behind him. The *mise-en-scène* serves as a representation of a man holding a speech in a bar, and the fact that a number of successive HTs are realised in the same manner is again owed to the conventions of telecinematic continuity, which uses visual repetition to create a cohesive scene. This is accompanied by notable parallels in the prosodic performance of each HT. HT33, for instance, is performed with the same voice quality as HT32 and following the same pattern of a loud beginning that is followed by a punch line uttered at a lower volume. The effect of this presentation is that the two HTs illustrated in Example 8.8 and other HTs that follow construct Hank's speech as a series of related politically incorrect jokes. Repetition is thus used here to establish a local joke series, whose individual HTs are linked not just by a shared theme, but also by a similarity in performance and telecinematic framing. The co-occurring repeats mutually reinforce each other in establishing that each humorous line uttered by Hank does not stand on its own, but is part of the longer segment of his politically incorrect speech at the bar. That this speech serves as a humorous performance of cohesive lines is also manifest in a preceding utterance of the main character Steve, who informs his girlfriend that "this is gonna be good," thus implicating that she will be about to witness a spectacle.

8.3.2.2 Character multimodality: Inter-turn character gesture repeats and facial expressions correlating with other types of repeats

Inter-turn kinetic repeats, i.e. aspects of character multimodality that recur across HTs, also correlated with particular other types of repetition. As was illustrated in Examples 8.6 and 8.7, facial expressions and character gestures occur together with repetitive telecinematic framing, be it as multiple encoding of a reference back to an earlier turn, or in order to juxtapose two previously evoked frames that can be opposed to construct a humorous incongruity.

It is not surprising that the two aspects of character multimodality that were distinguished here, gestures and facial expressions, do also frequently co-occur as part of inter-turn repetition:

Example 8.9: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and facial expression repeat in *Undateable*, S01E02

Danny has been trying to give advice to his friend Justin on how to approach his co-worker Nicki and ask her out on a date. He is talking to him in the kitchen of the flat they share.

- [12:04] Danny: look, every time I give you an amazing idea, on how
HT99 to get Nicki, you shoot it down like skeet. (0.6) hey,
take her to a movie.
pull + ((makes gun noise)). +
+ *shooting a rifle gesture* +
- [12:13] Danny: stop singing so much.
HT100 pull + ((makes gun noise)). +
+ *shooting a rifle gesture* +

In Example 8.9 taken from the second episode of *Undateable*, Danny provides a very physical performance of what he feels is his friend Justin's reaction to his attempts at helping him. Based around the metaphorical expression 'to shoot down an idea', Danny does not simply explain how his friendly advice has been repeatedly rejected,

but constructs that rejection as a multimodal performance. He lists each proposition he has made to his friend Justin, and then follows it up with the sounds and gestures that imitate loading and shooting a rifle, quite literally acting out the shooting down of his ideas “like skeet”. This performance is accompanied by a salient facial expression, eyes wide open and raised eyebrows, which the actor repeats every time he pretends to shoot down one of his own ideas.

Repetition again creates a list of related humorous actions in this case, each of them incongruous mostly due to the actor/character performance that can be seen as another instance of a star turn, as it was illustrated in Example 8.3. Danny’s performance of shooting skeet is nearly identical in each HT here, and there is thus no notable variation in the physical punch lines. However, HT100 adds to the purely physical comedy a shift towards humour targeting Justin more directly: When HT99 shot down an expected piece of dating advice (“take her to a movie”), HT100 presents “stop singing so much” as advice for Justin, thus at the same time mocking Justin’s singing that the viewers had witnessed in earlier scenes, and unexpectedly including a request for him to stop singing into the category of what Danny believes counts as friendly dating advice. These two aspects allow for two interpretations of HT100. The first one will understand this second, advice-related aspect as a background incongruity to the physical performance in the foreground, while the punch line itself is based on exact repetition without variation. Following this understanding of HT100 and at the same time adhering to the incongruity-resolution paradigm, it would seem that the essential unexpected element here is exact repetition itself, i.e. that the physically enacted rifle shooting would occur not once, but multiple times in succession. Alternatively, if more weight is given to the stop-singing-as-advice incongruity, HT100 becomes an example of cohesively tying together thematically connected but different individual HTs to form a humorous series, not unlike Example 8.8.

Inter-turn repeats of character gestures and facial expressions each also interact with prosodic repetition. Example 8.10 presents how gestures and prosody co-occur, Example 8.11 focuses on facial expressions and prosodic repeats:

Example 8.10: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and prosodic repeat in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie and Kate have established that they both do not want a romantic relationship, but instead friendship and sex without commitment. In this scene, Charlie and Kate are lying in bed together, while Charlie expresses his appreciation of Kate's casualness about their relationship.

[07:20] Charlie: You're the best kind of friend there is. hhh .hhh
 HT57 No attachments whatsoever. hhh .hhh
 I promise, hhh.+ +± ±
 +*kiss*+ ±*kiss*±
 .hhh I will never, love you. % %
 %*ki*[*ss*%]
 [07:30] Kate: [mm]m. Keep
 talking!
 [07:33] Charlie: +mmm. I +will never ±(.) ±love you
 HT58 +*kiss*-----+ ±*kiss*±
 hhh .hhh % %forever.
 %*kiss*%

The scene from the first episode of *Anger Management* illustrates that the correlation between inter-turn repetition of character gestures/actions and prosodic repeats is typically due to the multimodality of performance. In this case, Charlie creates a mismatch of form and content by enacting a passionate lover's declaration of undying love while uttering the opposite, i.e. that he will never love Kate. The frame of the passionate lover is evoked by interrupting each utterance with audible breathing as well as with kisses, the 'no love' frame, on the other hand, is encoded linguistically, by explicitly stating that he will never love her in HT57, and that he will never love her forever in HT58. The latter HT thus includes repetition on multiple

levels: on top of repeated gestures and prosodic repeats, it also contains structural parallelism as well as exact multi-word repetition. The individual types of repetition that co-occur here cannot be said to serve separable functions, but they reinforce each other in their establishing of a local pattern in Charlie's behaviour and therefore in making salient the form/content incongruity at the core of the humour that is constructed here. While there is some variation between HT57 and HT58 with regard to the placement of the kisses and breaths that interrupt the utterance, the majority of repetitive aspects establish similarity between the two turns. Notable change only occurs on the level of lexis, where the addition of "forever" leads to an increased emphasis on the temporal aspects of Charlie's promises and thus on the 'love forever/never' incongruity.

The co-occurrence of inter-turn kinetic and prosodic repeats in Example 8.11 from the second episode of *The McCarthys* also serves to establish similarity between turns on multiple levels.

Example 8.11: Inter-turn facial expression repeat and prosodic repeat in *The McCarthys*, S01E02

Ronny is talking to his date Ben about how he will celebrate his parents' wedding anniversary with them.

[07:59] Ronny: oh, we're having dinner.

[08:00] Ben: **uh-hu:::h?**

HT68

[08:03] Ronny: a dinner party.

[08:05] Ben: **uh-hu:::h?**

HT69

Ben's emphatic backchannels communicate his expectation of a follow-up to the ways Ronny claims he will honour his parents' anniversary, pushing him to ever new promises he will have to keep in later scenes of the episode. In terms of humour construction itself, Example 8.11 is similar to Example 8.9 above, with identical punch

lines following slight variation of the frame. Here, however, the aspect of repetition is on a more conceptual level and more clearly tied to CL2: Each ‘uh-huh’ that follows after HT68 serves as a way of multimodally encoding that Ben is still not satisfied with Ronny’s plans and creates the expectation that Ronny, who wants to present himself in a good light, will have to add a more festive component to his plans for his parents in order to satisfy Ben. Ronny’s utterances present themselves as a list of ever more elaborate plans, which establish a discrepancy between the common ground that is shared by the television viewers and Ronny on one side, and Ronny and Ben on the other. Whereas Ben takes Ronny’s plans at face value, we as viewers know that he has in fact made no plans whatsoever and that the list he now presents is the product of impromptu invention. The humorous turns that are performed by Ben consist of identical utterances that are repeated on all levels. While the frame for each humorous incongruity shifts to include ever more festive plans for Ronny’s parents, Ben’s reaction remains the same and thus asks for yet more elaboration. This is to say that repetition occurs where variation would be the preferred response, which means that Ben’s utterance in HT69 is unexpected precisely because it is an exact repetition of HT68.

The final type of correlation between inter-turn kinetic repeats and repetition on a different level is illustrated in Example 8.12:

Example 8.12: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and structural parallelism in *Better with you*, S01E01

Casey, who is about to meet his future parents-in-law for the first time, is at Ben’s to receive some advice about how he should approach them.

[10:39] Ben: uh:, let's see. call them Mr. and Mrs. Putney, .h even=
 HT77 >>*right hand emphasis gesture (rheg)*----->
 = though they'll say, call us whatever.+
 -----+
 oh, ±an- an- and don't ± try and make a joke and=
 ±*rheg*-----±
 =actually. call them, % whatever %

- %rheg-----%
- [...]
[10:58] Ben: oh, don't give Mrs. Putney your e-mail address.
HT81 >>**rheg**----->
that woman has never+ =
-----+
= ± met a cutesy e-mail she hasn't ±=
±**one hand index finger g. (ohifg)**±
=% forwarded. .hh %
%**backhand moving g.--%**
[11:04] Ben: and + don't make any jokes about plastic surgery. +
HT82 + **index finger g. with two hands**-----+
± five years ago, = Mr. ± =
±**ohifg**-----±
=% Putney's ears stuck out like this.%=
%**holds both his ears**-----%
=+now they're fine. +
+**holds both hands away from head**+
= I don't know what happened.
±never asked. <whispering> don't wanna know. </w.>±
±**wags index finger**-----±

In this scene from the first episode of *Better with you*, Ben is giving advice to Casey on what to say and what not to say when he will meet his future parents-in-law for the first time.⁴⁷ The individual pieces of advice are phrased as “don’t + [V]” imperatives and they are accompanied by a progression of gestures that in both HT81 and HT82 include gesture repetition followed by variation: HT81 repeats the open-handed gesture of HT80 and then moves on to an index finger gesture. This gesture is taken up in HT82, accompanied by the same gesture mirrored with the other hand and then followed by other gestures that serve to emphasise the type of advice Ben is giving. The correlation between different types of repetition is clearly dependent on the relation between utterances and the character gestures that

⁴⁷ As a sidenote, it can be gathered from this and earlier examples that explicit advice-giving occurs very frequently in the AMSIL corpus.

accompany them, with the gestures being used to emphasise the specific piece of advice that is given and to position Ben as advice-giver. The step-by-step repetition and change pattern, however, occurs purely on the level of gestures and demonstrates that the different levels of repetition do nonetheless occur with some independence and can in this case construct Ben's utterances as a logical sequence of connected items on a purely kinetic level, whereas the linguistic level paratactically encodes a mere juxtaposition of unordered pieces of advice.

8.3.2.3 Inter-turn prosodic repeats correlating with other types of repeats

The third category of correlations that were shown to be statistically significant and of measurable effect size in AMSIL in Section 8.2 concerns inter-turn prosodic repeats. Examples 8.8, 8.10 and 8.11 have already provided illustrations of how prosodic repeats interact with aspects of telecinematic and character multimodality. In these cases, co-occurring repeats serve to jointly reinforce similarity between individual HTs in order to integrate them into a larger humorous segment and to multimodally establish a pattern that can then be contrasted with an aspect that does not fit the pattern in order to create a humorous incongruity. Conversely, they are also used to repeat the same incongruous element in the context of shifting frames, thus emphasising on multiple levels that there is exact repetition where variation would be expected.

Example 8.13 presents the correlation between inter-turn prosodic repeats and structural parallelism, which follows a similar pattern to the other examples:

Example 8.13: Inter-turn prosodic repeat and structural parallelism in *Retired at 35*, S01E02

David talks with his separated parents Alan and Elaine about them getting back together.

- [18:45] David: well, okay? (0.9) so, no:w. (0.5) f(h)inally, (0.7) are you guys gonna get back together?
- [18:52] Elaine: I don't know.
- [18:53] Alan: **me eith[er.]**
- [18:54] Elaine: [hhh.] I have no clue.
- [18:56] Alan: **me either.=**
- [18:56] Elaine: =it's all new to me.=
- [18:57] Alan: **=me, too.**
- HT121

In this case, prosody and the structural pattern “me + [either|too]” together emphasise the repetitiveness of Alan’s utterances, with the relevant HT121 introducing variation that is triggered by standard English grammar. The series of rhythmically alternating turns begins with Elaine who finds various ways to linguistically encode her cluelessness. While she contrasts formal variation with semantic repetition, Alan follows each turn by semantically repeating Elaine’s utterance and – from the second iteration onward – formally repeating his own earlier turn. The prosodic similarity of HT121 with earlier turns is on the one hand emphasised by the interactional context in which it occurs, and on the other hand accentuates the similarity in the structure not just of Alan’s turns but also of the entire back and forth between both participants. While it serves a slightly different function then, the co-occurrence of different repeats as such again has to be understood as a way of doing repetitiveness on multiple levels.

8.3.3 Combining intra-turn and inter-turn repetition

The final set of correlations found in 8.2 was between intra-turn and inter-turn repeats, and it was hypothesised there that in these cases repeats within turns will make salient a particular item that is repeated

from an earlier turn. This is to say that the intra-turn repeat in this case serves as a metacommunicative cue that highlights a particular item and signals to the television viewers that they should pay attention to that item, which will allow them to more readily recognise inter-turn repetition. The following subsection will present examples of the different types of intra-turn/inter-turn correlations and will reveal whether the hypothesis based on the quantitative findings can be supported by close-readings of data excerpts from AMSIL.

8.3.3.1 Lexical intra-turn and inter-turn repeats

On the level of lexis, the connection between intra-turn and inter-turn repeats was already introduced in Example 7.2, where multiple repeats of the word “tough” followed one instance of “tough” in the previous turn. A similar case is presented in Example 8.14:

Example 8.14: Inter-turn exact single-word repeat and intra-turn exact single-word repeat in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

David has been able to convince his mother, Susan, to come by his father’s house in an attempt to bring together his separated parents. However, now that Susan shows up at the house, his father is preparing for a romantic date with another woman and expecting that woman’s arrival at any minute.

[17:32] Susan: David, is there a **problem**?
 [17:34] David: u:hm, just little t:iny **problem**. u:h, >not a big
 HT128 **problem**. little **problem**. fun-size **problem**.<

In the excerpt of *Retired at 35* in Example 8.14, Susan asks her son David whether there is a problem. He echoes the word “problem” in his second pair-part, and then starts a series of lexical repeats of the same lexical item, pre-modified by different adjective phrases that all encode the same meaning, SMALL PROBLEM. The incongruity here consists of the looming problem expected by David and the television viewers alike, and David’s overly emphatic assertion that the problem

is just a very small one. This emphasis is achieved by semantic repetition as it will be discussed in Chapter 10, as well as by formal repetition of the lexical “problem”, which is motivated by Susan introducing it as a conversation topic. The incongruity is reinforced by the fact that the redundancy encoded in the quick succession of exact lexical repeats in David’s utterance is unexpected in itself.

Example 8.15 presents a case where partial multi-word repetition is used in a very similar fashion:

Example 8.15: Inter-turn partial multi-word repeat and intra-turn partial multi-word repeat in *Undateable*, S01E02

After Danny has repeatedly given his flatmate and friend Justin unsolicited dating advice, Justin has now turned the tables and asked Danny to “be real” for once.

[15:05] Danny: LOOK man, g- **get outta my business**, baby bird.
 [15:09] Justin: **get outta your business?** (0.7) you’re sending text messages from my phone- you couldn’t be **more in my business** if you crawled up my butt and started selling hats.

Here, the incongruity is in the comparison Justin offers to emphasise just how much Danny meddles in his life. The notion of “being in somebody’s business”, i.e. of meddling with someone’s private life, is escalated by means of a hyperbolic analogy that in itself is based around clashing frames (activated by “crawled up my butt” and “selling hats”). Intra-turn lexical repetition ties in this humorous escalation with the initial intonation unit of HT118. That unit in turn echoes Danny’s previous turn and thus serves as an interactional motivation of the following HT.

8.3.3.2 Intra-turn and inter-turn prosodic repeats

Prosodic intra-turn/inter-turn repeat correlations occur in the same fashion only when they are supporting lexical repetition. The typical pattern for prosody, however, can be called repetition of repetition, which is illustrated in Example 8.16:

Example 8.16: Inter-turn prosodic repeat and intra-turn prosodic repeat in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

In this episode, Amy repeatedly speaks with a marked intonational pattern that the characters themselves identify as “non-specific, emotional modulation”. It involves an increase in volume, staccato-like stress on most syllables and a change in voice quality, which together index the overly dramatic mode of speaking generally associated with overacting.

[01:40] Amy: mm, that’s a beautiful thought, David. but .hhh **THEY**
HT11 **EAT (.) WHAT YOU MAKE** them .hhh or **THEY**
WILL GO HUNGRY.

[...]
[02:29] Amy: why, if it isn’t Kevin, my husband’s strangely coiffed
HT19 and forever-loyal ex-assistant who we’ve all embraced
like a **LO:NG-LOST** cousin.

The instances of “non-specific, emotional modulation” that appear in Example 8.16 are examples of a repetitive speech pattern that recurs several times in this episode. Returning to her job as a soap opera actress, Amy practices her dramatic overacting at home, which is juxtaposed with the more naturalistic, albeit equally stylised, dialogue of the other characters, i.e. the established, unmarked norm on CL2. The rhythmic stress patterns that this marked emotional modulation entails is repetitive in itself, and that repetitive intonation is then repeated in several call backs without there being any variation in the prosodic realisation. Such patterns of repeated repetition will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 11, when the larger structures of scenes and episodes are addressed.

8.3.3.3 Intra-turn and inter-turn facial expression repeats

The seven instances of correlating intra-turn and inter-turn facial expressions in AMSIL all coincide with intra-turn/inter-turn repetition on a lexical or prosodic level. None of them have discernible separate functions outside of supporting the patterns that were already discussed in the previous sections.

8.3.3.4 Correlation between intra-turn prosodic repeat and inter-turn exact single-word repeat

I have found in Section 8.2.3 that there are no correlations between intra-turn and inter-turn repeats of different types in AMSIL except for the case of intra-turn prosodic repeats and inter-turn exact single-word repeats. For the 69 instances of this type, the statistical measures employed in this study indicated positive correlation that was highly significant and of weak effect size. Analysing all these instances in detail, however, no systematic interaction between the intra-turn prosodic repeats and the inter-turn lexical repeats could be identified. Example 8.17 presents a typical case:

Example 8.17: Inter-turn exact single-word repeat and intra-turn prosodic repeat in *Anger Management*, S01E02

In Charlie's kitchen, Charlie and his friend Kate talk about him meeting the woman from his past that has showed up in his therapy group.

- [09:05] Kate: no- I think you're cra:::zy, okay this woman has had HT74 a fantasy relationship with you for the past sixteen years. Now she's tracked you down, exposed you in front of your patients. And you're (.) so busy trying to be a better guy, that you are cooking dinner for a ↑sta:lker.
- [09:19] Charlie: She's not a stalker. She's just a woman with (.) HT75 pathologically low self- es↓tee:m, obsessive fi↓xations=and a tendency toward grandiose de↑lusions.

In this scene from the second episode of *Anger Management*, it can be observed how the lexical repetition of the word “stalker” ties in HT75 with HT74. Prosodic intra-turn repetition in the form of a rhythmic stress pattern is then used to create a structured list of character descriptions that together define a stalker, thus encoding the opposite of Charlie’s initial observation “she’s not a stalker”. Summarising both repetition patterns, we follow the introduction of “stalker” as a conversational topic in HT74 to its echoing in HT75, which in turn leads to the rhythmic and covert presentation of typical stalker characteristics that are incongruous with the assertion that the woman in question is not a stalker. There is thus in this case a connection that can be established between the lexical item that is repeated across turns and the prosodic repetition that occurs within HT75. However, it does not reveal why this type of prosodic repetitiveness should be particularly likely in HTs that repeat an exact word from an earlier turn, or, vice versa, why repeating a word across HTs should facilitate intra-turn prosodic repetition.

8.4 Summary

This chapter has gone beyond individual repeats and shifted the focus to the composition of humorous turns (HTs) insofar as they use repetitive elements to construct humorous incongruities. I have referred to patterns consisting of more than one type of repeat as complex repetition. Based on the coding scheme presented and discussed in Chapter 6, I have first used quantitative steps to find correlations between lexical, prosodic, structural, kinesic, and telecinematic repeats, both with respect to their inter-turn and intra-turn occurrences. Testing statistical significance of correlations and effect size has revealed different patterns for repetition across turns and within turns.

To begin with, intra-turn repeats typically correlate with other intra-turn repeats. This was thought to indicate that repetitiveness within a single turn is usually encoded on multiple levels by the

collective sender. Phonetic repeats and gesture repeats occurred on their own frequently, but they still correlated highly significantly with many different individual intra-turn repeats, so that two different uses of these two patterns emerge: (1) they support and are supported by other types of repeat; (2) they serve as a resource for sitcom humour independently.

Inter-turn repetition has also been shown to occur in different configurations. Whereas inter-turn lexical repeats as well as repeated character gestures and visual telecinematic repeats all appear on their own in HTs more often than not, structural parallelism, prosodic repeats and repeated facial expressions tended to occur together with other types of inter-turn repeats. In particular, when addressing the correlations between individual types of repeats, it appeared that many co-occurring repeats are linked to multimodality: repeated gestures and facial expressions correlated, as did facial expressions with prosodic repeats and, on a more strictly visual level, repeated gestures with visual telecinematic repeats. Lexical repeats, on the other hand, did not significantly correlate with other inter-turn repeats.

Finally, intra-turn and inter-turn repeats only correlated when they were of the same type, e.g. inter-turn exact single-word lexical repeats were likely to be joined in the same HT by intra-turn exact single-word lexical repeats. One exception to this rule was the correlation between inter-turn exact single-word repeat and intra-turn prosodic repeat.

The second, qualitative part of this chapter then addressed individual correlations in context. The close readings of representative examples have illustrated the different ways in which individual repeats are combined in HTs. On the one hand, they have shown that co-occurrences of different repeats can happen in a range of different ways, with the individual formal repeats jointly encoding repetition in some cases and establishing separate links to previously presented items in others. On the other hand, these jointly or separately operating repeats have been shown to serve different functions in humour. The following

Chapter 9 will systematically discuss these functions of complex repetition as well as the functions of those individual repeats that occur on their own in the construction of humorous incongruities.

9 Functions of repetition in humorous sitcom turns

9.1 Introduction

Having pointed to different functions of individual repeats and complex repetition composed of co-occurring repeats on different levels in Chapters 7 and 8, I will now gather the functions that have been illustrated so far, expand on them, and present an overview of what formal repetition does in sitcom humour or more precisely the construction of humorous incongruities in sitcoms. This will answer the third research question:

- (3) What are the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour when it comes to (a) the construction of incongruities based on frames and incongruous elements, and (b) the links between individual instances of humour?

The overview of the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour will on the one hand be informed by the data analyses that have been presented so far; on the other hand, it will take as a starting point those functions of repetition that have been associated with humour in the extant literature. Based on the theoretical discussion of repetition in humour that was presented earlier (see Chapter 5), Section 9.2 will start from a theory-driven summary of functions of repetition in humour before presenting an overview of the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour that were observed in the AMSIL corpus. I will categorise the observed functions into constitutive, cohesive, constructional and communicative repetition and will refer to them as the four C's of repetition in humour. The specific functions within each C of repetition will be discussed in subsections of Section 9.3.

The structured discussion of individual functions and the broader C-category they fall into follows the tradition of presenting systematic overviews and taxonomies of functions of repetition (e.g. Norrick, 1987; Tannen, 1989). This may at first glance imply a finite set of neatly

separable categories, brought about by the qualitative analyses of the AMSIL corpus that were in turn informed by the quantitative measures of distribution and correlations of individual formal repeats. However, the subsequent discussion of each category will make clear that functions of repetition have to be treated as fuzzy categories that loosely group repetitive patterns based on the role they play in the construction and communication of humorous incongruities. For instance, the functions of establishing as well as reinforcing the expectation-evoking frame in HTs (see 9.3.2.2) can be realised by repetition on different levels to various degrees. Many of the repeats established in Chapter 7 play their part in establishing frames, but within the multimodal and multi-layered meaning-making of telecinematic discourse, any HT is embedded in a rich context, and establishing a particular frame is almost always achieved by including multiple channels of communication. In addition, repetition in sitcom humour will also be shown here to be multifunctional, with individual repeats and complex repetition serving different roles in humour construction at the same time. This caveat notwithstanding, the systematic discussion of specific functions of formal repetition as members of higher-level categories will present an orderly overview of what repetition does in sitcom humour that concludes the discussion of formal repetition in this study, while at the same time preparing the subsequent discussion of the role of semantic repetition for microscopic and macroscopic narrative structures of sitcoms (Chapters 10 and 11).

9.2 Previous findings on the functions of repetition in humour

The functions of repetition that are discussed in the current chapter were established empirically, based on the analysis of the AMSIL corpus. Their presentation in Section 9.3 will be prefaced by a brief summary of relevant literature on the topic, which will serve as theoretical grounding and allow the positioning of the findings of this study within

existing research. Rather than following the chronology of publication or the categorisation that the authors included here suggest, the theoretical summary in this section will foreshadow the structure of the subsequent empirical discussion and achronologically treat established functions as precursors of functions of repetition in sitcom humour as represented in the AMSIL corpus. Accordingly, the sequence in which the functions are presented here will already follow the four C's of repetition that were established empirically.

9.2.1 Constitutive repetition

What is discussed here as constitutive repetition concerns those functions that are instrumental to the construction of the humorous incongruity itself, i.e. the realisation of an expectation-evoking frame, an incongruous element, and the establishment of a humorous frame in which amusement is permissible (see Sections 3.5.2 and 4.3).

Given the important role of surprise in humour (see Section 3.6), repetition can *a priori* be regarded as dispreferred in the construction of humorous incongruities since it risks habituation effects and thus a decrease in humour appreciation (Morreall, 1983; Deckers et al., 1989). That repetition is nonetheless frequent may first of all be tied to its function of facilitating linguistic production in joking (Johnstone, 1987; Norrick, 1993). Incongruous elements break with expectations and viewer expectations need to be evoked in order for humorous incongruities to succeed. Re-activating those frames that have previously been activated is thus a shortcut to established viewer expectations that is economical in terms of humour production.

Moreover, repetition has been found to contribute to establishing the appropriate frame for humorous incongruities and to be itself unexpected in some cases. Thus, that repetition often accompanies conversational humour has been found to render repetition indexical of humour and to contribute to the establishment of a humorous frame

(Norricks, 1993, 1996; Coates, 2007; Rees and Monrouxe, 2010). Where variation is expected, repetition has itself the potential to be surprising and thus incongruous (Morreall, 1983). A more indirect, but no less important function of repetition in humour has to do with the fact that it creates patterns through similarity and thus becomes a resource for humour when it is combined with variation: expectations are evoked based on a repetitive pattern; incongruity is achieved by disrupting the pattern (Tannen, 1987a, 1989; Norrick, 1993, 2003). Finally, repetition has also been found to be an instrument in the creation of humorous hyperbole (Norricks, 1993).

Common to all these constitutive functions of repetition in humour is that the construction of the individual humorous incongruity depends on repetition. Within the category of constitutive repetition, humour thus requires repetition, be it to establish the humorous frame, to evoke viewer expectations, or to create an incongruous element.

9.2.2 Cohesive repetition

The second function of repetition concerns the cohesion of humour and of the text through which humorous effects are achieved. In this regard, it is crucial that repetition can link two scripts or frames (Norricks, 1993). By tying in with a previous utterance, repetition can for instance establish a background script that serves as the expectation-evoking frame for humour (Norricks, 1993; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2004). With regard to the incongruous element, repetition has also been found to reintroduce items that are charged with humorous potential (Shepherd, 1985; Tannen, 1989; Coates, 2007). The role that repetition may play in the creation of puns (Norricks, 1993) is also understood in terms of cohesion here. The polysemy or homophony of a word on which puns rest can be brought about through repetition, which then joins two separate frames by presenting a lexical item that can activate either frame.

9.2.3 Constructional repetition

The term *constructional repetition* will be used here to refer to repetition that contributes to identity construction, be it the construction of fictional identities, i.e. characterisation (e.g. Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017), or of the comedian/actor's identity. The actor's identity is relevant for humour for instance when it comes to star turns (Kozloff, 2000), i.e. segments of actor performance in which the actor's rather than the character's agency is made salient by the collective sender. While Kozloff (2000) does not mention repetition in this context, Bal (2009: 126) identifies repetition as "an important principle of the construction of the image of a character."

9.2.4 Communicative repetition

Finally, communicative repetition will refer to those instances of repetition that express a particular stance of the speaker vis-à-vis a prior serious or humorous turn. Repetition in this sense may be used to mock another speaker or caricature what they said (Norrick, 1993; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2004; Haugh, 2010; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012); echoing another speaker can serve as humour support (Tannen, 1989; Hay, 2001; Coates, 2007); and, in the case of failed and incomprehensible humour, repetition can communicate lack of humour comprehension (Bell, 2007, 2013).

9.3 Functions of repetition in sitcom humour

The following overview of the functions of formal repetition that occur in AMSIL is based on the empirical analyses of Chapters 7 and 8 and refers back to examples that were already presented there. I want to reiterate here that repetition as it appeared in the AMSIL corpus was always multifunctional, which is to say that the individual categories are in no way to be thought of as describing disparate phenomena. Moreover, the individual functions are not homogenous, but describe

clusters of effects of repetition on humour that share enough similarities that their grouping together under one particular heading is useful.

It is also important at this point to return to the distinction between different communicative levels. The main axis of humour as it has been discussed here is between the collective sender and the main ratified participants, the television viewers (i.e. on CL1). Therefore, when I speak of functions of repetition in humour, I first and foremost refer to the role that repetition as it is employed by the collective sender plays in the amusement of the viewers, i.e. in the construction of humorous incongruities that are created for the benefit of the television audience. As stylised representation of conversation, repetition in sitcoms may of course also reproduce repetition as it normally occurs in conversation. However, as I have mentioned repeatedly, any utterance, any character action, any audiovisual move that is being performed on screen must be thought of as designed by the collective sender for the audience, and has to be treated as intentional. Accordingly, repetition does never only serve CL2-purposes, but has always also an effect on CL1, even if that effect is only to convincingly represent conversation in a fictional television series.

Echoing a previous utterance, for instance, can thus be said to serve conversational functions on CL2. As Tannen (1987a) points out, speakers can do interactional and interpersonal work by repeating from other speakers' utterances, e.g. managing conversation per se as well as establishing ties between themselves and other interactants. However, such CL2-functions of repetition can only indirectly contribute to humour, insofar as the conversational practice they represent is used by the collective sender to construct a humorous incongruity on CL1. What they do achieve, however, is to establish plausibility on the level of CL2 for the collective sender action on CL1, and I will briefly illustrate this by focusing on one particular aspect of Example 8.14 (introduced in Section 8.3.3.1), which I will include here again for ease of reading:

Example 8.14: Inter-turn exact single-word repeat and intra-turn exact single-word repeat in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

David has been able to convince his mother, Susan, to come by his father's house in an attempt to bring together his separated parents. However, now that Susan shows up at the house, his father is preparing for a romantic date with another woman and expecting that woman's arrival at any minute.

[17:32] Susan: David, is there a **problem**?
 [17:34] David: u:hm, just little t:iny **problem**. u:h, >not a big
 HT128 **problem**. little problem. fun-size problem.<

In this example, David in HT128 repeats the lexical item “problem” from Susan’s turn. Thus, on the level of CL2, the speaker David ties in his utterance with that of the previous speaker Susan, creating involvement between the two characters and aligning his utterance with the previous one in order to smoothen the fluency of the interaction. This is only relevant as a contribution to sitcom humour, however, insofar as it transpires to CL1. On this level, the television viewers perceive of David as a character in trouble who in an attempt at concealing the problem he is facing overly emphasises just how small it is. As discussed in Chapter 8, this emphasis is achieved through a combination of intra-turn lexical repeats and variation of pre-modifying adjective phrases.

It is useful at this point to return to Suls’ (1972) understanding of resolution. While the CL2-based conversational functions of David’s intra-turn lexical repeat are not directly relevant for the incongruity on CL1, they do affect the resolvability of that incongruity. As Suls points out, incongruities will only successfully create a humorous effect if the recipient is able to find some form of rule that will plausibly explain the presence of the incongruous element. That David starts a quick series of repetitions of the word “problem” is made plausible by different elements on CL2, and is also connected here to the fact that he does not need to introduce the topic of the problem he is facing himself, but can repeat it from the previous turn. Thus, the conversational functions that

inter-turn lexical repetition has here on CL2 establish cohesive humour on CL1 and (re-)activates a frame that is then exploited for humour based on intra-turn repetition.

It needs to be pointed out that sitcom humour's multimodality and layering also mean that different frames can be active at the same time, for instance when the scene with the acting characters evokes one frame, while their conversation evokes another. In this case, the frame of the conversation between Susan and David is clearly that of the particular problem at hand, which David and the viewers can easily identify (the imminent meeting between the father's wife and his date) and which Susan is oblivious to. At the same time, this is also a scene of son and mother meeting in the living room of David's father's house. Since Susan and David are talking about a problem that is directly related to their presence in that house, however, this only serves to reinforce the same frame.

Bearing this distinction of communicative levels in mind, I will now turn to the discussion of individual CL1-functions – starting from an overview of all functions and the subsections they are discussed in:

Constitutive repetition (Section 9.3.1)

- Repetition facilitates production and comprehension
- Repetition itself constitutes the humorous incongruity
- Repetition creates humorous escalation or accumulation
- Repetition establishes a series – variation creates incongruity

Cohesive repetition (Section 9.3.2)

- Repetition establishes or contributes to cohesion
- Repetition establishes or reinforces the expectation-evoking frame
- Repetition recycles an item as an incongruous element
- Repetition establishes a call back to an earlier instance of humour
- Repetition links different frames

Constructional repetition (Section 9.3.3)

- Repetition contributes to characterisation
- Repetition contributes to the identity construction of the star

Communicative repetition (Section 9.3.4)

- Repetition mocks or caricatures a previous utterance
- Repetition signals humour support/lack of humour comprehension

9.3.1 Constitutive repetition

Constitutive repetition subsumes those functions of repetition that are instrumental for the construction of individual humorous incongruities. In particular, repetition in this sense may facilitate (humour) production and comprehension (Section 9.3.1.1); repetition may occur where variation is expected and thus constitute the humorous incongruity itself (9.3.1.2); repetition may lead to the accumulation or escalation of humorous incongruities (9.3.1.3); and repetition may establish a series or pattern that evokes expectations and allows for variation to become incongruous (9.3.1.4).

9.3.1.1 Repetition facilitates production and comprehension

Scholars like Tannen (1987a, b, 1989) and Norrick (1987) have observed that repetition generally facilitates the production of speech as well as its comprehension. Both aspects are tied to information density and the finding that repeating an item verbatim is less cognitive work than adding a new one. It provides time to speakers to prepare the continuation of their turn or the next turn, and it allows listeners to more easily process information.

When it comes to functions of repetition in sitcom humour, ease of processing can be rendered in terms of economic production and the facilitation of comprehension. With regard to the former, it has to be assumed that writing an incongruity for roughly every four seconds of audiovisual text, and thus creating hundreds of different instances of humour for every episode, constitutes a challenge for writers and sitcom production in general. Any opportunity of using part of an incongruity again or even recycling the entire humorous instance can thus facilitate the writing process, and in this sense repetition certainly also plays an important role in sitcom production. The facilitation of comprehension, on the other hand, has been pointed to in the analysis of various examples, where repetition emphasises what audiences should focus on

and thus make it easier for them to have the expectations the collective sender wants to evoke and to read the incongruity in one of the intended ways. However, it remains an open question whether or not these inferred strategies of facilitating comprehension do indeed help actual audience comprehension. This question should be addressed by conducting pragmatic research of actual film and television viewing situations, which has only been done very sparsely up to now (but see Desilla, 2014 for an interesting cross-linguistic comparison of understanding implicatures in film).

9.3.1.2 Repetition itself constitutes the humorous incongruity

Repetition can also contribute to the construction of humorous incongruities by being unexpected itself. In these cases, the viewers are led to expect variation and are instead surprised by the sudden occurrence of repetition. In other words, similarity occurs where difference would be preferred or expected. This is achieved through inter-turn lexical repetition in Example 9.1:

Example 9.1: inter-turn repetition itself constructs humour in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie asks his clients about their assignments.

