

“LIFE IS SHORT, TALK FAST!”
Verbal humour in Gilmore Girls

Bachelor's thesis
Iina Halttunen

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Languages
English
January 2016

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Iina Halttunen	
Työn nimi – Title ”Life is short, talk fast!”: Verbal humour in <i>Gilmore Girls</i>	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level kandidaatintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Tammikuu 2016	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 27
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p><i>Gilmoren tytöt</i> on amerikkalainen televisiosarja, joka seuraa 32-vuotiaan äidin ja 16-vuotiaan tyttären elämää fiktiivisessä Stars Hollow’n pikkukaupungissa Connecticutissa seitsemän vuoden ajan. Sarja käsittelee television draamakomedioille tyypilliseen tapaan elämän pieniä ja suuria käännteitä rakkaudesta koulumaailmaan ja onnesta pettymyksiin. <i>Gilmoren tytöt</i> tunnetaan vahvojen naishahmojensa ja feministisyytensä lisäksi myös eläväisestä, terävästä dialogistaan.</p> <p>Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten <i>Gilmoren tyttöjen</i> verbaalinen huumori rakentuu. Aineistoni keskittyy sarjan neljään ensimmäiseen tuotantokauteen, joita yleisesti pidetään dialogiltaan ja huumoriltaan raikkaimpina. Kultakin kaudelta valittiin vapaasti aineistoon yksi jakso. Dialogin huumori jaoteltiin kategorioihin, ja näistä suurimmat ovat ironia, populaarikulttuuriviittaukset ja listaaminen. <i>Gilmoren tyttöjen</i> huumoria käsitellään tutkielmassa juuri näiden kolmen kategorian pohjalta. Huumoria tarkastellaan kategoriakohtaisesti myös liioittelun ja lingvisti H.P. Gricen toimivan kommunikaation periaatteiden perspektiivistä.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoituksena on kertoa, millainen rooli huumorilla ja varsinkin sarjan tunnetuksi tehneillä populaarikulttuuriviittauksilla on <i>Gilmoren tytöissä</i>. Sarjaa on tehty seitsemän tuotantokautta, joten neljän jakson aineisto on varsin suppea. Neljästä jaksosta on kuitenkin jo helppo huomata sarjalle ja sen päähenkilöille tyypillisiä huumorin piirteitä. Tulokset osoittavat, että <i>Gilmoren tyttöjen</i> huumori on taitavasti punottu verkko, jossa hyödynnetään huumorin eri lajeja yhdessä. Näin tavoitetaan mahdollisimman laaja yleisö ja ylitetään huumorin subjektiivisuuden luomia esteitä.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords: Gilmore Girls, verbal humour, H.P. Grice, popular culture references	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository: JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
2 HOW TO BE FUNNY	4
2.1 Humour research	4
2.2 Humour on television.....	6
2.2.1 Situational comedy.....	6
2.2.2 Comedy drama	7
2.3 Understanding conversation.....	9
3 THE WORLD AND HUMOUR OF GILMORE GIRLS.....	10
3.1 Aim and research questions	10
3.2 “Why, I believe it’s those adorable Gilmore Girls!”	11
3.3 Data	12
3.4 Analysing Gilmore Girls humour	12
3.4.1 Allusion.....	13
3.4.2 Irony	14
4 “I SEE WE’VE ENTERED A NO HUMOUR ZONE”	15
4.1 Irony	16
4.2 Popular culture references.....	19
4.3 Listing	22
5 CONCLUSION.....	25
6 BIBLIOGRAPHY	27

1 INTRODUCTION

In the days of Netflix and other online streaming services, it has become increasingly common to turn to television series for entertainment. Television series, like literature or films, are a way of escaping ordinary life into different worlds. Every viewer of television has a unique set of criteria for a good television series. The overall plot, the skills or the appearance of the actors, the set, the costumes or the soundtrack are all good reasons for choosing a television show, but there is one requirement that is practically universal: the dialogue should flow well and have its share of humorous moments. Television series have to be entertaining, and often the expectation to be amused is strong. However, the definition of funny is highly subjective; therefore creating a humorous television series that appeals to as large a crowd as possible is a difficult task. The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to look more closely into one particular television comedy drama, *Gilmore Girls*, and explore how it creates humour.

Gilmore Girls is an American television series that aired in the early 2000s. The series follows Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, a mother and a daughter, for seven years, starting from Rory's transition from a state school to a prestigious preparatory school and finishing with her graduation from an Ivy League university. *Gilmore Girls* has gained recognition as a strongly feminist television show, and its strong, versatile female characters have been investigated in theses and research papers. However, there is also another factor of *Gilmore Girls* on which researchers should focus. *Gilmore Girls* is famous for its incredibly quick, witty dialogue, so a deeper look into the structure of *Gilmore Girls* humour is necessary.

The aim of this paper is to provide answers to the question of how *Gilmore Girls* writers structure the dialogue in order to make it funny. The data consists of four *Gilmore Girls* episodes, all from different seasons of the series. Instances of verbal humour in the scripts of each episode have been categorized. This thesis focuses on the three major themes of the particular episodes' humour: irony, popular culture references and listing. The aim is to explore what makes *Gilmore Girls* funny, to point out possible dominating kinds of humour and to investigate just how important popular culture references, one of the reasons for *Gilmore Girls*' fame and loyal fanbase, are to the series.

This bachelor's thesis discusses verbal humour of *Gilmore Girls* from the perspective of the three aforementioned categories as well as from the point of view of H.P. Grice's cooperative principle and its sub-principles, the maxims of effective communication. The wittiness, chattiness and versatile use of references in *Gilmore Girls* dialogue offer great opportunities for analysis with Gricean maxims. Exaggeration, on which several themes of *Gilmore Girls* humour rely, is also discussed with each category. First, I will provide a quick introduction to humour research and introduce some key terms of my analysis. Secondly, I will provide my analysis on the four episodes chosen from *Gilmore Girls*' first four seasons. Lastly, I will conclude by summarizing my findings and returning to the question of what actually makes the series funny.

2 HOW TO BE FUNNY

2.1 Humour research

Everyone loves a good laugh over a funny story, but what individuals actually find funny varies. Humour research has the difficult task of determining what characteristics make something amusing. It is clear that certain areas of communication are labelled funny, while others are categorized as serious, but the audiences of something humorous tend to focus on the consequences of humour. It does not matter why we laugh, because the act of laughing and being amused is more important. Humour research would like to underline the importance of what triggers our laughter and point out, that the nature of humour and the characteristics from which it is constructed are also worth investigating (Mills 2009: 5). Chateau (1950, as quoted in Attardo 1994: 3) points out that it is common to contrast humour with seriousness, while others might argue that the relationship between humour and tragedy is the more sensible one. The differences in definitions and the overall ambiguity underline that humour is worth the research.

