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Stand up comedy: Using verbal communication and gestures to express humor in relationship jokes
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Abstract

This paper assesses verbal and non-verbal communication instances presented in stand up comedy routines on jokes about relationships. The combination of verbal and non-verbal communication features are common components of many human interactions. In stand up comedy, an audience generates responses that include prosodic features such as smiling, rolling of the eyes, applause, etc. These features have been studied in many linguistic situations and they include comedy settings with both staged and spontaneous humor. Researchers, such as Raskin (1985), introduced Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour and later with Salvatore Attardo, developed a theory to further study these humorous contexts with the General Theory of Verbal Humor (1991). Non-verbal humor is presented as hand gestures and head movements that aid stand up comedy performances. Many researchers have studied the relation of gestures and pitch in humor. In this article, readers will encounter descriptions of how verbal and non-verbal communication interconnect in the production of humorous utterances in stand up comedy. All of these diverse analyses respond to the question: Are verbal and non-verbal communication connected with humorous responses in jokes about relationships?

Keywords: stand up comedy, prosody, gestures, relationships
Introduction

Verbal and non-verbal communication features are often components of many personal interactions. Communicating with others may take on many forms and may use various tools to reach a purpose. In this exploratory work, stand up comedy routines are researched as linguistic data for the association of prosodic features and non-verbal features. During a stand up comedy routine, audience members may generate different responses to a comedian’s use of prosodic features such as a shift in intonation or stress during a performance and this creates a humorous situation. Researchers such as Gumperz writes in Discourse strategies: Studies in Interactional Linguistics (1982):

“Prosody here includes: (a) intonation, i.e. pitch levels on individual syllables and their combination into contours; (b) changes in loudness; (c) stress, a perceptual feature generally comprising variations in pitch, loudness, and duration; (d) other variations in vowel length; (e) phrasing, including utterance chunking by pausing, accelerations and decelerations within and across utterance chunks; and (f) overall shifts in speech register.” (p.100)

In conversations, a speaker implements prosodic features that take on a role to guide the hearer(s) to learn about their intentions, ideas and, expectations. The use of intonation may shift the understanding of the hearer(s) from one idea to another. Gumperz also states that “Knowledge of the conversational activity entails expectations about possible goals or outcomes for the interaction… about relevant aspects of interpersonal relations” (1982, p.100) Typically, prosody may be implemented to emphasize the wording, the meaning, or a change in context within a conversation.
The use of prosodic features such as intonation, stress, and phrasing provides tools to express humor during interactions. These prosodic features transmit semantic information that facilitates the sharing of ideas. Audiences present for stand up comedy routines begin to make inferences and create expectations depending on cultural backgrounds, and how the audience can relate to situations. The following section will explain the features that will be considered for this exploratory work. Also, the section addresses the use of paralanguage as a vital aspect in stand up comedy routines.

**Prosodic features and non-verbal features**

Communication involves paralanguage, which indicates connections considered implicit in discourse. Gumperz (1982) mentions that semantic signaling invokes value through prosodic cues, by using features and tying them to a developing theme. (p.104) The value is dependent on discourse context and it informs the audience of the changes in topics and intents with those. Pitch contours and intonation, sentence stress by loudness or duration, and paralinguistic pitch register are some of the examples of prosody studied in discourse. (1982, p.107) These features interact with non-verbal communication to convey the developing theme mentioned previously.

In different interactions, “All turn taking transitions occur at or slightly after clause boundaries; apart from the rhetorical pausing” (1982, p.106). Throughout interpersonal interactions, the subtle act of signaling shifts or transitions is a big part of the way information is perceived by others. These transitions use inferential processes and prosody to signal connections and intentions in conversation. Intentions are altered when speech activity shifts and addresses different speech styles to communicate different ideas. This is used in stand up comedy, in which the audience does not participate in the turn taking rule.
Researchers find paralanguage to be a useful tool in stand up comedy. Ladd (1978) writes in “The Structure of Intonational Meaning” that the American pitch level system is capable of distinguishing literally hundreds of contrasting contours (p.101). This feature encourages research on humor in staged comedy. It also supports the incongruity trope in humor that will be addressed later in this text.