- [08:56] Sean: **fifty-four percent** of this year's college grads
HT66 couldn't find work=**eighty-five percent** of them
moved home, so, (.) .hhh yeah, I did. **five percent** of
them moved home, so, (.) .hhh yeah, I did.
[...]
- [11:19] Jennifer: Yes, but he told me, **eighty-five percent** of all
HT80 relationships that last past two months go on to
marriage and **fifty-four percent** last an entire
lifetime.

In this case, humour is a matter of probability. Sean argues convincingly against college education in HT66, including precise

figures to position himself as an expert that has done his research. Later, Jennifer reports another piece of Sean's wisdom, this time in reference to relationships. While it has to be inferred that she is unaware of the repetition, Charlie notes that the percentages given to her by Sean are the same ones he used in the college argument. Even before that explication, the viewers will realise the unlikely repetition, however, which in this case reveals that Sean is not in fact knowledgeable about either topic, but simply uses invented statistics to boost his authority.

Returning to the pun for a moment, it can be added here that homonymy and polysemy can be interpreted in a similar fashion, by approaching the pun from the perspective of evoked frames rather than the ambiguity inherent in the multiplicity of meanings that the lexical items can trigger. Approaching a conversation conceptually as a succession of concepts or evoked frames, it is unlikely that two unconnected frames would be encoded using the same linguistic signs. In that sense, puns are surprising because they are cases of separate frames coinciding on one identical lexical form.

9.3.1.3 Repetition creates humorous escalation or accumulation

Another constitutive function of repetition in sitcom humour that was observed in the data is connected to unexpected exaggeration and ties in with similar observations made by Chlopicki (1987) about longer comic narratives (see 11.2). The previous section has already presented some cases of exact repetition combined with variation on other levels, which leads to a progressive increase in the severity of the incongruity. On the one hand, there is an overlap between call backs (see Section 9.3.2.4) and this series of escalating repeats. On the other hand, in so far as the pattern-building itself is the focus, escalation can be regarded as a subtype of repetition establishing a series that is then disrupted to create an incongruity (see Section 9.3.1.4).

The escalation series can occur across turns, but also within a single turn. A kinesic case of this can be observed in Example 8.4 below (discussed already in Section 8.3.1.3), where Perry is visibly bothered by hearing how easily his flatmate thinks they will get past their argument. Starting with one false start, then another, accompanied by erratic head movements, Perry quickly adds more and more until the viewers have been presented with a series of five false starts and as many back-and-forth movements of Perry's head. In this case it is more accurate to speak of accumulation rather than escalation, since there is no increase in intensity of each subsequent false start, but the absurdity of the behaviour increases because of the exaggerated frequency of false-starts that are accumulated in a short span of time.

Example 8.4: Intra-turn prosodic repeat and character gesture repeat in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Perry is talking to his friend Rebecca in his flat. She has just told him that his flatmate with whom he had a falling out thinks a make-up beer will remedy the situation.

[12:04] Perry: hm, +↑interesting. +=
 HT76 +turns head away and nods+
 =±o:kay,↑so he- ± %↑all right, yeah- %
 ±turns h. back and nods± %turns h. away and nods%
 that's good- ^↑so he: was just?- ^
 ^turns h. back and nods^
 # okay. (all right.) #
 #turns h. away and nods#

The pattern that is thus created is very similar to repetition itself being incongruous, which was addressed in Section 9.3.1.2. The difference between the two concerns the nature of the item that occurs repeatedly: If the false start is already seen as incongruous, I would speak of humorous escalation/accumulation. If the false start only becomes incongruous because it is repeated, I would speak of repetition itself being incongruous. In this case, the orderliness of sitcom dialogue

(and telecinematic discourse more generally) renders any hesitations and false-starts marked and unexpected. At the same time, it is doubtful whether one false-start in itself would constitute a violation of expectations that is substantial enough to construct a humorous incongruity. Example 8.4 thus falls somewhere between the two cases, and it would seem that repetition here renders a character utterance salient enough – through accumulation – to become a resource for humour.

A similar case is found in Example 8.14 (introduced in Section 8.3.3.1):

Example 8.14: Inter-turn exact single-word repeat and intra-turn exact single-word repeat in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

David has been able to convince his mother, Susan, to come by his father's house in an attempt to bring together his separated parents. However, now that Susan shows up at the house, his father is preparing for a romantic date with another woman and expecting that woman's arrival at any minute.

[17:32] Susan: David, is there a **problem**?
 [17:34] David: u:hm, just little t:iny **problem**. u:h, >not a big
 HT128 **problem**. little **problem**. fun-size **problem**.<

David answers his mother's question by uttering four noun phrases, each of them having "problem" as their head, while finding various ways of encoding the small size of that problem in the pre-modifier slot. Intra-turn repetition on a lexical level here creates conversationally unexpected redundancy, accompanied by the character talking at a high speed that indexes that the character is frantic despite his claim that the problem is only little.

That inter-turn repetition can also serve this function is visible in the scene that is illustrated in Example 8.8 (introduced in Section 8.3.2.1):

Example 8.8: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

Hank is giving a (casually racist) speech about ethnic changes in the neighbourhood of the bar where the scene takes place. He stands next to the bar, with a beer in his hand and oriented towards the other customers who listen to what he has to say and frequently cheer in response to his comments.

[05:24] Hank: **THEN THE Italians** moved in. and we all
HT32 thought, **oh**-oh, there goes the neighbourhood (0.8)
[05:29] Hank: b-but **Jack** said, **HA:NK**, simmer **do:wn**. (0.9)
HT33 technically Italians are white people **too**.

It presents two turns in a longer series of the character Hank giving a toast at the bar, which on the one hand seems to demonstrate his appreciation for change in the neighbourhood – most notably with regard to the arrival of neighbours of other ethnicities, and on the other hand undermines that message by including politically incorrect elements in each turn. Given the setting in which the scene takes place and the way his remarks are taken up on CL2, i.e. by the characters around him laughing at Hank, what would otherwise have to be regarded as unacceptable behaviour is positioned as a benevolent violation by the collective sender and thus rendered palatable for the television viewers. Hank is the old fool who does not know any better, the other characters laugh about him and thus also mark that Hank's humour is not that of the collective sender, and the television viewers are thus allowed to laugh together with the onscreen observers.

Here, a secondary consequence of this incongruity through accumulation is also apparent: Whereas a single politically incorrect utterance by Hank could be discarded by the viewers as a one-time mistake or accident, the multiplicity of racist remarks makes clear that they are to be inferred as part of the character Hank. Thus, the escalation of political incorrectness in this scene also serves larger narrative purposes of characterisation (see 9.3.3.1). Such character traits then

also become part of the humorous repertoire of the sitcom and can recur for humorous effect in later scenes (see Chapter 11).

9.3.1.4 Repetition establishes a series – variation creates incongruity

Another function of both inter-turn and intra-turn repetition in sitcom humour is the establishing of a series. This can follow the stereotypical pattern of three (see Norrick, 1993), in which case the first occurrence and one repeat together constitute a minimal series that the third, different, item can then break. However, there are also examples of more than three elements in AMSIL (see example 7.13 below). This function is based on the assumption that similarity leads to the expectation of more similarity, i.e. that the first two or more items are inferred to be a series which is expected to continue with yet another similar item. The occurrence of something that is opposed to the frame of that series will then create the incongruity.

An example based on lexical inter-turn repetition is 7.12 (introduced in Section 7.3.1.2 and its “valid life choice” mantra.

Example 7.12: Exact and partial multi-word lexical repetition across turns in *Better with you*, S01E01

Maddie, standing next to her partner Ben, explains their living situation to the reception head waitress at a restaurant.

[02:11] Maddie: mhhmmh neither of us want to be married, but we love
HT14 each other. we're very happy. (.) **it's a valid life choice.**

[...]

Later, Maddie again talks to Ben about their relationship status.

[05:43] Maddie: no::. I know why we aren't married. **it's a valid life**
HT38 **choice.**

[...]

In a later scene, the family is discussing Mia's engagement and the fact that Maddie is not married at the restaurant.

[14:55] Maddie: hey, our not being married **is a va[lid-]**

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- [14:57] Vicky: **[valid] life choice.**
HT111 okay, she said it. everybody has to drink.
[...]
Towards the end of the episode, Maddie asks her sister Mia for relationship advice in a taxi.
- [19:25] Maddie: Maddie: should Ben and I have gotten married a long
HT137 time ago? (1.4)
↑**is my life choice** (.) not valid?

In addition to the functions that were already observed for this recurring phrase, the individual repetitions in HT14, HT38, HT111 and HT137 examined together also constitute a series of first using exact multi-word repetition as an assertion of the relationship status, followed by a variation in HT111, where another speaker undermines the assertive aspect of the phrase, and then yet again in HT137, where its partial repetition questions the defence of the life choice it refers to. In this case, the first three HTs can be regarded as one series of three, whereas HT137 can be said to assume as common ground the existence of that series, that can yet again be broken with a different type of variation in order to establish a new series of three – HT14, HT38, HT137– and a new incongruity.

A simpler case based on intra-turn exact multi-word repetition can be seen in Example 6.3 (introduced in Section 6.5), which establishes with three repeats that the addressee is right, before then advising him to admit he is wrong.

Example 6.3: Intra-turn exact multi-word repeat, structural parallelism, and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E02

Steve has been arguing with his mother. In this scene his father, Jack, tells him to go and apologise to her.

- [13:41] Jack: I know **you're right**, your sister knows **you're**
HT92 **right**=everyone here knows **you're right**. now go
to your mother and tell her you're wrong.

While realising this function through lexical repetition presents the most obvious case, 8.3 also illustrates the role other types of repeat play for this function. In this case, both structural parallelism and prosodic repeats accompany the lexical repeats and contribute to signalling to the viewership that they should read this as a series of similar items and form expectations for a continuation of the pattern. While this is in many ways a prototypical example of the establishment and disruption of a series for humorous effect, the repeats here can also be understood as a strategy to emphasise the expectation-evoking frame. Arguably, humour could also be successfully established here by only stating “I know you’re right” once and then progressing directly to the punchline, “now go to your mother and tell her you’re wrong.” Thus, repetition would have an emphatic function with regard to the frame and would make sure that the viewers are optimally prepared for the reception of the clashing ideas that follow. It is worth noting that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive: if the repetition-as-series reading is accepted, establishing that series would still also emphasise the premise for the subsequent incongruity.

While auditory telecinematic repeats were very rare in the AMSIL corpus, Example 9.2 below illustrates that they can also establish a series. In the opening scene of *Anger Management*, Charlie faces the camera and performs a punching motion with his right arm twice in HT1. Both times the thumping sound that follows the motion indicates that he has hit an object below the camera, which he faces, so that the television viewers can only guess what that object might be. In HT3, the frame is repeated, which is encoded in terms of the framing of the camera shot as well as structurally and on the level of prosody, but this time the now expected thump does not follow, and instead Charlie turns around while the camera cuts to a long shot that shows a living room and an audience that will soon after be revealed to be a therapy group. This not only illustrates how a particular sound, in this case tied to a character action, can establish a series, but also that the surprising break in that series can happen through simple absence of the

expected element. While it is accompanied by a change in camera perspective and the turning around of the speaking character, the most striking difference in this scene is still the fact that Charlie does not punch the inflatable doll that is now revealed to have been the victim of his blows.

Example 9.2: establishing a series in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie is shown in a close-up, facing the camera directly. The background only reveals that he is indoors, no further details about the room are visible.

[00:02]	Charlie:	you can't fire me, I quit. (.)+	
HT1			<i>+punch with the right arm-</i>
			{thump sound}
		think you can replace me with some other guy? Go ahead, it won't be=	
		the same.+	
			<i>+punch with the right arm-</i>
			{thump sound}
[00:09]	Charlie:	you may think I'm losing, but I'm not. I'm-	+
HT2			<i>+turns</i>
		<i>around+</i>	
			{cut to
		long shot}	
		anyway, you get the idea.	

9.3.2 Cohesive repetition

Cohesive repetition is understood here as an umbrella term for those functions of inter-turn repetition that relate to the establishment of different types of ties to earlier HTs. Generally, any instance of inter-turn repetition can be said to serve text cohesion (9.3.2.1). However, more specific to the tying in of HTs with previous HTs are instances in which repetition establishes or reinforces the expectation-evoking frame on which the incongruity is based (9.3.2.2); the recycling of items as incongruous elements (9.3.2.3); call backs to earlier instances of humour (9.3.2.4); and the linking of different frames (9.3.2.5). The

cohesive functions of repetition will be further explored based on semantic repetition in Chapters 10 and 11: Repeatedly reactivating frames, in particular those that have already been used to create humorous incongruities earlier on in a sitcom scene or episode, will be shown there to be one of the structuring principles of sitcom narratives and sitcom humour.

9.3.2.1 Repetition establishes or contributes to cohesion

When discussing individual examples of inter-turn repetition in Chapters 7 and 8, I have repeatedly pointed to the influence these instances of simple and complex repetition have on the cohesion of the overall text and the humorous incongruities that are constructed therein. While cohesion will be covered more extensively in the following two Chapters 10 and 11, it also needs to be included here as a function of inter-turn repetition. Since repetition across turns is understood as a notable recurrence of an item the viewer has encountered in an earlier turn of the same sitcom episode, it follows that by definition all inter-turn repetition is cohesive. This is to say that irrespective of the level on which cohesive ties are established, they always refer back to the earlier instance and thus establish a connection between audiovisual text elements that may either also be made cohesive by the collective sender with the help of other means, or depend on the repeat in question. These other means of establishing cohesion are abundant in sitcoms. The limited number of characters and settings, among other things, mean that there are typically many cues for the viewers in any given scene that mark it as a continuation of a prior or more locally of the ongoing scene. In a broad sense, all these aspects are repetitive, even if they do not include formal repetition as it is defined here. But for the time being, I will return to those formal repeats, in the narrower definition I have followed, that serve the cohesion of the text as well as of humour.

Example 8.6 (introduced in Section 8.3.2.1) with its impersonation of *Darth Vader* illustrates this property of repetition in sitcoms nicely.

Example 8.6: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and facial expression repeat in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Having dated a woman who wants him to spank her and call her names during sex, Perry has found a way to trigger his angry side by having his friend Lisa imitate the Star Wars character Darth Vader. Here, he has rushed out of the bedroom and, dressed only in boxer shorts, called Lisa who obliged by imitating Darth Vader's voice and breathing on the phone.

[16:36] Lisa: <deep voice> use some fo:rce.
 HT110 </deep voice>
 [16:40] Perry: <deep voice> oh I will you heavy-breathing
 HT111 bastard.</deep voice>.
 [16:44] Perry: oh my god. thank you so much=bye, Lisa.
 HT112

Through inter-turn visual telecinematic repetition, the more local incongruity of the half-naked man who has escaped from his own bedroom is recreated. At the same time, a repeated facial expression is employed to contrast incompatible character traits and actions, which the sitcom presented at several prior moments in the same episode. For the scene at hand, the visual repeats contribute first of all to its understanding as a cohesive scene that communicates a coherent story to the viewers, but they also position the individual HTs as part of a thematically linked cycle of humorous instances. On a macrotextual level, the return to the KIND/VIOLENT incongruity has a similar effect. It embeds the current scene in the episode and also reinforces the mental model that viewers have begun to form of the character in question. Every scene that constructs a humorous incongruity based on his inability to cope with the violence and verbal abuse that is requested of him by his sexual partner at the same time strengthens his characterisation as an exceedingly friendly and kind man.

9.3.2.2 Repetition establishes or reinforces the expectation-evoking frame

Another cohesive function of repetition that has emerged from the discussion of examples in Chapters 7 and 8 is the evoking of a particular frame that serves as the context for the punchline at the end of the HT. As a reminder, the textual basis of humour is thought to be in the presentation of incongruous stimuli, with a surprising stimulus disrupting the expectations the viewers have formed based on the frame in place. This is to say that in every HT analysed here, the collective sender will have done some work to evoke a particular frame and then to create an incongruous element that can amuse viewers, as long as they accept the play frame and recognise the humorous incongruity. This aspect of repetition in sitcom humour thus refers to the contribution that repeats make to the expectation-evoking frame in particular. Several examples showed how inter-turn repetition echoed the conversational topic that was introduced by another speaker in a previous turn in order to then introduce an incongruous element that clashes with it. As will be further discussed in Chapter 11, these topics are sometimes re-activated time and again within a scene or even an entire episode, thus creating a cycle of thematically linked humorous instances that all revolve around the same frame, but use different incongruous elements that create different punch lines. At other times this form of echoing operates more locally, between two adjacent turns.

Revisiting some examples from Chapters 7 and 8 makes clear first of all that activation of frames can happen through simple repeats. This function can be observed in all examples that were presented for simple inter-turn lexical repetition. In Example 7.10 (introduced in Section 7.3.1.1), for instance, the lexical item “mad” is repeated to set up an incongruity between different character reactions (MAD/NOT MAD).

Example 7.10: Exact single word lexical repetition across turns in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

In an earlier scene, Alan has stood up his date, Susan, and left her with his son David. Later he has a change of heart and asks David for her number. However, since – unbeknownst to Alan – David has slept with Susan, he is hesitant to share the number and tries to convince his dad that it would not be good idea.

[19:28] David: that's a ba:d (h)idea. I- she was really, really ma:d.

[...]

Alan and Susan, who have been on a date despite David's hesitation, run into David at the local bar.

[20:07] Alan: SHE'S NOT MAD AT ME AT A:LL!(.)

HT149 uh- I don't know what you said to her, but it really worked.

And in Example 7.11 (also introduced in Section 7.3.1.1), the compound “gas station” is repeated to reactivate the frame of buying coffee at that particular place, which in turn prepares two very different assessments by different characters as to the price of that coffee.

Example 7.11: Exact single word lexical repetition across turns in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

Ashley explains to Steve why she wants to go back to New York rather than to stay in Pittsburgh.

[14:49] Ashley: see this coffee I'm drinking? (1.0) there is no Starbucks in this neighbourhood. (0.9) I bought this at a gas station. (0.9) a gas station, Steve=it cost one dollar.

[...]

Later Steve works at the bar that he just bought from his parents.

[18:16] Steve: ah, drinking coffee?

[18:17] Melanie: yeah, I get it at the gas station. expensive, but it's good.

Inter-turn structural parallelism and prosodic repeats cannot serve this function as easily, as prosody and morphosyntactic structure

do not typically activate a particular semantic frame as unambiguously as lexical items do. However, Example 7.14 (introduced in Section 7.3.2) does show that the inter-turn repetition of a particular syntactic construction in “stop being legally unable to drive at night so much” can re-activate the complaint-frame and use unexpected lexical items to create a mismatch between construction and lexemes.

Example 7.14: Structural parallelism across turns in *The McCarthys*, S01E01

It's night time and while Marjorie is at the wheel, her husband Arthur is backseat-driving.

[11:27] Arthur: **Marjorie, stop pumpin' on the brakes so much.=**
 [11:29] Marjorie: **=Arthur stop being legally unable to drive at**
 HT91 **night so much.**

In a similar fashion, Example 7.15 (introduced in Section 7.3.3) and 8.8 (introduced in Section 8.3.2.1) encode a particular situation in an intonation pattern the repetition of which can also re-activate that same situation as a frame.

Example 7.15: Prosodic repetition across turns in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

In a taxi, Steve shows his girlfriend Ashley the buildings in Pittsburgh that were significant in his youth.

[00:03] Steve: yeah. **that'**s the rink where I played high-school
hockey.
 [00:06] Ashley: ohh.
 [00:06] Steve: **l:**ed the league in scoring, just saying.
 [00:08] Ashley: .hh
 [00:08] Steve: and **that'**s the house >where my< first **girl**friend
 HT1 lived. (0.8)
not a lot of scoring there.

Example 8.8: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

Hank is giving a (casually racist) speech about ethnic changes in the neighbourhood of the bar where the scene takes place. He stands next to the bar, with a beer in his hand and oriented towards the other customers who listen to what he has to say and frequently cheer in response to his comments.

[05:24] Hank: **THEN THE Italians** moved in. and we all
 HT32 thought, **oh**-oh, there goes the neighbourhood (0.8)
 [05:29] Hank: b-but **Jack** said, **HA:NK**, simmer **do:wn**. (0.9)
 HT33 technically Italians are white people **too**.

Thus, in 7.15, a humorous incongruity is constructed based on the character's evaluation of his own former self, whereas in 8.8 the long toast in front of the bar results in ever new violations of what can be considered appropriate topics for a public speech.

When it comes to visual aspects of multimodality, Example 7.20 below (introduced in Section 7.3.5.1) shows how the recurrence of a particular element of the *mise-en-scène*, here a piece of bacon, can serve as the premise for the unlikely comparison bacon/belt. In this case, it is not only the frame that is repeated, but also the incongruous element, and repetition can thus establish a full call back to an earlier instance of humour. While call backs include both the repetition of the frame as well as of the incongruous elements, and can thus in some ways be regarded as subtypes of either of the two functions, they are also a clearly separable function that offers less variation with regard to the construction of a humorous incongruity and thus deserves to be discussed separately (see 9.3.2.4).

Example 7.20: Repetition of visual telecinematic multimodality across turns in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

David has made breakfast for his three children. They are sitting at the table and eating.

[00:11] Emily: %I think I could=
 HT3 >>picks up **black piece of bacon**% dangles bacon in

=use this turkey bacon as a belt. (1.2) %
front of her face-----%

[...]

David and his wife Amy are alone in the kitchen and talk about the earlier breakfast with the children (and the mess that David has made).

[01:35] Amy: >>*reaches for something in the sink*
 HT10 %is that a belt? (0.4) % & (0.5) &=
 %holds **black bacon** up% &turns it around-& >
 = £(1.1)
 ---£hits David with the bacon£
 David: °that's° funny, honey, £ funny. I want them to
 have a healthy breakfast!

Insofar as the re-activation of a previously established frame is concerned, intra-turn repeats can by definition not achieve the same effect on their own. However, they can emphasise the frame that is being evoked and thus increase the probability that television viewers will form the expectations that are required to comprehend and appreciate the subsequent incongruity. In Example 8.10 (introduced in Section 8.3.2.2), for instance, the kisses that repeatedly interrupt the characters' conversation serve to establish strongly that the relevant frame here is that of a stereotypical romantic scene of two lovers in bed declaring their love for each other.

Example 8.10: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and prosodic repeat in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie and Kate have established that they both do not want a romantic relationship, but instead friendship and sex without commitment. In this scene, Charlie and Kate are lying in bed together, while Charlie expresses his appreciation of Kate's casualness about their relationship.

[07:20] Charlie: You're the best kind of friend there is. hhh .hhh
 HT57 No attachments whatsoever. hhh .hhh
 I promise, hhh.+ +± ±
 +*kiss*+ ±*kiss*±
 .hhh I will never, love you. % %
 %*ki*[ss%]

[07:30] Kate: [mm]m. Keep
talking!
[07:33] Charlie: +mmm. I +will never ±(.) ±love you
HT58 +*kiss*-----+ ±*kiss*±
hhh .hhh % %forever.
%*kiss*%

Only if this frame is activated can viewers understand the linguistically encoded absence of love as incongruous. Similarly, complex repetition in Example 6.3 (introduced in Section 6.5), “I know you’re right, our sister knows you’re right, everyone here knows you’re right”, does not only establish a series (see 9.3.1.4), but also makes sure that each following stimulus is measured against the premise that the character in question is right, thus making the suggestion that he admit he is wrong to his mother a surprise.

Example 6.3: Intra-turn exact multi-word repeat, structural parallelism, and prosodic repeat in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E02

Steve has been arguing with his mother. In this scene his father, Jack, tells him to go and apologise to her.

[13:41] Jack: I know **you're right**, your sister knows **you're**
HT92 **right**=everyone here knows **you're right**. now go
to your mother and tell her you're wrong.

9.3.2.3 Repetition recycles an item as an incongruous element

If humorous incongruities are constructed based on frames and the elements that do not fit them, it follows that repetition can also concern those aspects that clash with the expectation-evoking frame. However, given that the disrupting second stimulus is prototypically and perhaps even necessarily unexpected, it comes as no surprise that this second function is less prevalent than the first one. One instance of repetition of the incongruous element can be found in the last turn (HT137) of Example 7.12 (introduced in Section 7.3.1.2):

Example 7.12: Exact and partial multi-word lexical repetition across turns in *Better with you*, S01E01

Maddie, standing next to her partner Ben, explains their living situation to the reception head waitress at a restaurant.

[02:11] Maddie: mhhmh neither of us want to be married, but we love
HT14 each other. we're very happy. (.) **it's a valid life choice.**

[...]

Later, Maddie again talks to Ben about their relationship status.

[05:43] Maddie: no:: I know why we aren't married. **it's a valid life**
HT38 **choice.**

[...]

In a later scene, the family is discussing Mia's engagement and the fact that Maddie is not married at the restaurant.

[14:55] Maddie: hey, our not being married **is a va[lid-]**

[14:57] Vicky: **[valid] life choice.**

HT111 okay, she said it. everybody has to drink.

[...]

Towards the end of the episode, Maddie asks her sister Mia for relationship advice in a taxi.

[19:25] Maddie: Maddie: should Ben and I have gotten married a long
HT137 time ago? (1.4)

↑**is my life choice (.) not valid?**

The phrase “valid life choice,” which had reappeared multiple times throughout the episode, is repeated a final time in HT137 to question the decision not to get married that the main character has affirmed time and again with that mantra. Partial multi-word repetition is used here to introduce an incongruous stimulus to a new frame: Whereas before, the purpose of uttering the phrase was always for the character Maddie to defend the particular life choice in question (i.e. to assert that it is valid), the situation in this case is one of exchanging relationship advice with her younger sister, whom she now asks for her opinion.

The recycling of an incongruous element can also be realised in the form of visual telecinematic inter-turn repetition. This was the case in Example 7.20 (introduced in Section 7.3.5.1), when the black piece

of bacon is presented a second time, but in a new conversational context.

Example 7.20: Repetition of visual telecinematic multimodality across turns in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

David has made breakfast for his three children. They are sitting at the table and eating.

[00:11] Emily: %I think I could=
HT3 >>picks up **black piece of bacon**% dangles bacon in
=use this turkey bacon as a belt. (1.2) %
front of her face-----%

[...]

David and his wife Amy are alone in the kitchen and talk about the earlier breakfast with the children (and the mess that David has made).

[01:35] Amy: >>reaches for something in the sink
HT10 %is that a belt? (0.4) % & (0.5) &=
%holds **black bacon** up% &turns it around-& >
= £(1.1)

---£hits David with the bacon£
David: °that's° funny, honey, £ funny. I want them to
have a healthy breakfast!

In Example 7.15 (introduced in Section 7.3.3), on the other hand, the repetition of the word “scoring” in HT1 is notable, because it not only presents a case of exact single word repetition that is used in the punchline of an instance of humour, but also illustrates that repeats can serve to create puns, and in this case the formal repetition of “scoring” works precisely because of its polysemy.

Example 7.15: Prosodic repetition across turns in *Sullivan & Son*, S01E01

In a taxi, Steve shows his girlfriend Ashley the buildings in Pittsburgh that were significant in his youth.

[00:03] Steve: yeah. that's the rink where I played high-school
hockey.

- [00:06] Ashley: ohh.
 [00:06] Steve: led the league in **scoring**, just saying.
 [00:08] Ashley: .hh
 [00:08] Steve: and that's the house >where my< first girlfriend
 HT1 lived. (0.8)
 not a lot of **scoring** there.

Whereas “scoring” referred to scoring goals in hockey games in Steve’s previous turn (“led the league in scoring”), it now makes use of the girlfriend frame that HT1 introduces, which activates the meaning ‘having sex’. This also means that contrary to Example 7.14, the first iteration of “scoring” is in this case not humorous, but serves as the immediate context for HT1 which evokes the semantic frame of HOCKEY, while the repeat as an incongruous element activates the GIRLFRIEND frame.

This is thus a textbook case for the understanding of humour that Attardo and Raskin (1991) propose: the polysemy of “scoring” manages to create an overlap between the HOCKEY and GIRLFRIEND frames, which are presented as opposed by the character who characterises one type of scoring as successful and the other one as unsuccessful. In addition, the character in this example makes fun of himself by flaunting the lack of sexual prowess of his former self. Given the presence of his current girlfriend, this could be interpreted as boosting his current successful self by contrasting it with a less successful past. Irrespective of the precise interpretation of the effects of the comparison, this is a good illustration of humour that is situated not just on CL1, between the collective sender and the television audience, but also within CL2 on the level of characters. Accordingly, television viewers can also laugh together with (rather than at) the characters in this scene.

To expand the discussion of this second function to complex repetition, Examples 8.7 (introduced in Section 8.3.2.1) and 8.9

(introduced in Section 8.3.2.2) are illustrative. Both of them use complex repetition to repeat an incongruous element.

Example 8.7: Inter-turn visual telecinematic repeat and character gesture repeat in *See Dad Run*, S01E02

Emily stands opposite her father, David. She holds a shrunk pink sweater with torn off sleeves. (We saw her tear off the sleeves in HT57 and HT58).

- [11:28] David: please, tell me that's not mom's favourite sweater.
 [11:31] Emily: *nods four times.*
 [11:32] David: *grabs a paper bag and loudly breathes in and out into the bag.*

Example 8.9: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and facial expression repeat in *Undateable*, S01E02

Danny has been trying to give advice to his friend Justin on how to approach his co-worker Nicki and ask her out on a date. He is talking to him in the kitchen of the flat they share.

- [12:04] Danny: look, every time I give you an amazing idea, on how
 HT99 to get Nicki, you shoot it down like skeet. (0.6) hey,
 take her to a movie.
pull + ((makes gun noise)). +
 + *shooting a rifle gesture* +
 [12:13] Danny: stop singing so much.
 HT100 pull + ((makes gun noise)). +
 + *shooting a rifle gesture* +

As is typical for complex repetition, Examples 8.7 and 8.9 are both based on aspects of multimodality. Example 8.7 repeats the exaggerated hyperventilating into a paper bag, which is based on visual telecinematic repetition as well as on character gestures; Example 8.9 repeats the gestures and facial expressions involved in the mimicked shooting of a rifle as a bodily enactment of the metaphorical expression of ‘shooting down an idea.’ In both cases, the incongruous element follows a related expectation-evoking frame, which means that depending on the level of abstraction one uses to identify the frame, they may yet again also be regarded as call backs. However, it seems a substantial variation in 8.7 that the hyperventilation as an overreaction

to a minor event is transferred from a child to an adult. The breathing into the paper bag by the boy is incongruous also because it is behaviour that – if anything – one would associate with an adult who has knowledge about how to counteract an attack of hyperventilation, rather than with a boy in primary school; and indeed there are other instances in the same episode where the same child character appropriates markedly adult behaviour for humorous purposes.

In the second case, on the other hand, the mimicked rifle shooting follows a list of ideas, with the individual items being clearly different from each other (“take her to a movie” versus “stop singing so much”). If these items are generalised to be instances of behavioural patterns that the advisor presents as ideas for change to the addressee, this is a case of call back. If the focus is on the notable variation between the two items, from a plausible piece of advice to less constructive criticism of character behaviour, the repeated punch line has to be seen as the recycling of an incongruous element that has kept its humorous potential because the frame that precedes it has been altered.

Again, the recycling of a punch line from an earlier HT can by definition not be a function of intra-turn repetition which is confined to an individual HT. While intra-turn repetition could repeatedly activate the frame, there are only very few examples in the corpus where repetition within turns would repeatedly present the incongruous element and could thus be said to emphasise the punch line through repetition. In fact, the only clear-cut case is Danny repeatedly imitating a regurgitating bird in Example 8.5 below (introduced in Section 8.3.1.5).

Example 8.5: Intra-turn phonetic repeat and prosodic repeat in *Undateable*, S01E01

Danny speaks to his friend and flatmate Justin about helping him to improve his dating life.

[07:31] Danny: look, I get it you know. you're scared and change is
 HT76 hard baby bird, but I'm gonna help you mend those
 broken wings. I'm gonna be the father bird and just
feed you knowledge.
 +**UGH-U:GH-EHH** +=
 +moves head forward and sticks tongue out+
 = ±**U:GH-EHH** ±
 ±moves head forward and sticks tongue out±
 %**U:GH-EHH** %
 %moves head forward and sticks tongue out%

In Example 8.5, it seems quite clear that the initial imitation of a bird feeding their young is already incongruous with expected behaviour of an adult in this situation. Adding several repetitions of the same instance only serves to accentuate the absurdity of the character's behaviour. However, even in this case, it can be argued that these repetitions do not amount to a recurrence of the incongruous element, but that the whole set of imitating the regurgitating bird together constitute the incongruous action. It seems thus that there are very few exceptions to the rule that can be deduced here, which is that generally incongruous elements appear suddenly and therefore only once per HT. This also conforms to the (generally tacit) assumption in the literature that there is only one punch line per instance of humour.

9.3.2.4 Repetition establishes a call back to an earlier instance of humour

As the two previous sections have already mentioned, one function of repetition in sitcom humour is what I refer to as a call back to an earlier instance of humour. In this case, there is formal repetition both with regard to the expectation-evoking frame and the incongruous element, and the HT in question thus recycles humour that had been previously

established in the same episode. This does not mean that an entire HT is repeated verbatim. As was discussed in Chapter 5, the notion of exact repetition has to be relativised, since the recurrence of an item by definition always also includes change – at the very least in form of a changed context. Instead, the call back is a semantic notion and essentially a double-tie – frame to frame, and incongruous element to incongruous element – to a previous HT. I will also include the call back in my discussion of semantic repetition and the larger structures of the sitcom in the following two chapters (10 and 11), but it needs to be included at this point as well, since that twofold connection can also be achieved through formal repetition. It should also be clear that by definition this form of referring back to an earlier HT cannot be achieved through intra-turn repetition.

The examples for call backs I have provided so far in this chapter were 7.12 (“valid life choice”) and 7.20 (the recurring burned piece of bacon). In Example 7.12, the incongruity in both the first (HT14) and second (HT38) occurrence is introduced by activating the MARRIAGE frame, which is in both cases encoded in language (“neither of us want to be married” and “I know why we aren’t married,” respectively). The incongruous aspect, that Maddie pretends to be content with or even to prefer to remain unmarried while at the same time resorting to formal-cum-formulaic phrasing to assert that contentment, is also performed very similarly in the second instance so that in many ways the television audience will feel they have seen the same argument by Maddie and the same clash before.

The way humour works in this second instance allows more than one interpretation. If the unexpected appearance of the incongruous stimulus is a necessary condition for humour, it would mean that whatever variation occurs between the two occurrences of “valid life choice” in question is central. One reading would thus be that the phrasing of “valid life choice” in HT14 seems to have crept into the casual conversation at the reception of a restaurant from a different

register, which is why it appears incongruous. Later, in HT38, the same phrase as an instance of that ill-fitting register would no longer be surprising per se and therefore cannot trigger humour itself. However, the verbatim repetition of the phrase renders it formulaic and thus re-establishes the potential of “valid life choice” to amuse viewers. Alternatively, the slight changes in situation, with the first HT set in a restaurant and the second in Maddie and Ben’s apartment could be seen as enough variation to make the reappearance of the phrase surprising.

Apart from these two readings that are compatible with a model of humour that regards unexpectedness as a necessary condition for humour, there is a third interpretation of this HT38 that at least at first glance seems to reject the necessity for surprise in humour. Quite simply, this third reading would assume the humorous incongruity in HT14 as an entity that can be charged with humour (as is suggested for instance by Coates, 2007). The repetition of the frame and of the incongruous element thus reconstruct the earlier incongruity and reminds the viewers that since it was followed by laughter the last time, it is now part of the television series’ repertoire of humorous stimuli. In this case I propose to speak of *nostalgic humour* and state that strictly speaking viewers do not laugh because HT38 is funny, but because HT38 reminds them that HT14 was funny and allows them to revisit that earlier moment of amusement. This is in line with Coates’ (2007) findings of particular elements becoming charged with humorous meaning and in particular with Suls’ (1972: 94) assumption that a joke can become associated with the positive emotions that were experienced when hearing it for the first time. Excluding such nostalgic humour from humour proper will permit treating it as a special case that can operate outside of the conditions that are normally necessary for humour. This important theoretical consequence of opting for one or another interpretation of humour in Example 7.12 will need to be revisited towards the end of this thesis, in Chapter 12, but I will point out in the further discussion of examples where different interpretations of humorous instances will support one or the other theoretical stance.