Attardo (1994: 1-5) presents three theories of humour. The essential theory discusses the conditions that make a phenomenon humorous. The teleological theory, on the other hand, focuses on the goals of the phenomenon, and the ways it attempts to achieve them. For example, the teleological theory would investigate the background knowledge one is required to have in order to fully understand a joke. These two theories cover the most part of linguistic humour research. They look at language and humour from a sociolinguistic perspective. Humour is always linked to cultures and societies –

what we find humorous is based on our upbringing, education and overall surroundings. According to Attardo (1994: 9), humour is what a specific social group defines it to be. The third theory of humour, the substantialist theory, attempts to explain phenomena with their contents. The three theories try to present large phenomena in a simpler manner. They reduce the phenomena into smaller issues that are easier to grasp and this process is another point underlining the complexity of humour.

There has been a multitude of attempts to explain universally why and how certain words, characters, or events are seen as funny. Attardo (1994: 3) inquires if it really is the case that humour is completely indefinable. According to Attardo, it is practically impossible to predict which turns at talk are seen as humorous and which are not. This is all because of the relationship between humour and culture. One tends to find comfort in familiar and easily predictable matters; therefore issues that can be funny in one culture may be considered extremely offensive in another. Certain Asian cultures focus on avoiding the loss of 'face', whereas in the Western world it is acceptable to joke heavily about oneself and matters that would be considered private, like one's love life. It is also shown, that while laughter is often credited to be one of humour's clearest features, not all humour makes its audience laugh. Mills (2009: 9) agrees with the idea and promotes the journal *Humor: International Journal for Humor Research*. The writers of the journal confirm that it would be for the better to focus on the idea of a variety of different humours. There cannot be any universal theories of humour due to the changing nature of circumstances, content and texts themselves that affect humour. This phenomenon was noted even in 1903 when Croce underlined the importance of historical contexts and the obvious lack of theoretical definitions (Attardo 1994: 7).

Common sense associates laughter closely with humour, but research points out that humour does not depend solely on laughter. The primary aim of humour is to appear funny to the audience (Mills 2009: 5), but as there are several varieties of humour, the need for laughter varies as well. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1974, as quoted in Attardo 1994: 11-12) has compiled criteria that illustrate clearly why laughter should not always be considered to belong together with humour. The first point made is that laughter is a larger phenomenon than humour. Laughter does not require humour. For example, the use of drugs or alcohol, due to their effects on a user's state of mind, can create laughter also in the absence of humour. Secondly, laughter does not have a firm, universal meaning. One can laugh spontaneously at a funny joke or attempt to hide embarrassment by laughing. Another interesting feature is ritual laughter: in the workplace, at a family event or in any situation with either hierarchies or peer pressure, one can feel obligated to laugh despite not being amused.

Simulating laughter in such a manner, with the aim of guarding oneself from disapproval and other negative effects, is different from genuine laughter. Thirdly, laughter does not always tell about the actual level or quality of humour. Those who are more mature or educated can find it easier to remain calm even when faced with a humorous situation. Repetition of a joke also affects laughter – a joke that creates a splendid roar of laughter the first time will, inevitably, get old.

Olbrechts-Tyteca (1974) also contemplates the relationship between laughter and smile. Humour can create both of them, one of them or neither, and the same joke can get different reactions from different members of the audience. Finally, Olbrechts-Tyteca (1974) also argues that social aspects are in a key role in understanding the motive behind laughter and how the relationship between humour and laughter is formed. One interprets laughter and humour based on the situation and one's own background – what is seen as offensive to one, is purely a carefree joke for another. This phenomenon is easily seen on television, as viewers tend to prefer the programmes that feel familiar to them and from which they can find links to their own lives and ways of thinking. Humour is a way of attracting viewers, but the game of keeping viewers interested requires both skilful writers and cultural knowledge.

2.2 Humour on television

Television has been a firm feature of Western life since the 1960s. Its role has changed from being solely the provider of valuable, necessary information to being a source for both information and entertainment. In the following section, I will introduce two key terms in the field of humorous television. It is worth noting, that while humour is also used in more informational television contexts, such as panel programmes or as comic relief at the end of a newscast, the following section focuses on the use of humour in fiction. Understanding the ways television programmes use and benefit from humour is valuable if one wishes to analyse a specific television series' humour in detail.

2.2.1 Situational comedy

Situational comedy, widely known as its abbreviation “sitcom”, is a very prominent type of television entertainment in the 21st century. Sitcoms are characterized by their relatively short length, 20-30 minutes, and the use of live audience and laugh tracks. Sitcoms also circle around

familiar locations. For example, most of *How I Met Your Mother*, one of the most famous situational comedies of the 21st century, takes place at the apartments of the main characters or at the local bar where they frequently meet. The fictional Central Perk, the café of *Friends*, has even become an institution. The charm of sitcoms is often said to be in the choice of topics. Sitcoms discuss relatively small, domestic matters in comparison to the topics of those in documentaries or on the news. It is argued, that it is the sitcoms, not the serious television, that remain the most salient figure in the television landscape of an era (Mills, 2009: 1, 4.)

Sitcoms have found their place in people's lives. According to Mills (2009) sitcoms and culture are intertwined, but there is also a set of universal characteristics for the genre of sitcoms. Flexibility is one of the sitcom's most important features. Sitcoms are primarily seen as a type of television entertainment that is easily consumed with as little energy and concentration as possible. Mills (2009: 4-5) points out that despite the attempts of appearing simple and light, television programmes are, in reality, complicated. One can argue that sitcoms do not require any thinking, but many of the storylines are actually thought-provoking. The audience expects to be amused, and does not treat jokeless sitcoms nicely. That does not stop sitcoms from discussing difficult issues, but in the end the primary aim of sitcoms is to be funny, and to create laughter. Humour is the driving force of situational comedy, and the reason why certain series rise to fame and others remain unknown.

2.2.2 Comedy drama

Comedy dramas, or dramedies, as they are commonly called, are the second major television programme category that involves humour as an essential characteristic. The most visible differences between sitcoms and dramedies are about laughter and location. Dramedies seldom use laugh tracks or live audiences, both of which are sitcom staples. Sitcoms also have narrow locations: the majority of the sitcom can be set in a single apartment or a bar. Dramedies, on the other hand, have a wider selection of scene settings from which to choose. Dramedies are also not restricted by the 20-30 minute time limit put on most sitcoms. Da Ros (2010), discussing the term dramedy from the perspective of *Gilmore Girls*, argues that drama and comedy can co-exist in the same television series, as the serious and the exaggerated features of the show can easily balance one another. The drama portion in dramedies is built from familiar, easily relatable issues such as family, friendships, love, disagreements, mistakes, and career ambitions, and comedy is brought in by jokes, witticisms, allusions and exaggeration both in terms of people and situations (Da Ros

2010: 57-58.) In other words, a dramedy is a mixture of the warmth and traditions associated with television drama and the use of jokes and exaggeration associated with comedies.