According to Christina Kubicek’s research in “Using Humor To Negate the Effects of Stress”, “One of the first documented instances of a physician associating humor with well-being was in 1260 A.D., by the father of French surgery, Henri de Moundeville, who was known to tell jokes to his patients in recovery rooms to facilitate healing” (2019). Later, Kubicek writes that people “may use humor to protect themselves by avoiding meaningful conversations so their true selves are not exposed, thus mitigating the threat of rejection or judgment” or “may use humor to hide their thoughts and emotions from others, as it may be easier for them to be funny rather than open and honest with their true thoughts and feelings” (2019, p.23). These statements provide a psychological insight for people implementing humor in their daily interactions. In the case of stand up comedy, many comedians could subvert this discourse taking into consideration that many of them use the stage to intentionally address situations from their past or from present situations that, to them, may need more exposure. The psychological bounds related to non-verbal communication in stand up routines may be a part of the artistic persona as well as they may be natural expressions of the comedian’s personality.

Gestures are important to understand non-verbal features within stand up comedy routines. Buján (2019, p.3) identified gestures pertinent in humorous exchanges and organized them in the following table:
These are specific gestures retrieved from interactions where laughter from the audience was the determiner for the presence of humour. The humour types column shares a wide variety of themes where non-verbal communication is essential to convey a specific message. Facial gestures along with head movements could garner numerous expressions, but to understand their composition, head movement was detailed in the following image:
Buján writes that these head movements involve specific rotations: axis Y, axis Z, axis X (2019, p.6). This research describes communication and its role between gestures and speech. To specify the term gestures, they are described as actions performed with the face muscles, and these include expressions such as smiling, frowning, squinting, raised eyebrows, among others. Buján also states that facial expressions punctuate questions, emphasis, intonational accents, pauses; but also refer to an emotion that is not the current emotion the comedian is experiencing, such as in a joke using an anecdote (2019, p.7). Facial gestures include eyebrow raising, which was researched by Tabacura and Lemmens (2014) in “Raised eyebrows as gestural triggers in humour: The case of sarcasm and hyper-understanding”, where the researchers state that raised eyebrows are a type of discourse gesture and that it marks humorous interpretations and the switch (p. 15). This switch incorporates the incongruity to achieve humor that will be addressed later in Linguistic Humor Theories.

Tabacura and Lemmens (2014), Buján (2019) and Wagner et al. (2014) indicate that head movements can have semantic, discourse, and communicative functions. Head shakes and head turns appear in stand up comedy, along with nods and tilts. Head shakes involve repeated sweeps but head turns involve a single movement. There, the existence of implicit notions of negation in head shakes accompany expressions of intensification (Kendon, 2002, p. 151). Also, related to the head shakes is the alignment with prosody. Head nods and head tilts were gestures found in humorous utterances and enable the humorous interpretation thus proving this alignment with prosodic features.

**Linguistic Humor Theories**

Linguistics perceives humor as a product of human communication. One aspect in the study of language is Pragmatics, which is widely concerned with meaning in context. As it states,
the cooperative principle and the politeness principle are involved. Attardo (2017) mentions the idea of non-bona-fide communication to characterize non-cooperative exchanges exemplified in staged comedy communicating with audience members.

Chusni Hadiati (2018) states that “Humor is context-bound and culture provides the most immense context”. Where backgrounds prove to have an effect on how humorous a joke in a stand-up comedy performance may result, Hadiati states that “In a simple way, humor is defined as anything that makes people laugh or is amusing, or the capacity to recognize what is funny about a situation or person. Anything that invites laugh can be considered as humor” (2018, p.3). Reactions such as laughter are not the main source of proof in humorous utterances, but it is a strong asset in the list of reactions presented in moments of humor.