There is no indication in the data that the call back is limited to any particular type of repetition. Since it is constituted by reproducing a previous incongruity, any means by which incongruities can be constructed are also valid means to repeat the same incongruity. For instance, Example 7.16 (introduced in Section 7.3.3) presented humour that was based on the particular voice quality of a character, which was motivated on CL2 by his recent visit to a dentist.

Example 7.16: Prosodic repetition across turns in *Romantically Challenged*, S01E02

Perry just had a wisdom tooth pulled and is waiting for Shawn to pick him up. Since Shawn is not there, Perry tries to call him on the phone, even though he can barely speak.

- [04:40] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> (Sh)awn? </VQ>
HT27
- [04:43] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> (Sh)a:-aw:n! </VQ>
HT28
- [04:47] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> whe(r)e ↑a(r)e ↓you? </VQ>
HT29
- [04:52] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> whe(r)e a(r)e you, (b)u(dd)y?
HT30 </VQ>
- [04:55] Perry: <nasalised whiny VQ> you're a(lr)ea(d)y (t)en
HT31 minu(tes) la(t)e! </VQ>

After it has been introduced in HT27, the same voice quality and the same incongruity is repeated multiple times in HT28–31. Humour here is clearly based on the way the actor/character performs each line of dialogue, and not on the linguistic realisations themselves. Thus, regarding humour proper, each HT presented in 7.16 is the same: an abnormal way of speaking, plausibly motivated by the sitcom narrative. It is interesting to note, however, that there is variation on the level of language, which moves from “Shawn” (HT27) to “Sha-awn” (HT28), to “where are you?” (HT29), to “where are you, buddy?” (HT30), and finally to “you’re already ten minutes late!” (HT31). The muffled voice

caused by swollen gums and the aftereffects of anaesthesia is repeated throughout the HTs in Example 7.16. Perry's utterances on the other hand do not only change, but they change in an orderly fashion, namely from the single syllable in HT27 in several steps of progressively longer turns to the longest one in HT31. Thus, repetition can also be linked here to humorous escalation (see Section 9.3.1.3): While the incongruity is repeated in principle, there is a progressive escalation of the incongruous element that becomes a more and more severe violation of what can be expected based on the existing prosodic norms of CL2. In the example at hand, this increasing severity of the incongruity is simply achieved by making utterances longer and including more and more stops and approximants in them, which give more and more emphasis to the character's dentist-related speech impediment.

This overlap between escalation and call back can also be seen in Example 8.10 below (introduced in Section 8.3.2.2), where Charlie enacts the romantic lover in bed while professing that they are not in love. HT58 in Example 8.10 takes place in an unchanged setting, between the same two characters, with the same speaker and the same addressee. He again interrupts his utterance with kisses and repeats the phrase "I will never love you" exactly, which includes the prosodic realisation, using the same intonation patterns and stressing the same syllables. However, again the second HT adds something to the repeated utterance, when Charlie appends the word "forever" at the end of his turn. This addition is made plausible on CL2 when Kate asks him to "keep talking," and it serves as an emphasis of the contrast between the romantic and decidedly unromantic aspects of the incongruity.

Example 8.10: Inter-turn character gesture repeat and prosodic repeat in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie and Kate have established that they both do not want a romantic relationship, but instead friendship and sex without commitment. In this scene, Charlie and Kate are lying in bed together, while Charlie expresses his appreciation of Kate's casualness about their relationship.

[07:20] Charlie: You're the best kind of friend there is. hhh .hhh
 HT57 No attachments whatsoever. hhh .hhh
 I promise, hhh.+ ± ± ±
 +*kiss*+ ±*kiss*±
 .hhh I will never, love you. % %
 %*ki*[*ss*%]
 [07:30] Kate: [mm]m. Keep
 talking!
 [07:33] Charlie: +mmm. I +will never ±(.) ±love you
 HT58 +*kiss*-----+ ±*kiss*±
 hhh .hhh % %forever.
 %*kiss*%

9.3.2.5 Repetition links different frames

Whereas the repeats in the functions discussed so far served to reactivate the same frame in a new surrounding, formal repetition can also connect different frames when the same sign (a lexical item, a gesture, etc.) serves as an access point to different domains. A special case of this is the pun, which will be discussed later in this section. This function is not limited to prototypical cases of polysemy and homonymy, however. Example 9.3 below illustrates a case in which repetition of the same lexical item is framed differently due to contrasting actor/character performances:

Example 9.3: Inter-turn repetition links frames in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Nolan talks about his weekend in therapy.

[01:35] Nolan: ↑okay hhh., well. e:h hhh., I told this:, girl I went
HT12 out with that my problem is I'm attracted to angry
people, (1.0) she thought I was talking about her, so
she screamed at me for like an hour. **very** (.)
belittling things.

[01:48] Nolan: **Very belittling** hheh + +
HT13 +smiles+

In HT12, Nolan tells the group and his therapist Charlie about his date on the weekend, which culminated in him being verbally abused. Nolan presents this in a matter-of-fact voice that leaves the evaluation of that date to the television audience. Accordingly, most viewers will feel that Nolan was treated badly and that his date did not go well. In HT13, he repeats that what the girl he is referring to said was “very belittling,” but this time he does not do so neutrally. Instead he appears cheerful and smiles, which indicates that he enjoyed the verbal abuse. This incongruous reaction can easily be resolved by the viewers because Nolan also said in HT12 that he is attracted to angry people. Looking at the core meaning of “very belittling,” there is thus no change between HT12, and HT13, but taking into account the character’s evaluation that is realised in his facial expression, the exact repeat manages to connect the serious verbal abuse with the playful romantic/sexual preference of the therapy client.

Another case in point is Example 8.1 (introduced in Section 8.3.1.1), where the character Brandon establishes a connection between being adopted and his parents telling their friends he is adopted. Through repeated prosody he emphasises a formal similarity that does however join very different concepts: adopting a child and feeling embarrassment.

Example 8.1: Intra-turn exact single-word repeat and character gesture repeat in *Retired at 35*, S01E01

At the local bar, Jessica has been talking to David. Brandon has just interrupted them.

[14:30] Jessica: look, Brandon, I was talking to David hhh.
 [14:33] Brandon: sorry,+I just thought you and I had something in+=
 HT106 +*extends right hand*-----+
 =common. (0.4) ±you're **ado:pte:d**, ±=
 ±*extends right hand*±
 =%my parents tell their friends I'm **ado:pte:d**.%
 %*points towards himself with right hand*-----%

A special case of repetition linking frames is the preparation for a pun, which makes use of polysemy or homonymy. Example 9.4 includes a typical case:

Example 9.4: inter-turn repetition prepares a pun in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie asks his clients about their assignments.

[00:43] Charlie: Okay. Did you: handle that in a healthy way or
 with a **passive- aggressive act**?
 [00:46] Patrick: I sent everyone in my ↓family a (.) Fourth of July
 HT5 card with a picture of me dressed as the ↓Statue
 of Liberty with a ↑sparkler sticking out of my ass.
 [00:55] Charlie: Patrick, that's not a **passive-aggressive act**, it's the
 HT6 whole play.

In HT6, Charlie returns to the “passive-aggressive act” that he asked about in his previous turn, but then shifts the frame retrospectively by comparing it to “the whole play”. Even though the modifier “passive-aggressive” disambiguates “act” to mean ‘action’ rather than part of a theatrical work, his reference to a play forces the activation of that second frame and thus the realisation that Charlie presents a pun in an attempt to be humorous.

As can be seen here, the pun is not just a special case of linking two frames because it makes use of a particular property of the word(s) it repeats, it is also a form of play that foregrounds the act of combining the two frames rather than the frames themselves. In this example, for instance, there is no relevance to theatrical production at any point in the entire episode, and the link established through “act” is thus not a segue that would lead to the introduction of a new topic, but a bit of (admittedly crude) wit by the character, whose subsequent reaction makes clear that this is humour not just on CL1, but also within the fiction of CL2. In comparison, both linked frames in Example 9.3 where topical and repetition thus joined two aspects that are relevant for the character Nolan.

9.3.3 Constructional repetition

On a different level, some of the examples have already shown that repetition also serves an indirect function in sitcom humour through the construction of a character’s (9.3.3.1) or comedian/actor’s (9.3.3.2) identity.

9.3.3.1 Repetition contributes to characterisation

Since viewer expectations are an integral aspect of humour, mental models of characters are an important premise for the prediction of what behaviour and utterances can be expected of them in any given scene. In this sense, repeated character actions become part of what the viewers assume characters to habitually do, and they can be manipulated for humorous effect in the same ways as was illustrated for instance in Example 8.6. Moreover, the notion of nostalgic humour introduced in 9.3.2.4 can also be applied here, based again on the premise that units on different levels can become charged with and even indexical of humour through repeated association with humour support – in this case in the form of the extradiegetic laughter that follows. This is relevant for characterisation since it includes character actions that

are funny because they are surprisingly opposed to the norm, i.e. to those actions that could be expected in the given scenario. The unorthodox behaviour that establishes the incongruity because it is unexpected the first time around can no longer be understood as surprising the second and third time (unless there is substantial variation), and instead will be humorous by indexing the earlier humorous instance and with time a schematic representation thereof.

Notable in the data and part of the larger narrative structures discussed in Chapter 11 is the varying longevity of such aspects of character identity construction. For instance, the “valid life choice” mantra that is associated with the character Maddie in the first episode of *Better with you* on CL1 as well as on CL2 (see Example 7.12) does only occur locally, within that episode and does not reappear in following episodes. Danny’s physical re-enactments in *Undateable* on the other hand are established as part of his character beyond the sitcom episode boundary, be they of regurgitating birds (Example 8.5) or of rifle shooting (Example 8.9).

9.3.3.2 Repetition contributes to the identity construction of the star

The examples of Danny in *Undateable* can also serve as a connector to the CL1 level of communication between the collective sender and the television viewers of which the actors’ performance is a part. Kozloff’s (2000) notion of star turns, which I have introduced earlier (see Section 8.3.1.5), refers to the fact that particular aspects of the actors’ performance can shift the viewers’ attention to the level of actors rather than characters (CL1 instead of CL2), which means that in Clark’s (1996) terms they will appreciate the comic talent of the comic actor rather than imagining it as part of the fictional world for which they do otherwise willingly suspend their disbelief. In the absence of real-viewer research it is of course speculative when exactly such a shift will occur, but it is nonetheless possible to pinpoint moments in sitcoms that

seem motivated less by narrative plausibility and more by an attempt of showcasing the humorous repertoire of the star-comedian.

Moving beyond the data at hand for an instant, the late Robin Williams with his signature rapid-fire humorous lines is a good example of an actor who was allowed to include such star turns in many of his performances (e.g. in Disney's *Aladdin*, 1992, in the sitcom *The Crazy Ones*, CBS, 2013–2014, or – as Kozloff, 2000, points out – in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, 1993). There are many cases, however, where the distinction between those repeats that serve characterisation and those that serve the identity construction of the star are difficult to establish. In particular, this is the case in sitcoms whose fictional protagonist is modelled in many ways on the actor that portrays them. *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989–1998) is a famous example, and within the AMSIL corpus, *Anger Management* with actor Charlie Sheen playing character Charlie Goodson is another case in point. That some of the humorous instances thus bridge the gap between CL1 and CL2 can for instance be seen in Example 9.2 (introduced in Section 9.3.1.4), where the character Charlie references the feud of actor Charlie Sheen with producer Chuck Lorre, which is signalled among other things by the direct gaze into the camera (see also Messerli, 2017b).

In its role in constructing a certain star persona, repetition is of course also an intertextual phenomenon, with actors displaying their comic talent within different fictional, and sometimes non-fictional contexts. However, speech and behaviour patterns are often established locally first, by employing repetition within the scope of a film or in this case a sitcom episode. Once established, these patterns can be accessed and reinforced in later star turns because they have been made noticeable and charged with humour in the course of their original, repeated, presentation.

Example 9.2: establishing a series in *Anger Management*, S01E01

Charlie is shown in a close-up facing the camera directly. The background only reveals that he is indoors, no further details about the room are visible.

[00:02] Charlie: you can't fire me, I quit. (.)+
HT1 **+punch with the right**

arm-+

{thump sound}

think you can replace me with some other guy? Go ahead, it won't be= the same.+

+punch with the right arm-+

{thump sound}

[00:09] Charlie: you may think I'm losing, but I'm not. I'm- +
HT2 *+turns*

around+

{cut to

long shot}

anyway, you get the idea.

9.3.4 Communicative repetition

The final category of functions of formal repetition concerns the positioning of speakers with regard to prior utterances and speakers. Repetition in this sense can be used to mock another speaker (9.3.4.1); or to signal either humour support or lack of humour comprehension (9.3.4.2). These functions are included here because they appear in the existing literature (see Section 9.2.4). In the AMSIL corpus, however, there are no examples that would clearly illustrate either function, and it can thus be assumed that communicative repetition is not an important aspect of sitcom humour (even though it may occur occasionally in some sitcoms).

9.3.4.1 Repetition mocks or caricatures a previous utterance

The use of echoing as mockery of another person or utterance has been observed by various scholars in spontaneous face-to-face conversations (see Section 9.2 and references). Anecdotally, I can confirm that this function of repetition does occur in sitcoms. In *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–), for instance, Sheldon’s aloofness often results in him mocking other characters, and there are similar examples in *That ‘70s Show* (Fox, 1998–2006), where one character, Fez, is sometimes mocked by others. However, there are very few typical instances of formal repetition serving this function in the AMSIL corpus. Example 7.12 employs “valid life choice” in a similar way in HT111. Although it is not clear that Maddie’s mother by finishing her mantra for her is trying to mock her, she certainly appropriates the phrase that is associated with her daughter and employs it in what is marked by laughter as a humorous turn. There is a more clear-cut case in HT95 in the first episode of *The McCarthys*, where the character Gerard mocks his brother by repeating his utterance verbatim and imitating his voice (“you know what dad, I will”), and – as will be illustrated in Section 10.7 – there are some cases of mockery that are based on semantic repetition in *Anger Management*. Generally, however, it seems that mockery plays only a minor role in sitcom humour and that therefore repetition is only rarely used in a mocking function in sitcoms. It also appears that mockery could be closely tied to characterisation: Gerard is generally portrayed as joyless and negative towards others, the aforementioned Sheldon is characterised as condescending and prone to mock others, and the stereotypical foreigner Fez in *That ‘70s Show* serves as a cliché target of mockery at several points in that series. In other words, a sitcom seems to need specific characters that are prone to mocking or being mocked in order to feature repetition with a mocking function.

9.3.4.2 Repetition signals humour support or lack of humour comprehension

Other communicative functions of repetition concern the signalling of humour support and of a lack of humour comprehension. Elsewhere, I have illustrated different humour constellations in one episode of the sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (CBS, 2011–2017; Messerli, 2016, see also Section 4.8). That episode made unsuccessful humour one of its topics and showed a range of humour support strategies on CL2, as well as employing failed humour as a resource to construct incongruities that work on CL1. However, humour support can only be incorporated into the audiovisual text of the sitcom in cases of CL2-humour, i.e. where humour is not only part of the communication between the collective sender and the television audience, but also of the fictional world of the characters. Most of the HTs, however are not intended to be humorous within CL2, which means that humour support could only be observed when examining real-viewer reception. The same is true for the second aspect of failed or incomprehensible humour, which has been studied by Bell (2009, 2013). As Bazzanella (2011) points out, repetition in conversation more generally can express both disagreement and agreement, and similarly the repetition of a punch line as a reaction to hearing a joke can signal either appreciation or lack of comprehension, depending on the context and on the intonation with which it is uttered (see e.g. Norrick, 1993, and Bell, 2009). Insofar as sitcom dialogue serves as a stylised representation of conversation, such uses of repetition in support of humour or to signal lack of comprehension can thus appear in sitcoms, and cases for both can indeed be found in the aforementioned examples in Messerli (2016). In AMSIL, however, neither function of repetition can be found, which makes it likely that they are not an important part of sitcom humour more generally, but may occur in special cases, and they are probably tied to the occurrence of CL2-humour and failed CL2-humour respectively.

It has to be added that the extradiegetic laughter that follows all HTs can also be understood as a form of humour support. While it does not as such repeat aspects of any of the HTs it follows, it is very notably repetitive itself. A typical laugh as it is repeated hundreds of times in each episode was presented in Section 6.4.1.

9.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have used the repetition patterns that emerged from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of Chapters 7 and 8 in order to address the functions of repetition in sitcom humour that can be observed in AMSIL. Having emphasised that the categories distinguished here are fuzzy and that generally, repetition in sitcom humour is multifunctional (for instance by revisiting Example 7.12 multiple times to illustrate different aspects of repetition in humour), I have presented what I have referred to as the four C's of repetition: constitutive repetition, cohesive repetition, constructional repetition, and communicative repetition. Whereas constitutive repetition described repetition that is instrumental for the construction of individual humorous incongruities, cohesive repetition referred to repetition that establishes links between HTs in general and between different building-blocks of HTs in particular. On a different level, constructional repetition was used for aspects of identity construction of characters and comedians/actors, whereas communicative repetition subsumed functions that position the HT and speaker in question with regard to prior turns and speakers. This last category is all but absent from the AMSIL corpus and is assumed to be of minor importance for sitcom humour.

While most of the many functions that were observed here are compatible with the incongruity-resolution approach to humour that this study has followed, one potential conflict was identified in the case of call backs, which was also taken up again when discussing the role of repetition in characterisation. Some examples indicated that there is

no notable repetition in the expectation-evoking frame, nor in the incongruous element of such a recycled humorous instance, and the unexpectedness of the incongruity that models like that of Suls (1972) predict can thus not easily be assumed in these cases. However, I put forward the notion of nostalgic humour for these examples, which postulates that rather than creating humour per se, these call backs work by referring back to the original humorous incongruity, which is charged with humorous potential through the cue of the extradiegetic laughter that follows it. Humour reception in these cases is understood as a form of reliving the original instance of humour, rather than being surprised by a new incongruity.

I will return to the functions of humour in the final Chapter 12, once I have addressed semantic repetition and the larger narrative structures of sitcom scenes and episodes and will thus be in a position to address even more comprehensively what repetition does in sitcom humour.

10 Semantic Repetition: Humour cohesion and coherence

10.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters have identified and illustrated simple formal repeats of different types in US American sitcoms (Chapter 7) and demonstrated how individual repeats co-occur in humorous turns to form more complex repetitive patterns (Chapter 8). I have shown that these simple and more complex forms of repetition have a range of different, but often co-occurring functions in sitcom humour (Chapter 9) – some of them more directly involved with the construction of incongruities, others linked to the structure of the sitcom episode as an audiovisual text. While intra-turn repetition was treated as a local phenomenon that can be analysed within the individual humorous instance and thus with only limited inclusion of the larger context of the sitcom narrative in which it occurs, one of the central aspects that has been established for inter-turn repetition in sitcom humour is its contribution to cohesion. In this chapter, I will further explore the structuring role of repetition within the humorous narrative of the sitcom. I will do so by looking beyond formal to semantic repetition and thus by addressing the following research question:

- (4) How does inter-turn semantic repetition contribute to humour cohesion in AMSIL?

As a starting point, the general considerations about text cohesion and coherence in Section 10.2 will provide a text linguistic framework for this and the following chapters. After briefly revisiting humorous incongruities in this context (Section 10.3), and approaching similar notions through the lens of continuity in film and television (10.4), the role of semantic repetition in AMSIL and Sitcoms more generally will be examined in Sections 10.5 and 10.6, again following a pattern from smaller to larger structures. The discussion of cohesion between

adjacent turns and within one scene in Section 10.6 will also prepare the focus on larger sitcom structures that is presented in Chapter 11.

10.2 Cohesion and coherence

One lens through which repetition has been observed in the text linguistic literature is cohesion and coherence. While coherence refers to a contextualised notion “that the identified textual parts all contribute to a whole” (Toolan, 2009: 44), cohesion usually refers to “a property of a text” (Bublitz, 1996: 17), i.e. to purely linguistic means that may contribute to a text appearing to be coherent. A good starting point in this tradition is Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) seminal work on *Cohesion in English*. They assume that what makes a text a text is the semantic network of cohesive ties that exist between individual sentences. These ties are established through conjunctive elements and through processes of reference to previous items. Reference in their sense means using linguistic means to point back at a previously mentioned thing, “whereby the same thing enters into the discourse a second time” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 31). Whereas reference is thus based on a relationship of meaning between two items, it can be formally realised through a range of different processes, which include substitution and ellipsis, and also reiteration and repetition. Halliday and Hasan use the term *repetition* exclusively for the exact recurrence of a lexical item with the same referent, which they describe as a subcategory of the more general phenomenon of *reiteration*, i.e. lexical cohesion established by using a lexical item to refer back to a referent. Apart from repetition proper, reiteration in this terminology thus also includes the use of synonyms and near-synonyms as well as pronouns to repeat meaning.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) approach repetition as an aspect of cohesion and more particularly lexical cohesion. They identify processes of lexical repetition as one key mechanism that can establish ties between sentences of the text and that is thus instrumental for text

cohesion. Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of lexical ties for text cohesion, however, Halliday and Hasan (1976) give much more room to other types of cohesive ties, which prompts Hoey (1991) and later Toolan (2016) to offer a narrower approach to text-constitutive cohesive patterns that gives centre stage to lexical relationships and repetition in particular. Hoey (1991) on the one hand argues theoretically for the importance of lexical patterning in text organisation and demonstrates how repetitions of different types (simple and complex lexical repetition as well as paraphrase) can be organised into complex matrices and then into repetition nets, which illustrate many of the properties of text structure. On the other hand, he suggests applied uses of these same repetition nets, which can not only reveal that text elements are tied together with semantic links, but also identify more central parts of a text and can thus at least potentially be used to generate “intelligible abridgements” (Hoey, 1991: 124) of the text. Toolan (2016) is interested in story-reading and more particularly in “written narrative sense-making” for which repetition is crucial (244). Like Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Hoey (1991) before him, he too finds that when exploring the text-constitutive links that make texts cohesive units, a broad understanding of repetition is necessary, which goes beyond exact recurrence of the same form, and includes semantic relatedness. While his interest is mostly in providing evidential support for the importance of repetition for text structuring and its effects on the reading experience of narrative texts, Toolan (2016) also looks to his own and Tannen’s (1987a, 1989) research on the structuring functions of repetition in dialogue to contextualise his analyses, which contribute both to the stylistics of narrative texts as well as to a pragmatics of fiction. This duality of approaches, which can roughly be rendered as text linguistic and conversation or discourse analytic, is of interest to this study since sitcoms as data inherently share properties of both face-to-face conversation, which most character dialogues are meant to represent, and fictional narrative texts, which form the basis of the character performances and the televisual broadcast at large.

Shifting the focus to coherence, “an interpretive, hearer-based notion” (Bublitz, 1996: 26; see also Bublitz, 1994) is another way of moving away from the formal ties that exist between text elements and look at the bigger picture of the text in context, interpreted by readers or hearers. As has been pointed out frequently (e.g. by Bublitz, 1996; Toolan, 2009), the relationship between cohesion and coherence is not simply one of cause and effect, of linguistic ties leading to the understanding of a text as a coherent whole. Coherence may arise in the absence of cohesion, and a text can be cohesive but not coherent. Bublitz (1996) even discusses the notion that the order of the causality might be reversed, i.e. that cohesion may be an effect of understanding a text as coherent. However, rephrasing Bublitz’s (1996: 27) conclusion, I will start from the premise here that, prototypically, cohesion does significantly contribute to coherence and that therefore analysing textual links that tie it together cohesively is a possible approach to understanding the reception of the text as a coherent entity. In the same vein, Toolan (2009: 48–49) remarks that the difference between the text linguistic interest in the organisation of texts and the pragmatic focus on how texts are received and understood should not be overstated: a focus on the structure of a text and a recipient making sense of it are two sides of the same coin.

The cohesive functions of repetition have been observed in many different text genres – from Javanese shadow plays (Becker, 1994) to online blogs (Hoffmann, 2012) – and the different types of cohesive ties that were already systematically categorised by Halliday and Hasan (1976) have been organised into different taxonomies, for which Hoffmann (2012) will be used as an illustrative example. Hoffmann (2012) starts from Halliday and Hasan (1976) in order to develop a framework for cohesion in blogs. He hierarchically discusses cohesive ties from top to bottom and first of all distinguishes grammatical and lexical cohesion before then discussing the subcategories of the two. With regard to lexical cohesion, which could perhaps more aptly be termed semantic cohesion, Hoffmann (2012: 94) distinguishes (1)

repetition proper, (2) equivalence, which includes synonymy, syntactical parallelism, and paraphrase; (3) superordination; (4) co-hyponymy; (5) antonymy; and (6) collocation, and he regards the ties that these categories of lexical cohesion establish as a grade between the more formal (1) and the more semantic (6).

This classification is systematic and thorough, but at the same time presents problems when it comes to its operationalisability for empirical research. Hoffmann (2012: 100) states himself that contrary to grammatical cohesion, “[lexical cohesion] simply did not comprise clear-cut formal indicators which could be searched with concordance tools.” This means that categorisation can only happen manually and subjectively, based on the qualitative observations of the researcher. In the absence of any coder agreement we have to trust the researcher that his categorisation scheme can indeed be unambiguously applied to his data. This is not meant as a criticism of Hoffmann’s study, but as a caveat that repetition in a purely semantic sense, i.e. in the absence of partial or full formal recurrence of lexical items, is more difficult to establish as a valid category than more formal types of repetition. It is because of this difficulty that the current study has clearly separated formal from semantic repetition (see also Chapter 6). Whereas the repeats in Chapters 7 and 8 all included formal repetition on some linguistic or non-linguistic level, this chapter discusses humour cohesion based on a broader, semantic understanding of repetition.

Compared to Hoffmann’s (2012) more general interest in different types of semantic relationships, my own approach is more narrow, however. Rather than asking how sitcom cohesion is established per se, this study is interested specifically in the cohesive functions of repetition. In particular, it wants to demonstrate the links that are established through semantic repetition between individual humorous turns. Accordingly, I will focus here on what Hoffmann (2012) calls *semantic relationships of equivalence*.

10.3 Humour cohesion and semantic repetition

In order to specify the approach to semantic repetition between humorous turns, I will briefly return to the notion of incongruity and to its semantic background in particular. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, incongruity, be it in the sense of Suls (1972) or as script opposition in Raskin and Attardo (1994) is, at its core, a semantic concept. The stimuli presented to the recipients, e.g. the beginning of a joke, activate particular frames or scripts (the narrative schema in Suls, 1972; the first script in Raskin and Attardo, 1994) – and subsequent stimuli are then assessed for their compatibility with the evoked frame. Leaving resolvability and context aside for the time being, an instance of humour thus consists of two aspects, the expectation-evoking frame and the incongruous element, which can in prototypical cases be rendered as two clashing semantic frames whose incompatibility triggers the cognitive processes of humour reception. While other properties and processes are of importance – e.g. surprise and resolution – it makes sense then to model the decontextualised humorous instance as constituted by these two elements, to approach semantic repetition from the same perspective, and to ask in what different ways semantic repetition may contribute to the creation of the individual humorous turn.

Since semantic repetition can be present or absent in either the expectation-evoking first frame and present or absent in the incongruous element that clashes with that frame, it follows that there are four different configurations of semantic repetition in any incongruity. The humorous turn can either be constructed (1) without the employment of semantic repetition (absent in the expectation-evoking frame and absent in the incongruous element); (2) by including semantic repetition to evoke the frame on which its humour is based (no semantic repetition in the incongruous element); (3) by employing repetition as part of the incongruous element (no semantic repetition in the expectation-evoking frame); or (4) by including semantic repetition

in the expectation-evoking frame as well as in the incongruous element (see also Section 9.3).

Given the focus of this study, only cases (2) to (4) are of interest here, which feature semantic repetition in some form. While they all contribute to cohesion, the discussion of how these ties are established in the AMSIL corpus will reveal how humour cohesion in particular is established and what effects can be observed for the individual semantically repetitive humorous turn.

The formal repeats presented in Chapters 7 and 8 were based on an identification and categorisation scheme that was validated by a second coder, and accordingly the results lent themselves to quantification that allowed the presentation of the frequency of the distinguished types of repeat and their co-occurrences in humorous turns. The approach to semantic repetition of this study, on the other hand, is more holistic and based on entirely qualitative observations about the way in which humorous turns tie in with other humorous turns by repeating meaning that has been evoked before in the same episode. These semantic recurrences include some of the formal repeats that have been discussed up to this point, but are often also realised without even partially repeating the words, structures, gestures etc. that were used to evoke the same frames earlier. The approach to these aspects of meaning relates to frame semantics (see e.g. Fillmore, 2006), and is tied in particular to the understanding of humorous incongruities as incompatibilities with semantic frames and the elements and events that are expected to occur based on the common ground that communicative sender and audience share.

10.4 Semantic repetition and continuity

Given the layering and multimodality of the sitcom narrative, text cohesion in a sitcom scene or episode is not a purely linguistic phenomenon, but is established with the help of the entire meaning-

making apparatus at the collective sender's disposal, which includes the paralinguistic aspects of actor performance as well as the work done by the crew members during pre-production, filming and post-production. Addressing cohesive ties between adjacent turns thus not only rests on the dialogue, but also on the way this dialogue is framed in terms of its *mise-en-scène*. In this regard, one important lens through which cohesion in telecinematic discourse can be addressed is film theory's understanding of continuity, which is understood as a system of editing conventions that viewers are socialised into when engaging with storytelling of a similar kind, in this case of sitcoms and other US American television series.

In their introduction to film studies, Bordwell and Thompson (2004) provide a valuable overview of continuity editing in film, and I will use some of the key aspects they mention to address continuity in the sitcom episodes in *AMSIL*. Here, and in the following sections, I will understand continuity as those visual and auditory aspects of film-making and by extension of television-making that contribute to cohesion, i.e. as a particular telecinematic way of realising cohesion in the audiovisual text. Bordwell and Thompson's (2004: 310–346) explanation of the aim of continuity editing is a good starting point:

The basic purpose of the continuity system is to create a **smooth flow** from shot to shot. All of the possibilities of editing we have already examined are turned to this end. First, graphic qualities are usually kept roughly **continuous** from shot to shot. The figures are **balanced** and symmetrically deployed in the frame; the overall lighting tonality remains **constant**; the action occupies the central zone of the screen. [...]

(Bordwell and Thompson,
2004: 310, my emphasis)

As the quote illustrates, the collective sender uses the apparatus at her disposal to frame the onscreen actions as a predictable movement of characters through the diegetic world, keeping intact most of the consistent stimuli that our perception would encounter when seeing similar actions in a non-fictional context. In order to create the illusion that characters have an existence outside of the camera frame and the moment in which they are witnessed, they must in some ways behave like human agents, even if their actions and utterances are stylised to some degree. I will return briefly to Example 7.12 (introduced in Section 7.3.1.2) to illustrate this and will reproduce it here for ease of reading:

Example 7.12: Exact and partial multi-word lexical repetition across turns in *Better with you*, S01E01

Maddie, standing next to her partner Ben, explains their living situation to the reception head waitress at a restaurant.

[02:11] Maddie: mhhmh neither of us want to be married, but we love
HT14 each other. we're very happy. (.) it's a valid life
choice.

[...]

Later, Maddie again talks to Ben about their relationship status.

[05:43] Maddie: no::. I know why we aren't married. it's a valid life
HT38 choice.

[...]

In a later scene, the family is discussing Mia's engagement and the fact that Maddie is not married at the restaurant.

[14:55] Maddie: hey, our not being married is a va[lid-]

[14:57] Vicky: [valid] life choice.

HT111 okay, she said it. everybody has to drink.

[...]

Towards the end of the episode, Maddie asks her sister Mia for relationship advice in a taxi.

[19:25] Maddie: Maddie: should Ben and I have gotten married a long
HT137 time ago? (1.4)

↑is my life choice (.) not valid?

Focusing on HT111 and the preceding turn by Maddie in Example 7.12, there are a number of aspects that we may take for granted as television viewers because they resemble our perception of real life encounters with other people. To begin with, the characters Maddie and Vicky still look like the Maddie and Vicky we encountered in earlier scenes. As self-evident as it may seem, this is already the result of choices by the collective sender, who in this case has selected to facilitate viewer comprehension by following the conventions of using the same actors to portray the fictional characters in the story throughout the episode and even the entire sitcom, and to use different actors for different characters.⁴⁸ In addition, the characters' bodily appearance matches that of earlier scenes: They may, for instance, wear different clothes just like our acquaintances in real life would, but even slightly more static features like haircuts will remain the same or receive additional explanation in the narrative if they have changed. All these aspects of characters seem entirely unremarkable, but they are the result of careful pre-production, production and post-production, which makes sure among other things that even when shots are filmed in non-chronological order or using different cameras that they still match viewers' expectations of continuous development analogous to their real-world experiences. It is worth pointing out here that it is this likeness between certain aspects of the diegetic world onscreen and the viewers' environment that lets viewers form hypotheses about character

⁴⁸ While films and television series generally follow this pattern of employing a one-to-one relationship between actors and characters, there are exceptions even in sitcoms. For instance, the minor character of Ross's wife Carol in *Friends* (NBC, 1994–2004) was initially played by actress Anita Barone in the second episode of the first season, the same character was later portrayed by Jane Sibbett. On the same sitcom, actress Lisa Kudrow was both part of the main cast as one of the friends, Phoebe, and also played a recurring character, Phoebe's twin sister Ursula. In this case, the resemblance between the two characters was thus made plausible by their fictional biographies. These are, however, exceptions and they could even be interpreted themselves as incongruous and thus potentially humorous.

actions not only based on their knowledge of sitcoms, but also based on the frames evoked through the fictional representation of non-fictional events. In the case of Example 7.12, for instance, it is not unexpected that glasses are raised and speeches are made at the table in the restaurant, because these are actions that fit the restaurant frame and more particularly the frame of gathering one's family for dinner to share important life news.

In addition to character actions and utterances, continuity also affects the aesthetic quality of the sitcom scene, for instance by ensuring in post-production that the tonality of the image remains constant. Instead of discussing all such aspects in great detail, I will merely present two exemplary spatial conventions that are typically followed when composing a film or fictional television scene. The first such aspect is the *180-degree system* (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004: 310–313), which refers to the convention that the camera typically remains on one side of the so-called *axis of action*. This imaginary line is established through the direction of a moving object in the centre of the frame or also by connecting interacting characters. Given that the sitcoms in AMSIL and multi-camera sitcoms in general are recorded on a stage in front of an audience, this rule is of course followed even more consistently than in other genres, since it would not be easily possible to position a camera behind the axis of action, i.e. at the back of the stage, while still keeping it hidden from the live audience's sight. As Bordwell and Thompson (2004: 311) point out, one effect of this system is that “characters remain in the same positions in the frame relative to each other” – in HT111, for instance, Vicky is always seen to the right of Maddie.

The second aspect is called *eyeline match* (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004: 314) and refers to the simple convention that if in a succession of camera shots, the first one shows a character gazing somewhere off-screen, we will typically see the object of their gaze in the next shot. Shared knowledge of this convention establishes spatial

continuity in an economical way, without redundancies. Often, this convention is also applied to dialogues between characters, and indeed in 7.12 Maddie always looks to the right of the screen (where we assume Vicky must be even when she is not visible in the camera frame), whereas Vicky always looks to the left.

Interestingly, the first connection between continuity and repetition that can be noted here is that the continuity system allows coherent telecinematic storytelling without repetition: By following the axis of action and using the tropes of film and television to establish spatial continuity, the collective sender can seamlessly continue the onscreen actions without repetition, i.e. the character does not perform a gesture again simply because she is filmed in a new shot from a different angle. This also ties in with what Culpeper (2001: 6–7) calls the humanising approach to characterisation. As Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017: 95) point out, we treat characters in many ways like real human beings, which also means that our “mental representation of the goals, motives, beliefs, traits and emotions of fictional characters proceeds in much the same way as for real people.” We assume as common ground between ourselves as viewers and the fictional characters that we both remember those actions, because we witnessed them, or – in the case of characters – performed them.

In other ways, however, continuity also encourages repetition. Very often, the same characters will recur in adjacent shots, on the same set, wearing the same clothes, continuing the same action, and the same also holds true when returning to the unit of conversational turns, which are sometimes equivalent in length with one camera shot, but can also span multiple shots or be part of a longer shot that includes several turns. For any of these cases it holds true that typically most of the *mise-en-scène* will remain the same and that repetition in a sense broader than what was coded here as formal repetition will contribute to the spatial and temporal continuity of the scene.