Dramedies are less stable than sitcoms, and prone to more severe changes in the storyline. However, dramedies also ensure that there is a certain sense of seriality in their episodes. Seriality, according to Da Ros (2010), is a key to spectator enjoyment. It means providing the audience with familiar settings, and introducing new characters and situations slowly, in order to guard the familiarity. This creates televisual liturgy, the task of which is to showcase the matters shared by audience members and the fictional characters by repetition. If the routines of the characters are familiar to the audience, a spectator is more likely to relate to the characters and enjoy the series more. In the case of *Gilmore Girls* the most significant ritual is the girls' weekly Friday night dinner with Lorelai's parents Richard and Emily Gilmore. Liturgy has clear structure, and evokes a sense of intimacy, interpersonal relationships and fitting in. Any problems with liturgy mean change in a core theme of the show. The Friday night dinners picture the Anglo-American classic idyll of a family sharing a meal together. However, in the case of *Gilmore Girls*, the dinner table is also a battleground and the fragile relationships between the oldest and the younger Gilmore generations do not exactly answer to the classic stereotype for family. The liturgical events of dramedies are core elements of the series, and something to which the audience is emotionally linked. The familiarity of liturgical elements, in this case family relations and sitting down to enjoy a family meal, are easily relatable and spectators can interpret them with the help of their own background. The importance of liturgy is in its addictiveness. A spectator has certain expectations from a television show, and any changes in liturgy will awake concerns and hopes about the possibility of recomposing the liturgy and returning to status quo (Da Ros 2010: 58-63.)

In conclusion, liturgy is the reason why people are drawn to comedy dramas. Cliff-hangers provide momentary excitement, but familiarity and repetition are the factors that matter more when spectators get attached to a television show. Each member of the audience has a set of expectations for a comedy drama. Whereas sitcoms are seen as carefree, low energy entertainment, comedy dramas are more complex. Da Ros (2010: 74-75) divides spectator expectations into two categories. Expecting to be amused and laugh at a certain character's funny behaviour is an example of confirmed expectations, whereas unconfirmed expectations are about the drama elements of dramedies. Audience knows anything can happen, and that the facade guarded by the fictional characters can break at any moment.

2.3 Understanding conversation

In order to fully understand how the dialogue of television series scripts is constructed, one needs to be aware of the research done in the field of social interaction. How and why people interact with others is a fascinating phenomenon. McCabe (2011) discusses the linguist H.P. Grice's (1975, as cited in McCabe 2011) work on meaning in conversation widely, pointing out several key features of Grice's work that are also applicable in analysing conversations on television series. Conversation makes a television series flow, and understanding how conversation and its participants function is therefore essential.

McCabe (2011: 21-22) presents the cooperative principle as Grice's main concept. The idea of the cooperative principle is to guarantee that each turn at talk serves the purpose of the conversation. Participants of a conversation should therefore utter what is required of them at each stage of the conversation and with their utterances lead the conversation onwards. The goal is to always have as effective a discussion as possible. Grice's idea of effective communication is divided into four sub-principles, which are often called Gricean conversational maxims. McCabe (2011: 22) emphasises the importance of the maxim of quality. The maxim of quality is a requirement to speak truthfully and avoid sharing information when one does not know all the facts behind it. Inadequate information does not serve the conversation. Maxim of quantity is about the amount of information – one should not speak too much or too little. The relation maxim is about being relevant, and the maxim of manner wishes that turns at talk would be clear, brief and orderly.

In a Gricean world of communication, participants of conversations expect that each participant will follow the maxims in order to make the conversation as effective as possible. This phenomenon is called the standard implicature (Goatly 2012: 225.) Kalliomäki (2005: 27) argues that the cooperative principle and its maxims are merely a suggestion about a way of communication that could be reasonable to follow. In reality, people can talk too much, rant about irrelevant things, withhold information and gossip. There are therefore several ways of avoiding the maxims, and using the maxims in an uncommon way is also an effective communication strategy. In other words, acting against the cooperative principle is a signal to the other participants of a discussion to start deciphering the turn at talk in question and search for its hidden true meaning.

There are several possible ways of not following the conversational maxims. The two most significant ones are violating and flouting maxims. Violation of a maxim means a covert act of not

following a maxim. Lies, for instance, are violations of the maxim of quality, which underlines the importance of the hearer being oblivious to the fact that maxims are not being followed. A lie should not be revealed. Flouting, on the other hand, is a breach of a maxim that the hearer is expected to notice. Flouting is an act that still expects that the cooperative principle is working. In order to flout a maxim, one must have a message to deliver (Goatly 2012: 225-229.) Kalliomäki, (2005: 24-28) discussing verbal humour from the perspective of Grice, underlines the obviousness of avoiding Grice's ideas in jokes and humour in general and adds two more categories, opting out and clashes, to the list of ways utterances can avoid following the cooperative principle. One can opt out from using the cooperative principle and the conversational maxims for legal reasons, or because one does not want to betray a friend's trust. Similarly, one can choose not to follow the rules of Gricean conversation because of a clash of maxims. There are situations where it is impossible to construct one's turn at talk in a manner that it would follow all four maxims. Clashes are evident in, for instance, gossip. When gossiping, it can be very challenging to adhere to both the maxim of quality and the maxim of quantity, as a good conversation would require sharing all information necessary in the stage of the conversation, but still avoiding the information without adequate evidence.

To sum up, it is vital to understand the structure of interpersonal communication in order to analyse dialogue from television series. Characters of television series follow the behavioural patterns of the real world, which can either boost their likeability or strengthen their role as the villain. Finding something humorous is to go behind the actual utterance and realize how it is constructed and why it is uttered at that specific stage of the conversation. Not behaving according to the cooperative principle and its sub-principles is an effective tool of creating humour. After all, talking too much or too little, being irrelevant, playing with words and overall erratic behaviour as a participant of a conversation are all clear characteristics of humour.