While studying comedy, scholars divide humor into two general types: high comedy and low comedy. “High comedy provides a critique, often quite stinging of human weakness and customs, social structure, and power. It is realized into the following but not limited to satire and irony; and dark comedy. Dark comedy is usually defined as humor relating to subject normally treated very serious or somber. Low comedy does not imply any social critique and is based on a wide range of topics, such as: romantic comedy (battle of the sexes, sexual innuendo), sitcom (stupidity/naive), slapstick (physical humor, delight in misfortune of others and physical incongruity).” (p.3) Stand up comedy implements social criticism, struggles that all humans may have with power, ideologies, and even everyday life situations that we collectively share. Stand up comedy is then considered high comedy. Using current events and collective situations, expressing thoughts in a stage, inevitably employs verbal and non-verbal communication to share these.
Chusni Hadiati also mentions the different humor theories, such as Relief/Release theory, commonly associated with Freud’s work in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1960). The superiority theory implies that laughter occurs as a reaction of to a feeling of ‘sudden glory’. Whereas, there is also the incongruity theory, which states that humor arises from a certain discrepancy in a situation, where someone is “to expect a certain behavior, statement, chain of events and then is surprised and humor is produced by the misperception or unrecognized meaning” (p.4). As mentioned by Raskin (1985), the verbal part of the joke is presented with an opposition that overlaps within the context in the joke. This addresses the incongruity in the situation.

Raskin introduces the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour and is author of the book “Semantic Mechanisms of Humor”, where he describes incongruity in theories of humor (1985, p.30). He writes on the humor act and the kinds of laughter. Identifying humor as verbal communication, only focusing on verbal humor in practice, he made his proposals around the end of 1970s when formal semantics reached its highest cognitive breakthrough (1985, p.31). This Script-based Semantic Theory explains a text that can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text where two scripts somehow overlap and become partly or fully compatible. He adds the following postulate about joke-telling, where four different situations may occur: the speaker makes the joke intentionally or unintentionally, and/or whether the hearer expects or does not expect the joke. In stand up comedy, the hearer expects the joke but does not necessarily know what tools of prosody the speaker may present.

The hearer of the joke could understand it as a default "bona-fide” way, which follows the Gricean pragmatics concept of rational conversational rules in the Cooperative Principle. If the receiver acknowledges the joke, the Cooperative Principle is activated. Next, understanding
the relationship between the two scripts overlapping or being opposites in this compatibility process, ensures that some jokes are usual antonymous oppositions but they may also be local antonyms. These are linguistic entities, whose meanings are opposite only within a particular discourse and solely for the purpose of that discourse. These scripts evoke a “real” and an “unreal” situation, as in “the 1) actual and non-actual, non-existing situation, 2) expected and abnormal, unexpected states of affairs, 3) possible, plausible and impossible, less plausible situation” (1985, p.32) These evoke binaries already previously established in cultural backgrounds. Bertrand & Priego-Valverde explain in “Does prosody play a specific role in conversational humor?” that the subjects have to be on the same wavelength to make humor work (2011, p.1). Audiences recall information that is not explicitly shared by the stand up comedian and engage in a passive manner.

Another humor theory is the General Theory of Verbal Humor, in which Raskin and Attardo (1991), use a hierarchy of knowledge resources that goes as follows:

1. Language (LA): “It includes all the choices at the phonetic, phonologic, morphophonemic, morphologic, lexic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels of language structure that the speaker is still free to make, given that everything else in the joke is already given and cannot be tinkered with” (p. 298)

2. Narrative strategy (NS): “...whether the text of the joke is set up as expository, as a riddle, as a question-and-answer sequence, and so on” (p. 300) This can also include expanded dialogue, triple sequence, newspaper advertisement applied, among others.

3. Target (TA): Attardo and Raskin explain that it is the personalized object of the joke, the individual or group.
4. Situation (SI): consists of the constituents of the joke, participants besides the target, activities, objects, etc. Logical mechanism (LG): this element is understood as a quotidian sense of rationality, manifesting a “false logic” by figure-ground reversal, the use of false analogy, etc.