It may seem that such aspects of a specifically telecinematic way of storytelling are entirely separate from semantic repetition. However, when treating sitcoms as a way of collective senders communicating with television audiences, all semiotic systems need to be included into a semantic analysis. Frames as knowledge structures at the disposal of television viewers are not only evoked by character utterances, but also by the actions represented through the multimodal performance of actors in front of the camera. For instance, a scene can be semantically repetitive because its characters discuss again the topic of remaining unmarried despite having been together for almost ten years, or because a character is yet again or still dining in a restaurant and keeps behaving in a manner that is inappropriate for that restaurant frame. Semantic repetition in this sense also occurs across semiotic systems: Characters can talk about a specific object repeatedly, but using different linguistic encoding, they can point to it using gestures, or the camera can present the same object centrally – all of them ways of returning to the same topic without necessarily employing formal repetition. It has to be added here that this way of returning to the same aspect is not different in principle from the formal repeats that have been analysed so far. In many cases, these formal repeats do also include semantic repetition, thus reinforcing the semantic tie on the text surface.

10.5 Semantic repetition in two adjacent turns

With regard to humour specifically, semantic repetition is important for the establishment of the frame as well as for the construction of the incongruity by adding an ill-fitting element, i.e. an aspect that does not fit the active semantic frame. As mentioned before, both the frame and the incongruous element can be realised with the help of language as well as the other semiotic systems at the collective sender's disposal. I will illustrate this briefly in Example 10.1, which presents an excerpt of the opening scene of the second episode of *Anger Management*.

Example 10.1: Semantic repetition in *Anger Management*, S01E02⁴⁹

The episode starts on the patio of a bar. Charlie and a young woman sit next to each other at a round table, behind them a group of people standing at bar tables, some empty tables and a tree decorated with a chain of lights. The lighting suggests it is evening, Charlie is wearing a long-sleeved shirt, the woman who will be identified in the course of the scene as his date, Daytona, wears a flowery dress and speaks in a high-pitched voice. They both hold drinks menus. While Daytona remains seated in her chair on the left of the screen, Charlie will soon get up and get their drinks at the bar. At the bar he talks to the bartender Brett, a blonde woman in her fifties, who is wearing a white shirt and a black vest.

[00:00] Charlie: + ++okay I'm gonna order us± =
 +closes menu++puts menu on table-----±
 = %some drinks. (0.2) what can I get %you?
 %gets up, turns head towards Daytona%
 [00:03] Daytona: ±anything ±blue.
 HT1 ±nods twice then looks top left±

I will start by analysing semantic repetition in adjacent turns in Example 10.1, which means that I will examine how HT1 relates to the previous, non-humorous turn. As has been discussed, the conventions of the continuity system will work towards establishing a smooth flow between shots, thus ensuring cohesion even across cuts. This is already the case for the first turn-transition, from Charlie's opening question to Daytona's HT1. Charlie's utterance includes some key lexical items like "order" and "drinks" and serves as one particular realisation of offering someone to buy them a drink. Even before the dialogue, the surroundings that are captured by a long camera shot allow the viewers to infer that this is the patio of a bar and that the main character they know from the first episode is sitting in that bar with a woman. Moreover, visual aspects such as the lighting and the clothes the characters are wearing will make it plausible that this may be a date.

⁴⁹ The continuation of the same scene is transcribed further down in Example 10.2.

Accordingly, when Charlie asks his question, it fits the frame, with the lexical items serving as additional access points to the restaurant frame and particular actions that fit that frame, in this case ordering a drink at the bar, or more precisely and stereotypically, for a man to offer his female date to buy a drink for her.

Apart from this descriptive aspect, Charlie's question also points forward, serving as the first pair-part of an adjacency pair, question-answer, with certain answers as second pair-parts being more acceptable than others. Based on the knowledge the viewers have about the frame that has been evoked, they will have expectations what that answer could look like, and they will form vague hypotheses of what Charlie might expect to hear in response to his question.⁵⁰ They will expect that Daytona takes the floor; that she will say something that serves as a relevant answer to his question, and therefore that after her utterance, Charlie will be able to go to the bar having the authority and information to place an order. To be precise, they will expect Daytona to utter the name of a particular drink, perhaps one that she has read on the menu that she holds in her hands. They will also assume that Charlie expects the same. In addition, given the stereotypes that the scene fits, viewers may expect that Daytona will request an alcoholic drink, and perhaps a drink that is typically associated with women.

Before continuing, it is important to briefly disambiguate what I mean by viewer expectations here. As I have mentioned repeatedly, telecinematic discourse as a multi-layered communicative setting can produce expectations on different levels. These different expectations can vary from viewer to viewer, but even if for reasons of simplification just one prototypical viewer type is constructed as an exemplar, that idealised viewer would still have access to different expectations,

⁵⁰ I say that hypotheses are vague here, because I do not mean to suggest that television audiences always try to predict exactly what will happen next. Instead their inferences will lead them to be prepared for a range of different continuations, whereas other answers will be unexpected.

connected among other things to processes of imagination and appreciation (Clark, 1996). When I say, referring to Example 10.1, that the viewers expect Daytona to provide the name of a drink that Charlie can order, I need to specify that the viewers also know they are watching a sitcom, and that therefore they will have a second set of expectations that includes such aspects as the specific relevance of the scene for the episode and maybe the sitcom, the stylised nature of the dialogue, and – most importantly – the possibility of humorous incongruity. I will limit the discussion to this last aspect that is directly relevant for humour.

The expectations that relate to the comic genre of the sitcom are necessarily much vaguer than the ones directly tied to the particular situation and the evoked semantic frames. The first type of expectations defines a time when the second pair-part needs to be uttered, membership of the named item in the semantic category of DRINKS ONE CAN ORDER AT A BAR, and pragmatic constraints for the response to be that of a cooperative interlocutor. The second type of expectations on the other hand refers to the viewers' readiness to be amused by the collective sender. To that purpose they expect to be presented with humorous incongruities that they can understand and resolve; they expect these incongruities to be effective when it comes to eliciting humour and that they thus deserve to be followed by the studio audience's laughter that is broadcast as part of the episode. The incongruity-resolution model predicts that recipients need to be surprised by something incongruous and unexpected, and accordingly viewers also implicitly expect to be surprised. As a result, it must be the goal of the collective sender to meet viewers' expectations in order not to disappoint them while at the same time ensuring that the humorous incongruities remain unpredictable. This task is made easier by the typical viewer's willingness to suspend their disbelief, i.e. by their complicity in the institutional form of joint pretence that is conventional for the reception of fictional film and television (see Chapter 2): If it is the collective sender's goal to amuse viewers, it is in the viewers'

interest to facilitate being amused. To return to Example 10.1, the consequence of this is that viewers have clear expectations as to what Daytona will say next, and while they expect that something unexpected will happen sooner rather than later, they have no clear idea what that incongruous element may be or even when exactly it will occur (even though the frequency of sitcom humour is such that many turns end in a punch line).⁵¹

Daytona's response, HT1, is presented in the form of a medium close-up of the character. She starts her utterance, "anything blue" while still looking at the menu and nodding twice, and raises her gaze towards where we infer Charlie's face must be when landing on the word "blue." In many ways, Daytona's turn meets viewer expectations. With regard to the visual components of the turn, Charlie is still to the screen left of Daytona (we can even see part of his torso); the character still wears the same dress and makeup, and what can be seen of the setting fits the earlier camera shot. In terms of kinesic aspects, Daytona's nodding seems to confirm that she has made a decision, the timing of her gaze fits the communicative ends of requesting a particular drink from her addressee, and the direction of the gaze appropriately points to Charlie. On the linguistic level, she does take the floor and provides an utterance that serves as second pair-part, and her response also successfully names if not a drink then a subcategory of drinks, preceded by an invitation for Charlie to select an item of his choosing from that subcategory.

The "anything + x" construction that Daytona selects would be within the expected if realised as, say, "anything sweet" or "anything with Vodka" and in the context would realise a request of a type of drink. The same is true for Daytona's actual answer. However, she opts

⁵¹ As a piece of subjective, anecdotal evidence, I can add that I as a metarecipient when first seeing this scene expected that a humorous incongruity targeting Daytona would follow Charlie's question, but I did not guess it would be based on the colour of the drink.

for a way of categorisation that is surprising in this context: Drinks in a bar are typically sorted into such categories as established hyponyms (e.g. wine, beer, etc.), their main ingredients (e.g. gin or tequila), the volume of alcohol they contain (e.g., alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks), or even the container they are served in (e.g., beer on tap or in bottles). Categorising drinks by colour, on the other hand, is untypical, and – particularly when done in Daytona’s high-pitched voice – will evoke a CHILDHOOD frame in the viewers, who may remember their own preference for blue sweets or red soda. The incongruity is thus quite simply based on a clash between the restaurant frame and that sudden appearance of categorisation that clashes with the frame.

The detailed analysis of the setup of these first two turns reveals a range of repetitive aspects and their function in the construction of the incongruity of HT1. The abrupt introduction of a different frame is only a small deviation from the expected. What is interesting, however, is to look at the work that is being done by the collective sender in only a few seconds of the broadcast to repeatedly activate the frame that “blue” clashes with and to establish a smooth flow of the scene right until the incongruous element. The activation of the BAR frame starts with a range of cues in the *mise-en-scène* that let viewers infer that this is the patio of a bar. This is recognisable already in the first (camera) frame, and then is reinforced repeatedly already during that first turn. The viewer may glimpse the characters and their actions in the background, their positioning in the scene, someone carrying a tray; the characters in the foreground sit at a table, look at a menu; Charlie explicates that he is going to order some drinks; he gets up indicating that he is about to walk to the bar; he asks what drink he should buy for Daytona. All these aspects of the first turn serve as access points to the BAR frame, and they are repeated in HT1. Charlie is again standing at the table in his shirt, ready to walk to the bar, Daytona is still dressed up and still reading the menu, but ready to name her choice of drink. Her nodding confirms she has found a drink. She starts with “anything,” tying her utterance nicely to the *what*-question Charlie has just asked

and using a pronoun that in the context signifies ‘a drink that you choose for me.’ Only now, when the collective sender has used this plethora of cues to again and again communicate that this is a typical conversation in a bar, does Daytona add “blue,” creating an incongruity by adding an unorthodox postmodifier.

None of the aspects that I have described here are formally repetitive in a strict sense. For instance, Charlie does not repeat the word “drinks”, nor does Daytona. However, the two turns point to drinks in a bar over and over, using processes like pronominalisation and hyponymy (“anything”), presenting or foregrounding elements of the frame (e.g. the menu), or performing parts of a typical action for the frame (standing up in order to walk to the bar). Based on the example of these first two turns it can be gathered that any HT in AMSIL will be full of semantic repetition. Having illustrated this in some detail here, I will thus assume as common ground between myself and the readers that most of these instances of semantic repetition can be identified in any other HT, and will henceforth discuss only selected patterns of semantic repetition and their functions.

10.6 Semantic repetition in one scene

The two turns illustrated in Example 10.1, which are also included in the extended transcript of the same scene that is Example 10.2, have already shown a few ways in which semantic repetition is formally realised in AMSIL. These included multimodal strategies of activating a semantic frame – both on the level of characters and the *mise-en-scène*, as well as linguistic strategies such as pronominalisation and hyponymy. In what follows, I will use a longer transcript (Example 10.2) to point to further patterns that emerge when focusing on semantic repetition.

Example 10.2: Semantic repetition in *Anger Management*, S01E02

The episode starts on the patio of a bar. Charlie and a young woman sit next to each other at a round table, behind them a group of people standing at bar tables, some empty tables and a tree decorated with a chain of lights. The lighting suggests it is evening, Charlie is wearing a long-sleeved shirt, the woman who will be identified in the course of the scene as his date, Daytona, wears a flowery dress and speaks in a high-pitched voice. They both hold drinks menus. While Daytona remains seated in her chair on the left of the screen, Charlie will soon get up and get their drinks at the bar. At the bar he talks to the bartender Brett, a blonde woman in her fifties, who is wearing a white shirt and a black vest.

[00:00] Charlie: + ±okay I'm gonna order us± =
 +closes menu±±puts menu on table-----±
 = %some drinks. (0.2) what can I get %you?
 %gets up, turns head towards Daytona%

[00:03] Daytona: ±anything ±blue:.
 HT1 ±nods twice then looks top left±

[00:04] SA: hahah[ahaha]⁵²

[00:05] Daytona: [or %ye]llow %
 HT2 %nods twice%

[00:06] SA: hahahaha[[hahahahahahaha]]

[00:07] Charlie: +[[on the off chance]] they don't have+ =
 HT3 +hands folded in front of body-----+
 = ±either:: ±,+ is there another primary color=
 ±opens hands± +hands folded again----->
 == I can get for you?+=
 -----+

[00:10] SA: =hahaha[haha]

[00:11] Daytona: ±[p(h)]ink. ±
 HT4 ±eyes wide open±

[00:12] SA: hahahaha[[hahahahahahaha]]haha
 Charlie: %[[°be right back°]] % + (1.0) +
 % index finger gesture% +walks to bar+

[00:15] Brett: how's your date going?

[00:17] Charlie: she would like a: (.) + ±blue drink, (.)

⁵² While I have refrained from transcribing the laugh track in previous examples to improve readability, I will include the studio audience (SA) as a participant in the conversation here. Their laughter, i.e. the laugh track, is represented in haha syllables, which only very approximately transcribe the length of laughter. Square brackets indicate overlap with the dialogue.

HT5 +raises eyes+
 or a yellow drink=
 [00:20] SA: =ha[haha]haha
 [00:20] Charlie: [or a:] (.) + pink + ± drink. ±
 HT6 +closes eyes+ ±blinks rapidly±
 [00:22] SA: hahahaha[[ha]]
 [00:23] Brett: [[you]] want me to put it in a sippy cup?
 HT7
 [00:25] SA: hahahahahahaha

Example 10.2 shows further incongruities that are constructed following HT1 (see Section 10.5 for a detailed discussion of that first HT). The first one (HT2) follows within the same camera shot and offers another colour for Charlie to choose from. While no words are repeated in this case, HT2 is an example of the same call back that was also found to be a function of formal repetition (see Section 9.3.2.4). The same incongruity between specifying a drink in a bar and naming a colour that was discussed for HT1 is reactivated here. There is of course variation in this case, a different colour is named, and it is introduced by the conjunction “or,” which indicates that the second response serves as an alternative to the first. However, I will argue that the difference between the two colours is of no consequence here, and it is not conceivable that replacing each of the two colours with any other would make HT1 or HT2 different in their humorous effect. This is because “blue” and “yellow” serve as examples and hyponyms of COLOUR, which here activates the CHILDHOOD frame. On this level of semantic frames, the two HTs are identical not only because the two incongruous elements are both colours, but also because the frame with which they clash is still active. The collective sender multimodally constructs HT2 to be a continuation of HT1 in the same setting, with Charlie still about to leave for the bar.

Another humorous turn follows right away in HT3, when Charlie takes the floor. Continuity is observed here also with regard to matching eye lines, and the BAR frame is still active. However, making use of

his standing position and adding an expert gesture of opening and closing his folded hands, Charlie here impersonates a waiter to ask for yet another alternative. In so doing, he identifies the category Daytona has been using to select her drink as “primary colour,” which serves as another call back to the incongruity in HT1. In addition, however, Charlie may either be mocking Daytona here, or he could be trying to elicit a reaction that would retrospectively identify her unorthodox responses as a joke. Based on the linguistic realisation as well as his gesture, it is clear in any case that Charlie is not serious and not bona fide asking for another colour.

In HT4, however, Daytona excitedly makes clear she would also appreciate a pink drink. This is again for the most part identical to HTs 1 and 2, but one variation is Daytona’s changed facial expression, and another one is that this turn also follows slightly altered viewer expectations. If Charlie is joking, we would expect Daytona to infer that Charlie is looking for humour support or acknowledgement that the already offered primary colours are not to be taken seriously. Answering with another colour instead, which on the surface looks like the preferred response, fails to signal such recognition and instead returns to the BAR/CHILDHOOD opposition once more.

While HTs 5 and 6 use lexical repetition to refer back to this conversation between Charlie and Daytona, HT7, uttered by the bartender, finds a new way of activating the same incongruity, while also enacting the same disbelief that Charlie indicated in HT3. This disbelief has now turned to mockery – either of Daytona for ordering coloured drinks or, more likely, of Charlie for being on a date with someone who orders coloured drinks. This mockery is realised through the compound “sippy cup”, which also evokes a CHILDHOOD frame more explicitly. The scene is thus also an example of escalation realised in part through semantic repetition. Again, HT4–7 follow the continuity system, with the pun before HT5 serving as a typical way of connecting the conversation at the table between Charlie and Daytona (H1–4) to

that at the bar between Charlie and Brett (HT5–7). The visual cohesion that is thus established, a constructed unity of space and time, is accompanied by conversational cohesion, for which question-answer adjacency pairs are instrumental in this scene. This example also illustrates, however, that humour in sitcoms is not only cohesive because it occurs in a cohesive context. Semantic repetition does play a key role in ensuring that incongruities are carefully motivated on CL2, and in establishing a continuous narrative that appears plausible to the television viewers. More than that, however, HTs keep returning to the same frames and the same incongruities over and over and in doing so not only connect the individual HTs, but also the scene more generally.

I will return to these cohesive functions of semantic repetition as well as of formal repetition in the following Chapter 11, where I will use this discussion of the workings of semantic repetition in one scene as a starting point for the exploration of the larger narrative structures of sitcoms. There I will also address the workings of semantic as well as formal repetition over greater distances in the text.

10.7 Summary

Having focused on different types of formal repetition for the most part of this study, I have used this chapter to also address what the other chapters had consciously ignored, which is repetition not of form, but of meaning, of ideas, of concepts. I have approached this topic choosing a text linguistic understanding of cohesion and coherence as the first lens, but also including concepts of the continuity system that I borrowed from film studies. In order to explore the role that semantic repetition plays in establishing cohesive ties, I have argued from a frame semantic perspective, which I combined with the aforementioned approaches. Based on these frameworks, I analysed first only a single pair of two adjacent turns and then a short scene, which included 7 HTs. I was able to show with these close readings how the collective sender employs semantic repetition to activate and constantly re-activate

particular semantic frames that are then exploited for the construction of incongruities. Work is done on many levels by the collective sender to establish a continuous scene, which allows viewers to have clear expectations about the range of directions actions and utterances can take, and which makes it possible for them to process as incongruous what falls outside that range. The analysed scene returned to the same incongruity with only marginal variation in every HT, which also means that humour in this sitcom is not so much influenced by the context in which it occurs, but rather that HTs define the context that subsequent HTs tie in with and that the entire scene follows. These findings, which were based on the analysis of one short scene, will be supported by the observations made in the following Chapter 11, which examines the functions of repetition – both formal and semantic – in the structuring of the sitcom episode. There, the network of HTs that forms the skeleton of each sitcom episode will be made visible, while demonstrating how its structural integrity builds on strands and bridges of semantic and formal, simple and complex, repetition.

11 Humorous structure of a sitcom episode

11.1 Introduction

The empirical part of this study has started with analyses of individual repeats (Chapter 7) and has then progressively moved to larger chunks of sitcom texts. From the composition of humorous turns (HTs) through complex repetition, i.e. combinations of simple repeats (Chapter 8), it has expanded to include the functions of repeats and repetition (Chapter 9) and has then gone beyond formal repetition to include semantic repetition and cohesion, while also broadening its scope from the HT to an exemplary scene (Chapter 10). This chapter will now adopt an even wider focus and address the structure of an entire sitcom episode. The case study I present here will address the final research question:

- (5) What is the role of repetition in the larger narrative structures of sitcoms, such as scenes, sequences and entire episodes?

The successive shift from a more microscopic examination of simple repeats in individual turns towards larger structures also requires a different theoretical approach to humour that goes beyond the construction of humorous incongruities based on expectation-evoking frames and incongruous elements and takes into account the way longer comic narratives can be understood in humour theoretic terms. In preparation for the other sections in this chapter, this focus on comic narratives will be added in the following Section 11.2, which offers a brief presentation of existing conceptualisations of comic narratives and repetition therein in particular. This look at the existing literature on comic narratives will be followed by a case study on one of the episodes in AMSIL, the first episode of *The McCarthys*, in 11.3.

11.2 Repetition in comic narratives

A good starting point for a discussion of how longer comic narratives have been considered to be structured by means of repetitive devices is Marszalek (2013), who offers a cognitive stylistic approach to what she refers to as *humorous narratives*. The canonical distinction between canned and conversational humour (see e.g. Norrick, 1993; Attardo, 2001; Ermida, 2008) can be rendered as two ideal endpoints of a scale from the decontextualised local joke viewed in isolation of the situation of any performance to situated conversational, or indeed situational humour (Ermida, 2008). Marszalek (2013: 395) refers to this latter, context-dependent form of humour as *extended humour* and points out that it often depends on the understanding of the larger narrative in which it is embedded, which she terms the *humorous world*. This world establishes patterns of humour which are dependent on recipient knowledge, i.e. on schemata/frames/scripts that are triggered by the narrative. Presenting examples for objects, characters and events that may disrupt the schemata activated by the story, Marszalek (2013: 399–400) observes that these *disrupted elements* may not be recognisable as humorous without context:

That is because (1) their humorous potential is only "unlocked" in the wider humorous context in which they appear, and (2) they do not need to involve an easily resolved incongruity between two contrasting concepts as is the case with some verbal humour, but instead operate on a different, perhaps more general, kind of incongruity, one between (a) what we know about typical real life entities (as held in schemata) and (b) the way those entities are represented in the text (as diverging from schemata).

Such a view is not different in principle from the model that Suls (1972) proposed and that this study adheres to. What it does, however, is emphasise the particular way in which the evoked frame as well as the unexpected elements that lead to the cognitive processes of recognition and resolution on the recipients' side are realised within the setting of the longer humorous narrative. With her proposition of a "more general" incongruity that occurs in absence of "two contrasting concepts," Marszalek (2013) separates her view of extended humour within the humorous world from the overlapping-and-opposed scripts approach of which Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) is the most prominent representative. The manipulation of familiar elements, recontextualised by and for the humorous world, is potentially sufficient in itself to achieve a humorous effect (Marszalek, 2013: 402).

While Marszalek (2013) points out that repetition has been identified in previous linguistic research as a key structuring feature within the comic narrative, she only mentions exemplary cases like Attardo (2001) and Ermida (2008) in passing. However, it is worth looking at these previous discussions in more detail at this point, because they offer a fine-grained humour-specific perspective onto how comic narratives are organised through recurring patterns of humour. Attardo (2001) in particular offers useful terminology for different types of repetition *of* humour that will be adopted in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Attardo and Raskin's (1991) GTVH was originally optimised for the analysis of individual jokes. However, its later adaptation to humorous texts by Attardo (2001) led to the identification of several relevant macrotextual features of humour that are of value for this analysis and will be presented in this section.

A first structural distinction is that between jab lines and punch lines, which are semantically identical but different when it comes to their position in the text: Whereas jab lines are "fully integrated in the narrative in which they appear" (Attardo, 2001: 82), punch lines are

“disruptive elements” (83) that force recipients to backtrack and reanalyse the ongoing narrative in terms of a second script (*ibid.*). Since, like Marszalek (2013), I follow a broader understanding of incongruity and resolution, which understands humour as the result of a resolvable incongruity and does not include the notion of opposing and overlapping scripts as a necessary condition for humour, the distinction between jab and punch lines *per se* is of little importance to this study. However, it leads Attardo to the notions of strands, stacks, combs and bridges, which together establish a systematic account of how humorous instances are hierarchically and sequentially organised in comic narratives. A strand is simply defined by Attardo (2001: 83, referencing Attardo, 1996) as “a (non-necessarily contiguous) sequence of (punch or jab) lines formally or thematically linked.” As a further condition, Attardo (2001) refers to the *rule of three* often used in jokes and therefore requires for a strand to include at least three related lines (84). Strands that occur “within a narrow space” are called *combs* by Attardo (2001: 87). I will follow Attardo’s terminology here and use the term strand as well as its subcategories and specifications. It seems unnecessary, however, to limit this category to those instances where at least three linked lines occur. Surely, two linked lines are not the same as one unlinked one, and the exclusion of two linked lines in a text from the strand would thus require the introduction of a separate category that contrasts the function of such structures with those of single lines on the one hand and strands on the other. I will instead treat all cases of recurring linked lines in the same text as parts of a strand.

Attardo (2001) further distinguishes between central strands and peripheral strands based on frequency of occurrence, and he includes the notion of substrands, which share only some, but not all of the features of a strand and can therefore be regarded as a nested subgroup of the larger pattern. On a higher level, Attardo (2001: 86) introduces the stack to refer to a strand of strands, i.e. to strands that are thematically or formally tied to each other. Finally, strands can be spatially distinguished based on the distance between individual lines.

Whereas combs are defined by Attardo (2001: 87) as humorous lines that occur “within a narrow space” – which he equates to approximately 10% of the overall text length, bridges occur at a distance of each other.

Attardo’s (2001) taxonomy-focused approach is taken up by Ermida (2008) who criticises some of the overly simplistic dichotomies introduced to distinguish features of comic narratives as well as Attardo’s view that longer narratives can be understood entirely sequentially (Ermida, 2008: 109–110). Such a linear approach has two downsides for Ermida: First of all it neglects the vertical semantic organisation of narratives; secondly it ignores pragmatic aspects of comic narrative discourse (111). Earlier research on narrative humour by Nash (1985) and Chlopicki (1987) – both of them also summarised in Ermida (2008) – had already emphasised that longer humorous texts are more than a sequence of individual jokes.

Nash (1985) starts by explaining the individual joke, for which he postulates three components: genus, design and locus (9). Whereas genus refers to the situatedness of the joke in a particular cultural context, which also means that it requires some form of common ground between teller and listener, design points to the recognisable communicative act, i.e. that the joke is told in a fashion that indicates that humour is intended. Finally, the third aspect, locus, refers to the particular indispensable linguistic encoding on which the joke centres. Following on from this understanding of the joke, Nash (1985) speaks of compressions and expansions that occur both when expanding the focus to joke cycles and to longer comic narratives. Distinguishing between oral and textual humour, he finds that it is in the latter that expansion can be observed. Corresponding to the three aspects of a joke, he finds that jokes are expanded along three axes, which he calls generic, interactional and linguistic (Nash, 1985: 21). Ermida (2008: 102) points out that this suggests that “a wider interpersonal and cultural framework of analysis” is necessary for a linguistic analysis of the comic narrative.

Chlopicki (1987) addresses humorous short stories through the lens of Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour. His doctoral dissertation is later refined in Chlopicki and Attardo (1997), and both together can be said to serve as the basis for Ermida's (2008) own model of humorous narratives. She takes from Chlopicki first of all the support that a script-based approach to humour can be fruitful not only for the analysis of jokes, but also for longer narratives (Ermida, 2008: 104). In terms of the actual application of script theory to narratives, Chlopicki's distinction of three different organisational principles is noteworthy: humorous short stories seem to either progress from less to more serious humorous instances (escalation); present a range of different realisations of the same script opposition (variation); or delay the resolution of incongruities until the final stages of the narrative (accumulation) (Ermida, 2008: 103). This focus by Chlopicki on macrostructures of humour also carries over to his understanding of scripts and script oppositions: He finds that stories usually have main scripts which pervade parts of the story or indeed the entire short story, and while it is possible to identify script oppositions that lead to individual humorous moments, Chlopicki (1987) finds that there are also *shadow oppositions* that can be used to explain the understanding of the whole text as a humorous text (see also discussions in Attardo, 2001: 38–39; Ermida, 2008: 103–104).

Ermida's (2008) own model of humorous narratives builds on Chlopicki and Attardo's (1997) notion that there are higher-level scripts in which individual script oppositions in narratives are embedded. She hypothesises that there are five organising principles that characterise humorous narratives, which she also takes as an identifying criterion, i.e. as a necessary condition to regard a narrative as humorous. These principles are (1) the *Principle of Opposition*, which establishes that scripts in humorous texts come in opposed pairs; (2) the *Principle of Hierarchy*, which distinguishes higher-level, hyperonymous supra-scripts from more local lower-level (infra-)scripts; (3) the *Principle of Recurrence*, which postulates that supra-scripts are realised in series of

infra-scripts; (4) the *Principle of Informativeness*, which addresses the surprise that typically concludes humorous stories and understands it in terms of a foregrounding of the supra-script that goes against reader predictions; and (5) the *Principle of Cooperation*, which postulates that the humorous intent is encoded in the communicative processes of storytelling (Ermida, 2008: 172–173). The obvious Gricean flavour of these principles is rooted in Ermida’s understanding of humorous communication in terms of breaking the communicative contract, which she refers to as “an infraction of the pragmatic principles, shared by sender and recipient, which govern speech acts” (142). Ermida addresses humour as a flouting of Gricean maxims in particular and stresses the importance of implicature, which for her means that recipients of humorous narratives “will have to read between the lines, under the etymologically intertwined forms of the ‘implicit’ and the ‘implicated’, so as to spot the clues to solve the problem” (161).

This pragmatic approach to the humorous narrative proves to be a valuable heuristic in Ermida’s application of her model to a short story by Woody Allen (*The Lunatic’s Tale*). She shows first of all how the humorous mode is set in the initial sentences of the text – what I would refer to as the establishing of the play frame – and then characterises the further development of the humorous mode in terms of a recurrent pattern of symmetrical antitheses in the presentation of characters, narrative events, etc. (Ermida, 2008: 176–177). This sequential structure is then concluded with a final surprise, understood in terms of the principle of informativeness. The main focus of Ermida’s analysis is not on the relatively simple horizontal structure of the story, however. She discusses the vertical organisation of the text’s humour in much more detail, which culminates in a script hierarchy on four levels, from the supra-script of the SUCCESSFUL DOCTOR, to a second-level distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic qualities, to themes such as MONEY or HAPPINESS, and finally to eleven infra-scripts in which different hyponyms of that supra-scripts are encoded throughout the narrative (e.g. ‘satisfaction’ and ‘peace of mind’ as subcategories of

HAPPINESS). The segmentation of scripts into four discrete levels is perhaps overly structured and suggests a degree of semantic accuracy that is difficult to support with the lexical and inferential scripts that are borrowed from Attardo (2001). However, Ermida's analysis demonstrates convincingly how individual incongruities can be understood as recurrent variations, each of them in hyponymical relationship with an overarching supra-script.

This hierarchy in Ermida (2008) and the more linear approach in Attardo (2001) will both serve as tools for the subsequent case study. They have in common that they are not built on formal aspects of repetition, but are interested in semantic similarity, in repeated realisations of incongruities, be it with identical or different linguistic means, and in the way humorous narratives are ultimately structured and characterised by such aspects of semantic repetition. Ermida (2008) and Marszalek (2013) further make clear that comic narratives are more than a sequence of individual jokes and that the narrative coherence of the story is also encoded in humorous instances that can be called cohesive because they are tied to other instances of humour in the same text through particular semantic relationships. In discussing the structures of the sitcom episodes in *AMSIL*, I will include such semantic ties as well as the formal connections that I have discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 in order to examine more comprehensively how repetition in the different facets that have been discussed here contributes to the way sitcom humour unfolds.

11.3 Sitcoms as networks of humorous turns: a case study

11.3.1 Introduction: Adapting the transcription methodology for a larger excerpt

In order to show how repetition in formal and semantic realisations contributes to the structure of a sitcom episode, this section (11.3) will present a case study based on the first episode of *The McCarthys* (CBS, 2014–2015), which was selected randomly from the episodes in the AMSIL corpus. Bearing in mind the examples presented in earlier chapters, it should be clear that taking into account an entire episode rather than individual repeats or individual humorous turns (HTs) requires a way of representing these HTs that is different from the detailed transcripts included so far. On the one hand, including the detailed transcript of an entire sitcom episode could potentially get in conflict with policies of Fair Use or Fair Dealing; on the other hand, the transcript of 25 seconds from *Anger Management* in Example 10.2 makes clear that such a full transcript of an episode would be roughly fifty pages long. Having already demonstrated the intricacies of individual repeats, complex repetition and semantic repetition in the preceding chapters, I will thus at this point use a much coarser grain and present HTs in an abstracted form that does, however, still manage to describe the evoked frames and incongruities that are at play. The linguistic realisation of all HTs will be presented in tables, and I will add additional details whenever it is necessary or beneficial for the understanding of the ties that exist between HTs and scenes in this sitcom episode. More of these details will be included for the first scenes so as to demonstrate the richness of the data. Later scenes will then be described in less detail.

The discussion will focus on semantic ties and their contribution to text cohesion at first, with 11.3.2 presenting an overview of the plot and working definitions for the subsequent sections. In Section 11.3.3,

I will take a closer look at the semantic ties within and across scenes in the first sequence of *The McCarthys*, S01E01; Section 11.3.4 will focus on humour in the remaining six sequences and the way they link back to these earlier scenes that establish the main themes for both the plot of and the incongruities in the episode. Based on these discussions, 11.3.5 will address the hierarchy of semantic frames that serves as a vertical structure for the incongruities in this episode, and it will schematically describe the path the narrative takes through that hierarchy. Finally, I will discuss the role of formal repetition within the thus structured humour in Section 11.3.6.

11.3.2 Overview and definitions

Excluding the credits at the end, episode 1 of *The McCarthys* is just under twenty-one minutes long and consists of individual camera shots that can be grouped together into scenes, sequences and finally the entire episode. As is commonly done in film studies (see Bordwell and Thompson, 2004: 63–64), I have used the criteria of unity of time and space to distinguish scenes and sequences, complemented by the inclusion of conversation participants as a more linguistic criterion for scenes in particular. I thus define sequences as large segments of a sitcom that take place at the same location and during the same period of time, whereas scenes are the smaller units that constitute sequences. Scenes inevitably share the aspects of unity of space and time with sequences, but they also entail the same group of participants. There is some fuzziness about the criterion of participants – for instance, bystanders will in some scene become ratified participants of the conversation and therefore the subsequent interactions could be considered a new scene or part of the previous one. However, since the notion of scenes is merely a tool to represent the structure of the narrative and to organise the visualisation of the ties between HTs, different scene boundaries would not change the network of HTs that will be the result of this analysis in any significant way. This is so

because the cohesive links that will be looked at are between the HTs that are included in those scenes and sequences and not between scenes and sequences themselves. It should be added that there are also four flashbacks in this episode. These short scenes that take place prior to the main storyline are marked with a sound effect at both their beginning and end, and are thus audibly separated from the other scenes.

I will start the discussion with individual scenes in 11.3.3, but before that I will present here an overview of the structure of the entire episode to help orientation and to make clear the basic plot of the episode. To this effect, Table 11.1 below will present all scenes in their plot order. As will be illustrated in the following sections, sequences are typically composed of several scenes, and scenes typically contain multiple HTs.

Based on spatial and temporal criteria, seven different sequences can be identified.⁵³ The first part consists of scenes at the family home, where the parents live and where all four adult children that make up the rest of the main characters usually meet. The viewers are informed in the prologue (scene 1) that the entire family lives on the same street block in Boston. The second and third sequences are set at the funeral home where the wake takes place and in the car on the way back, respectively. Sequence 4 consists of only one scene at Ronny's home, and the remaining sequences are at different points of the family home. After a return to the living room (seq. 5), the collective sender takes us to the backyard (seq. 6) and then to a short final sequence, the tag, at the front door of the house. It can be added that based on the map that is presented in scene 1 as well as on linguistic and multimodal cues

⁵³ The segmentation into sequences is straightforward and unambiguous in the sitcoms in AMSIL, because locations are static and clearly separable. However, one could potentially regard scenes five to nine as a separate sequence, since there is a short time gap before everybody reappears dressed for the wake.

throughout the episode, the viewers can infer without much guesswork where the sequences are set, and the same is true for the timeline of the episode. For instance, we gather that the car-sequence is right after the wake because of the topics of conversation and the clothes the characters wear; and it is implicated that sequence 6 is in the family's backyard when the parents exit the house in the background in scene 30.