3 THE WORLD AND HUMOUR OF GILMORE GIRLS

3.1 Aim and research questions

This qualitative study on the verbal humour of *Gilmore Girls* attempts to analyze the role of humour in the dialogue of the television series. My purpose is to answer the following research questions:

1. What different kinds of verbal humour are used in *Gilmore Girls* dialogue?
2. Is there a dominating kind of verbal humour in *Gilmore Girls* dialogue?
3. What is the role of popular culture references in creating humour in *Gilmore Girls*?

3.2 “Why, I believe it’s those adorable Gilmore Girls!”

Gilmore Girls is an American comedy-drama that aired from 2000 to 2007. The series consists of seven seasons and 153 episodes, each episode approximately 40 minutes long. The series was cancelled after its seventh season, but has remained a firm favourite: the show’s recent arrival into the American version of the online streaming service Netflix proved to be quite a phenomenon among fans. *Gilmore Girls* is widely known for its popular culture references, lively dialogue and eccentric characters. It follows the lives of Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, a mother and a daughter sixteen years apart in age, who share a love for coffee, food, music, films, television, clothes and learning. Lorelai manages an inn and Rory is an ambitious student with a lifelong dream of attending Harvard University and becoming a journalist like her idol Christiane Amanpour. The Gilmore girls live in the fictional town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut, only a short distance away from the state capital Hartford. The series records their lives during seven important years, following Lorelai’s dreams of owning an inn and Rory’s journey from a normal state high school to a prestigious preparatory school and consequently to Yale University, from where she graduates at the end of the seventh season. The series focuses on the Gilmore family, but includes a vast array of minor characters as well, the most significant being Lorelai and Rory’s best friends and boyfriends.

In many ways, *Gilmore Girls* is a portrayal of the American dream and stereotypical American values, such as self-reliance and staying true to oneself (Sborgi 2010: 186). Lorelai, who is in her thirties, has escaped the strict rules and traditional values of her upper class upbringing and keeps herself a safe distance away from her parents, Emily and Richard Gilmore. Their icy, problematic relationship is one of the key elements of the show, and is often contrasted with the idyllic, warm and close relationship Lorelai and Rory have. The grandparents pay for Rory’s education, and in return Lorelai and Rory visit their house weekly for Friday night dinners, which are another firm feature in the series. In time Rory grows fonder of her distant grandparents, and a fragile truce is slowly built in the ruins of the relationship of Lorelai and her parents.

3.3 Data

The aim of my study is to investigate the role of verbal humour in the series. My data consists of four episodes, one from each of the first four seasons of the series. *Gilmore Girls* is a versatile show with a myriad of quirky characters, and in order to discuss its humour, a versatile data is necessary. Episodes have been chosen so that they would provide an all-round look on the show and its humour. The four episodes chosen all illustrate a different theme in the series as well.

That Damn Donna Reed circles around a 1950s television series *Donna Reed Show*, and therefore gives an excellent example on Lorelai and Rory's love of television and the series' penchant for popular culture references. *Road Trip to Harvard* is about Lorelai surviving at the ruins of yet another relationship, but it also focuses on Rory and her ambitious schooling – the girls go on a spontaneous road trip and finally arrive at the gates of the Ivy League institution. *Happy Birthday, Baby* is the story of Lorelai's birthday, but the episode showcases the relationships within the Gilmore family and the extended family of Stars Hollow as well. *Scene in the Mall* illustrates the differences in life and values between the elder and younger Gilmores. The marriage between Richard and Emily Gilmore has reached a crisis point, and the furious Emily takes the Gilmore girls along on a revenge shopping trip.

3.4 Analysing Gilmore Girls humour

In the following section I will present the tools for the analysis of my data. I have watched the episodes discussed earlier, written down instances of verbal humour and compiled lists of humorous moments. Based on my findings, I have chosen to look at *Gilmore Girls* from the perspective of irony, popular culture references and listing. I will also study my data in general from the point of view of exaggeration and Grice's conversational maxims, as they offer an interesting perspective on how dialogue is constructed and humour created for television purposes. This following section will discuss irony and allusion, on which popular culture references heavily rely, in more detail. There is no universal formula to humorous television entertainment, but irony and the use of allusions are something that all audiences, despite their different backgrounds, can recognize as building blocks of humour.

3.4.1 Allusion

References between texts are a means to create cultural value. According to Montgomery (2007: 156), references to other texts can be either explicit or implicit. Explicit references are direct quotations, whereas implicit ones have a more relaxed structure, and even allow changes to original wording. Allusions are also very much tied to the culture and society of both the source and the product text. With allusions, one is given a perspective not only into the mind of a particular thinker but also to their surroundings. Allusions are an interesting tool of affecting one's audience: texts can be written in such a manner that finding allusions and interpreting them correctly can be a challenging task. It is often considered, that a member of the audience, who recognizes the allusions, has proven their worth as audience (Montgomery 2007: 157).

Montgomery (2007: 158) lists several ways of alluding to other texts. The first is verbal reference. Another type of allusion is naming. The naming of characters is a useful way of making meaning: a link between two characters can have a significant role in creating the image of the product text character. The third category of allusions is the choice of titles. It is important for the text to flow and therefore the allusions should not be too obvious. Allusions should be weaved into the text so, that they become a natural part of the text. It needs to be emphasised, that not all allusions should be found. Allusions, according to Montgomery (2007), are challenges.

Montgomery (2007: 160-164) underlines that in the question of allusions, it is important to consider what part of the text is the author's own work and how significant a role does previous literature possess. Analysing allusions is a process that aims to discover the motive behind the allusion and the similarities and differences between the source and product texts. Montgomery introduces a three-step procedure for the analysis: the first step is to recognize the allusion. The allusion must be traced back to its source text and the two texts are consequently compared. Investigating details of the passage from what the allusion was made is essential in discovering the reason why the two texts have been linked by allusion. Attardo (2001: 87) points out that even though the phenomenon of intertextuality is not humorous in itself, it can be used as a means to create humour. All in all, texts are all connected, and it is important, both in general and from the perspective of humour, to realize why specific passages have been tied together.

3.4.2 Irony

Understanding and using irony is essential in creating flowing dialogue for television purposes. Verbal irony is about not meaning what one has said and therefore appearing to have an attitude of disbelief towards the turn of talk in question. In understanding communication and consequently humorous communication, the term *communicated meaning* is vital. The term includes the actual statement, proposition and the attitude the speaker or writer has towards that particular statement. If one believes their own proposition, the proposition is true. Irony plays with untrue propositions and the relationship between what was said and what attitudes are portrayed towards it. The disbelief portrayed by the speaker's attitude is always implicit. Providing adequate hints for the audience to recognize the disbelief and the irony itself is therefore necessary, and also a requirement needed for irony to be successful. (Montgomery 2007: 131-133).