5. Script opposition (SO): “This is the only level of Raskin’s SSTH incorporated into the GTVH model.”

Later on, Krikmann writes, in Contemporary Linguistic Theories of Humor (2006), about various types of theories related to the perception of humor. There exist theories of incongruity, or inconsistency, or contradiction, or bisociation; theories of superiority, or disparagement, or criticism, or hostility that accentuate the (negative) attitude of the producer and/or user of humour towards its target and the often alleged aggressive character of laughter; and theories of release, or relief, or relaxation, also known as psychoanalytic (p. 26-27). Previously mentioned is Buján’s (2019) table number 2, which includes a column on humour types that indicate the study on versatile assessments of the theories on by Krikmann. Krikmann later explains “many contemporary researchers believe that humour in its totality is too huge and multiform a phenomenon to be incorporated into a single integrated theory” (p. 34). This implies that using single theories separately for the analysis of humor has boundaries because of the immense multifaceted form of the subject. Multiple platforms become home to humoristic expressions therefore including the importance of the analysis of gestures in performances.

**Methodology**

The samples include stand up comedy performances available in the Netflix streaming service. The choice of the stand up comedians is based on their use of non-verbal communication
and verbal communication on stage to convey humor. The criterion of audience laughter according to Table 28 from Attardo, et al (2013, p. 1), will be taken into consideration to link the two concepts — gestures and verbal jokes — as these interact to obtain a response from the audience for a specific topic: relationships. These examples of jokes were chosen according to the level of the audience’s laughter. The reaction that the joke evokes and the topics are the main reason the routines were chosen for this pilot investigation. This is not an instrumental analysis for intonational utterances, but informal observations based on the researcher's perception. On the other hand, observations of gestures are based of comparative analysis of the comedian's initial position and the changes aligned with the audience reaction. For future research, identifying an instrument to analyze the intonational variations related to jokes about relationships in stand up comedy routines would be ideal. The comedians chosen for this research are Taylor Tomlinson, Ali Wong, and Iliza Shlesinger. These three female comedians have several jokes pertaining topics on relationships such as mistakes made during the dating process, interactions with a long-term partner, or day to day banter, and differences in relationships. With each joke about relationships, there follows an explanation on the use of gestures coupled with intonation and pitch changes, and phrasing.

**Gestures in Humor**

In “A study of gestural feedback expressions” by Allwood and Cerrato, audiences engage in feedback gestures such as nodding, jerking, smiling, laughing, eyebrow raising, and eyebrow frowning. (2003, p. 4) With these, researchers identify forms of non-verbal communication as criteria to understand humor that occurs during staged comedy.

Taylor Tomlinson has made an appearance in the comedy show “Conan”, she was one of the top ten finalists on NBC’s “The Last Comic Standing”, and co-hosted “The Self-Helpless”
podcast (Escandón, 2019). In Taylor Tomlinson’s most recent work, the Netflix Original Standup: Quarter-life Crisis (2020), there are a number of relationship jokes that can be used to study the relationship between specific humor types, facial gestures, and head movements. This joke was built up with the mention of the lack of trust people bestow upon people in their 20s and their lack of good judgment to make important decisions such as the choosing of a partner according to their previous experiences, which are implicitly disregarded despite the outcomes. The comedian says:

You have no intuition, no instincts. You can’t make decisions, only mistakes. That’s why you’re thin in your 20s. You don’t have a gut to listen to yet. There’s no mystic bad feeling under your ribs going, ‘Hey, maybe don’t date a DJ… again.’

Facial gestures: raised eyebrows --- frowning

Head movements: retraction coupled with shake --- protrusion

She raises her eyebrows while uttering the word “no”, which is repeated several times, and the negations as well, creating an emphasis for the meaning of the joke. The shake of the head presents the physical emphasis of the negation in the joke and coupled with the retraction
movement, making the object of discussion repellant. When she utters the lines about the mystic ribs, right at the beginning, she protrudes her head to invoke an anecdotal voice in the act. When she says the word again, she protrudes her head to make emphasis in the gravity of the detail in the joke because she lowers the pitch in her voice.

Later, she presents a joke about the life changes she made that she deems important before turning 30, and she expressed:

I’ve done so much work on myself for the last five years. I quit dating losers. That took a minute… Thank you. There’s no rehab for that, only sponsors.