Seq.	Scene	Timecode	Plot description	HTs in scene
1	1	00:00–00:33	Ronny introduces his family.	
	2	00:33–01:13	The four adult siblings, Ronny, Gerard, Sean and Jackie, are watching basketball with their father. They are at the family home.	1–8
	3	01:13–01:31	The mother joins the group.	9–12
	4	01:31–02:49	There is a phone call and the family learns about the death of the father's former assistant coach.	13–19
	5	02:49–03:37	Ronny and his mother talk about his father's feelings about the death of his assistant.	20–26
	6	03:37–04:53	Everybody reappears dressed for the wake.	27–39
	F1	04:54–05:01	Flashback to Gerard as a junior basketball coach.	40–41
	7	05:01–06:16	The family talk about who of the brothers could be the new assistant coach.	42–51
	F2	06:16–06:27	Flashback to when Ronny came out to his parents.	52–53
	8	06:27–06:49	Ronny and his mother talk about his plans to move to Rhode Island.	54–56
	F3	06:49–07:11	Flashback to a date Ronny had.	57–60
	9	07:11–07:48	The family talks about their role in Ronny's dating life.	61–64
	2	10	07:48–08:20	Ronny, Jackie and their mother talk at the wake. They are at a funeral home.
11		08:20–09:20	The father talks to a coach for another school.	71–75
12		09:20–09:30	The father kneels in front of the coffin and talks on the phone.	76–77
13		09:30–09:37	Sean flirts with a woman at the wake.	78–79

	14	09:37–10:15	Ronny and his mother sit in the pews and talk about their relationship.	80–85
	15	10:15–11:19	The father announces Ronny as the new assistant coach. Ronny refuses.	86–89
3	16	11:19–11:40	The family is in the car, discussing Ronny's nomination as new assistant coach.	90–91
	F4	11:40–11:46	Flashback to Gerard teaching.	92–93
	17	11:46–12:20	The father tells Ronny he will be a good assistant.	94–96
Seq.	Scene	Timecode	Plot description	HTs in scene
4	18	12:20–14:16	Ronny's parents visit him in his apartment. His father tells him that he really picked him as an assistant because he is gay.	97–107
5	19	14:16–14:28	The parents are at their home, discussing the surprise party they have organised for Ronny.	108
	20	14:28–14:32	Ronny's mother leads him into the living room, where the guests are waiting.	109
	21	14:32–14:45	Ronny's mother announces they made him a gay bar.	110–111
	22	14:45–15:08	Gerard introduces Philipp to Ronny.	112–115
	23	15:08–15:19	The mother introduces Ken to Ronny.	116–117
	24	15:19–15:27	Sean introduces a woman to Ronny.	118–119
	25	15:27–15:41	The father brings drinks over to Ronny.	120–121
	26	15:41–16:09	Jackie tells Ronny that she is pregnant.	122–125
	27	16:09–16:45	Jackie announces her pregnancy to everyone.	126–131
	28	16:45–17:35	The family discusses the future, how Jackie will raise the baby.	132–139
	29	17:35–17:50	The father makes a toast to the baby.	140–141
6	30	17:50–18:45	Jackie, Gerard and Sean are playing basketball.	142–148
	31	18:45–19:41	Ronny throws a basketball to determine whether he will stay, or leave for Rhode Island.	149–154
	32	19:41–20:21	Ronny announces he will be the assistant coach after all.	155–159
7	33	20:21–20:55	The mother says goodbye to each of her children individually.	160–162

Table 11.1: Plot structure of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

11.3.3 A look at individual scenes in sequence 1 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

I presented a detailed partial analysis of a scene in *Anger Management* in Chapter 10. There, seven successive HTs employed semantic repetition to activate the same semantic frames and to present the textual basis for seven versions of the same incongruity. In every case the frame was that of adults having a drink in a bar, and the incongruous element consisted of the uttering or reporting of childlike preferences at odds with that context. Turning the attention to the scenes in the first episode of *The McCarthys* now, I will follow the segmentation presented in Table 11.1 and will in this section summarise the humorous incongruities in the scenes of its first sequence. For each scene, a table will provide a broad transcription of each HT. However, only some of the humour will be understandable from the tables per se, whereas in all other cases they will need additional context and explanation. I will include such additional information in the text. While there is already a progression from more to less detail in the subsequent sections on HTs in the first sequence, that tendency will be carried over to 11.3.4, which presents general patterns and trends that were observed for the other six sequences, without exploring them to such detail as is done for the first scenes of sequence 1.

11.3.3.1 Sequence 1, Scenes 1–3: Incongruities between sports and arts

Scene 1 is a brief prologue in which the voiceover of the sitcom's protagonist Ronny introduces the place, Boston, as well as his family, who he says "loyally root" for their team. There are no HTs in this scene, but scene 2 (see Table 11.2) immediately starts with Ronny's siblings sitting in the living room in front of the TV, each of them cursing at their team.

HT1	Gerard	piece-a ga:bage!
HT2	Ronny	so:, who's winning the sports today?
HT3	Gerard	just sports, not the.
HT4	Ronny	the Celtics are the green ones,
HT5	Ronny	and they're playing the Miami.
HT6	Ronny	the Mi-ami, uh, I really wanna sa:y, Sound Machine.
HT7	Arthur	hey, if anybody could be that dumb about sports, it's Ronny.
HT8	Ronny	thanks for believing in me dad.

Table 11.2: HTs in Scene 2 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01⁵⁴

HT1 has Gerard insulting his team on TV, which is incongruous with the active frame LOYAL FANS. Ronny arrives during HT1 and starts a conversation with his family in which he, and later his mother, are positioned as followers of such television series as *The Good Wife* and *The Closer*, whereas the rest of the family are fans of the Boston Celtics, with the dad also being a high school basketball coach. HT2 until HT7 are all based on the differences between Ronny and his sport-loving family. This is realised first by Ronny applying a definite article where none is expected (HT2), which is promptly corrected by Gerard (HT3). There are then three HTs around Ronny not being able to identify the Celtics' opponents, with HT6 also explicitly contrasting the BASKETBALL frame with a MUSIC frame. The response is Sean stating that: "you gotta be messin' with us. you can't be that dumb about spo:ts." – a non-humorous turn, which does not appear in the example. This is taken up by Arthur in HT7, where he formally repeats part of his son's statement (exact multi-word repetition), presenting it as a defence of the attacked Ronny. The mismatch between what is encoded

⁵⁴ Table 11.2 and subsequent tables in this chapter include broad transcriptions only of the HTs in the respective scenes. They do not include the laugh tracks that follow the HT in each case, nor the context and non-humorous turns that occur between HTs.

linguistically in HT7 (Ronny is dumb about sports) and what can be inferred to be its pragmatic intention (defending Ronny) is taken up again in HT8, where Ronny reacts to the latter while ignoring the former, i.e. instead of protesting against being called “dumb about sports” he thanks his father for believing in him.

In this second scene, there is very little formal repetition to be observed. Characters do not for the most part notably employ intra-turn repetition in HTs, nor do they repeat units from previous turns. This is also true on the levels of prosody, character gestures, facial expressions and telecinematic realisations, which are not present in the broad transcripts in this and the following tables.

On the other hand, examining the same scene through the lens of semantic repetition that was introduced in Chapter 10, it is apparent that there are close semantic ties between the eight HTs with which the humorous effects on the viewers are created. The aforementioned opposition between the family interested in and knowledgeable about sports or basketball in particular and Ronny’s ignorance in that domain is encoded in different ways. To begin with, Ronny arrives at the scene where the other four are already gathered in front of the TV, thus already clearly separating the groups. Also on the level of the *mise-en-scène*, Ronny’s siblings sit next to each other on the same couch, whereas he sits down on a separate chair. This spatial separation is also encoded in the individual camera shots that are used to construct the conversation between Ronny and other members of his family: Ronny is always alone in a camera frame; his siblings, on the other hand, are always visible in twos or threes. That they take turns when speaking to Ronny reinforces the already established fact that Ronny is the main character of this sitcom, and it also positions them as part of the same group, to which Ronny does not belong. Further aspects that serve to activate the same contrast are that the brothers, Sean and Gerard, are wearing sports clothes, whereas Ronny is wearing a buttoned shirt; they

have angry facial expressions whereas Ronny looks cheerful; and their pronounced Boston accent also separates them from Ronny.

On the linguistic level, the “dumb about sports” theme is realised in Ronny’s utterances as surprising ignorance (HTs 2,4,5 and 6) or in the turns of other characters as references to that ignorance (the correction in HT3, the explicit labelling in HT7). However, it is also apparent that despite the similarities, these HTs are realised in different ways. For instance, the non-idiomatic use of the definite article in HT2 is followed by a call back realised as other-correction in HT3; and Ronny’s ignorance is realised as making a statement that is irrelevant because it is too obvious in HT4, then as vagueness in HT5 and as a blatantly wrong answer in HT6. It is important to note here that in their different realisations, the HTs can go beyond the incongruity with the SPORTS frame that is at the essence of humour here, which is to say that it would be too simple to understand every HT in terms of activating just one frame and constructing one incongruous element that clashes with that frame. Instead, the context as well as the particular way in which each HT is multimodally realised will lead to the foregrounding of other aspects. For instance, HTs 2 and 3 can also be said to activate frames that relate to language use or more generally to knowledge; it is clear that the definite article in HT5’s “the Miami” is also a call back to “the sports” of HT2, and HT8 both ties in with the back-handed compliment in HT7, while also serving as an example of unsuccessful communication (even though Ronny’s response matches Arthur’s communicative intent, which is to stand up for Ronny when he is being criticised).

The following scene 3 exemplifies a pattern that recurs in many subsequent scenes: On the one hand it ties in directly with the previous scene with regard to the *mise-en-scène*, characters, their positions, etc. and also with respect to the incongruities that it includes; on the other hand it also marks a shift away from the theme of the previous incongruities, which can be conceptualised as an instance of expansion

in Nash's (1985) sense (see 11.2). As Table 11.3 illustrates, HT9 evokes the constellation of four adult children at their parents' home that had already been activated by the *mise-en-scène* in scene 2.

HT9	Marjorie	god. I got a lot of kids.
HT10	Marjorie	oh there is one that I li:ke
HT11	R&M	the: Good Wife.
HT12	Arthur	DON'T TAKE THAT SHOT! (0.5) ooh, great shot.

Table 11.3: HTs in Scene 3 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

The incongruity in this case is to do with the surprising attitude Marjorie has towards her children. First of all, there is not much motherly love present in her utterance, and secondly she presents the number of her own adult children as a sudden realisation when she as their mother should be well aware of their existence. The MOTHERLY LOVE frame is taken up in HT10, with “one” referring back to the large number of children, while singling out the one she likes implicates that she does not like the others, which reinforces the lack of motherly love that was also already present in HT9. Referring to a child as “one” rather than by name creates further distancing between herself and the children and thus further opposition to MOTHERLY LOVE.

HT11 then returns to the issue of definite articles, while also presenting a different angle on the opposition between sports and the arts that HT6 had introduced (“Miami [...] Sound Machine”). Marjorie has walked over to Ronny and sat down next to him, and the two of them correct Gerard's “they wanna watch Good Wife” in the same way Gerard did in HT3. Thus, the opposition between ignorance about sports and knowledge about the arts has been extended to its opposite, and the corrector has become the correctee. This is mirrored in the linguistic realisation as well, where now the correction has moved from prescribing the omission of the surplus definite article (“the sports”) to

the inclusion of a missing one (“Good Wife”). Finally, HT12 makes use of the trope of the invested sports fan who believes themselves to be an expert and to know what the active participants in the game they are watching should do. Ventriloquising a coach on the side-lines, Arthur shouts his instructions, before praising the player for doing successfully what he had spoken out against moments ago. In this case, the incongruity shifts the focus to the interaction between sports fan and television, which serves as a new aspect of the SPORTS frame that has not yet been used to create humour in the episode. At the same time, it still refers back to the same frame, while also still being situated within the same telecinematic context.

The semantic patterns in these first three scenes already tie in with some of the elements of the theoretical conceptualisations of humorous narratives presented in 11.3.2. The realisation of the semantic opposition between knowledge and ignorance about sports in scene 2 can be understood in Attardo’s (2001) terms as a strand (i.e. a series of linked instances of humour) and more specifically a comb (i.e. a strand whose elements occur in quick succession). Given its position very early in the narrative, it establishes this clash of ideas and in this case also of character personalities as a theme of the episode and perhaps the entire sitcom.

I have demonstrated the specific telecinematic realisation of the incongruities as multimodal clashes that are not only performed in character utterances, but also in their positioning and framing within the *mise-en-scène* and by the camera. Apart from demonstrating the specificity of telecinematic humour (as opposed to that of humorous short stories, for instance), the clear ties that were thus established between particular semantic frames and characters also relate to the frame hierarchy that is alluded to by Attardo (2001) and elaborated by Ermida (2008). I will have to return to the notion of stacks later on, but these early HTs already indicate that the more specific incongruities between the family of Boston Celtics fans and Ronny’s ignorance about

basketball can also be regarded as part of a more general opposition, one based on supra-scripts in Ermida's (2008) terms, between SPORTS and ARTS. I will refer to these suprastructural entities as supra-frames to remain consistent with the terminology employed here.

Moreover, HT11's "the Good Wife" forms what Attardo (2001) calls a bridge to some of the HTs in scene 2 (HT2's "the sports" and HT5's "the Miami"): They connect HTs across a distance. The return to an earlier pattern can be regarded as one way of establishing surprise despite repetition. The five HTs in between and the arrival of the new character Marjorie that marks the transition to scene 2 have momentarily shifted the viewers' focus away from the unidiomatic usage of the definite article. Combined with the variation I have discussed above, the distance makes sure that the recurrence of the correction sequence in HT11 will not be predicted.

11.3.3.2 Sequence 1, scene 4: Escalation and reverse call backs

Some of the more general patterns of how individual HTs multimodally tie in with previous ones in the same scene and in earlier scenes should have become clear, and I will now move on to a more selective discussion of the remaining scenes. Scene 4 is introduced by an unexpected phone call, which announces the death of Arthur's former assistant coach, Fatty. As can be gathered from Table 11.4, HTs 13, 15, 17 and 18 are a good example of escalation as it was already observed as a function of formal repetition (see Sections 7.2.5.2 and 8.3.3.1).

All incongruities here are between the proper reaction to the sad news of someone's death and the family's desire to continue watching their basketball game and engaging in the activities that typically come with it. In HT13, Arthur conjectures what his late assistant coach would want for them as a surprising authorisation strategy to go on with their leisure activity. In the subsequent HTs, the viewing is extended to ordering food, and in each case the characters do progressively less

work to motivate ever more elaborate and specific food orders with what they claim would have been Fatty’s wishes. Embedded in this escalation sequence are HT14, and HT16: The former condenses HT13 into the cheer “for Fatty”; the latter employs exact multi-word repetition to create a call back to HT14.

HT13	Arthur	o:r. (1.0) I mean I'm just thinking out loud here. (.) Fatty was my assistant coach for six years, and- (.) I mean basketball was his life. (0.5) he'd probably want us to (1.0) finish watching the game.
HT14	everyone	for Fatty.
HT15	Sean	you know what occurs to me another way to honour Fatty's memory (1.6) would be to order some pizza.
HT16	Gerard	good call, I'll dial it up. (1.2) for Fatty.
HT17	Marjorie	and as I recall he also enjoyed a Caesar salad dressing on the side.
HT18	Ronny	oh, and if you're ordering from Giovanni's get the eggplant parm, (1.3) is what I once heard Fatty say.
HT19	others	YEAH!

Table 11.4: HTs in Scene 4 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

This instance of successively escalating incongruities in scene 4 includes another interesting pattern regarding the precise relationship between the individual HTs that are part of it. HT13 evokes GRIEF as a frame and leads up to a clash with an activity that I will simplify as belonging to the LEISURE frame. It is worth pointing out that the humorous potential of the activity Arthur wants to continue lies not in the particular frame it evokes, but merely in the fact that (a) it is an action that does not fit the GRIEF frame, and (b) that Arthur pretends it is grounded in the wishes of the deceased.

The following HTs 14 to 18 then introduce a sequence of reverse call backs. I have used the term call back to refer to HTs that repeat both the evoked frame and the incongruous element from an earlier HT,

and what I mean by reverse call back is that the opposite occurs: the frame of the HT in question repeats what was incongruous in a previous HT, and the incongruous element refers back to the frame of that same previous HT. It should be added here that there are two reasons why reverse call backs were not included as part of the functions of formal repetition in Chapter 9. First of all, the first two functions that were observed there were repetition of the frame and repetition of the incongruous element, which means that call backs and reverse call backs are both simply cases of these two functions occurring in the same HT. Accordingly, call backs are strictly speaking special cases of these first two functions rather than a separate effect. Since a number of striking examples of call backs employed formal repetition, their inclusion as a separate function of formal repetition in sitcom humour accurately represented a notable pattern in the data. In the case of reverse call backs, however, no typical example based on formal repetition was found in the data. Instead, as was the case in the first episode of *The McCarthys*, reverse call backs only occurred based on semantic (and non-formal) ties.

This oscillation between the GRIEF frame and incongruous elements is realised as follows in Scene 4: HT13 has just shifted the viewers' attention away from Fatty's death and towards the basketball game they are watching on television. HT14 then uses that leisure activity as the expectation-evoking frame and leads back to the honouring of Fatty, which it pretends is the reason they watch the game. HT15 again linearly creates the incongruity in the same manner HT13 did: It starts with Fatty's memory and leads up to ordering pizza. HT16 returns to the linear structure of HT14, and HT17 and HT18 continue that alternation between the two linear structures. The entire scene thus constitutes a humorous escalation series between grieving and joyful activities, which means that it presents a cluster of related HTs that – following Attardo (2001) – I will refer to as a comb of humorous instances. Embedded therein is a series of reverse call backs that results

in an effect of variation despite the fact that no new semantic frames are being activated.

This escalation scene is another example of a comb, but it also already demonstrates that combs are realised in different ways that need to be recognised as separate patterns. In this case, there is an identifiable progressive development away from the GRIEF frame from which the scene starts and towards the hedonistic LEISURE frame whose anchoring in the hypothetical wishes of the deceased assistant coach move further and further into the background of the characters' utterances. This development is thus also an instance of expansion of humour in Nash's (1985) sense. This expansion has a linguistic component, with subsequent utterances encoding more and more specific details about the food the family are going to order, as well as a cultural one, which has the scene move from the initial activity of watching television to the associated ordering of food.

A final point I want to raise here is that scene 4 can be conceptualised as the instantiation of a supra-frame-opposition that was already present in scene 2, namely that between the display of conventionally appropriate emotions to an event on the one side and a more selfish and less considerate response on the other. In scene 4, the initial attempts at justifying why the family will continue to watch the game instead of mourning the deceased imply that they have a clear concept of what would be the appropriate and morally sound response to the sad news. Initially, Marjorie suggested going to the church and lighting a candle, to which everyone hesitantly agreed. Instead, however, they follow the alternative presented by Arthur and go on to order food. This ties in with HTs 9 and 10 in scene 2, where Marjorie's evident lack of motherly love is the incongruous (un)emotional response that creates the humorous effect.

As is pointed out by Chlopicki (1987) as well as by Ermida (2008), there is always some subjectivity involved when it comes to deciding where individual frames and supra-frames begin and end, not

least because knowledge structures are activated in each individual viewer. While regarding HTs 9, 10 and all HTs in scene 4 as hyponyms of one supra-frame is thus to some extent a subjective choice made by myself as a researcher, I would argue that this choice has a solid foundation in the sitcom episode itself, which includes a semantic link between a range of HTs that are based on a lack of consideration, affect, love or support in the interaction between the family members. This lack of attending to the other's face, to put it in politeness terms, will reappear in subsequent scenes and sequences and is made an explicit topic of conversation in the second episode of the same sitcom, which contrasts the McCarthy family's expressions of their love for each other (or lack thereof) with that of another family.

11.3.3.3 Sequence 1, Scenes 5–9: reinforcing links between previously employed incongruities and establishing ties for new humour topics

The continuation of the first sequence in scene 5 does not include any notable new patterns. HT20, which is in response to Marjorie claiming Ronny is a psychiatrist, and HT21 are interesting because of the vagueness of the incongruity they contain (see Table 11.5). It is clear that they both rest on Marjorie's treating the professions of guidance counsellor and psychiatrist as one and the same. However, at this point in the episode it is not clear whether the opposition rests on the mother's overestimation of her son's professional status, on her inability to understand words borrowed from Ancient Greek, or on a combination of the two. Seeing as Ronny is the one child she does like (HT10) the first interpretation seems most likely. However, Ronny points out later (HT61) that she has mistaken "psychopath" for "architect," which seems a clear call back to the HTs in scene 5. It seems most promising here to return to the notion of background scripts that was introduced in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2). Thus the LANGUAGE COMPETENCE frame can be said to be activated at least in the background, and the later HT that includes a similar misunderstanding of word meaning can

be regarded as coherent because it is cohesively tied to this earlier instance of humour.

The remaining HTs in scene 5 first return to Marjorie's fondness for television shows (HT22–24). Her emotional investment in *The Closer* and the importance she gives to it and the actress who played the main role (Kyra Sedgwick) are incongruous themselves, but receive additional emphasis when they are contrasted with the lack of motherly love she shows her own children (with the exception of Ronny).

HT20	Ronny	high school guidance counselor?
HT21	Marjorie	we're saying the same thing.
HT22	Ronny	are you comparing the loss of dad's friend to the cancellation of Kyra Sedgwick's the Closer?
HT23	Marjorie	are you saying that the Closer was cancelled because it wasn't. Kyra decided to go out, on top, and she did.
HT24	Marjorie	she did.
HT25	Ronny	dad. (1.0) I know we don't talk about feelings, (.) or you know, have them.
HT26	Arthur	now I need a new assistant coach to replace that fat bastard.

Table 11.5: HTs in Scene 5 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

At this point in the episode, no explicit connection between Marjorie's emotional stance towards fictional and non-fictional people has been made, but Ronny's asking about the responses to the death of a friend and the cancellation of that television show in HT21 already paves the way for the more explicit contrast between the two frames that will follow later. HT23 also introduces another pattern that will recur in this episode: HT22, while including separate references to Fatty's death and to the cancellation of *The Closer*, pointed out the inappropriateness of showing a similar emotional response to each of the two. Rather than addressing that issue, Marjorie uses structural

parallelism (“are you [...] [+VERB -ing]”) and prosodic repetition to align her question in HT23 with that of Ronny in HT22 and, by focusing solely on the cancellation of the television show, does yet again what her son has just criticised with his rhetorical question. Thus HT22 constructs an incongruity based on the LIFE/ARTS opposition that is also explicit on CL2 where it is raised as a conversational topic by the character Ronny. Accordingly, the relevant frame for the subsequent HT23 is that opposition, and expectations for Marjorie to address that opposition are triggered. When HT23 only reactivates the ARTS frame and disregards the relationship with the life of the characters that was questioned, it is incongruous precisely because of the reduction of what can be inferred to be the intended meaning of HT22. HT23 is thus incongruous both in its representation of miscommunication, i.e. of the addressee understanding something other than the speaker had intended to communicate, and in its reactivation of the ARTS frame that is given undue importance by one of the characters.

After a call back to HT23 in HT24, realised by echoing verbatim the last two-word clause (“she did”), the scene makes explicit the lack of emotional display in HT25 and HT26. It thus establishes a cohesive tie with the previous two scenes, while also shifting the viewers’ attention back to Fatty’s death. That topic is taken up in two ways in the following scene 6 (see Table 11.6).

HT27	Jackie	WHO'S READY FOR A WAKE.
HT28	Jackie	I know, I know, I know.
HT29	Jackie	I know.
HT30	Ronny	good for you Jackie. own it. (0.8) unless you can return it, then definitely stop owning it.
HT31	Marjorie	it's okay, Jackie. at least you're presenting at the Academy Awards.
HT32	Jackie	thanks, ma.
HT33	Sean	hey guys you like our suits? Gerard and I look like twins again.

HT34	Gerard	Sean. we have never looked like twins. look at that baby picture. (picture of a very big and a very small baby, each of them wearing a shirt that says "BIG" and "LITTLE", respectively.)
HT35	Gerard	in the sixth grade the teacher thought you were my father.
HT36	Marjorie	I don't need a reason.
HT37	Sean	intentional, Ronny. ladies love it when a guy squeezes into something tight.
HT38	Gerard	THAT'S NOT A SUIT. IT'S A SAUSAGE CASING.
HT39	Sean	dad, as a two-time Boston Globe all star, I just wanna remind you (0.5) that I was a two-time Boston Globe all star.

Table 11.6: HTs in Scene 6 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

The first way in which scene 6 refers back to Fatty's death concerns the upcoming wake they will all attend, the second one concerns Fatty's succession, since his death also means that Arthur has to look for a new assistant coach. Humour is initially based on the contrast between the sad occasion and an overly glamorous dress worn by Jackie (HTs 27–32). This in turn is taken up in humour focusing on the suits the two brothers are wearing as well as on their physical dissimilarity (HTs 33–38). HT38 is followed by Gerard stating that: "Dad, he's an idiot. which is why I should be your new assistant coach." While the shift towards a new topic for humour seems forced here and takes place in a serious turn, it is also clearly traceable as a step-by-step development from the wake, to Jackie's dress, to the brothers' suits, to Sean being "an idiot" about his suit and finally to Gerard using this as a reason why he, by exclusion, should be his father's new assistant coach.

First HT39, and then the first flashback in this episode (see Table 11.7) are about the two son's qualities as coaches. Apart from being topical in that regard, HTs 39–42 also contribute to characterisation of Ronny's brothers, with Sean being constructed as the dumb and Gerard

as the angry one. Both aspects are realised through formal repetition in this case, with Sean inadvertently including his being an all-star both as an authentication strategy that gives legitimacy to what he is about to say and as the argument for his own candidacy itself. The intra-turn exact multiword repetition in HT39 thus constructs an unexpected circularity. Gerard on the other hand is shown in a flashback to scream at a young basketball player (HT40), which clashes with his intentions of presenting himself as a good assistant coach. Immediately after HT40, HT41 repeats exactly the same coaching strategy and is thus an instance of accumulation, while also establishing that HT40 was not a singular occurrence, but is to be understood as the character's coaching philosophy.

HT40	Gerard	THAT'S WHY YOU PLAY JB.
HT41	Gerard	THAT'S WHY YOU PLAY JB.

Table 11.7: HTs in Flashback 1 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

After the flashback, scene 7 (see Table 11.8) ties together several of the earlier scenes by referring back first to the flashback (HT42); then to the SPORTS/ARTS opposition (HTs 43–44); then to Jackie's dress (HT45); and finally very specifically to the psychiatrist/counselor incongruity (HTs 47–48). The same scene then introduces Ronny's plans to move to Providence, Rhode Island, and his being gay as new topics, which are the main source for incongruities in the remaining scenes of the first sequence.

HT42	Gerard	coaching is all about volume and repetition. (0.6) VOLUME AND REPETITION.
HT43	Ronny	you know, a father passing on his kingdom, his children fighting. (0.5) this is all very King Lear.
HT44	Gerard	we hate plays.

HT45	Marjorie	well, pick Jackie then. she's dressed like she's on Dynasty.
HT46	Ronny	dad, if it makes you feel better, I'm not going to apply for the job. (.) A because my knowledge of the basketball is limited,
HT47	Marjorie	head guidance counselor. so you're gonna be in charge of all the other psychiatrists.
HT48	Ronny	I'm gonna let you have that one.
HT49	Sean	that's not a real state.
HT50	Gerard	aren't all gay communities vibrant?
HT51	Marjorie	RONNY! (0.5) you're still gay?

Table 11.8: HTs in Scene 7 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Tables with broad transcriptions of HTs for the subsequent scenes can be found in Appendix C. Here, I will only summarise briefly the contents of the remaining HTs in sequence 1. After a flashback to Ronny's coming out to his parents – the parents drink alcohol instead of showing any form of emotional response – scene 8 again connects the topic of Ronny being gay to his plans to move to Rhode Island. Incongruities here are based on the parents understanding homosexuality as a temporary lifestyle choice, which was already established in HT51 in scene 7. Ronny's intention to move is connected to his dating experiences in Boston, which another flashback shows to be a result of his overly involved family (HTs are based on the inappropriate presence and behaviour of his entire family during what is otherwise framed as a romantic date). This is summed up in the final scene 9, which also returns to Sean's tight suit and thus implicitly also reactivates the wake where sequence 2 takes place.

11.3.4 Sequences 2–7: Ties between more distant humorous turns

As stated in the previous sections, I will content myself with a more fragmentary and summary analysis of humorous turns in the remaining sequences in the first episode of *The McCarthys*. I will explain here what patterns, what semantic frames and what incongruities recur later in the episode, and what new ones are established. Tables including all HTs in this episode are included in Appendix C, and while they are not self-explanatory and provide only very limited context, they can nonetheless grant a glimpse of the linguistic realisation of those HTs that I can only summarise in the text.

Sequence 2 takes place at a funeral home. The setting itself is exploited for humour a few times, especially when the WAKE frame is contrasted with the BASKETBALL frame. This receives purely audiovisual realisations (Fatty holding a basketball in his coffin in HT65, Arthur's phone ringing when he kneels down in front of the coffin in HT76), but is soon tied to the newly introduced topic of a star player that could potentially join Arthur's team or that of a competing team whose coach is also at the wake. As a result, Arthur takes a phone call in front of the coffin and later takes the microphone of the church official in charge of the ceremony to instead announce his new player and name Ronny his new assistant coach.

Other HTs before returned to the LIFE/ARTS opposition, which is at one time triggered by what seems like an overly emotional reaction to Fatty's death by the daughter Jackie, and in another scene is tied to Ronny's relationship with his mother. Based on the emphasis that both the topic of basketball and fiction or *The Good Wife* and *The Closer* in particular have received early on, it will not be surprising to viewers that these topics recur and are exploited for the construction of HTs in later scenes. Part of their potential for surprise lies in the juxtaposition with the WAKE frame that I have just summarised. For instance, Ronny and his mother sitting in the pews among mourners while at the same

time discussing the impossibility of recording *The Good Wife* rather than watching it when it is broadcast (scene 14) creates a contrast despite the previous introduction of both frames. Other call backs are less expected because they point back to incongruities that were not as clearly foregrounded. For instance, the reference to Sean's tight suit appeared to be a local resource for humour that was introduced in the course of establishing a connection between the wake and the question of Fatty's succession. Sean stresses the benefits of his suit when it comes to dating in HT37 and again at the end of sequence 1, when he proposes wearing a tighter suit might help Ronny with his dating problems (HT63 "so wear a tighter suit" and HT64 "I'd go with the suit"). It nonetheless comes as a surprise when, in the fourth scene of sequence 2, his suit is complimented by a female mourner at the wake and he ties it back to the earlier comments (HT78 "nice and tight, right?"). This leads to Gerard saying "you're kidding me, right?" (HT79), which transfers the sense of disbelief to CL2.

Two shorter sequences follow the wake. Sequence 3 presents the way back in the car and contains 7 HTs of which one is tied to the setting (i.e. driving the car). Furthermore, two HTs are presented in a flashback as call backs to Gerard's coaching style: Realised by employing formal repetition on different levels, the flashback shows how Gerard as a teacher gets angry at a student in HT92, before again immediately repeating the same utterance in HT93 (see Table 11.9). This also exemplifies repetition of repetition that has been associated with humour: The two pairs of HTs, HTs 41–42 and HTs 92–93, both consist of a first turn that is incongruous with the frame activated by its setting (coaching and teaching, respectively); they then add a second HT that is almost identical with the first one on all levels, thus accumulating the incongruousness and establishing the habitualness of the character's transgression. In addition, HT92 refers back to HTs 41–42 by including variation in terms of the frame that also leads to an adaptation of the linguistic and multimodal realisation of the punch line to that new frame.

- HT92 Gerard that's why you take remedial math.
 HT93 Gerard tha:t's why you take remedial math.

Table 11.9: HTs in Flashback 4 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Since I will return to it later, I will briefly mention here the short interaction in scene 17 (the final scene of sequence 3) that leads to HT94: Arthur explains that he thinks Ronny could be a good assistant coach, which leads Gerard to call it “gross!” and then Jackie to state: “I think I’m gonna boot” (HT94). In the same scene, Arthur also tells his son to sleep on his decision, but sequence 4 begins with an outside camera shot of a building (presumably Ronny’s) and the caption “41 minutes later...”. The incongruities in that sequence start from the discrepancy regarding the time Ronny’s father wants to give him for his decision. They then lead to an attempt by his mother to guilt him into staying in Boston because she is sick. Finally, they culminate in his father’s admission that he needs Ronny to be his assistant coach because he needed to demonstrate to the lesbian mother of his prospective star player that his school is gay-friendly. There is of course nothing inherently humorous about the father’s admission that he has instrumentalised his son’s sexual orientation for his purposes, but as Table 11.10 illustrates, the collective sender realises the initial part of the admission in three HTs.

- HT104 Arthur Ronny, stop picking on your mother. (1.5) she's not the bad one here, I am. (1.2) the truth is, the- the real reason I asked you to coach with me, is that Darryl Silver's mother i:s, a lez.
 HT105 Ronny .=-BIAN.
 HT106 Arthur fine. she's bein' a lez.

Table 11.10: HTs 104–108 in Scene 18 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT104 is incongruous because of Arthur's use of a derogatory term for lesbian which leads to other-correction in HT105 and then to repetition of the same slur in HT106. Again, the exact repetition of an incongruous element is combined with miscommunication: In this case, Arthur seems to have understood that he is being corrected, but based on (near-)homophony interprets "-bian" as "bein'." Intended as a suffix which could be combined with the term used by Arthur to defuse the slur, it is taken up as a correction of the verb tense, which has Arthur promptly repeat the same slur in a progressive construction.

This scene is not only interesting because it infuses humour into a scene that leads to a grave argument. It also manages to establish a connection between two central themes and character actions and intentions that are tied to those themes. Now that the narrative has intertwined Ronny's sexual orientation with his nomination as an assistant coach, the viewers are able to retrospectively recognise that some of the cohesive ties that were established earlier using repetition in humorous turns served as a foreshadowing of the more intrinsic link between the two frames that is revealed now.

A similar development takes place in sequence 5. In order to be forgiven by Ronny, the parents have organised what they call a "gay bar" for him, which means that they have invited whoever they think might be gay from their circles. Many of the earlier HTs in sequence 5 are constructed around the contrast between the framing tied to the gay bar setting and the introduced new characters who are either stereotypically gay or stereotypically straight. Soon, however, Jackie makes the surprising announcement that she is pregnant with Fatty's baby. On the one hand this is used a resource for HTs that also reference Marjorie's lack of motherly love, which is realised here as reluctance to help her daughter raise her child. On the other hand, it allows the viewers to reinterpret some earlier HTs, e.g. Jackie's overly dramatic reaction to Fatty's death at the wake or her announcement that she was going to throw up in HT94. This retrospective reinterpretation does of

course not affect the reception of the incongruity when it is encountered in the episode, but the two HTs in question, whose incongruities seemed less anchored in the preceding narratives than those of other HTs, receive a late validation by Jackie's announcement. Accordingly, it can be assumed that this twist in the first episode of *The McCarthys* will have a positive influence on the viewers reflective assessment of narrative cohesion.

The two final sequences take place back at the parents' home and among the McCarthy family members, and they thus return to the setting of the long first sequence. Now, the adult children are playing basketball rather than watching it, and accordingly the realisation of incongruities with the SPORTS frame have moved from knowledge to skills. Based on the assumption that Ronny cannot play basketball, which is established as common ground for all characters including Ronny, his scoring of two very difficult shots is presented as incongruous with the expectations of characters and viewers alike, while also being employed on CL2 as a way of deciding whether or not Ronny will remain in Boston or move to Rhode Island. Ronny of course decides to stay, and his mother compares him to *The Closer* before taking back her compliment (see Table 11.11).

HT158	Marjorie	he's better than all of you. (0.5) you know what he is? (2.0) he's the Closer.
HT159	Marjorie	o::h, Ronny. (1.0) of course you're not, nobody is.

Table 11.11: HTs in Scene 32 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

While this penultimate sequence has provided closure on all important questions the narrative has asked and thus nicely concludes the episode, a short seventh sequence is added as a tag. It ties in with Marjorie's observation that Ronny is the one child that she likes in scene 2, and now has her say goodbye to each of her children

individually (see Table 11.12). After the non-humorous line, “good night, Ronny, you’re my favourite,” which is established as part of Marjorie’s characterisation in the episode, she moves on in HT160 and HT161 to exact formal repetition that is incongruous precisely because of its repetitiveness. The contradiction inherent in calling several of her children her favourite is reinforced by the lack of affection she has been associated with. Finally, HT162 operates based on the established series in the three preceding turns (including HTs 160 and 161). Having shifted viewer attention to the three identical occurrences, the return to her lack of motherly love for her daughter in HT162 is both consistent with her earlier interactions with Jackie, yet unexpected on the local level of this scene.

HT160	Marjorie	good night, Sean. (1.2) you're my favourite.
HT161	Marjorie	good night, Gerard. (1.1) you're my favourite.
HT162	Marjorie	good night, Jackie (1.4), I'm a need that plate back.

Table 11.12: HTs in Scene 33 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

11.3.5 Hierarchy of semantic frames in the humour of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

The previous sections have shown the plot developments of the first episode of *The McCarthys* through the lens of the HTs that are constructed therein. They have revealed some of the semantic patterns that are used to establish local and progressively more global ties between humorous instances in one sitcom episode. Based on that discussion it is now possible to present a schematic overview over the development of humour in this episode and to use the theoretical frameworks presented in 11.2 to relate individual HTs to the overall hierarchical and linear structure of the episode.