Rodriguez Rosique (2013: 17-19) discusses the ways the term *irony* could be explained. One perspective on irony is to see it as a phenomenon where more is meant than said. The phenomenon is an infringement of H.P. Grice's cooperative principle and the maxim of quality, both of which set out criteria for effective conversation. Reyes (2002, as quoted in Rodriguez Rosique 2013: 18), however, points out, that not every example of irony can be explained away as an infringement of the conversational maxim. Another idea for interpreting the term *irony* is to observe the use of irony from the point of view of relevance. Irony stops following the cooperative principle and its sub-principles, the conversational maxims, momentarily, and returns to them immediately after having done its part in the conversation. In the end, it is not necessarily H.P. Grice's work but the topic of relevance that needs to be taken into account as one tries to detect irony. In the case of irony, the effective way of communicating is to interpret an utterance in such a manner that it is as relevant to the conversation as possible. When one keeps in mind that an utterance, though seeming odd, is somehow relevant to the conversation, irony and therefore the real meaning of the utterance is easier to detect.

It is evident that there are many varieties of irony. Situational irony is a difference in the way participants and their audience see a situation. The audience tends to have the upper hand on these situations, as they can be, for example, more developed mentally, or from a different historical era. Readers of a book can view a situation differently than the book's young protagonist, and audiences in 2015 can be horrified of the prejudices and common opinions of a previous century. The type of situational irony where the audience is from a later point in time is called historical irony. Dramatic

irony focuses on the theatrical world, but could also be seen as a matter of television. In an instance of dramatic irony, a character can have a strong belief the audience knows to be false – and the contrast between the belief’s importance to the plot and its false nature can affect the audience experience immensely. In conclusion, situational irony does not focus on the person, but on the actual event (Montgomery 2007: 134, 136.)

4 “I SEE WE’VE ENTERED A NO HUMOUR ZONE”

Comedy dramas such as *Gilmore Girls* rely heavily on finding a proper balance between fun and seriousness. Comedy dramas are a step away from the light, easy-to-follow world of sitcoms, but have not progressed enough to be counted as serious television. In *Gilmore Girls*, the balance between comedy and drama has succeeded, and the show showcases difficult, tragic topics as well as quirky, fun times. My aim is to discover how verbal humour is constructed in the series.

In analyzing *Gilmore Girls*, it is essential to grasp the idea of a Gilmore way of life. The mother-daughter duo, Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, do many things their own way. *Gilmore Girls* is a refreshing television show in the sense that it both illustrates what bad decisions do to one’s mind and life in general and also points out that everyone can learn from their mistakes. A great deal of *Gilmore Girls* humour is based on the idea of Lorelai and Rory living their own life, and proudly being the women they really are. The writers play with the great divide between generations and the differences between men and women, but unlike many other comedy dramas, they ensure that their portrayal of women is refreshing: women are strong, smart characters who both fall and try again. It is important to learn to see differences in *Gilmore Girls* characters, as these differences play a significant role in establishing *Gilmore Girls* humour. Humour depends on the distinct characteristics of a particular character, the differences and similarities between the characters and on how good the chemistry between the characters is. Stars Hollow, the small town where Lorelai and Rory live, is a melting pot of all possible oddities of the world, and each of the townspeople is quirky in their own way. In other words, the show teaches with its characters that it is perfectly fine to be exactly who one is, without giving in to peer pressure. Creating a well-coordinated chaos is, according to *Gilmore Girls*’ success, an effective way of creating humour.

As pointed out earlier, humour is an extremely subjective experience. The writers of *Gilmore Girls* aim at providing something funny for all viewers. The dialogue is filled with references to films, television and historical events, as well as general observations on life. It is important to take into account that all these details are not funny alone. Age, gender, culture and background make the lines and scenes funny. In this chapter I will present my findings from the four *Gilmore Girls* episodes chosen for closer analysis. After viewing the episodes and reading the scripts thoroughly, it is clear that there are certain themes that stand out from the writing and therefore create humour in *Gilmore Girls*. I will examine the data from the perspective of my research questions and provide examples to support my arguments. All observations are also to be linked with H.P. Grice's work on effective communication.

4.1 Irony

It is made very clear for all viewers of *Gilmore Girls* from the very episode onwards that Lorelai and Rory Gilmore are a team. During her journey from a sixteen-year-old mother to an inn manager, Lorelai has learned that it is best to be exactly who she is, and do things the way that makes her happy. She is content with having a more relaxed life than her upbringing would have given her and is proud to be “the grown woman with a Hello Kitty waffle iron”, like Rory describes her on season three. Lorelai is raising her only child with the methods she believes in. Lorelai and Rory are, in many ways, extremely similar, but the series points out several differences as well. The character of Rory, especially during the early seasons of *Gilmore Girls*, is a classic portrayal of the stereotypical good girl who behaves well, does not get into trouble and is a success at school. The Rory of earlier seasons views breaking or even bending the rules as a horrific crime, whereas her mother, with her life experiences, is more realistic and willing to do unexpected things to reach desired outcomes. This difference shows in the ways the two communicate, both in general as well as with each other. Humour is one instance where the differences between the two main characters are extremely visible. Lorelai enjoys colourful, quick comebacks whereas her daughter, though able to master both dry irony and wild exaggeration, prefers not to make a spectacle about being funny.

Example 1

Season 3, Episode 18: Happy Birthday, Baby

Rory: Luke can't sweep our chimney!

Lorelai: Why not?

Rory: Because you need to be a chimney sweep to sweep a chimney.

Lorelai: Please. If Dick van Dyke can do it, so can Luke.

.....

Rory: The spirit of giving is completely lost on you.

Lorelai: But the spirit of getting is alive and well and it wants its chimney swept.

Despite the differences in how they naturally use humour, the mother-daughter duo loves witty remarks. The example above is from the third season of the series and illustrates the ways Lorelai and Rory use humour. In this scene, Lorelai's birthday is approaching and the girls go around the house, preparing the annual list of repairs for Luke, the town diner-owner and friend, to do as a birthday present for Lorelai. Lorelai is excitedly moving around the house, listing the repairs that need to be done and Rory follows her in a calmer manner, notebook in hand. Situations where one stays calm and gently brings the other's feet firmly back to the ground are very common in Lorelai and Rory's life. Usually it is the down-to-earth Rory who calms her mother down, and in these instances there is no sign of the clear motherly attitude Lorelai takes as she guides her daughter. Gilmores are a very sharp, witty family that enjoys returning someone back to reality with the help of irony. Proving a point is much more effective when irony is used, and proving a point effectively is a skill mastered by all three generations of Gilmores.