Facial gestures: raised eyebrows --- blank face

Head movements: nod --- retraction

Taylor Tomlinson jokes about previously having difficulties dating people, whom she considers “losers”. This is following the previous example by her. When she utters the next line, she tilts her head signaling agreement with the comment she made. And, when she ends the joke, she retracts her head and presents a blank face where the lack of expression creates an
incongruity and it evokes humor and a reaction of the audience in the form of laughter. This is accompanied with her pitch lowering to deliver the punchline.

Attardo writes, in Humor in Language (2017), that language is the medium of much humor. Attardo also explains verbal humor is comprised of puns, ambiguity-based humor, or humor that is based on repetition of parts of the signifier (p.2). Much like stated by Putu Wijana from Gadjah Mada University, who writes in “Stand Up Comedy: Language Play and Its Functions (Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach)”, when stand up comedians perform, they are “showing their high capability in playing linguistic elements of various hierarchical levels” (2016, p.100). Linguistically, stand up comedy performances are rich and creative spaces to find a variety of prosodic features. Gestures also aid to convey the semantic meanings within stand up routines.

Focusing on auditory measures, we can observe prosodic features in stand up comedy performances. Some of the prosodic features used to mark speech include higher pitch, louder volume, and the presence of pauses. In Prosodic and Multimodal Markers of Humor, by Gironzetti, a change of intonation indicates an incongruous shift in script (2017, p.401). Raskin indicates a shift is achieved by the use of prosody. An example of this is when the researcher found that “Non-parametric statistical analysis of the data showed that punch lines were delivered with a significantly lower pitch than the setup” (p. 402). Gironzetti presents a contrast with Raskin’s previous research, and it could also be linked with other factors such as gender, age, and cultural background. The pitch variation in the punchline is one of the more common occurrences in humor. She also found Wennerstrom’s 2001 proposal regarding the relationship between structural components of narrative and prosodic features. This was concluded after instrumentally analyzing a set of 10 video recordings of two participants performing two jokes
each, recalled from memory using a KayPENTAX Computerized Speech Laboratory (CSL) Model 43006 by Pickering et al. (2009). The researchers concluded “their delivery is characterized by the typical prosodic features of the end of a paratone: lower volume and lower pitch” (2017, p. 402).

Ali Wong is another stand up comedian who has two comedy specials on Netflix, “Ali Wong: Baby Cobra” (2016), and Ali Wong: Hard Knock Wife (2018). She majored in Asian-American studies at U.C.L.A., and was also a writer for the sitcom “Fresh Off the Boat” (Zinoman, 2018). An example for the indication of incongruous shift in the script is Ali Wong’s performance in “Baby Cobra” that goes as follows:

You wanna be a grown-ass woman, stop dating skaters. Stop dating skaters unless you wanna wake up on a mattress in the kitchen.

Facial gestures: blank face --- raised eyebrows

Head movements: tilt to the left
The comedian Ali Wong expresses her suggestion on dating. She states that she does not approve of dating skaters and she continues to change the intonation in order to address the severity of the joke. Her pitch lowers and her words are uttered slightly slower reflecting Gironzetti’s (2017) idea to evoke the impact of the punchline. When she commences her advice driven joke, she tilts her head to the left and leaves it there. The pitch is coupled with the head movement, making it an indicator for the incongruity. Then, the combination of raised eyebrows with the previous tilting of the head creates the illusion or maybe the clarification that the joke is an anecdote.

Another example from Ali Wong’s stand up comedy special is the following:

Him and I had been dating for four years and I—I just had this sneaking suspicion that he was gonna propose… because… I had been pressuring him to do it. You know I had this wacky women’s intuition.

Facial gestures: eyebrow raise --- blank face

Head movements: fragmentated nod
To emphasize the amount of years, Ali Wong incorporates the facial gesture of the eyebrow raising. The phrasing is very noticeable here for the interpretation of humor. Elongating the joke along with a blank face creates the moment of incongruity that Raskin (1985) states in his work. She also follows Gironzetti’s (2017) idea of the pitch being lower than the set up.