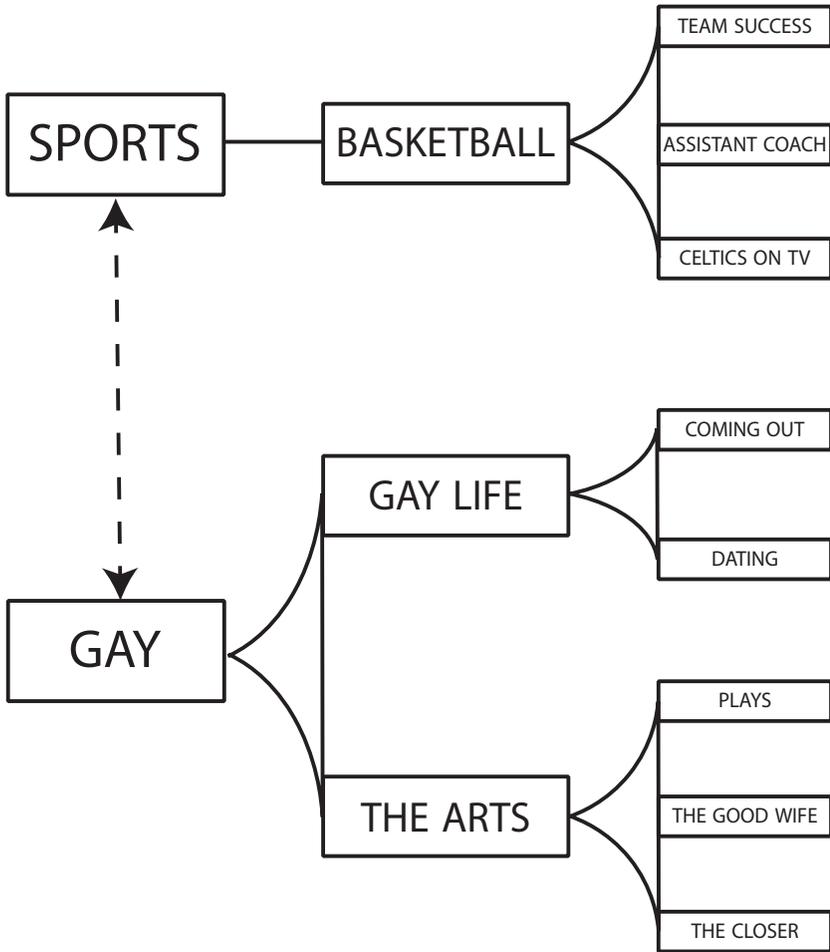


Figure 11.1: Hierarchy of main semantic frames in *The McCarthys*, S01E01

I will start by presenting a hierarchical view that bears some similarity to the one Ermida (2008) introduced for *The Lunatic's Tale* (see Figure 11.1). It illustrates the main semantic frames that are relevant for humour construction in the first episode of *The McCarthys*.

Other frames, such as the GRIEF frame that was exemplified in the previous section, are of importance more locally, but only play a minor role when it comes to the episode's humour overall. These additional frames will be briefly discussed at the end of this section. In the text, I will follow the horizontal path of the individual HTs and the scenes and sequences in which they are located and will point to the frames illustrated in Figure 11.1, which can thus be located within the hierarchy it depicts.

To start this endeavour, I will summarise the plot of the episode in one simple sentence: A gay son becomes assistant basketball coach to his father. This is both the end result of the episode and the main plot development whose structure can be understood in terms of a canonical story that first sets up the scene and the characters, then establishes the goal for them, and finally resolves the action by presenting an outcome (see for instance Bordwell, 2006: 34–35). Rather than exploring this in strictly narratological terms, I will examine this structure through the humorous turns and incongruities at the centre of the sitcom episode.

On the highest level of frames that are relevant for the humour of this episode, the collective sender presents as opposed supra-frames those of gayness and sports.⁵⁵ This opposition is not simply taken for granted, however – it is established progressively, HT by HT. This starts with incongruities between knowledge and ignorance about sports, which is then mirrored in incongruities between knowledge and ignorance of fictional television and *The Good Wife* in particular. The combs of HTs that are employed in this vein clearly separate the

⁵⁵ I would like to emphasise here that presenting homosexuality and sports as opposed frames is not a representation of my views. As can be gathered from the examples presented so far, the gay main character Ronny is on the one hand the protagonist and in many ways presented as superior to the other members of his family. At the same time however, he is characterised with the help of stereotypes whose perpetuation by *The McCarthys* is not unproblematic. I am here simply representing the frames that are employed by the collective sender in the construction of individual HTs and the overall plot of the episode.

characters into two groups, the television or arts characters, which are Ronny and his mother, and the sports characters, which is the group everyone else belongs to. Whereas the arts characters are “dumb about sports”, the sports characters likewise know nothing about the arts. These associations of characters with particular frames also shape the expectations viewers have with respect to the actions the characters will perform (e.g. it is not surprising that Ronny compares the search for Fatty’s successor to King Lear, nor that Gerard has worked as a Junior Basketball coach).

Once this clear contrast between characters and between the frames they are associated with has been presented in a humorous form of exposition, Fatty’s death marks an important plot point that establishes the main goal for most of the characters in this episode (to fill the position of assistant coach), and it thus sets in motion the main action (attempts to find or become that assistant coach). While its most immediate effect is that the family has to attend the wake, the most important result of Fatty’s death for the plot is that the central question is being asked: which son will succeed Fatty as Arthur’s assistant coach. As a result, the opposition between the BASKETBALL and THE ARTS frames has received additional relevance because it seems to disqualify Ronny as a candidate, which is reinforced by his explicit statements that he will not apply for the job. This is realised by Ronny stating he does not know much about “the basketball” (HT46), which ties in with the earlier incongruities based on the definite article not only by means of semantic repetition, but also structural parallelism.

At the same time, Ronny reveals his plans to move to a different town, Providence, Rhode Island, which at this moment seems to present the main obstacle for the main action (i.e. for the gay son to become the assistant basketball coach). The individual HTs here demonstrate that topics that enter the conversation are typically associated with multiple frames. In this case, Rhode Island is first associated with the place itself and the knowledge and stereotypes the collective sender assumes their

target audience will have regarding that place (e.g. the small size of Rhode Island as a state). However, for the most part it is only relevant to the plot as any place away from Boston that would prevent Ronny from becoming assistant coach. After HT49, in which Sean makes fun of the state itself, it only reappears in this second context.

Shortly after, the collective sender makes explicit that Ronny is gay, which on the one hand fits the stereotyping his character has been subject to and on the other hand is as of yet not directly connected to the succession of the assistant basketball coach. Indirectly, however, ties are being established between Ronny's sexual orientation and his positioning as an unlikely candidate for the job when he links his planned move to Providence to its vibrant gay community. In turn, this association creates another obstacle and another opposition between frames. For Ronny to become assistant coach, he has to remain in Boston, which is now tied to an unfulfilled dating life. This will eventually trigger the "gay bar" sequence in which the other family members try to overcome the obstacle in one way (showing Ronny that the gay scene in Boston is as good as the one in Providence), and succeed in another (Jackie's pregnancy is one of the factors that convinces Ronny to stay).

When the family is about to leave for the wake at the end of sequence 1, it is firmly established that Ronny will not become assistant coach to his father Arthur. This makes Arthur's announcement in the second sequence, that he nominates Ronny for the job, a surprise that cannot at the time be completely resolved by the viewers. The reasons are only explained in full in sequence 4 when Arthur reveals the connection between the assistant coach position and Ronny's sexual orientation. That revelation in turn presents an interesting twist to the story: While Ronny's being gay has so far been indirectly associated with obstacles that will prevent him from becoming Arthur's assistant, it is now revealed that it is in fact the reason that would make him the best candidate for the job. On the one hand, the main obstacle is thus

resolved, as the viewers have been presented with a reason why Ronny would be chosen over his two basketball-loving brothers despite his lack of interest in and knowledge about the sport. On the other hand the secondary obstacle of his plan to move to Providence is still in place, and as a new obstacle the argument with his parents needs to be overcome.

The aforementioned “gay bar” sequence is the direct result of these two remaining obstacles. The sequence is introduced by Marjorie declaring that the goal is for Ronny to forgive them, and even though she later states that she accepts his plan to move away, the scenes in this sequence for the most part consist of attempts to introduce Ronny to gay members of the local community, which – if successful – would make his move superfluous. The failed attempts are the main resource for humour in this sequence, but the shift of focus to a secondary story, Jackie being pregnant with Fatty’s baby, resolves the issue in an unexpected way.

In the final plot-relevant sequence 6, Ronny has moved past the argument and seems to formally accept the father’s job offer, but chooses to base the decision between becoming assistant basketball coach and moving to Providence on a bet against himself: He will try to hit the net with a basketball shot and will stay if he misses. Ronny’s lack of expertise when it comes to basketball has so far only been demonstrated as a lack of knowledge, but the viewers must infer that he will also lack basketball skills. Retrospectively this lack of faith in his skills is shared by all characters who react with disbelief when Ronny surprisingly scores not one, but two difficult shots. This yet again creates an interesting contradiction: It boosts Ronny’s status as a valid candidate for the assistant coach job, thus removing the questionable reason for his nomination and legitimising him. At the same time, however, it means at this point that Ronny will move away, and thus will not be able to take the job that he is finally in a position to accept. All it takes to resolve this contradiction is for Ronny to declare he will

stay after all, which is what he does to end the main plot of the episode. As an addendum, the tag then returns to Marjorie and the love she expresses for her children.

This overview of the major plot movement reveals first of all that there are only two supra-frames that are essential to the plot, which concern Ronny's life as a gay man and the dominance that basketball has in the family's life. Accordingly, Figure 11.1 has only represented these two main aspects, but a few others can be added at this point, since they also serve as resources for some of the HTs. To begin with, the family is often presented as behaving in a way that goes against conventionally appropriate behaviour. These notions of decorum are tied here to the GRIEF frame brought about by the announcement of Fatty's death and by the setting of the wake scene. It is exploited for humour in the aforementioned comb of HTs around ordering food instead of going to church; in the inappropriate clothing worn by Jackie and by Sean in scene 6; or when Arthur takes the microphone during the wake to announce his new assistant coach. While the incongruities are based mostly on behaviour that violates the social conventions in these particular situations, there is – as pointed out already – also a connection to the display of emotions that is another relevant frame in this episode.

In particular, Marjorie's attitude towards her children is a recurrent theme: In scene 2 and in the final scene of the episode, HTs are based on her incongruous lack of love for Jackie in particular. This aspect is also realised as a lack of willingness to support her daughter in the "gay bar" sequence after the announcement of Jackie's pregnancy.

For the character Gerard, ANGER is the relevant emotion whose display is exploited for humour. Several HTs (HTs 1, 40, 41, 92, 93) have him angrily scream at his team, his players or his pupils, which is a resource for humour especially in the context of his attempts to boost

his own candidacy as an assistant coach (i.e. he presents his overly angry demeanour as a form of coaching/teaching expertise).

The final relevant frame is that of FAMILY, which results in humour about the overly close relationship Ronny has with his mother and about Jackie's pregnancy. The former aspect is tied to stereotypes about gay men and also to the television shows that have been associated with both characters. The latter theme is directly tied to Fatty and thus yet again to the BASKETBALL frame.

The topicality of humour in this episode is such that only a handful of HTs can be said to directly depend on frames that have not yet been mentioned, and even these cases are always tied in some way to the main frames I have presented. The instance of humour about Rhode Island specifically has already been mentioned, and there are a couple of HTs about Ronny's job as a high school guidance counsellor which are connected to aspects of family, to gay communities and to his candidacy as assistant basketball coach. Sean's tight suit is connected to successful dating (which ties in with Ronny's search for a partner), and the "gay bar" sequence has one character confuse Jackie's announcement of her pregnancy with a murder mystery game, which refers back to the LIFE/ARTS incongruities in the first sequence.

11.3.6 The role of semantic repetition in the structure of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Analysing the plot of the first episode of the *McCarthys* as well as the embedded humorous turns has first of all revealed that the humour that is manifest in this audiovisual text is defined by the context in which it occurs. While some incongruities go beyond the central themes of this sitcom episode's story, most of the humorous turns are based on frames that have been evoked before and on incongruous elements that have already been used to surprise viewers at earlier moments. In this case, oppositions are established in particular with regard to the domain of

sports that is not only a central element of this episode's story, but also plays an important role in the characterisation of many of the main characters. This frame is contrasted with a number of different frames that are established over the course of the episode as hyponyms of what has been termed here the GAY frame, which is personified in the main character Ronny. Examined in sum, the humour of the episode can be regarded in a simplified manner as being based by and large on the stereotypical contrast between sports and being gay. The former is manifest in most of the activities the characters engage in, be it in the form of watching the Boston Celtics on television in the parents' living room, which spans the first sequence, or in the search of a successor for Arthur's assistant as basketball coach, which defines most scenes from the middle of the first sequence onwards.

It may seem more obvious to contrast the aspect of sports with the ARTS frame that is realised in the form of television shows (*The Closer*, *The Good Wife*), actors, plays, music (as was done when looking at incongruities in a linear fashion in Section 11.3.4). Whereas sports are stereotypically associated with (male) heterosexuality, and accordingly Ronny's father and brothers are quickly constructed as heterosexual characters, the ARTS frame is tied to the gay character Ronny and later to his mother, Marjorie, who is positioned alongside him throughout the episode – as an expert on television shows and as someone who has no particular sports expertise.

Soon, however, the opposition with the SPORTS frame is realised by activating other frames. A number of other aspects that tie in with Ronny's life as a gay man, but are not connected to that ARTS frame, are introduced already in the first sequence as an opposition to the sports-dominated life of the other characters. Some of these ties are based on stereotypes (e.g. Ronny being in touch with his feelings; him calling his mother his best friend, etc.), but the importance of Ronny's sexual orientation for the crucial decisions in this first episode is also made explicit early on, when his frustration with dating in Boston and

his hope for a vibrant gay scene in Rhode Island are introduced. Heterosexuality, on the other hand, does not become an explicit topic for humour, even though it is encoded in many ways as the norm against which Ronny stands out.⁵⁶ Based on the humorous turns in this episode of *The McCarthys*, it is thus first and foremost a story about a gay son in a basketball-loving family.

The small number of relevant frames for the 162 HTs in this episode also points to the relevance of semantic repetition for its humour. I have demonstrated some of the microstructural patterns of referring back to earlier turns in scenes in the first sequence. These patterns are based on semantic repetition between humorous turns, and more precisely on ties between particular aspects of the constitutive elements of incongruities. Seen as clashes between frames and incongruous elements, instances of humour are repetitive when they (1) evoke a frame that has been activated before; (2) surprise viewers with an incongruous element that has been introduced before; (3) combine 1 and 2 so that (a) a call back is established, i.e. the incongruity is a version of an incongruity that occurred before, or that (b) a reverse call back is the result, with the formerly incongruous frame now being used as the basis for expectations, and the former frame now being incongruous.

In terms of Attardo's (2001) linear conceptualisation of humour, the microstructural semantic analysis showed that the humour in this sitcom episode consists almost exclusively of strands, i.e. of multiples of HTs that employ and re-employ the same incongruity even if they may not employ formal repetition. Individual scenes realised (parts of) these strands as combs, often by constructing a series of call backs or reverse call backs that continue to present two frames as opposites for

⁵⁶ It can be added here that Raskin (1985) and, following him, Ermida (2008) use the term *shadow scripts* for scripts that are activated only as antonyms inferred based on the lexical activation of scripts. Thus they would refer to *heterosexuality* as a shadow-script in this episode.

humorous effect. Typically the last HT in a scene (see e.g. HT12 in Table 11.3 and HT19 in Table 11.4) includes a shift to a different frame. Instead of being part of the comb of humorous instances of the scene, it can serve as a bridge to humour that is more distant. HT26 (“now I need a new assistant coach to replace that fat bastard.”), for instance, is based on the frame of the display of emotions, about which Ronny had just asked, but introduces an incongruous element to explicate the more central theme of the assistant coach that later HTs will return to.

While I have limited the detailed semantic analysis to this case study of one episode, a brief look at the continuation of *The McCarthys* in the second episode makes clear that bridges between humorous HTs do also cross the episode boundaries. Interestingly, however, those frames that were the main resource for the first episode’s humour are only of minor importance in the second episode. Instead, especially the aspect of display of emotions is moved to the foreground, with several strands focusing on the unwillingness or inability of the McCarthys to express their love for one another. These strands do tie in with the strand around Marjorie’s lack of motherly love in the first episode, thus forming a stack in Attardo’s (2001) terms, i.e. two related strands of humour. Stacks are semantic repetitions of series of semantically repetitive instances of humour, and they can thus contribute to the construction of individual episodes as part of a cohesive whole (i.e. the sitcom *The McCarthys* as one text) as well as to more long-term characterisation. In turn, this will subsequently lead to viewer expectations regarding character behaviour, which can be exploited as an expectation-evoking frame for humour. Moreover, stacks lead to HTs being embedded not only in the plot of the individual episode, but also of the larger text and especially those aspects of that text that transcend individual episodes.

While the clustering of HTs that occurs here is captured well with Attardo’s terms, combs in particular can be further qualified in terms of the functions that semantic repetition has on the humour of the episode.

Chlopicki (1987) reduced these functions to the three organisational principles of escalation, variation, and accumulation, and the case study confirms that all three principles occur in sitcoms as well. In my discussion of the functions of formal repeats, I have treated accumulation and escalation as very similar patterns (9.3.1.3). In the case of semantic repetition, this is no different, with escalating incongruities being those type of accumulations that also progress towards graver violations of expectations. The analysis here has shown that accumulation is frequent, and HTs are almost exclusively parts of strands. While an example of escalation was illustrated in 11.3.3.2, humour in this episode seems to favour repetition of the same type of incongruity rather than progressing to more and more incongruous elements (i.e. accumulation over escalation). This can be exemplified in the two flashbacks that were discussed in Section 11.3.4. Both of them consist of Gerard presenting a comb of two near-identical HTs, the first time in the role of a coach, the second time in that of a teacher. While it is at least partially motivated by the variation in setting, from the basketball court to the class room, it is still notable that the second iteration tones down Gerard's overly angry screaming rather than maintaining or even increasing the volume of his voice. What is more, each flashback contains inter-turn repetition between adjacent HTs, which is also realised in the form of accumulation rather than escalation.

Ermida's (2008) five principles a narrative text has to follow in order to be considered humorous can be used as a benchmark for the sitcom episode in this case study (see Section 11.2). The Principle of Opposition predicts that humour is based on opposites and more generally that there is an overarching opposition between supra-frames that organises humour in the longer narrative. Since humour has been regarded here based on incongruity, opposition in a broad sense is part of the premise from which this study started. Ermida's (2008) usage of the term goes back to Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour and its most central knowledge resource of script

opposition. The notion that this form of opposition can be encoded in lexical antonyms (Ermida, 2008: 172) may be questionable, and on a local level it may not be necessary to identify or even label the frame that the incongruous element evokes – it suffices to recognise that it is incongruous with the frame at hand. However, it is very useful to understand the collective HTs of the first episode of *The McCarthys* as instances that are hyponyms to very few important oppositions of supra-frames, of which in this case GAY/SPORTS was the most important pair.

This also means that the episode is clearly structured according to the second Principle of Hierarchy. Ermida (2008: 172) also claims that supra-frames dominate longer parts of texts, whereas lower structures are more local. Partially, this is of course accurate by definition: As hypernyms of frames, supra-frames cannot possibly be more limited than their subcategories. However, the claim that “lower scripts ... are sequentially limited” (Ermida, 2008: 172) cannot be confirmed as an absolute rule. For instance, the specific reference to *The Closer* occurs at the very beginning and at the very end of the episode. Much more important is Ermida’s (2008: 234) finding that lower-level oppositions can only be fully understood in terms of the higher-level oppositions they are hyponyms of. This can certainly be confirmed based on this case study, which showed the link between the progression of the plot, the central opposition, and the individual HTs. It is interesting to note that the construction of some HTs is such that they can only be fully resolved in hindsight or in a second viewing. For instance, Jackie’s exaggerated sadness at the funeral (HT66) and her stating that she needs to throw up (HT94) can only later be tied to her pregnancy. Crucially, in these cases the incongruous quality of the action or utterance depends on the lack of knowledge on the part of the viewers: Jackie’s reaction at the funeral is an overreaction because as far as the viewers know she mourns the death of her father’s assistant coach (rather than that of her sexual partner and father of her unborn child). In this, Ermida’s (2008) Principle of Cooperation is also at play,

as the viewers will accept the withholding of information by the collective sender as a necessary device to achieve a humorous effect in the respective scenes.

Ermida's (2008) Principle of Recurrence is perhaps the most important principle for this study. It postulates that "supra-scripts are recurrently instantiated / activated / evoked by several infra-scripts along the textual axis" (172), which was demonstrated in some detail for the first episode of *The McCarthys*. That viewers are assumed to base their expectations on such recurring patterns could be shown even on a very small scale in the case of reverse call backs: What had just been incongruous can become the active frame and the basis for viewer expectations already in the next HT, where a humorous effect can be achieved by suddenly returning to what used to be the expectation-evoking frame (e.g. HT18, "oh, and if you're ordering from Giovanni's get the eggplant parm, (1.3) is what I once heard Fatty say").

Finally, Ermida (2008: 172) postulates a Principle of Informativeness, which predicts that humorous stories will end in a final surprise based on the sudden inversion of the defining supra-frames. In terms of the larger developments of the plot, the case study seems to disconfirm this. Ronny's staying in Boston and taking the job as assistant coach is a gradual development of overcoming obstacles rather than a sudden revelation. However, a focus on humorous turns does indeed reveal a sudden twist. Ronny's lack of expertise in Basketball was employed for humour already in the second scene and persisted throughout the episode as a premise for viewer expectations. In the final scene before the tag, however, he surprises with a demonstration of basketball skills that dissolve the opposition the story had constructed between him and his basketball-loving family. That this is a general pattern in US Sitcoms can be confirmed by including the final humorous turns in the other episodes in AMSIL. For instance, the HTs at the end of the first episode of *Anger Management* bridge the gap between the FRIEND/THERAPIST opposition that had been

established between the two main characters Charlie and Kate; the second episode of *Retired at 35* surprisingly brings the main character's parents closer together after the episode had been about his failed attempts at doing so; and the second episode of *Sullivan and Son* equally finds a resolution to the conflict between the main character and his mother, with the stubbornness of each character being both what created the conflict and what unites them in the end.

A closer look at the final HTs in the episodes in AMSIL thus points to a general feature of sitcom episode structure that conforms to the principles formalised by Ermida (2008). At the same time it also makes apparent that the narration of the story takes place within HTs to a large degree, which is to say that every significant development in the sitcom plot is mirrored in humorous instances. Based on the analysis of the sitcom text as product, it is not possible to decide whether an episode should be regarded as the context which is employed for the construction of incongruities whenever possible; or whether the individual local oppositions that hierarchically construct the main opposition of supra-frames also construct the story around them. The former would suggest that the sitcom episode would still be a story if all the humorous instances were removed, whereas the latter suggests that the story only exists to fill the gaps between HTs. Irrespective of this aspect, the case study has made clear that HTs and in particular clusters of HTs in the form of combs create humorous scenes. These humorous scenes are often almost monothematic in the sense that they are based on one opposition between frames that in turn serves the overall supra-frame opposition that defines the essence of the episode. Scenes are then combined into sequences and into the episode at hand by constructing bridges, i.e. pairs of semantically repetitive HTs at different places of the episode.

11.3.7 The role of formal repetition in the structure of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

The analysis of the functions of formal repetition in 9.3 has revealed effects of repetition on different levels of humour – from constitutive contributions to the construction of the individual incongruity itself to more macrostructural functions that establish links between humorous turns. Based on this case study of the first episode of *The McCarthys*, I will now return to these functions and relate them to the observed structuring properties of semantic repetition.

First of all, it needs to be reiterated that formal repetition and semantic repetition are not mutually exclusive. Lexical repetition, for instance will in most cases also include semantic repetition (i.e. not just the form of the word is repeated, but also the referent it points to), and the same is true for most other types of repeat as well: As long as the repeated unit is meaningful, a semantic tie is established. Moreover, formal repetition needs to be regarded as a way to establish ties between HTs and thus also between scenes and sequences even when it is not also semantic. The fact that the viewers recognise that they have encountered the same unit or structure before means that a link between the two occurrences is established. It follows that the observed structuring properties of semantic repetition are also served by formal repetition, as was indeed already shown when discussing the functions of inter-turn repetition in Chapter 9. In that list of functions established in Section 9.3, there are first of all a number of microstructural functions of formal repetition that are influential in the construction of individual HTs. Formal repetition that is incongruous as such, i.e. because repetition occurs where variation is expected, is one such function; the creation of puns is another; and the creation of a series of similar units within a HT, with variation then creating an incongruity also operates on that level. The examples for recycled incongruous elements, re-activated frames and call backs on the other hand are versions of the semantic realisations of the same patterns, as are

humorous escalation and accumulation. As has been shown both in the examples in Chapter 9 and in the discussion of this case study, these patterns describe the specific ways HTs and groups of HTs refer back to one another. Finally, cohesion, characterisation and the contribution to the construction of the comedy star's identity can be regarded as meta-functions in the sense that they are the result of (the recurrences of) other effects of repetition (e.g. cohesion is the result of established ties between frames).

Put differently, what has been observed here are two different types of links between humorous turns and the components they are made of – formal and semantic; and the effect that these ties have on sitcom humour and the sitcom plot is for the most part shared by both types. The question is then what additional effects formal repetition has in sitcom humour and in the structuring of sitcom humour that go beyond what has just been discussed for semantic repetition.

A first aspect that needs to be mentioned in this regard is that of salience or foregrounding of repetition. The case study of the first episode of *The McCarthys* has discussed in detail the semantic ties that are established between different HTs. While some instances of semantic repetition were visible even at first glance, others became apparent only when relating them to the larger context of the episode and in particular to the overarching opposition of supra-frames. While such interpretation requires work on the part of the viewers, formal repetition, i.e. repetition on the text surface, can be recognised and understood without effort, which is also the implicit premise for the common assumption that exact formal repetition in particular is associated with facilitating language production and comprehension (see e.g. Tannen, 1987b: 581–582). Repetition can be brought to the foreground in different ways, for instance by explicitly or implicitly referring to it in the character dialogue. This was exemplified here in Example 7.12, in which one character implies that the other has just repeated herself by stating that: “valid life choice. okay, she said it.

everybody has to drink.” In many cases, however, this foregrounding of repetition occurs precisely by encoding it on the text surface rather than on a purely semantic level. As a reminder, the coding of formal repetition in this study included the notion of salience in the codebook, i.e. coders were asked to only identify as repetition what they deemed immediately noticeable. Thus, what is referred to as formal repetition here is by definition foregrounded in the text.

Connected to the foregrounding of repetition is the aspect of intentionality. I have previously presented repetition as something that is pervasive in language (see Chapter 5), and this study has shown that it is frequent in sitcom humour as well. At the same time, however, repetition is often dispreferred when it is regarded as a superfluous recurrence of something that has already been said or written (see e.g. Johnstone, 1987: 205–206). In this sense, when it is perceived as unnecessary, repetition can be regarded in Gricean terms either as a violation or as a flouting of conversational cooperativeness, both because it may render utterances longer than they need to be and because its relevance may not be immediately apparent (see Hirsch, 2011). The difference between the two understandings is quite simply – as Cameron (2001: 78) puts it – that “flouting is meant to be noticed, violation is meant not to be.”

Within the communicative setting of the sitcom, character dialogues and actions are written and performed with the television audience in mind (see Chapter 2). The willing suspension of disbelief television viewers adopt leads to a dual perception of the interaction on screen that consists of imagination and appreciation (Clark, 1996): Viewers form mental models of characters and more generally the plot events that go beyond their reading as textual constructs, but at the same time it is common ground between the collective sender and the viewers that the characters’ words are not their own and that the events that unfold in a sitcom episode are not coincidental, but are the result of planned processes. This is also in line with Ermida’s (2008) Principle

of Cooperation, and viewers thus assume a high degree of (collective sender's) intentionality when it comes to the dialogues and actions they receive, while the collective sender constructs the audiovisual text under the assumption that it will be received by a cooperative audience.

The laugh track as an extradiegetic cue is one textual trace of this premise, and it is also manifest in the formal and semantic repetition that appears in the sitcom's HTs. If the cooperative collective sender wants to communicate that an HT is repetitive, foregrounding repetition makes sure that the communicative intent will be recognised by the viewers. Accordingly, employing formal repetition is a way for the collective sender to communicate repetitiveness and thus also that the viewers need to understand unnecessary repetition as a flouting rather than a violation of her cooperativeness. Flouting leads to implicatures, which is to say that viewers infer meaning in the fact that the collective sender has ostentatiously presented them with repetition. Semantic non-foregrounded repetition on the other hand is not intended as a cue for viewers to search for additional meaning.

Since this study does not include real-viewer research, the assumptions about the television viewers' reception processes cannot be empirically substantiated on that level. However, this difference in intentionality between formal and semantic repetition can be illustrated by shifting attention to CL2. Example 10.2, which was discussed in some detail in Section 10.6, demonstrated how the opposition between a bar scene as the initially activated frame and a CHILDHOOD frame as incongruous element was realised in a comb of HTs. The second part of the scene had Charlie walk to the bar and tell the bartender that, "she would like a blue drink, or a yellow drink" (HT5) and then, "or a pink drink" (HT6). The bartender's response was "you want me to put it in a sippy cup?" (HT7). While HT5 and 6 both employ formal repetition (exact single-word repetition), HT7 activates the incongruous CHILDHOOD frame by different means and thus establishes a purely semantic tie to the earlier instances of humour in this comb. The

employment of formal repetition in the first two HTs thus overtly communicates to the viewer that Charlie's turns are repetitive, which is motivated here by the fact that he is reporting the drink order of his date. In this case, formal repetition thus also serves as a representation of repetition on CL2. The last HT, on the other hand, represents a witty response by the bartender, which ties in with the previous HTs, but appears creative rather than repetitive.

The same example can also be discussed from the perspective of another difference between formal and semantic repetition. Whereas variation indexes that cognitive processes have taken place, the mechanical (Bergson, 1900/2002), automatic (Tannen, 1987a; Norrick, 1993) quality of exact formal repetition can index the opposite, that no processing was necessary to echo the earlier turn (see also Section 5.2 and Chapter 3). HT7 is creative because it chooses a different realisation of the CHILDHOOD frame; HTs 5 and 6 are repetitive and not creative because they formally repeat the earlier order. It has to be added here, however, that the actor/character performance in HTs 5 and 6 establishes a particular stance towards his own utterance and thus by extension to the earlier order it ties in with. Charlie's facial expression and prosody in this case serve to distance him from the order, which he also explicitly introduces as his date's choice. This is relevant in so far as it serves as an invitation for the barkeeper's witty response in HT7. Without discussing it again, the "valid life choice" mantra can be mentioned here as another case in point. As was mentioned in Section 7.3.1.2, the verbatim repetition of the phrase in that example is humorous because the unaltered form indexes automaticity and the absence of cognitive processing, whereas the character intends to communicate her active choice to remain single.

Before I present a summary of this chapter in 11.4, I need to briefly return to the different communicative levels, which have surfaced again in this discussion of the functions of semantic and formal repetition as structuring devices in sitcom episodes. Based on this

study's approach to the participation framework of sitcoms (see Chapter 2), it is clear that CL1 between collective sender and television viewers and CL2 on the level of the fictional characters cannot be completely separated because any action on CL2 is always also an action on CL1, the most obvious example for which is the fact that characters cannot move independently of the actors that portray them. However, communicative events on CL1 can occur in such a way that they are inferred by the viewers as external and thus not directly dependent on CL2. Again, the laugh track is a good example of such an extradiegetic element that presents a response to CL2 events, but is not acknowledged by the fictional characters.⁵⁷ When it comes to repetition, examples that illustrate CL2-awareness can easily be found, and I have pointed to cases where repetition is commented on or acknowledged by characters throughout the discussion of examples in Chapters 7–11.

Finding cases that clearly repeat on CL1 but not on CL2 are more difficult to find, since they rest on the absence of character responses. However, unambiguous examples can be identified based on the spatial and temporal structure of the plot. For instance, the first episode of *Better With You* begins with a juxtaposition of the three couples, all of them telecinematically framed in similar fashion, on the back seat of a taxi. By convention, the cross-cutting between the individual camera shots encodes contemporaneity, but it is even more obvious on the spatial level that the characters could not possibly be aware that their actions mirror each other's without violating the conventional hierarchy of communicative levels, i.e. that characters do not know that they are being filmed by cameras and part of a sitcom.

⁵⁷ Willing suspension of disbelief is necessary here as well, however: While characters are apparently unaware of the laugh track and do not directly acknowledge it, they generally wait for extradiegetic laughter to subside before they begin a new turn.

Based on the detailed discussions of a scene in the second episode of *Anger Management* in the last chapter and on the first episode of *The McCarthys* in the current chapter, it seems clear that semantic and formal repetition in sitcom humour is for the most part anchored also on CL2. This is to say that even when the focus is on the structuring functions that define the way the fictional story is presented by the collective sender to the television viewers, the combs of humorous turns that cohesively tie in with earlier scenes are performed and received as such by the fictional characters. Scene 3 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01 is a typical example in which the characters engage in a collective strategy of justifying their leisure activities with hypotheses about the wishes of the deceased basketball coach. Each turn here directly ties in with the previous one, thus representing a cohesive conversation among people. It is interesting to note, however, that while the repetition here works on both CL1 and CL2, the humorous effect is not acknowledged by the characters. They show awareness that their justification strategies are an elaborate excuse for doing what they want rather than what they think they should, but the sitcom in no way encodes that any of them is trying to be humorous. This shows that while the cohesive function of repetition in this case plays on both CL1 and CL2, its contribution to humour is solely for the benefit of the television viewers.

Similarly, the first scene in *Anger Management*, S01E02 makes clear that Charlie is aware that he is repeating something (in this case the drink his date asked him to order for her). As mentioned before, this is accompanied by Charlie distancing himself from her order and establishing that he, too (like the television viewers) perceives this order as unorthodox. While his utterances leave open for interpretation whether they are meant to be humorous not just on CL1, but also to the barkeeper he is talking to, the response is clearly encoded as humour intended by the character, which is done both on a lexical level (“sippy cup”) and in the character’s clearly visible facial expression. Thus, the

creative semantic repetition here serves as a motivation for humour on both levels at the same time.

11.4 Summary

This chapter has marked the last step in the progression of this study from microscopic aspects of individual simple repeats to the macroscopic structure of the sitcom episode. In order to do so, I have presented theoretical conceptualisations of longer comic narratives, and in particular Attardo (2001) and Ermida (2008). Their more linear (Attardo) and more hierarchical (Ermida) analyses of narratives that go beyond individual incongruities have been included as a toolset to examine the structure of one sitcom episode in AMSIL as a case study in this chapter.

In this case study, I have largely continued with the focus on semantic repetition that was introduced in Chapter 10. It has shown that individual scenes in the first episode of *The McCarthys* consist of combs of humorous turns, i.e. of juxtaposed strands of individual instances of humour that are linked in the frames they are based on; the incongruous elements they include to surprise viewers; or in both constituents of humour at the same time. This last case marks a particularly strong semantic link to an earlier humorous turn and presents itself either as a call back or as a reverse call back. The former functions as an incongruity that is semantically identical to that in an earlier HT, the latter reverses the linear order between frame and incongruous element so that what was incongruous earlier is now the premise for humour, and what was the expectation-evoking frame is now incongruous. Combs thus construct cohesive humorous scenes that are linked on CL2 as events and actions that are plausible and motivated by the larger events of the sitcom episode. On CL1, they form cycles of related humour that manage to create multiple incongruities in quick succession without necessitating a great number of semantic frames for

their constructions. These scenes are thus also an efficient way of achieving a series of humorous effects in a narrow space.

Extending the view to sequences, it was shown that these cohesive scenes are linked by semantically repetitive HTs that serve as bridges across fictional space and time to yet again tie in individual incongruities with earlier moments in the narrative. Moreover, these links beyond individual scenes reveal the hierarchical structure of sitcom humour, which in this episode was shown to be based on a handful of supra-structural oppositions that define the story of the episode as well as almost all the humorous incongruities that are constructed therein. These higher-level oppositions between frames were shown to be realised in lower-level hyponymical oppositions that in turn are realised as incongruities that may or may not contain formal repetition, but are cohesively linked by establishing semantic ties with each other.