This example is an interesting point of discussion as it shows how the writers create verbal humour in *Gilmore Girls*. There often are evident overlaps between different ways of creating humour. Firstly, this particular example is built on irony and wordplay. 'The spirit of giving' is a well-used phrase especially in the North American Christmas context, and here it is combined with its direct opposite, 'the spirit of getting', which has no history as a phrase. This juxtaposition can be used as a humour device, because respect for manners and politeness is universal, even though depictions of manners and politeness vary. Rory blames her mother for neglecting the principle of being grateful, whereas Lorelai is quick to change the blame into an ironic comeback. This contrast between the two phrases is also an interesting insight on Lorelai as a character and emphasizes how she knows exactly what she wants and is not afraid to pursue it. Playing with words and meanings is also a way of making the viewer aware of humour in the particular moment. Secondly, this example also offers a glimpse of how deeply popular culture has affected the world of the Gilmores. Lorelai compares Luke to Dick van Dyke, and suggests that if chimney-sweeping is a job Dick van Dyke can do, it definitely is something Luke could do. In this example, the popular culture reference to Dick van Dyke offers help to the main goal of Lorelai's remark, which is to be sarcastic. Due to the vast amount of shared background knowledge between Lorelai and Rory, the Dick van Dyke reference does not act as a stop in communication. Technically, Lorelai does not follow the conversational maxim of relevance, but if one recognizes the context and sees the connection

between Luke, a diner owner and Dick van Dyke, an actor playing a chimney sweep in *Mary Poppins* and realizes how neither has any real expertise of sweeping chimneys, the conversation flows well and the full meaning of the remark is conveyed.

Ironic remarks are a firm feature of one liturgical element of the show, the Friday night dinners (Da Ros 2010). At the start of season one, Emily and Richard Gilmore agree to pay for their granddaughter Rory's private education at the prestigious Chilton preparatory school on one condition: the four Gilmores must meet weekly. Lorelai and Rory are expected to make an appearance at dinner at the Gilmore house in Hartford every Friday. The Friday night dinners offer a multitude of material for *Gilmore Girls* research, as they are an interesting meeting point of two completely different worlds, that of traditional, upper class Emily and Richard, and that of relaxed, modern Lorelai and Rory. The meeting of two worlds is also a meeting of two different ways of using humour.

Example 2

Season 3, Episode 18: Happy Birthday, Baby

Richard: Oh, this is my favorite thing to eat as a boy. My gran used to make this for me whenever I was feeling a little sad. You know, if my cricket team lost or a girl I fancied turned up her nose at me.

Lorelai: Well, then load me up because there was this really cute chick at the pharmacy today. I used my best material on her and nothing.

Emily: Richard, at least let Pina serve it.

Lorelai: No comment on my lesbian hilarity. My, how far we've come.

In Example 2, the Gilmore family has once again gathered together for a Friday night dinner. Richard is excited, as he is about to serve his family a dish he loved as a boy. The conversation offers plenty of examples of Lorelai's irony and her mother's dry wit. Lorelai and her mother are more similar than either would like to admit, and one way of ignoring the fact is to be dramatic and to exaggerate. Lorelai is very keen on highlighting the differences between her world and that of her parents, and making sure that her opinions about the wrongdoings of the traditional world of her parents are heard. She provokes her parents a great deal, which is clearly shown in the excerpt above. Richard is describing an idyllic, traditional world of his childhood, and how this particular dinner would bring them all back to those happy times. The excerpt also shows Lorelai's penchant for exaggeration: she takes Richard's idyllic reminiscence and provides a witty comeback of her own. In telling her story about the girl in the pharmacy, Lorelai flouts both the Gricean maxim of relevance and the maxim of quality. According to Gricean ideas of effective communication (McCabe 2011: 21-22), each turn at talk should fit into the current stage of the conversation, and each participant should only speak what is required of them. Lorelai's pharmacy story is a good

example of effective conversation that does not follow the Gricean principles. The viewers know Lorelai to be heterosexual, and therefore flouting of the maxim of quality is obvious. The maxim of relevance, on the other hand, requires each turn of talk to be relevant to the ongoing conversation. It could be said that exaggerating in this way does not serve the conversation according to the rules of Gricean maxims. In conclusion, Example 2 plays with the differences of Lorelai and her parents. Lorelai enjoys shocking her parents and many of her ironic remarks over dinner are deliberate attempts to provoke her parents and in so doing, to capture their attention.

4.2 Popular culture references

Lorelai and Rory Gilmore are extremely curious about the world surrounding them, but they also share a deep interest and love for the fictional worlds found in books, films and television. In *Gilmore Girls*, movie nights are an essential part of life, and more proof to the claim that Lorelai and Rory are not only a mother and a daughter but also the very best of friends. Movie nights are so important to the duo that once Rory leaves for university, Lorelai feels that her evenings are tragically empty. In other words, binge-watching television while eating extremely large amounts of unhealthy food could be considered as one of Lorelai and Rory's dearest hobbies and favourite ways to spend an evening. Lorelai fought hard to be able to fill her house with love, fun, books and music and, in other words, to teach her daughter everything worth knowing from all important aspects of life. In order to highlight the importance of films, music, politics or even fashion in the characters' lives, the writers of *Gilmore Girls* have chosen to embellish the scripts with popular culture references. As well as being an irreplaceable stylistic device in the series, popular culture references are also a way for the writers to voice subtle critique towards society and politics. In time, it is these references that lifted *Gilmore Girls* to fame.

Gilmore Girls, especially during the earlier seasons, is a very literary television series. Sborgi (2010: 187, 197) argues that the amount of screen time literature gets in *Gilmore Girls*, from the titles of episodes to quotes in dialogue, highlights the fact that *Gilmore Girls* differs from the normal dramedies. In *Gilmore Girls*, the use of allusions and references is a complex, strong mix of both high and popular culture. References vary from Charles Dickens to Mötley Crue, and each character has a different way of using and respecting literary culture. Lorelai, though respecting the classics, is shown to enjoy fashion magazines and crazy sitcoms, whereas her daughter loves Russian classics and struggles with deciding how many books she should actually take with her to school or to trips. Practically all characters use popular culture references, but what connects the

references is the fact that popular culture references, especially literary ones, are mainly used in poignant moments.