Another possible marker for the presence of humor in conversation was the "laughing voice" or "smiling voice" found in “Happy talk: Perceptual and acoustic affects of smiling on speech” (Tartter, 1980). This is described as widening of the mouth opening, shortening of the vocal tract, and enlarging of vocal tract opening (Shor, 1978). In “Multimodality in conversational humor”, researchers Attardo, Pickering, Lomotey, and Menjo identified a corpus of conversational data that included humor, and stated that the only markers noticeable were smiling and laughter. (Attardo, et al., 2013, p. X) These levels of smiling are identified and explained in the following table by Attardo et al (p.40).

The importance of this table rest on the idea that visual impact can ignite a response for humorous situations. In Comic Cassettes For Language Classes, Gerald Fleming (1968) writes that these can influence how we interpret a joke or simply something that may be humorous. “It is reality that evokes speech.” Explaining pieces of media such as stand up comedy, special works as media used to be “guided inescapably towards a high degree of acuity of perception, observation and analysis (i.e. interpretation) of content of such visual modern-language teaching media” (1968, p.1).

Jodłowiec describes secondary speech situations as “acts in which the speaker reports to the hearer on somebody’s linguistic behaviour. By definition then, two sets of speakers and hearers are involved: on one hand, the joke teller and his audience and on the other, the characters in the joke” (1991, p. 244) When focusing on how a joke is delivered, we identify two
speech situations in stand-up comedy routines. The first is the one between comedians and their audiences. This one is considered the “context of the joke” and researchers use the term C1. The second one is the speech situation found in the joking stories of the stand-up comedians considered the “context in the joke”, where the term used is C2. (p. 244) This is the context known within the narrative that the performer is building. This set-up tends to provide a world within the story to make the narrative relatable or to Adetunji’s "The interactional context of humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy" (2013), these characters may be real or imaginary. When they are used, real characters are representative of individuals or social groups in the wider society. Stand-up comedians do use referring expressions (real or pseudo names) to denote or connote such individuals or social groups.” (2013, p.45) The characters are divided by changes in prosodic features such as tone and stress. The use of accents may also create a shift in the script and indicate to the audience that the standup performer is presenting a different context, the C2. Shared cultural knowledge dictates if the audience can relate and understand the C2 in the act. In the contexts, C1 highlights a common knowledge or shared beliefs by both comedians and audiences. Whereas, C2 keeps changing as much as stand-up comedians present their audiences with different and multiple joking sequences in a routine (2013, p.44).

In “The function of face gestures and head movements in spontaneous humorous communication”, by Buján, the researcher focuses on different “facial displays, focused on raised eyebrows and smile/laughter, followed by a section on head movements, with special emphasis on tilts, nods, shakes, and turns” (2019, p.2). The previous gestures in humorous utterances were identified by the author going through joke set up. When Taylor Tomlinson explains that young brides try to make the best out of the walk down the aisle, that at the least she expects the groom to be a bit emotional. She later reimagines what she thinks would happen
if the groom at her own wedding would not show some difficulty to restrain tears and excitement.


Babe, come here. We’re just gonna… Just – I miss him! [giggles] Sidebar. So much fun.

You need to get your shit together. I showed up. I have a spray tan. I’m wearing flavored underwear for you. Yeah, pork roast panties, just like your mom used to make, which is weird. That’s a weird request, but I did it. Now, we’re going to go back – Don’t look at them. Look at me. I’m your future. You focus up buddy.

Oh, don’t start crying now. It’s too late and too early. You save that up ‘cause we’re going to go back out there and we’re gonna get it right this time, aren’t we?

Facial gestures: raised eyebrows, smile, frowning

Head movements: upstroke, turn and nod, protrusion, nod at the end

The gesture of raising her eyebrows and performing an upstroke is similar to the same gesture parents use when their children misbehave in public and they are about to be punished.

That is the energy this combination of gesture and head movement tries to convey, in order to set
up the rest of the combinations. Pitch change is associated with head movements in the routine. When Taylor Tomlinson turns and nods, she exemplifies the action of addressing others before the following non-bona-fide mirroring skit.