In this semantic network of humour, formal repetition was understood as one particularly salient way of establishing cohesive links, which was also tied to the communicative intent of the collective sender: Formal repetition is used to communicate to the viewers that humorous turns refer back to earlier humorous turns, either to represent repetitiveness on CL2, or to trigger the viewers' memory of earlier humorous instances. This allows viewers to revisit the earlier humorous turn to experience what has been termed nostalgic humour here (see Section 9.3.2.4) or to simply take notice of the connection to an earlier scene and thus to put the current utterance into a particular context.

12 Humour in US Sitcoms: Overview and Discussion

12.1 Introduction

This final chapter will first of all summarise some of the key findings made in the different analyses of this study. It will then present a synthesis of the different aspects and functions of repetition in sitcom humour that have been explored so far (Section 12.2); examine variation within the corpus, which has so far been neglected (Section 12.3); and look beyond the AMSIL corpus and the case studies included here to prepare the field for analyses of repetitive humour in different genres (Section 12.4).

12.2 Formal and semantic repetition in sitcom humour

12.2.1 Summary of Chapters 1–11

It has been the goal of this study to theoretically and empirically examine the role repetition plays in sitcom humour. This overarching research aim was structured according to five main research questions, which I will reiterate at this point:

- (1) What types of simple repeats occur in the AMSIL corpus (a) within individual humorous turns and (b) across humorous turns?
- (2) Given the occurrence of many-to-one relationships between individual humorous turns, i.e. the co-occurrence of several repeats within a single humorous turn, how do humorous turns in sitcoms construct incongruities with the help of complex repetition?
- (3) What are the functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour when it comes to (a) the construction of incongruities based on

- frames and incongruous elements, and (b) the links between individual instances of humour?
- (4) How does inter-turn semantic repetition contribute to humour cohesion in AMSIL?
 - (5) What is the role of repetition in the larger narrative structures of sitcoms, such as scenes, sequences and entire episodes?

Chapters 7–11 each successively addressed one of the five questions, and I will add a brief summary of the findings as the basis for a more general discussion of how repetition, semantic and formal, works in American sitcom humour as it is represented in the AMSIL corpus. This will also require a brief summary of the premises on which this study rests, i.e. on its understanding of sitcoms and telecinematic discourse more generally as a form of communication, of its approach to humour, and on the way it conceptualises repetition.

In this regard, Chapter 2 presented sitcoms as an example of communication that takes place on two levels. Following Brock (2015), I referred to the communication between fictional characters as occurring on CL2 (communicative level 2), which is always to be understood as embedded within communication on a first level, CL1, between the collective sender (Dynel, 2011d) and the television viewers. In general, this means that television viewers engage in two forms of communication that can be associated with two different reception processes. Following Clark (1996) I have referred to these processes as imagination and appreciation. Imagination highlights the mental models viewers form of characters and more generally the notion that they willingly suspend their disbelief in order to understand character actions as akin to those of real-life human agents; and to understand fictional events as a stylised representation of events they may know from their own non-fictional experience. Appreciation on the other hand refers to processes that take place in awareness of the constructedness of the fictional world, which is designed with the

television viewers in mind. This does not mean that television viewers need to fully recognise how exactly the audiovisual artefact is created, but they will be aware that they are engaging with telecinematic discourse and with a particular genre that promises to amuse them by strategically achieving humorous effects.

Humour, which is central to the genre of the sitcom and thus to the expectations audiences have when they watch sitcom episodes, has been understood here as the result of incongruity and resolution, which are ultimately cognitive processes on the side of the individual television viewer (see Chapter 3). However, the study has limited itself to examining those multimodal stimuli in the audiovisual text that serve as the basis for such cognitive processes and that have been constructed as such by the collective sender precisely to achieve humorous effects in viewers. Based on Suls' (1972) seminal theory, I have assumed a linear construction of humour whose premise is the activation of a frame in viewers that leads to the formation of particular expectations. Subsequent stimuli are compared to expectations by viewers, and humour ensues when they clash with the active frame while still being explicable with some form of cognitive or experiential rule. Furthermore, the successful reception of incongruities as humorous was said here to depend on the activation of a play frame in the sense of Bateson (1955/1972).

In the case of telecinematic discourse and sitcoms in particular, that play frame can be assumed to be safely established based on a number of metacommunicative cues at the viewers' disposal (see Chapter 4). Sitcoms that include a laugh track, i.e. recorded studio audience laughter, are a particularly good example for the study of humour in the context of dual levels of communication. This is so because collective senders of sitcoms require audiences to understand the characters as more than textual constructs in order to form expectations about character actions and utterances. At the same time collective senders remind audiences of the constructedness of sitcoms

by including extradiegetic laughter by another audience. In terms of positioning, this means that television viewers oscillate between imagination and appreciation. With regard to the collective sender, it means that instances of humour are marked as intended by subsequent laughter.

The empirical study of the role repetition plays in this construction of humorous incongruities was done based on the AMSIL (AMERICAN Sitcoms with a Laugh track) corpus, which consists of a randomly selected sample of 16 episodes from 8 sitcoms with a laugh track that were in production in the US in the years 2010 to 2016. Each sitcom is represented in the corpus by its first two episodes. The episodes were transcribed multimodally and segmented into conversational turns, with those turns that were followed by studio audience laughter being referred to as humorous turns (HTs). All subsequent analyses of repetition were based on these HTs.

The transcribed 2351 HTs were qualitatively analysed with regard to their inclusion of formal repetition on different levels, which led first of all to a typology of repetition in sitcom humour that is presented again in Tables 12.1 and 12.2 (see also Chapter 7). Formal repeats were not only distinguished based on the type of unit they repeated (lexical, gestural or otherwise), but also based on whether the recurring units occurred within the same HT (intra-turn) or linked two separate HTs (inter-turn). Each instance of repetition of any of these types was referred to as a simple repeat, which can either occur on its own in any HT or co-occur with other simple repeats to form complex repetition.

lexical repetition

exact single word	Ferrari → Ferrari
exact multi-word	around nine → around nine
single word, partial	wives → wifing
multi-word, partial	I'll just call you back in one minute → I'll call you back in, in just a minute

structural parallelism

phonetic repetition

prosodic repetition

she's older than she looks. → and acts. → and is.
pewng → *pewng* (making a bullet sound)
 a big lo:ft → an old chu:rch (stress and lengthening)

kinesic repetition

character gestures	moves hand up and down → moves hand up and down
facial expressions	raises eyes → raises eyes

telecinematic repetition

visual	mixer overflows → mixer overflows
audio	sound of door lock opening → sound of door lock opening

Table 12.1: Repetition categories intra-turn, sorted from more linguistic to paralinguistic and non-linguistic features

lexical repetition

exact single word	mad → mad
exact multi-word	it's a valid life choice → it's a valid life choice
single word, partial	cool → cooler
multi-word, partial	it's a valid life choice → is my life choice not valid?

structural parallelism

stop pumpin' on the brakes so much → stop being legally unable to drive at night so much
that's the rink... → l:ed the league... (stress on first syllable)

kinesic repetition

character gestures	hand gesture palms upwards → hand gesture palms upwards
facial expressions	raises eyebrows → raises eyebrows

telecinematic repetition

visual	burned piece of bacon is held up → burned piece of bacon is held up
audio	ringing mobile phone → ringing mobile phone

Table 12.2: Repetition categories inter-turn, sorted from more linguistic to paralinguistic and non-linguistic features

Having provided both a typology of repeats and a comprehensive overview of the typicality of each type based on descriptive statistics, the study attempted to arrive at a better understanding of how formal repetition is employed in the construction of HTs (see Chapter 8). This was done first of all by statistically testing the significance and effect size of correlations between the different types of repeats. Subsequently, the thus established patterns of significant correlations were analysed qualitatively and based on selected examples in order to both address the relationship between individual simple repeats and their function in sitcom humour.

For intra-turn repeats, occurrence of just one type of repeat in an HT was less frequent for all types, and only phonetic and character gesture repeats occurred on their own often. Especially for gesture repetition, two configurations emerged: They were both used as resources for sitcom humour themselves and supported repetition on other levels in other cases. For inter-turn repetition, it was shown that there are essentially two groups of repetition types. Whereas lexical repetition tends to occur on its own and is thus independent of repetition on other levels, other types of repeats and repeated aspects of multimodality in particular tended to occur in groups, which was interpreted as a way for the collective sender to encode repetitiveness on multiple levels.

The qualitative analysis of examples highlighted in particular the specificity of the relation between simple repeats in these cases of complex repetition. While they act jointly in some cases to establish multilevel links to earlier occurrences, in other cases they establish separate ties to several other turns, thus bringing together disparate moments of the narrative in one new HT. The functions of formal repetition relevant to humour were then further discussed and illustrated in Chapter 9 in terms of the four C's of repetition, i.e. constitutive, cohesive, constructional and communicative repetition (see Table 12.3).

Constitutive repetition

- Repetition facilitates production and comprehension
- Repetition itself constitutes the humorous incongruity
- Repetition creates humorous escalation or accumulation
- Repetition establishes a series – variation creates incongruity

Cohesive repetition

- Repetition establishes or contributes to cohesion
- Repetition establishes or reinforces the expectation-evoking frame
- Repetition recycles an item as an incongruous element
- Repetition establishes a call back to an earlier instance of humour
- Repetition links different frames

Constructional repetition

- Repetition contributes to characterisation
- Repetition contributes to the identity construction of the star

Communicative repetition

- Repetition mocks or caricatures a previous utterance
- Repetition signals humour support/lack of humour comprehension

Table 12.3: Functions of formal repetition in sitcom humour

Even though individual functions were listed and discussed as separate effects of repetition, I emphasised the multifunctionality of repetition and the fuzzy boundaries between individual functions. Whereas communicative repetition was almost entirely absent from the AMSIL corpus, the constitutive and cohesive functions could be illustrated with numerous examples. These examples demonstrated on the one hand that repetition is in many instances instrumental for the construction of the individual incongruity itself, while also emphasising the network of links between different HTs that exists largely as an effect of inter-turn repetition. Constructional repetition was discussed in terms of characterisation and the star comedian's identity construction, which are of indirect importance to humour as a source for particular viewer expectations that can be exploited for the construction of incongruities.

In an attempt to also address broader repetitive patterns and the larger structures of humour in the sitcom episode, Chapter 10 moved beyond formal repetition to semantic repetition, i.e. the repeated reference to the same concept and more generally the repeated activation of a particular semantic frame. Focusing on the establishment of cohesive ties between HTs and the components based on which incongruities are constructed, I analysed an exemplary scene from *Anger Management* and demonstrated the constitution of that scene through recurring incongruities based on the opposition of the situation in which the character interaction took place (a date in a bar) and the utterances of the female character in particular (defining drinks like a child in terms of primary colours).

This exemplary scene opened the floor for the study of the larger structuring functions of semantic repetition in sitcom humour, which was done in Chapter 11 based on a case study of one episode in the AMSIL corpus (episode 1 of *The McCarthys*). This case study revealed first of all how individual scenes are constructed based on patterns of call backs and reverse call backs and more generally on combs of HTs that tie in with each other. It then showed how scenes are linked through HTs that serve as bridges and thus how the whole sitcom episode becomes a cohesive network of HTs. From a more hierarchical perspective, it was further shown that almost all instances of humour in that episode can be regarded as instantiations of a very small number of higher-level oppositions that are also the central elements of the sitcom episode's narrative. In particular, the story of the analysed episode could be reduced to the opposition between a gay son and his basketball-loving family. This overarching opposition defined most of the scenes and led to combs of humour that always exploited one particular lower-level opposition, e.g. that between sports and the arts, which would at the same time anchor the incongruities in the larger narrative context and construct cycles of humorous instances that constituted the scene. More generally, the analysis of semantic repetition in HTs showed that more than being embedded in the sitcom

narrative, incongruities are the loci in which the story unfolds – step-by-step with only little variation. This was also regarded as the result of efficient humour production and reception, which makes use of already active and previously activated semantic frames both to establish frames and to construct clashes with them by introducing incongruous elements.

Returning to the role of formal repetition, the same chapter first established that there is no difference in principle between the functions of semantic and formal repetition in this macrostructural sense, since both of them create a notable link to an earlier occurrence that manages to shift the viewers' attention back to that moment in the narrative. However, the difference in salience was stressed, which was also thought to lead to a difference in communicativeness of repetition: Whereas semantic repetition may be intended to go unnoticed at least in some cases and to tacitly establish cohesion, formal repetition in the way it was defined here was thought to be explicit and to alert viewers to the fact that the collective sender is doing repetition. As a result, one use of formal repetition in particular is the representation of repetition on the level of CL2 and the conversational functions it has on the same level between characters. Formal repetition was also found to be used to create nostalgic humour, i.e. to have viewers revisit an earlier instance of humour by repeating it without creating a new incongruity.

12.2.2 Further discussion and interpretation of the findings

The empirical analyses of repetition in the AMSIL corpus have demonstrated different aspects of how repetition works within the humour of American sitcoms with a laugh track. It was shown that repetition occurs very frequently in the humour-relevant segments of these sitcoms and that repeats serve a range of different functions that are in some cases genre-specific realisations of functions that have already been found in other humorous text types. On a local level, repetition creates patterns that lead to expectations. And based on the

premise of these expectations, sudden variation can create the cognitive disruption that viewers perceive and process as humour. In other cases, repetition itself is unexpected, because it occurs when variation would be preferred. While these and other effects of repetition reveal diverse ways in which the communicative setting of sitcoms can be exploited by collective senders for the construction of incongruities, the most far-reaching function of repetition in sitcom humour observed here has been that of cohesion. It may seem unremarkable to observe that both semantic and formal repetition establish ties between adjacent HTs as well as between HTs, scenes and sequences that are farther apart, but the combination of this prevalent function with the sheer frequency of humorous turns in sitcom episodes creates a unique form of humour that can best be conceptualised as a collection of thematically linked combs that together construct a story, rather than being merely embedded in one.

It was not possible from a text-based perspective to establish causality in this respect, i.e. to determine whether collective senders use repetition in the creation of humorous instances in order to make them cohesive or if a narrative context is created in order to motivate repetitive humour. However, both aspects are worth considering in the sitcom production process: It is in the interest of creating an imaginable story with believable characters and followable events that humorous turns tie in with each other; and the fact that repetition facilitates both language production and comprehension also translates to increased efficiency in the construction of understandable incongruities when they re-activate previously evoked semantic frames.

One interesting aspect in this regard is the role of repetitive incongruities, and the role of formal repetition in particular, in the positioning of television viewers. I have previously discussed that sitcoms with laugh tracks on the one hand position viewers as immersed witnesses that engage in an elaborate act of joint pretence in order to animate characters into beings that exist outside of the camera frames

in which they are visible. On the other hand it is one of the characteristics of sitcoms that they broadcast extradiegetic studio laughter together with the character performance, which highlights the constructedness of the fictional world. This second aspect is however not directly dependent on laughter as an extradiegetic cue. At least in those cases where humour is situated only on CL1, i.e. where characters show no sign of being amused or of recognising that an incongruity has been constructed, the viewers are distanced from CL2 by the constructed incongruities themselves, irrespective of whether or not they are meta-communicatively marked. This is so because the incongruities serve as invitations by the collective sender to laugh about the characters that are conventionally ignorant of their role. Repetition in HTs can serve to make amusing character behaviour plausible by linking it to earlier HTs and thus presenting it as recognisably consistent with the experiential knowledge the viewers have about the fictional world and the characters within it. Formal repetition in addition communicates overtly to the viewers that characters are being repetitive and thus accentuates the narrative motivation of the character actions. Thus, repetition in this sense partially mitigates the distancing effect of humour by presenting incongruous actions and utterances as organic developments within the fictional world.

The interaction of incongruity and repetition can thus be described as complementary on the level of constructional and of cohesive repetition. In its contribution to characterisation as well as to narrative cohesion, repetition facilitates the viewers' formation of mental models of characters and situations that can serve as the basis for expectations. Activating these expectations is an efficient way for the collective sender to create a fertile ground for incongruities, which are constructed by juxtaposing a variety of typically similar but different incongruous elements with the familiar expectation-evoking frames.

On the level of constitutive repetition, on the other hand, the assumed tension between repetition and incongruity is manifest in the case of the call back, i.e. in those instances where both the expectation-evoking frame and the incongruous element are based on repetition from the same earlier HT. In most examples, repetition on one level was accompanied by variation on another level, e.g. the same gesture was accompanied by a different utterance, or an identical structure was used with different lexical items. However, there were some examples of what could be colloquially referred to as retellings of the same joke. In these cases no substantial variation was discernible as far as the construction of the humorous incongruity was concerned, there was no surprise and therefore no incongruity in the sense of Suls (1972), and consequently these cases cannot be called humorous in a strict sense according to an incongruity-based understanding of humour. What these examples in AMSIL shared was an explicitness in their repetition that not only linked two HTs but did so ostentatiously, thus reminding the viewers of the earlier incongruity. I suggested therefore that the pleasurable effect in this case does not rely on the actual creation of a humorous effect, but on what I called nostalgic humour, i.e. the triggering of the pleasant memory of having experienced humour in the earlier HT. Rather than being surprised, viewers thus fondly revisit their earlier state of amusement. It can be assumed in addition that it is pleasurable for viewers in these moments of nostalgic humour to recognise the reference to the earlier scene.⁵⁸

12.3 Humour variation between sitcoms and episodes

Up to this point, this study on repetition in sitcom humour has focused on the commonalities between the sitcom episodes in the AMSIL corpus, i.e. it has analysed the corpus as a representative sample of US

⁵⁸ Black (2006), for instance, notes that it is pleasurable for readers to recognise intertextual references in texts, and it seems plausible that quotes to earlier scene can create the same “warm feeling of inclusion” (Black, 2006: 50).

American Sitcoms with a laugh track that were produced between 2010 and 2016. What I have neglected therefore are the idiosyncrasies that individual sitcoms and even individual episodes may demonstrate with regard to these patterns. Potentially, there could for instance be different styles of repetition-based humour that prefer some types of repetition and functions of repetition over others, or even refrain from employing types and functions that were observed here altogether. A thorough investigation of this aspect, based on the comparison of subcorpora or on several case studies, would have to be carried out as part of a follow-up project to the current study, but I can offer some first insights based on the data that was collected and analysed here.

In order to do that, I will compare sitcoms and individual episodes with respect to a number of criteria that were discussed here. The similarities and variation will be summarised in this section in roughly the same order as the respective criteria were discussed in the study. The presented observations are not to be considered a full, comprehensive analysis of variation in the employment of repetition by different sitcoms, but merely as a selective collection of notable consistencies and inconsistencies that need to be explored in further research.

As is illustrated in Table 12.4, variation starts already when observing the segmentation of each episode into humorous turns (HTs). While *The McCarthys* contributed 323 HTs to the 2351 HTs that were analysed overall, *Sullivan & Son* only accounted for 249 of them, thus demonstrating that while humour is frequent in all sitcoms, there is still considerable variation in frequency of humorous incongruities between the sitcoms, whose episodes are virtually identical in length. What is more, the average length of humorous turns per sitcom also varies between 3.2 seconds (*Better with you*, σ 2.5) and 5.1 seconds (*Sullivan & Son*, σ 2.8), and there seems to be at least some connection between the two aspects, i.e. at least some sitcoms seem to prefer longer HTs

Sitcom episode	Episode	HTs	Avg. length	S. dev.	Rep.	Rep. %	Intra-turn	%	Inter-turn	%
<i>Anger Management</i>	S1E01	146	3.6	2.6	95	65%	62	42%	68	47%
	S1E02	165	3.5	2.4	108	65%	64	39%	80	48%
	Total	311	3.5	2.5	203	65%	126	41%	148	48%
<i>Better with you</i>	S1E01	149	3.1	2.3	123	83%	60	40%	99	66%
	S1E02	147	3.3	2.7	98	67%	41	28%	78	53%
	Total	296	3.2	2.5	221	75%	101	34%	177	60%
<i>The McCarthys</i>	S1E01	162	4.3	2.5	103	64%	49	30%	84	52%
	S1E02	161	3.9	2.2	120	75%	53	33%	98	61%
	Total	323	4.1	2.3	223	69%	102	32%	182	56%
<i>Retired at 35</i>	S1E01	152	3.3	2.4	108	71%	70	46%	78	51%
	S1E02	124	5.3	2.6	95	77%	61	49%	71	57%
	Total	276	4.2	2.6	203	74%	131	47%	149	54%
<i>Romantically Challenged</i>	S1E01	146	3.4	2.2	93	64%	62	42%	56	38%
	S1E02	125	3.2	2.5	77	62%	31	25%	63	50%
	Total	271	3.3	2.3	170	63%	93	34%	119	44%
<i>See Dad Run</i>	S1E01	168	3.6	2.2	107	64%	50	30%	88	52%
	S1E02	141	4.8	2.6	107	76%	57	40%	83	59%
	Total	309	4.1	2.5	214	69%	107	35%	171	55%
<i>Sullivan & Son</i>	S1E01	117	5.0	3.2	80	68%	40	34%	57	49%
	S1E02	132	5.1	2.4	83	63%	49	37%	55	42%
	Total	249	5.1	2.8	163	65%	89	36%	112	45%
<i>Undateable</i>	S1E01	167	4.6	2.7	105	63%	52	31%	75	45%
	S1E02	149	5.4	2.7	118	79%	80	54%	88	59%
	Total	316	5.0	2.7	223	71%	132	42%	163	52%
Total	-	2351	4.06	2.61	1620	68%	881	37%	1221	52%

Table 12.4: Individual sitcom episodes in AMSIL

that are less frequent, while others employ shorter HTs at a higher frequency. However, when looking at individual episodes, there is little consistency with regard to these criteria: For some sitcoms, the two episodes that were observed here can be characterised as similar in terms of HT frequency and length, but in other cases episodes 1 and 2 are at opposite ends of the scale. In these sitcoms with large variation between episodes, there is furthermore no clear tendency when the sequence of episodes is taken into account, i.e. that second episodes would tend to be more or less populated by HTs of shorter or longer duration. That no clear patterns emerge in this area can be taken as a tentative indication that while some sitcoms may characteristically employ short or long HTs more or less frequently, in most cases this criterion is not predictable and could depend on aspects such as the particular theme of the episode and the characters that appear in it.

Turning to repetition, the ratio of HTs that are repetitive in some form is between 63% and 75%, with 4 of the 8 sitcoms between 69% and 71%. While there is thus some commonality in the employment of repetition in HTs overall, the importance of intra-turn and inter-turn repetition seems to vary more substantially. Intra-turn repetition ranges from 32% to 47% of all HTs in a sitcom; inter-turn repetition ranges from 44% to 60%. Individual episodes have ratios as low as 25% intra-turn and 38% inter-turn, and as high as 54% and 66% respectively. Again, no clear pattern emerges here, and there seems to be a lot of variation both between different sitcoms and between the two episodes of each sitcom that were analysed.

With regard to individual types of simple formal repeats, the numeric comparison confirms some of the intuitive impressions that arise when watching the sitcom episodes in question. For instance, the physical performance of *Undateable*'s main character does indeed translate to a high proportion of inter-turn kinesic repeats, i.e. character gesture and facial expressions taken together (16% compared to as little as 6% in *Sullivan & Son*), and *See Dad Run* appears to make use of

more telecinematic repetition, in particular of visual elements, than other sitcoms do. However, there is a great deal of variation between episodes of the same sitcom in this regard as well, and more data would be necessary to come to a clearer finding as to whether the employment of any particular type of repeat for sitcom humour is predictable based on the specific sitcom or if it depends on other factors.

Variation between semantic repetition patterns is even more difficult to pinpoint, but the observed pattern of most incongruities being hyponymical to just a few higher-level oppositions seems to hold true for all of the episodes in the corpus. For instance, the main oppositions in *Anger Management* are between regarding a female friend as therapist or lover (episode 1) and between superficial and more meaningful relationships (episode 2); the second episode of *Undateable* similarly opposes cautious and superficial approaches to dating; and in the first episode of *Better with you*, marriage is opposed to remaining single as a valid life choice. This also makes clear that across all sitcoms and episodes, there are a number of recurring themes that keep reappearing. Main themes are family; relationships and in particular romantic relationships, which is already reflected in some of the sitcoms' titles; and – to a lesser degree – work and leisure activities. These common themes dictate the humorous incongruities that are constructed in each sitcom and each episode, which can be described as specific realisations of higher-level oppositions that are shared to a large degree by all of the sitcoms that were analysed here. In this regard, it would be interesting to compare the US American data at the basis of this study to corpora of other sociocultural origin, which might be thematically different or more heterogeneous.

A further avenue to pursue within the AMSIL corpus would be different character humour profiles that may occur within and across sitcoms and thus to explore the functions of humour and repeated humour as part of sitcom characterisation. Stereotypical catch phrases of characters did not occur within the data – either because they are in

fact not as frequently employed in current sitcoms or because the data selection (only the first two episodes per sitcom) excluded them in case they appear later in the series. However, there may well be formal and semantic properties of humour made typical for a specific character by use of repetition. Whether or not such character-typical humour styles or even humour repetition styles exists, could be explored in a follow-up study.

12.4 Humorous repetition beyond AMSIL

The findings of this study also lend themselves to a comparison with related genres that are at least potentially produced for the same target audience. In particular, the multi-camera sitcoms of the laugh track kind that were represented in AMSIL should be compared to those single-camera sitcoms that do not employ a laugh track. It can be assumed that the laugh track adds rhythm to the broadcast that would make it likely on the one hand that there are simply more humorous turns in sitcoms with than in those without laugh tracks. On the other hand, the mode of production might well also influence the importance of repetition for each of the two subgenre's incongruity construction. I would assume based on the greater variation in settings and the absence of the laugh track itself that single-camera sitcoms will on average be less dependent on repetition in their humour than is the case for the AMSIL corpus.

Apart from the effect of the laugh track and of the cultural communities in which collective senders and target audiences are situated, seriality could also be regarded as an important independent variable that may influence the use of repetition in the creation of humorous effects. However, a direct comparison with the current findings with regard to this aspect alone is difficult, since film comedies are not screened with laugh tracks. Comparing sitcoms and film comedies without laugh tracks could indicate, however, to what extent seriality favours repetition as a resource for humour. Intuitively, it would seem that repetition in the format, i.e. recurring characters,

settings etc., which is characteristic for series but not for films, would also mean that there is more repetition in sitcom than in film humour. On the other hand, the fact that the second episodes in the corpus did not consistently employ more repetition than the first episodes could be read as a counterargument to that hypothesis.

I stated initially that there was only sparse literature on the interaction between repetition and humour. The clearest consensus that emerged from existing theoretical and empirical observations, however, seemed to be in the notion that repetition combined with variation was one of the typical resources for humour (e.g. Tannen, 1989; Norrick, 1993; Attardo 1994, 2001). Based on the empirical findings presented here it can be attested that this combination of repetition and variation in the creation of humour is also pervasive in the humour of the sitcoms in the AMSIL corpus, at least when it is understood in a broad sense as humour resting on both repeated and non-repeated elements. However, as the examples throughout the analysis have made clear, this combination of the old and the new comes in many different shades that need not follow the prototypical pattern of creating a series of similar items in order to disrupt the flow with an incongruous element (even if examples of such cases were also discussed in Section 9.3.1.4). The correlations between simple repeats (Chapter 8), and the connections that semantic repetition establishes in sitcom episodes (Chapter 11) have shown that sitcom humour is varied as well as repetitive. Individual incongruities may rest on recurring themes, on consistent characters and even on repeated incongruous elements, but they are also very specific and thus novel in their multimodal and multi-layered realisation.

The example of sitcom humour, which is performed by actors/characters who enact the scriptwriters' incongruities, makes it particularly obvious that broadly speaking language and communication, and by extension humour, are always necessarily repetitive as well as original. This is manifest in the scriptedness of the

performance and the recordedness of the broadcast on the one side; and on the specificity of the multimodal performance of each turn on the other. Even with the narrower understanding of repetition as consisting of those pre-patterned phenomena that are notable to an informed viewer, the findings of this study indicate that repetition does not hinder the construction of humorous incongruities. At the same time, it has become clear that there are only few cases in which repetition itself is directly involved in surprising the viewers. Instead, repetition positions humorous instances in connection with others and gives them narrative significance and motivation by tying them to previous character actions and fictional events; it establishes series and creates predictable patterns; it lets viewers revisit humorous turns and accumulates and escalates incongruities; it facilitates the production and comprehension of humour; it establishes and maintains the playframe; and on a larger scale it creates a cohesive and hierarchically structured network of humour that is characteristic for sitcoms in its particular serial and multimodal realisation, while also sharing aspects with related comic narratives such as short stories.

It is clear that the observations made here based on the analysis of the AMSIL corpus can only hint at the variety of ways in which repeats can be employed for the construction of humorous incongruities in different settings, and the similarities with conversational humour, humour in short stories and comedies in film and theatre need to be further explored. However, the study has provided a comprehensive overview of the various patterns and functions of repetition that occur in a particular type of American sitcom humour. And after all: This study is a linguistic exploration of repetition in US American sitcoms. Okay. He said it. Everybody has to drink.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The sentence “[t]his study is a linguistic exploration of repetition in US American sitcoms” employs exact multi-word repetition not only to establish a cohesive tie to the introduction, but also to evoke the frame of REPETITION. I leave it to the reader to decide, whether the subsequent utterance’s formal

repeat of Example 7.12 is at odds with the CONCLUSION OF A STUDY frame and thereby constructs incongruity through repetition; whether it creates nostalgic humour by referring back to that example; or whether it should be categorised as failed humour.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

A1. Transcription conventions Chapter 2

[]	overlapping speech (including laughter)
(.)	short gap between utterances
(0.3)	gap between utterances in seconds
=	latch
—	stress
:	indicates lengthening of the previous sound
↑↓	shift to high or low pitch
. , ? !	punctuation indicates usual intonation
haha	laughter
HAHA	loud laughter
<LT>	beginning of extradiegetic laughter
</LT, 0.3>	end of extradiegetic laughter, followed by indication of length of laughter in seconds
* ± § \$%^ ^	symbols to identify participants
----	delimits action/facial expression by participant
*---->	action continues on subsequent line(s)
----*	action ends
34	number in left-hand column refers to shots

These transcription conventions were adapted from Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2014).

A2. Transcription conventions Chapters 4–12

[]	overlapping speech (including laughter)
(.)	short gap between utterances
(0.3)	gap between utterances in seconds
=	latch
—	stress
:	indicates lengthening of the previous sound
↑↓	shift to high or low pitch
. , ? !	punctuation indicates usual intonation
haha	laughter
HAHA	loud laughter
* ± § \$%^ ^	symbols to align gestures and facial expressions with spoken utterances
----	delimits action/facial expression by participant
*---->	action continues on subsequent line(s)
----*	action ends
< >	description of voice quality
</>	end of description
HT34	number in left-hand column refers to humorous turns

These transcription conventions were adapted from Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2014).

Appendix B. Codebook

B1. Coding Instructions

Coding Instructions

Segmenting: The data is segmented and transcribed in ELAN. Every humorous turn, labelled "HT[number]" in the tier "Turns" in ELAN, can be selected and played individually. A coding sheet is provided: Double check that the HT you are coding on the sheet matches the respective HT in ELAN.

Code chronologically, beginning with the very first humorous turn.

The unit of analysis is the humorous turn, i.e. each category answers the question "Does this humorous turn contain...?".

Code absence/presence. For every HT, each code is a binary category that receives the values 0 (absent) or 1 (present). Coding any HT as 1 for any of the "inter-turn" categories means that the respective HT repeats something from an earlier turn. Note that while only humorous turns are coded, the repeats therein may be repeated from non-humorous turns. Accordingly, non-humorous turns need to be watched (but not coded) in order to code the "inter-turn" categories.

Coding any of the "intra-turn" categories as 1 means that repetition occurs within that HT.

Unless defined otherwise in the definitions of the individual codes, all codes may be present or absent in any HT, which is to say that the categories are not mutually exclusive. For instance, a HT may be coded as containing intra-turn semantic repetition, intra-turn character gesture repetition and inter-turn semantic repetition. Exceptions to this rule do only occur within the lexical categories, where single word/multiple word and exact/partial are mutually exclusive. These exceptions are specified in the definitions and instructions of the individual categories.

Code exhaustively, i.e. code each category for each humorous turn as either absent or present. Code consistently.

B2. Individual Codes.