According to Sborgi (2010: 196-200), *Gilmore Girls* is a coming-of-age story that strongly depends on its literary connections. While it shows Lorelai Gilmore's rise from a teenage mother to a successful entrepreneur whose own inn rises to the very top of Connecticut inns, the main focus, reference-wise, is on Rory. References to literature are used as a way of highlighting Rory's journey. Despite her great love for sitcoms and films, literature is the main way with which Rory builds her own identity and discovers who she is as a person. In the earlier seasons, Rory is shown reading the works of Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, showing her desire of becoming strong, witty, and independent. Openly preferring female authors is also a sign from the series' writers about *Gilmore Girls*' feminism. In later seasons, Rory is still pictured as someone with diverse interest in music, television or films, but in terms of literature, there is a clear change. Sborgi (2010) argues that the series' references to Sylvia Plath and Dorothy Parker, who both had strong literary ambitions and wishes to work in publishing or in the newspaper industry, are the start of Rory's life as a journalist. While popular culture references about films and music and celebrities stay the same the entire duration of *Gilmore Girls*, it is references to literature that signal Rory's journey from a bookworm to a confident journalist.

Example 3

Season 4, episode 15: Scene in a Mall

Luke: You doing okay with everything?

Lorelai: You're referring to my meltdown in the park.

Luke: It wasn't a meltdown.

Lorelai: Oh, it was a meltdown. They're even making it into a movie, *Meltdown in the Park*. No worries, it's just the working title. Baz Luhrmann's directing and in the movie Luke wears tights and sings.

Luke: But you're okay?

Lorelai: Thanks to my knight in shining armor.

Luke: Ah well.

Lorelai: I just hope Alec Baldwin captures your rare essence.

Luke: And slims down a little for the role.

Example 3 shows *Gilmore Girls*' strong links to films. During the fourth season of *Gilmore Girls*, Lorelai and her best friend Sookie are renovating an old inn in order to start their own business. The financial and mental strain on both women is terrible. Lorelai has plans to politely ask Luke, the local diner owner and her friend, for a loan, but breaks down and has a panic attack. The following morning, Lorelai returns to Luke's diner for breakfast and to thank Luke for listening to her troubles and supporting her. In the example above, Lorelai is embarrassed of her behaviour the previous

night, as she detests not being in control of herself. Embarrassment leads her to exaggerate as an attempt to lead attention away from the fact that she is not happy with the way she panicked.

Lorelai describes her meltdown as something Baz Luhrmann would make into a film. This point emphasizes the importance of films in the world of *Gilmore Girls*. In order to fully comprehend the situation, one must be familiar with the kind of directing work Baz Luhrmann has done in the past. At the time of the episode's first airing, Baz Luhrmann was mainly famous for *Moulin Rouge*, an extravagant, colourful and very dramatic film about the legendary Parisian cabaret of the turn of the 20th century. A reference to such a flamboyant film and the description of Luke's actor wearing tights and singing is a sign of exaggeration, which is typical to Lorelai. It is also a way of pointing out exactly how she feels about her problems and the meltdown. In addition, Lorelai picks the American actor Alec Baldwin to play Luke in the imaginary film. Luke's reaction to the casting choice is easier to understand, if one is familiar with Baldwin's looks and the work he has done and compares it to Luke's looks and behaviour. Luke's sarcastic ending remark is an interesting contrast to Lorelai's exaggeration. In terms of Gricean maxims, this piece of conversation is interesting, as it expects the viewer to share background knowledge about Baz Luhrmann and Alec Baldwin. If one knows the celebrities, one can see that the conversation is following the cooperative principle and its maxims.

Example 4

Season 4, episode 15: Scene in a Mall

Lorelai: Man, I love e-mail. Every day Rory and I write each other multiple times. It's great.

Luke: You enjoy typing to people more than talking to them?

Lorelai: Wrong perspective. E-mail is a return to the romantic days of letter writing. It's pure Dickens.

Luke: Why Dickens?

Lorelai: It's just when I picture letter writing, I picture Charles Dickens.

Luke: Charles Dickens wrote more letters than other people?

Lorelai: No, it's just I can easily picture him in his study with his dog and his pipe and his fancy feathered pen, writing

Lorelai with a British accent: "Cheerio, old bean. Have a cup of tea. How's Big Ben? How's the Tower of London, Sister Suffragette? Tuppence a bag."

The use of popular culture references is an effective tool in creating the series' atmosphere. In *Scene in a Mall*, Lorelai brings her laptop to Luke's diner, and attempts to work from there. The situation leads to Luke complaining and Lorelai teasing him for being annoyed. Example 4 plays with common prejudices and stereotypes concerning the English, and underlines the Americanism in the series. *Gilmore Girls* is a very American television series and tends to address differences between the United States and United Kingdom. This particular example picks a famous Brit, the

author Charles Dickens, as the joke's main idea that guides the viewer through to the highly exaggerated punch line. In order to create a humorous remark, Charles Dickens and letter writing are viewed as a logical combination. The last line acts as a punch line for Lorelai's idea. In this last line, the Americanism of the series is clearly shown. Americans tend to find British accents amusing, and Lorelai's imaginative Dickens talks like a very stereotypical Brit, names London landmarks and references *Mary Poppins*. In other words, popular culture references are an effective way of pointing out the perspective from which the writers look at the world.

Popular culture references can also be used to make a statement. On the first season of *Gilmore Girls* there is an entire episode dedicated to one of Lorelai and Rory's favourite television series, *Donna Reed Show*. Dedicating an entire episode to a specific television series and popular culture in general truly underlines the devotion Lorelai and Rory as well as the writing team of the series have for it. *That Damn Donna Reed* is both high praise for popular culture and the girls' enthusiasm for movie nights, but it is also an interesting insight to television series. *Donna Reed Show* is a situational comedy about a middle-class housewife of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and its atmosphere follows the general opinions of its era. Each character is presented as a complete stereotype of the era. The episode *That Damn Donna Reed*, with its scenes discussing housewifery and mid-20th century values, is another example of the Americanism in *Gilmore Girls*. Interestingly, *Gilmore Girls* offers a different perspective to the Donna Reed phenomenon as well. The writers of the series use Donna Reed references to criticize the life Donna Reed and Lorelai's parents Richard and Emily live, and to emphasize the feminist, modern message of *Gilmore Girls*: women do not need to stay at home in perfect haircuts, high heels and pearls to be successful.

4.3 Listing

Gilmore Girls love to talk. Their chatty natures also show in the way dialogue and episode scripts in general are created. One of the salient features in *Gilmore Girls* dialogue is listing. Listing provides plenty of opportunities for humour, as it offers a way to prove a point or to exaggerate for the purposes of humour. Listing is often used as a tool to emphasize the Gilmores' love of talking. In terms of *Gilmore Girls* humour, listing is a very straight-forward way of creating humour. It is more universal to laugh at overly dramatic and quick dialogue than it is to laugh at a film reference or a sarcastic remark. In *Gilmore Girls*, excessive, quick-fire talking is both expected and seen as a

functional way of communication, which is highly contrary to Gricean communication ideals of turns at talk being brief and absolutely relevant (McCabe 2011: 22).