The last example pertaining this exploratory works is stand up comedian Iliza Shlesinger who has five comedy specials streaming on Netflix: War Paint, Freezing Hot, Confirmed Kills, Elder Millenial, and Unveiled. She also recently released The Iliza Shlesinger Sketch Show on Netflix as well, and she was the first woman to win NBC’s Last Comic Standing in 2008 (Porter, 2019). In her special, Freezing Hot (2015), she mocks the idea of dating in your 20s as opposed to the attempts you need to endure during your 30s.

Went on a date recently. Uh… I made a real effort in my 30s. I’m 31. Made a real effort to try to date normal guys. ‘Cause when you’re in your 20s, you can date whoever you want. You’ll live forever, you’re hot, you’re in your 20s. Right? ‘You wanna go out? We’re both carbon-based. Let’s do it.’

Facial gestures: frowning

Head movements: upstroke, downstroke
Iliza Shlesinger changes her pitch by lowering it when entering the context within the joke, mocking the idea that dating in your 20s does not require a large amount of similarities in order for the dating process to take place. The head is a key movement to identify the non-bona-fide interaction in the joke performance. This also comes with a pitch variation, where the lowering indicates the shift change to express the joke with a tone mocking a younger person.

One last example from Iliza Shlesinger in her comedy special is when she talks about the inherent expectation of women not drinking more than men on a first date.

So we went to a bar, and we’re sitting there, and we sit down and he ordered on drink… the whole night. Here’s my problem with that. Um… It was a Friday night, and I’m a lady. I want to party but I’m a lady. So if you’ll only have one drink, that means I’m only going to have one drink. And if I only have one drink, how the hell am I supposed to want to touch you later?

Facial gestures: smile, eyebrow raise, blank face

Head movements: protrusion, upstroke, tilt
During the joke, she includes a pause in the phrasing as to signaling a reason to the set up of the narrative joke. When she utters, “Here’s my problem with that. Um…”, she successfully conveys a humoristic pause with a smile and the protrusion of the head. Not only does she use the head movements but she also accompanies them, as well as the previous examples, with pitch lowering. I propose that head movement has a connection to the pitch variation. After that, Iliza raises her eyebrows and models an upstroke in order to maintain the audience in the implications of the drinking. At the end, she tilts her head and presents a blank face to finish explaining the intimate results that are expected of a date.

Conclusions

This study contributes to language and linguistic topics of research in comedy and humor studies. My analysis is based on Gumperz’s (1982) description of the prosodic features of (a) intonation and (e) phrasing, including utterance chunking by pausing, and Buján’s (2019) table n°2's Controlled vocabulary for coding humour types, facial gestures, and head movements. The combination of these prosodic features along with non-verbal communication features such as head movements and facial gestures come together to express humor in jokes about relationships. These elicit the understanding in this type of joke. All the jokes that were chosen had a common reaction from the audience: laughter. This is thanks to Attardo’s (2017) Levels of Smiling table and Hadiati’s (2019) idea that laughter is a sign of existing humor. The information conveyed in jokes about relationships can vary, but as far as the dating topic goes, there is seemingly a correlation of non-verbal communication with the phrasing and pitch change.

After researching different comedians, the samples chosen were that of women. This implies that gender has an affiliation to this topic. The three female comedians age range is from mid 20s to mid 30s at the moment of their performance. Taylor Tomlinson, Ali Wong and Iliza
Shlesinger all address the dating pool related to that age group in our post-modern era. The gestures featured by these comedians could also be gender specific. These women included these in their performance for the non-bona-fide interaction to take place and convey humor through their routine.

For future studies, a formal approach to the variation in intonation would be of great use. To meticulously calculate the phonetic differences, aside from accents, could aid in determining a specific use of pitch for jokes of this topic. Advancements in technology can aid in our research of performative humor. It would also provide more information to sample more comedians who perform jokes about situations in relationships and to address the incongruity that could also arise from using an unexpected pitch change.
Bibliography