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
Inter-turn exact lexical single word repetition	A single lexical word is repeated from an earlier turn. The repetition is exact. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for content words. Use for salient repetition of function words. Use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated word, i.e. the repetition is verbatim. There may be several instances of single word lexical repetition in a humorous turn, as long as the repeated words do not form a syntactic unit.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repetition of a lexeme with a different form. (e.g. a different inflection). Do not use for exact repetition of a string of more than one lexical word.	(1) "pink" --> "pink drink" ["pink"] (2) "there is nothing more unattractive than envy" --> "I think envy's here" ["envy"]
Inter-turn partial lexical single word repetition	A single lexical word is repeated from an earlier turn. The repetition is partial in the sense that the exact forms do not match, but either the same lexeme or root is repeated, or a phonologically strikingly similar unit is produced. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for content words. Use for salient repetition of function words. Use for repetition of a lexeme with a different form. Use for repetition of a root with different affixes.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated word.	(1) "Yes, but he told me. 85% of all relationships that last past two months go on to marriage and 54% last an entire lifetime." --> "Those are the same percentages as the college thing." ["percent" > "percentage"]
Inter-turn exact lexical multiple word repetition	A syntactic group of two or more words is repeated from an earlier turn. The repetition is exact. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for strings containing at least one content word, i.e. for syntactic groups. Use only for adjacent words. Use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated words, i.e. the repetition is verbatim.	Do not use for function words. Do not use for repetition of lexemes with a different form. Do not use for repetition of multiple non-adjacent single words. Do not use if the	(1) "Now when I say ugly head, I'm using the term as a metaphor and not a description for that young lady." --> "And her ugly head," ["ugly head"]

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
			order of the repeated words has changed. Do not use if words have been added to or removed from the repeated syntactic group.	
Inter-turn partial lexical multiple word repetition	A syntactic group of two or more words is repeated from an earlier turn. The repetition is partial, which means that either the form of the repeated words does not exactly match the earlier turn, and/or that the number or order of the repeated words has changed. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for strings containing at least one content word, i.e. for syntactic groups. Use for adjacent words in the original turn, i.e. in the turn from which the current humorous turn repeats. Use for repetition of lexemes with a different form. Use if the order of the repeated words has changed. Use if words have been added to or removed from the repeated syntactic group as long as the repeat still contains more than one repeated word.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated words. Do not use for repetition of multiple non-adjacent single words.	(1) "Hey, Mom, can I invite them to come over and make jewelry with us tomorrow night?" --> "I love making jewelry." ["make jewelry" > "making jewelry"] (2) "You're dating your stalker?" --> "How could she be my stalker if I'm dating her?" ["dating your stalker" > "my stalker if I'm dating her"]
Inter-turn structural parallelism	A salient morphological or syntactic structure is repeated from an earlier turn.	Use if you find that there is a notable similarity in syntactic or morphological structure to an earlier turn.		(1) "I will never love you" --> "I will never love you forever." (note that this example is also an instance of exact lexical multiple word repetition) [PRP + AUX + ADV + V] (2) "In my town, I was known as the girl who slept with Charlie Goodson." --> "And I always

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
				<p>thought of myself as the guy who slept with Mel-" [N + "who slept with" + N]</p> <p>(3) "A date-date"? --> "Yes-yes." [reduplication is repeated]</p>
Inter-turn prosodic repetition	A salient aspect of prosody is repeated from a previous turn. This feature can pertain to any aspect of prosody (e.g. pitch, loudness, intonation patterns, rhythm).	Use if you find that there is a notable similarity in stress or intonation to an earlier turn. Use for noticeably high or low pitch. Use for intonation patterns (e.g. fall/rise) that stand out.	Do not use for prosody that is established as the norm for the respective character.	<p>(1) "(high-pitched voice) Oh good! Blue!" --> "(high-pitched voice) Hi:." [pitch]</p> <p>(2) "I can't help it. She changed the PASSword and locked me OUT." -> "I gotta take a CLASS or something." [loudness]</p> <p>(3) "hh. I'm s(h)o s(h)orry Ch(h)arlie, I feel s(h)o bad." --> "My tongue s(h)wells(h) when I have an allergic reaction." [lisp]</p>
Inter-turn character gesture repetition	A salient character gesture or character action that is repeated from an earlier turn. This will typically be a movement of the hands or the head of the respective character. The character in question will typically be the speaking character, but may also be another foregrounded character. Note that there is no	Use for those occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same gesture or character action, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition. Use where you can confidently label both the original instance and the repeat as gestures.	Do not use for facial expressions.	<p>(1) (Sam locks the door, then opens the lock, locks the door, opens the lock, locks the door, opens the door) --> (Sam locks the door, then opens the lock.) [locking and unlocking the door]</p>

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
	distinction between exact and partial repetition in this category.			
Inter-turn repetition of facial expression	A salient facial expression of a character is repeated from an earlier turn. The character in question will typically be the speaking character, but may also be another foregrounded character. Note that there is no distinction between exact and partial repetition in this category.	Use for those occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same facial expression of a character, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition.	Do not use for non-salient, unmarked facial expressions.	(1) Waitress: (shocked facial expression) "oh god, I'm so sorry." --> Maddie: "show me your eyes gain." Waitress: (shocked facial expression) [facial expression]
Inter-turn visual telecinematic repetition	A salient visual aspect related to the telecinematic production of the sitcom is repeated from an earlier turn. This can include framing, lighting or any other aspect of the mise-en-scène.	Use for those occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same salient visual feature, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition.	Do not use for non-salient repetition. Do not confuse with character gesture repetition or repetition of facial expression. However, all of those types of repetition may occur in the same humorous turn.	(1) (Charlie speaks directly into the camera) --> (Charlie speaks directly into the camera) [framing of character] (2) (split-screen) --> (split-screen) [editing technique]
Inter-turn auditory telecinematic repetition	A salient auditory aspect related to the telecinematic production of the sitcom is repeated from an earlier turn. This can include intra- and extradiegetic sounds, music or speech.	Use for those occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same salient auditory feature, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition. This may include silence.	Do not use for prosodic repetition.	(1) (ringing mobile phone interrupts Happy Birthday song after the first note) --> (ringing mobile phone interrupts Happy Birthday song after the first note) [ringing phone] (2) (voice-over) --> (voice-over)
Intra-turn exact lexical	A single lexical word is repeated within this turn.	Use for content words. Use for salient	Do not use for function words if they are not	(1) "Shut up, Ed! (.) What Ed said." ["Ed"]

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
single word repetition	The repetition is exact. Compounds are considered single words.	repetition of function words. Use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated word, i.e. the repetition is verbatim. There may be several instances of single word lexical repetition in a humorous turn, as long as the repeated words do not form a syntactic unit.	emphasised. Do not use for repetition of a lexeme with a different form. (e.g. a different inflection). Do not use for exact repetition of a string of more than one lexical word.	
Intra-turn partial lexical single word repetition	A single lexical word is repeated within this turn. The repetition is partial in the sense that the exact forms do not match, but either the same lexeme or root is repeated, or a phonologically strikingly similar unit is produced. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for content words. Use for salient repetition of function words. Use for repetition of a lexeme with a different form.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated word.	(1) "I love making jewelry. I made tiaras for all my cats." ("making" > "made") (2) "How am I supposed to work through my issues with men being dicks, while women are showing up in this group as a result of your past dickness?" ["dicks" > "dickness"]
Intra-turn exact lexical multiple word repetition	A syntactic group of two or more words is repeated within this turn. The repetition is exact. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for strings containing at least one content word, i.e. for syntactic groups. Use only for adjacent words. Use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated words, i.e. the repetition is verbatim.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repetition of lexemes with a different form. Do not use for repetition of multiple non-adjacent single words. Do not use if the order of the repeated words has changed.	(1) "Ooh. Lady and the Tramp! Lady and the Tramp!" ["Lady and the Tramp"]

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
			Do not use if words have been added to or removed from the repeated syntactic group.	
Intra-turn partial lexical multiple word repetition	A syntactic group of two or more words is repeated within this turn. The repetition is partial, which means that either the form of the repeated words does not exactly match, and/or that the number or order of the repeated words has changed. Compounds are considered single words.	Use for strings containing at least one content word, i.e. for syntactic groups. Use only for adjacent words in the original unit. Use for repetition of lexemes with a different form. Use if the order of the repeated words has changed. Use if words have been added to or removed from the repeated syntactic group as long as the repeat still contains more than one repeated word.	Do not use for function words if they are not emphasised. Do not use for repeats of the exact form of the repeated words. Do not use for repetition of multiple non-adjacent single words.	
Intra-turn structural parallelism	A salient morphological or syntactic structure is repeated within this turn.	Use if you find that there is a notable similarity in syntactic or morphological structure between two or more units (words, syntactic groups) in this turn.		(1) "This is Daytona. .hh Daytona, this is my ex-wife Jennifer and my daughter Sam." ["This is" + NP]
Intra-turn prosodic repetition	A salient aspect of prosody is repeated within this turn. This feature can pertain to any aspect of prosody (e.g. pitch, loudness, intonation patterns, rhythm).	Use if you repetition of stress or intonation within this turn. Use for repeated but separable instances of noticeably high or low pitch. Use for repeated intonation patterns	Do not use for prosody that is established as the norm for the respective character.	(1) "Sorry I'm late. I couldn't find the ↑house. And then I ↑found it." [intonation]

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
		(e.g. fall/rise) that stand out.		
Intra-turn character gesture repetition	A salient character gesture or character action is repeated within this turn. This will typically be a movement of the hands or the head of the respective character. The character in question will typically be the speaking character, but may also be another foregrounded character. Note that there is no distinction between exact and partial repetition in this category.	Use for those occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same gesture or character action, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition.	Do not use for facial expressions. Use where you can confidently label both the original instance and the repeat as gestures.	(1) "should have thumb wrestled (David raises both hands with thumbs up). him. my thumbs (David raises both hands with thumbs up).are huge from texting." [thumb gesture] (2) (Sam locks the door, then opens the lock, locks the door, opens the lock, locks the door, opens the door) [opening and locking the door] (3) (Repeated pointing with the fork to the spaghetti)
Intra-turn repetition of facial expression	A salient facial expression of a character is repeated within this turn. The character in question will typically be the speaking character, but may also be another foregrounded character. Note that there is no distinction between exact and partial repetition in this category.	Use for those repeated and separable occurrences that you regard as instances or versions of the same facial expression of a character, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition.	Do not use for non-salient, unmarked facial expressions.	(1) "oh, my god. .h here they come. .h just be yourself. .h but better. (closes eyes, clenches teeth) I'm sorry. (closes eyes, clenches teeth) but I mean it!" [facial expression]
Intra-turn visual telecinematic repetition	A salient visual aspect related to the telecinematic production of the sitcom is repeated within this turn. This can include	Use for those occurrences that you regard as repeated and separable instances or versions of the same salient visual	Do not use for non-salient repetition. Do not use for visual aspects that remain constant throughout this humorous turn.	

Code name	Definition	When to use	When not to use	Examples
	framing, lighting or any other aspect of the mise-en-scène.	feature, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition.		
Intra-turn auditory telecinematic repetition	A salient auditory aspect related to the telecinematic production of the sitcom is repeated within this turn. This can include intra- and extradiegetic sounds, music or speech.	Use for those occurrences that you regard as repeated and separable instances or versions of the same salient auditory feature, i.e. as sufficiently similar to be considered as repetition. This may include silence.	Do not use for non-salient repetition. Do not use for auditory aspects that remain constant throughout this humorous turn.	(1) "You can't fire me, I quit. (.) (character punches below the camera, there is a thud.) Think you can replace me with some other guy? Go ahead, it won't be the same. (character punches below the camera, there is a thud.)" [thud]
Intra-turn phonetic repetition	One or several phones are repeated in direct succession. Typically, this will be repetition occurring after false starts. This may include audible character laughter. Includes salient alliteration.	Use for repetition after false starts, stuttering.		(1) "O- o- o- oh, you mean a date!" ["o-" "o-"]

Appendix C. Humorous turns in *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 1

HT1	Gerard	piece-a ga:bage!
HT2	Ronny	so:, who's winning the sports today?
HT3	Gerard	just sports, not the.
HT4	Ronny	the Celtics are the green ones,
HT5	Ronny	and they're playing the Miami.
HT6	Ronny	the Mi-ami, uh, I really wanna sa:y, Sound Machine.
HT7	Arthur	hey, if anybody could be that dumb about sports, it's Ronny.
HT8	Ronny	thanks for believing in me dad.

Table C.1: HTs in Scene 2 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT9	Marjorie	god. I got a lot of kids.
HT10	Marjorie	oh there is one that I li:ke
HT11	R&M	the: Good Wife.
HT12	Arthur	DON'T TAKE THAT SHOT! (0.5) ooh, great shot.

Table C.2: HTs in Scene 3 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT13	Arthur	o:r. (1.0) I mean I'm just thinking out loud here. (.) Fatty was my assistant coach for six years, and- (.) I mean basketball was his life. (0.5) he'd probably want us to (1.0) finish watching the game.
HT14	everyone	for Fatty.
HT15	Sean	you know what occurs to me another way to honour Fatty's memory (1.6) would be to order some pizza.
HT16	Gerard	good call, I'll dial it up. (1.2) for Fatty.
HT17	Marjorie	and as I recall he also enjoyed a Caesar salad dressing on the side.
HT18	Ronny	oh, and if you're ordering from Giovanni's get the eggplant parm, (1.3) is what I once heard Fatty say.
HT19	others	YEAH!

Table C.3: HTs in Scene 4 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT20	Ronny	high school guidance counselor?
HT21	Marjorie	we're saying the same thing.
HT22	Ronny	are you comparing the loss of dad's friend to the cancellation of Kyra Sedgwick's the Closer?
HT23	Marjorie	are you saying that the Closer was cancelled? because it wasn't. Kyra decided to go out, on top, and she did.
HT24	Marjorie	she did.
HT25	Ronny	dad. (1.0) I know we don't talk about feelings, (.) or you know, have them.
HT26	Arthur	now I need a new assistant coach to replace that fat bastard.

Table C.4: HTs in Scene 5 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT27	Jackie	WHO'S READY FOR A WAKE.
HT28	Jackie	I know, I know, I know.
HT29	Jackie	I know.
HT30	Ronny	good for you Jackie. own it. (0.8) unless you can return it, then definitely stop owning it.
HT31	Marjorie	it's okay, Jackie. at least you're presenting at the Academy Awards.
HT32	Jackie	thanks, ma.
HT33	Sean	hey guys you like our suits? Gerard and I look like twins again.
HT34	Gerard	Sean. we have never looked like twins. look at that baby picture. (picture of a very big and a very small baby, each of them wearing a shirt that says "BIG" and "LITTLE", respectively.)
HT35	Gerard	in the sixth grade the teacher thought you were my father.
HT36	Marjorie	I don't need a reason.
HT37	Sean	intentional, Ronny. ladies love it when a guy squeezes into something tight.
HT38	Gerard	THAT'S NOT A SUIT. IT'S A SAUSAGE CASING.
HT39	Sean	dad, as a two-time Boston Globe all star, I just wanna remind you (0.5) that I was a two-time Boston Globe all star.

Table C.5: HTs in Scene 6 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT40 Gerard THAT'S WHY YOU PLAY JB.

HT41 Gerard THAT'S WHY YOU PLAY JB.

Table C.6: HTs in Flashback 1 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT42 Gerard coaching is all about volume and repetition. (0.6)
VOLUME AND REPETITION.

HT43 Ronny you know, a father passing on his kingdom, his
children fighting. (0.5) this is all very King Lear.

HT44 Gerard we hate plays.

HT45 Marjorie well, pick Jackie then. she's dressed like she's on
Dynasty.

HT46 Ronny dad, if it makes you feel better, I'm not going to
apply for the job. (.) A because my knowledge of
the basketball is limited,

HT47 Marjorie head guidance counselor. so you're gonna be in
charge of all the other psychiatrists.

HT48 Ronny I'm gonna let you have that one.

HT49 Sean that's not a real state.

HT50 Gerard aren't all gay communities vibrant?

HT51 Marjorie RONNY! (0.5) you're still gay?

Table C.7: HTs in Scene 7 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT52 Marjorie wow, that's big news. should we have a Highball?

HT53 Arthur hey, (0.5) we didn't judge you.

Table C.8: HTs in Flashback 2 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT54 Marjorie but its' been a while since you've dated anybody, so
I didn't know if you were still pursuing it.

HT55 Ronny y:up(h). still givin' it a go:.

HT56 Marjorie so you think, that it will be easier to date, without
the support of your family, in a foreign land.

Table C.9: HTs in Scene 8 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT57 J, S, G RONNY, RONNY, RONNY,

HT58 Henry and they do too.

HT59 Marjorie I had to come down here. you said your date's
name was Henry. that's a murderer's name.

HT60 Marjorie it's a murderer's name.

Table C.10: HTs in Flashback 3 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT61	Ronny	once again you're mixing up the words psychopath and architect.
HT62	Ronny	I love you guys. and I love that we spe::nd, so::, much time together.
HT63	Sean	so wear a tighter suit?
HT64	Sean	I'd go with the suit.

Table C.11: HTs in Scene 9 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 2

HT65		(Fatty is shown in the coffin, holding a basketball)
HT66	Jackie	IT'S NOT FAI::R.
HT67	Marjorie	dramatic much? tone it down Annette Bening.
HT68	Marjorie	now Ronny. I know that you're determined to move to Providence, but I have to be honest. (1.0) I believe that you will die there.
HT69	Ronny	who's Annette Bening now. and why are we using her name this way, she's a very nuanced actress.
HT70	Marjorie	please, she's no Sedgwick.

Table C.12: HTs in Scene 10 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT71	Coach Colwell	just a shame Fatty didn't live to see you coach a team all the way to the state title. then again, it would have been impossible for him to live forever.
HT72	Arthur	that was fast, and offensive. unlike your team.
HT73	Gerard	YEhEhs. ye(h)e(h)es, why are we hugging, get away from me.
HT74	Sean	maybe she's calling him any minute now to make it officialer.
HT75	Sean	<mouths>yeah</mouths>

Table C.13: HTs in Scene 11 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT76		(Arthur's phone wrings while he is kneeling in front of the coffin)
HT77	Arthur	no, no, no. a- a perfect time.

Table C.14: HTs in Scene 12 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT78	Sean	nice and tight, right?
HT79	Gerard	you're kidding me, right?

Table C.15: HTs in Scene 13 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT80	Marjorie	oh. (0.8) look who's here. I thought you might be at a more happenin' wake in Providence.
HT81	Ronny	o::h.
HT82	Ronny	I didn't know what it was.
HT83	Ronny	NO::.. that's not a good thing.
HT84	Marjorie	you could go out, we could DVR it.
HT85	Marjorie	no me neither.

Table C.16: HTs in Scene 14 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT86	Arthur	can you put a pin in that father?
HT87	Arthur	I, really wish that Fatty could be here but, (.) he's busy, coaching the team up in heaven now. (1.2) and those, dead kids are lucky to have him.
HT88	Ronny	who me? (0.7) oh no, thank you.
HT89	Arthur	but it's glued to his hands so we can't.

Table C.17: HTs in Scene 15 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 3

HT90	Marjorie	hey, don't, lump me in with D'Antoni.
HT91	Marjorie	Arthur stop being legally unable to drive at night so much.

Table C.18: HTs in Scene 16 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT92	Gerard	that's why you take remedial math.
HT93	Gerard	tha:t's why you take remedial math.

Table C.19: HTs in Flashback 4 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT94	Jackie	I think I'm gonna boot.
HT95	Gerard	you know what dad, I will.
HT96	Sean	I don't think he's talkin' to you, Gerard.

Table C.20: HTs in Scene 17 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 4

HT97	Arthur	decided yet?
HT98	Arthur	I didn't mean that. I mean, it's just something you say like have a nice trip.
HT99	Ronny	WHY::: ARE YOU HE:RE?
HT100	Marjorie	Ronny, don't stay in Boston because you're father is manipulating you. (0.7) but maybe do it because (0.6) I'm sick.
HT101	Marjorie	they don't know yet. they just know that (0.5)
HT102	Marjorie	I'm sick.
HT103	Marjorie	THEY DON'T KNOW YET.
HT104	Arthur	Ronny, stop picking on your mother. (1.5) she's not the bad one here, I am. (1.2) the truth is, the- the real reason I asked you to coach with me, is that Darryl Silver's mother i:s, a lez.
HT105	Ronny	.-=BIAN.
HT106	Arthur	fine. she's bein' a lez.
HT107	Ronny	let me put this in a way that you'll understand. (1.3) FOUL.

Table C.21: HTs in Scene 18 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 5

HT108	Marjorie	no, I promise. this'll make Ronny forgive you and me, he'll see we're not monsters, we're a loving, supportive family. here he is. beat it old man.
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Table C.22: HT in Scene 19 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT109	Marjorie	yeah, hurry up, in here. they're dying.
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Table C.23: HT in Scene 20 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT110	Marjorie	WE MADE YOU A GAY BA::R.
HT111	Marjorie	WE KNOW THAT YOU'RE MOVING to Providence, but for tonight, enjoy Bostons' MEN WHO LOVE MEN.

Table C.24: HTs in Scene 21 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT112 Phillip <sings>HE:::Y!</sings>
 HT113 Ronny I had a hunch.
 HT114 Phillip but I'm not a practising homosexual. (0.3) the church says I can have homosexual desires, I just can't act on them.
 HT115 Phillip it's a struggle, uhuhu.

Table C.25: HTs in Scene 22 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT116 Ken nope.
 HT117 Marjorie well, I took a shot. isn't this fun.

Table C.26: HTs in Scene 23 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT118 Sean lesbian.
 HT119 Sean best I could do, I work at a lot of basketball camps. these are the gays I meet.

Table C.27: HTs in Scene 24 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT120 Arthur hey Ronny, I made some special cocktails. (.) some mantinis, (.) a bamana daiquiri, (1.3) and a manhattan.
 HT121 Arthur I didn't have to change the name on that.

Table C.28: HTs in Scene 25 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT122 Ronny o:h no. did you get another DUI?
 HT123 Ronny yeah, I think so.
 HT124 Jackie I can't really say. (1.2) but recently we attended his wake.
 HT125 Ronny YE:S.

Table C.29: HTs in Scene 26 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT126 Jackie I'M PREGNANT.
 HT127 Jackie sorry, Ronny. he backed me into a corner.
 HT128 Phillip oh is this one of those murder mystery thi:::ngs?
 HT129 Jackie well, fine. It was one time after the Hyde Park game.
 HT130 Sean that was a great game.
 HT131 Sean I would have slept with Fatty tha:t night.

Table C.30: HTs in Scene 27 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT132	Gerard	Fatty's baby? (1.3) that's gonna be a rough delivery.
HT133	Marjorie	(silence) (1.7)
HT134	Marjorie	no she is.
HT135	Marjorie	he's dea:d.
HT136	Jackie	really? (0.9) how do you figure?
HT137	Marjorie	(1.0) yea:::h.
HT138	Phillip	bo:ring. should we just guess who committed the murder?
HT139	Phillip	(points at Sean)

Table C.31: HTs in Scene 28 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT140	Arthur	all right, to everybody raise your glass. (0.5) not you, madonna.
HT141	Arthur	to our first grand child. (0.5) may it be healthy, (.) and able to go to its left.

Table C.32: HTs in Scene 29 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 6

HT142	Jackie	THAT'S RIGHT. playin' for two now.
HT143	Ronny	it's okay. ((0.8) I'm sure I'm not the first gay man whose father used him to try to recruit a basketball player whose mother is a lesbian.
HT144	Arthur	that makes me feel better.
HT145	Marjorie	so when are you leaving for Rhode Island?
HT146	Marjorie	HE SAID TO:RN. CALM DOWN EVERYBODY.
HT147	Ronny	well, (.) on the one hand it'd be a new city and a great opportunity, (1.3) and on the other you guys did throw me a gay bar which was really, (0.5) sweet. (0.8) and awkward, and at times offensive.
HT148	Arthur	you're welcome.

Table C.33: HTs in Scene 30 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

HT149	Marjorie	don't give him that ball, he'll kill himself.
HT150	Marjorie	miss it. (.) miss i:t. (.) MISS IT. MISS IT. MISS IT.
HT151	Marjorie	well that took a turn.
HT152	Ronny	(makes a perfect basketball shot without looking)

- HT153 Ronny OH MY GOD, WHAT THE HELL!
 HT154 Marjorie oh thank go:d. oh, he's not gonna go to that god-forsaken wasteland of a city.

Table C.34: HTs in Scene 31 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

- HT155 Arthur of course you should. (0.3) that way I could spend every day, with the best kid I could ever hope for. (2.0) Darryl Silver.
 HT156 Sean you're gonna let Ronny coach 'cause he hit a couple of garbage shots?
 HT157 Gerard I saw a dog on YouTube hit those shots.
 HT158 Marjorie he's better than all of you. (0.5) you know what he is? (2.0) he's the Closer.
 HT159 Marjorie o::h, Ronny. (1.0) of course you're not, nobody is.

Table C.35: HTs in Scene 32 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Scenes in sequence 7

- HT160 Marjorie good night, Sean. (1.2) you're my favourite.
 HT161 Marjorie good night, Gerard. (1.1) you're my favourite.
 HT162 Marjorie good night, Jackie (1.4), I'm a need that plate back.

Table C.36: HTs in Scene 33 of *The McCarthys*, S01E01

Appendix D. Correlation tables

D1. Correlations intra-turn repeats

Using the Chi-square test function in R (`chisq.test`), the correlation of repeats was calculated and compared to expected values. Effect sizes were calculated using Cramer's *v*. Fisher's exact was calculated as a control measure where R suggested that Chi-squared approximation may be incorrect.

Repeat 1	Repeat 2	Chi square	compared to expectation	N	Cramer's v based on Yates Chi sq	Fisher's exact
Intra1LE	P	2.10076E-06	higher	9	0.09782974	0.0002021
Intra1LE	ME	0.077907441		8		
Intra1LE	MP	7.95374E-21	higher	13	0.1930464	2.60E-10
Intra1LE	Str	5.45412E-18	higher	34	0.1782628	
Intra1LE	Pros	5.25135E-21	higher	56	0.193949	
Intra1LE	Char	1.81484E-20	higher	96	0.1912406	
Intra1LE	FE	8.7677E-05	higher	8	0.0808954	0.001417
Intra1LE	V	3.56619E-08	higher	6	0.1136609	0.0001199
Intra1LE	Phon	0.000442342	higher	19	0.07246134	
Intra1LE	INTER	0.005322332	higher	112		
Intra1LP	ME	0.388797928		0		
Intra1LP	MP	0.606951716		0		
Intra1LP	Str	0.677012842		1		
Intra1LP	Pros	0.002332565	higher	8	0.06278485	0.0076
Intra1LP	Char	0.413690984		9		
Intra1LP	FE	0.00665845	higher	2	0.05596251	0.05165
Intra1LP	V	0.697924788		0		
Intra1LP	Phon	0.696645626		1		
Intra1LP	INTER	0.468415705		17		
IntraME	MP	0.000452807	higher	3	0.07233313	0.01382
IntraME	Str	1.67567E-09	higher	13	0.1242904	4.11E-06
IntraME	Pros	7.57184E-20	higher	27	0.1880736	
IntraME	Char	1.76178E-11	higher	36	0.1386867	
IntraME	FE	4.64165E-10	higher	6	0.1285035	6.51E-05
IntraME	V	0.001476909	higher	2	0.06556758	0.03369
IntraME	Phon	0.956828295		3		
IntraME	INTER	0.036055251	higher	38		
IntraMP	Str	4.29798E-09	higher	7	0.1211105	5.12E-05
IntraMP	Pros	3.87778E-20	higher	15	0.1895637	3.81E-11
IntraMP	Char	0.002903798	higher	11	0.06141307	

IntraMP	FE	9.52603E-08	higher	3	0.1100404	0.002137
IntraMP	V	0.00602746	higher	1	0.05663946	0.1023
IntraMP	Phon	0.003100689	higher	4	0.06099715	0.01859
IntraMP	INTER	0.001857343	higher	18		
IntraStr	Pros	2.2264E-108	higher	85	0.4561175	
IntraStr	Char	3.17642E-09	higher	57	0.1221399	
IntraStr	FE	3.81345E-25	higher	14	0.2136422	3.14E-11
IntraStr	V	9.44752E-09	higher	5	0.1183894	0.0001969
IntraStr	Phon	0.00070194	higher	14	0.06989116	
IntraStr	INTER	0.12746683		71		
IntraPros	Char	5.94166E-21	higher	120	0.1936809	
IntraPros	FE	7.35219E-30	higher	22	0.2340985	2.81E-16
IntraPros	V	0.000382818	higher	5	0.07324945	0.005052
IntraPros	Phon	0.000936442	higher	23	0.06824406	
IntraPros	INTER	5.80766E-05	higher	157		
IntraChar	FE	6.81707E-08	higher	20	0.1112858	
IntraChar	V	2.08942E-06	higher	10	0.09785234	3.00E-05
IntraChar	Phon	0.515815844		26		
IntraChar	INTER	0.169177495		314		
IntraFE	V	9.21693E-68	higher	4	0.2045769	9.95E-06
IntraFE	Phon	0.2050829		0		
IntraFE	INTER	0.601656299		17		
IntraV	Phon	0.424661929		0		
IntraV	INTER	0.656511699		7		
IntraA	Phon	0.542453906		0		
IntraA	INTER	0.957223861		61		
IntraPhon	INTER	0.782414685		4		

Table D.1: Correlations between intra-turn repeats, sorted by repeat 1, then repeat 2, from linguistic (lexical) to non-linguistic (telecinematic)

Glossary	
ILE	Single word lexical exact repeat
ILP	Single word lexical partial repeat
ME	Multi-word exact repeat
MP	Multi-word partial repeat
Str	Structural parallelism
Pros	Prosodic repeat
Char	Character gesture repeat
FE	Facial expression repeat
V	Telecinematic visual repeat
A	Telecinematic auditory repeat
INTER	Any inter-turn repeat
Phon	Phonetic repeat

D2. Correlations inter-turn repeats

Using the Chi-square test function in R (`chisq.test`), the correlation of repeats was calculated and compared to expected values. Effect sizes were calculated using Cramer's *v*. Fisher's exact was calculated as a control measure where R suggested that Chi-squared approximation may be incorrect.

Repeat 1	Repeat 2	Chi square	compared to expectation	N	Cramer's <i>v</i> based on Yates Chi sq	Fisher's exact
Inter1LE	P	0.078582542		8	-0.03627707	
Inter1LE	ME	3.43592E-06	lower	13	-0.09575486	
Inter1LE	MP	0.490347376		20	-0.01422556	
Inter1LE	Str	0.03534511	higher	18	0.04340086	
Inter1LE	Pros	0.286054417		55	0.02200208	
Inter1LE	Char	0.683995925		28	0.008394322	
Inter1LE	FE	0.193400385		23	-0.02682332	
Inter1LE	V	0.140130005		58	-0.03042679	
Inter1LE	A	0.627652449		2	-0.01000335	
Inter1LE	INTRA	0.000153983	higher	206		
Inter1LP	ME	0.94001251		6	0.001552044	
Inter1LP	MP	0.157078906		1	-0.02918228	
Inter1LP	Str	0.166148653		0	-0.02855781	
Inter1LP	Pros	0.313983641		5	-0.02076631	
Inter1LP	Char	0.576925572		3	-0.000822489	
Inter1LP	FE	0.212209514		2	-0.02572875	
Inter1LP	V	0.025623547	lower	4	-0.04603017	
Inter1LP	A	0.507810272		0	-0.01365829	
Inter1LP	INTRA	0.398138159		30		
InterME	MP	0.106789384		5	-0.03326231	
InterME	Str	0.003804177	higher	11	0.05968512	0.008177
InterME	Pros	0.041114775	higher	29	0.04212193	
InterME	Char	0.346103713		14	0.01943143	
InterME	FE	0.080470093		18	0.03605009	
InterME	V	0.80265396		30	0.005154233	
InterME	A	0.406127615		2	0.01713295	
InterME	INTRA	0.916398224		73		
InterMP	Str	0.553789248		4	0.01221132	
InterMP	Pros	0.462519964		15	0.01515256	
InterMP	Char	0.086332163		11	-0.006496624	
InterMP	FE	0.339513133		10	0.01969859	
InterMP	V	0.245374461		22	0.02395808	
InterMP	A	0.388304814		0	-0.01779227	
InterMP	INTRA	0.021503807	higher	56		

InterStr	Pros	4.84326E-05	higher	16	0.08379679	
InterStr	Char	1.69664E-12	higher	16	0.08758455	0.0004508
InterStr	FE	0.245173326		6	0.02396829	
InterStr	V	0.06427501		14	0.03815999	
InterStr	A	0.543632562		0	-0.01252558	
InterStr	INTRA	0.225713326		18		
InterPros	Char	1.87949E-08	higher	34	0.1159637	
InterPros	FE	9.87769E-38	higher	63	0.264798	
InterPros	V	5.48472E-05	higher	59	0.08319632	
InterPros	A	0.667629199		1	-0.008856045	
InterPros	INTRA	0.586550546		98		
InterChar	FE	2.03705E-12	higher	28	0.1450267	
InterChar	V	2.35041E-15	higher	52	0.1633692	
InterChar	A	0.821252546		1	0.02842302	
InterChar	INTRA	0.321712847		56		
InterFE	V	3.44651E-06	higher	42	0.09574175	
InterFE	A	0.906782067		1	0.002415042	
InterFE	INTRA	0.832916136		55		
InterV	A	0.000221596	higher	7	0.07616523	
InterV	INTRA	0.036083802	higher	114		
InterA	INTRA	0.676387548		6		

Table D.2: Correlations between inter-turn repeats, sorted by repeat 1, then repeat 2, from linguistic (lexical) to non-linguistic (telecinematic)

Glossary	
ILE	Single word lexical exact repeat
ILP	Single word lexical partial repeat
ME	Multi-word exact repeat
MP	Multi-word partial repeat
Str	Structural parallelism
Pros	Prosodic repeat
Char	Character gesture repeat
FE	Facial expression repeat
V	Telecinematic visual repeat
A	Telecinematic auditory repeat
INTRA	Any intra-turn repeat

D3. Correlations between inter- and intra-turn repeats

Using the Chi-square test function in R (`chisq.test`), the correlation of repeats was calculated and compared to expected values. Effect sizes were calculated using Cramer's *v*. Fisher's exact was calculated as a

control measure where R suggested that Chi-squared approximation may be incorrect.

Repeat 1	Repeat 2	Chi square	compared to expectation	N	Cramer's v based on Yates Chi sq	Fisher's exact
inter1LE	intra 1LE	1.57194E-08	higher	64	0.1165984	
inter1LE	intra 1LP	0.261684792		8		
inter1LE	intraME	0.274508215		8		
inter1LE	intraMP	0.006308101	higher	9	0.05633086	1
inter1LE	intraStr	0.900272876		24		
inter1LE	intraPros	0.000245421	higher	69	0.07562816	
inter1LE	intraChar	0.01059881	higher	133	0.05270793	
inter1LE	intraFE	0.703563137		5		
inter1LE	intraV	0.622558888		3		
inter1LE	intraA	0.732006162		1		
inter1LE	intraPhon	0.790375951		24		
interMP	intra 1LE	0.014269328	higher	16	0.05053737	
interMP	intra 1LP	0.696645626		1		
interMP	intraME	0.001942697	higher	8	0.06391091	0.007371
interMP	intraMP	3.0955E-12	higher	8	0.143818	3.74E-06
interMP	intraStr	0.210839814		9		
interMP	intraPros	0.038235359	higher	19	0.04273966	
interMP	intraChar	0.015386516	higher	40	0.04997516	
interMP	intraFE	0.003274744	higher	5	0.06064905	0.0152
interMP	intraV	0.598078794		1		
interMP	intraA	0.542453906		0		
interMP	intraPhon	0.014269328	higher	16	0.02745793	
interV	intra1LE	0.183071981		9		
interV	intra1LP	0.832025617		28		
interV	intraME	0.898854604		9		
interV	intraMP	0.485013041		2		
interV	intraStr	0.806555018		19		
interV	intraPros	0.06965325		27		
interV	intraChar	0.489008644		81		
interV	intraFE	0.804951795		4		
interV	intraV	0.072902691		4		
interV	intraA	0.266985686		0		
interV	intraPhon	0.668191115		16		
intra1LE	inter1LE	1.57194E-08	higher	64	0.1165984	
intra1LE	inter1LP	0.252009664		8		
intra1LE	interME	0.4204016		12		
intra1LE	interMP	0.014269328	higher	16	0.05053737	
intra1LE	interStr	0.426949157		3		
intra1LE	interPros	0.404958705		16		
intra1LE	interChar	0.06225672		16		
intra1LE	interFE	0.261336529		8		

intra1LE	interV	0.183071981		9		
intra1LE	interA	0.278429967		0		
intraMP	inter1LE	0.006308101	higher	9	0.05633086	0.01146
intraMP	inter1LP	0.416615971		0		
intraMP	interME	0.308223682		3		
intraMP	interMP	3.0955E-12	higher	8	0.143818	3.74E-06
intraMP	interStr	0.518912198		1		
intraMP	interPros	0.590561977		3		
intraMP	interChar	0.255889047		0		
intraMP	interFE	0.760510531		1		
intraMP	interV	0.485013041		2		
intraMP	interA	0.721630137		0		
intraPros	inter1LE	0.000245421	higher	69	0.07562816	
intraPros	inter1LP	0.812609662		8		
intraPros	interME	0.977887388		20		
intraPros	interMP	0.038235359	higher	19	0.04273966	
intraPros	interStr	0.913879503		6		
intraPros	interPros	1.801E-06	higher	48	0.09847071	
intraPros	interChar	0.25399059		18		
intraPros	interFE	0.227623094		20		
intraPros	interV	0.06965325		27		
intraPros	interA	0.200540093		0		
inter1LE	Intra1LE	1.57194E-08	higher	64	0.1165984	
inter1LP	intra1LP	2.20975E-08	higher	6	0.1153858	0.0001681
interME	intraME	0.278243062		7	0.02236212	0.3257
interMP	intraMP	3.0955E-12	higher	8	0.143818	3.74E-06
interStr	intraStr	0.589347887		4	0.01113247	0.548
interPros	intraPros	1.801E-06	higher	48	0.09847071	9.61E-06
interChar	intraChar	0.004281638	higher	47	0.05891526	0.005394
interFE	intraFE	0.000131413	higher	7	0.07886211	0.00219
interV	intraV	0.072902691		4	0.03698796	0.09041
interA	intraA	1.80387E-84	higher	4	0.4016445	2.73E-08

Table D.3: Correlations between inter-turn and intra-turn repeats, sorted by repeat 1, then repeat 2, from Inter-turn to intra-turn and from linguistic (lexical) to non-linguistic (telecinematic)

Glossary	
1LE	Single word lexical exact repeat
1LP	Single word lexical partial repeat
ME	Multi-word exact repeat
MP	Multi-word partial repeat
Str	Structural parallelism
Pros	Prosodic repeat
Char	Character gesture repeat
FE	Facial expression repeat
V	Telecinematic visual repeat
A	Telecinematic auditory repeat

Humour and repetition are in an interesting relationship. Humour depends on that moment when an unexpected incongruous thought surprises us – repetition depends on presenting again what has already been brought forward. Yet jokes often have repetitive structures and catchphrases occur again and again. The apparent tension between the new and the repeated are nowhere better explored than in the American sitcom with a laugh track, a genre of television comedy that is both full of humour and full of repetition. Although both elements are integral to this type of Telecinematic Discourse, the role repetition plays for humour in sitcoms has not previously been fully explored.

In this book, a random sample of such US sitcom episodes with a laugh track – the first and second episodes of *Anger Management*, *Better with you*, *The McCarthys*, *Retired at 35*, *Romantically Challenged*, *See Dad Run*, *Sullivan & Son* and *Undateable* – are explored for the repetitive patterns their humour follows. From the microscopic analysis of the individual word that appears twice, to the composition of individual instances of humour, to scenes and to the structure of the narrative of the entire episode, this study discusses repetitive phenomena on different levels of language, taking into account the multimodal and layered context of television viewing as a communicative setting, and in so doing explores the four C's of sitcom humour: Constitutive, Cohesive, Constructional and Communicative repetition. These functions of repetition are approached based on an incongruity-resolution approach to sitcom humour and informed by the detailed discourse analytic study and discussion of many examples from the data.

Thomas C. Messerli is a researcher in linguistics and digital humanities based at the University of Basel. He has published on digital social reading and evaluation and on linguistic pragmatic aspects of humour, telecinematic discourse, subtitling, and computer-mediated communication.

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