Example 5
Season 4, episode 15: Scene in the Mall

Christine: I love the floorboard thing. It's so Hogan's Heroes! I wonder if I can pull the floorboards at my house. Have you heard The Libertines? What about the White Stripes, is it over for them? What about Zeppelin? I'm getting more retro. What's a good Zeppelin? Two, three... Three's got Stairway to Heaven, right? Man, it's like a funeral down there. I thought my mom was harsh, but your mom makes the guy from Joy Division look like one of the Teletubbies.

A great deal of *Gilmore Girls* listing is in monologues, which are heavily used by the chatter-loving characters. For all three generations of Gilmore women, monologue-type of listing is an effective way to exaggerate. With other characters, listing is used for different purposes. In the example above, Rory's best friend Lane, an audiophile and an aspiring drummer, is being evicted from her mother's house. Lane's mother, Mrs. Kim, is a devout Seventh Day Adventist who does not approve of her daughter's decision to dedicate her life to rock music. Lane has always thought that her cousin Christine is quietly accepting the destiny of being a member of the religious Korean family, but once Lane and Christine are in Lane's room, packing her belongings, Christine surprises her with her Western behaviour. Listing is here used as a tool to emphasize the difference between the character's previous behaviour and their true nature. In the scene, Christine's excited monologues are used as a way to reveal to Lane and to the audience, that the most unsuspected character is actually a kindred spirit. Christine does not adhere to the maxim of quantity, the purpose of which is, to an extent, prevent excessive talking and unnecessary information (Goatly 2012: 225), but her enthusiasm and knowledge send a different message, and therefore the turn at talk can be seen as a success.

Example 6
Season 2, Episode 4: Road Trip to Harvard

Lorelai: What if it's a lemon?
Rory: Then I'm stuck with a lemon.
Lorelai: Hare Krishna banging a tambourine all night?
Rory: I'll wear earplugs.
Lorelai: Serial murderer?
Rory: I'll sleep with a gat strapped to my ankle.
Lorelai: Someone who likes Linkin Park?
Rory: Then I'll have to drop out.

Listing is also used as a way of highlighting the bond between Lorelai and Rory. In the example above, Lorelai and Rory are on a very spontaneous road trip. Lorelai is at the ruins of a relationship,

having just called off her wedding to Rory's English teacher Max Medina, and is desperately searching for a way to not think of the problems she has caused with her erratic behaviour. Eventually the girls arrive at the gates of Harvard University, Rory's ultimate dream. They wander around the campus and even visit a residence hall, where Rory gets the opportunity to see what living in residence at Harvard could be like. In the example chosen, the girls are discussing the inevitable roommate Rory gets when she moves into residence. The listing of roommate qualities is a typical example of Gilmore girl roles. Lorelai exaggerates and creates terrifying roommate situations to which Rory calmly provides a sensible solution. Lists tend to have a punch line, and here the band Linkin Park acts as one and provides another example of overlaps between different themes in *Gilmore Girls* humour.

Listings offer a glimpse into the world of Gilmore values as well. Lorelai and Rory are deeply affected by the films they have seen, the books they have read and the television series they have watched. Lorelai has taught her daughter everything she knows, and the connection the two have is very visible in conversation. McCabe (2011) points out that conversation without shared background knowledge could lead to misunderstandings, and in the case of Lorelai and Rory, it is evident that their strong bond and plethora of shared interests effect their communication in a very positive manner. Listings flout the maxims of relevance and quantity constantly, but at the same time act as an effective way of creating humour.

Example 7
 Season 2, episode 4: Road Trip to Harvard

Lorelai: Uhh, there's just a lot...
 Rory: A lot of flowers.
 Lorelai: Yeah, like a ton of flowers.
 Rory: A plethora of flowers.
 Lorelai: A load of flowers.

Wordplay is a firm feature of listing in *Gilmore Girls* dialogue. In this particular example from the second season, Lorelai and Rory have arrived at a bed and breakfast that does not meet their standards. The owner of the establishment is very excited about their arrival and proud of her over-decorated workplace. She shows the girls their room, in which flowery prints are used in everything. The girls are shocked, but as members of the world of small talk, try to put their thoughts into polite words. The use of synonyms and the repetition of one idea, the comment about the use of flowery prints in the room, underline their shock and create a humorous effect. This particular example of listing shows that even Lorelai and Rory Gilmore can be too shocked about something to speak.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to investigate how verbal humour is constructed in the American television series *Gilmore Girls*. The series is known for being extremely quick-paced and witty, which provided a starting point for this paper. My purpose was to discover how verbal humour was created in *Gilmore Girls* dialogues, if there were any dominating kinds of verbal humour and how essential the role of popular culture references was to the series. *Gilmore Girls* research tends to focus on gender roles and the apparent feminism in the series; therefore, humour was an interesting point of discussion. The scope of a bachelor's thesis is inevitably small, and in order to make any strong arguments about *Gilmore Girls* humour, one should study the series much more in detail. However, a data of four episodes is still enough for general observations on the writing of the series.

Gilmore Girls humour is a complex mixture of different themes. In the episodes chosen for analysis, the most prominent ones were popular culture references, irony and listing. Irony is what drives the series, introduces the state of relationships and tells the viewers about a character's personality. Irony is used both as a means of exaggeration and to control exaggeration. Exaggeration is a theme that is strongly a part of all themes of *Gilmore Girls* humour. Gilmores love to exaggerate in order to underline the importance or ridiculousness of a situation, but exaggeration is also used as just a stylistic device. Exaggeration is very visible in listing as well. Monologues and excessive talking in general are very typical for most *Gilmore Girls* characters, and therefore listing is a theme worth analyzing. Listing is also a valuable tool in understanding relationships between characters, as rants and complaints, which tend to dominate *Gilmore Girls* listing, are usually done to someone close, who has the patience to listen.

One of my research questions was about the role of popular culture references. The world of *Gilmore Girls* is filled to the extreme with references to books, films, television, historical figures and celebrities. The vast quantities and different themes of references, as well as the significant role of literature references (Sborgi 2010: 187) make *Gilmore Girls* unique as a comedy drama. In their scripts the writers have made it clear that popular culture references have very versatile uses, from showcasing teenage life to underlining the writers' political stance. *Gilmore Girls* relies strongly on its popular culture references, as they are the most important meaning-making device of the series.

The references help understand the *Gilmore Girls* world as well as its residents. The use of popular culture references underlines the belief that one is shaped by the books one reads, the music one listens to and what one watches on television. In other words, popular culture references are dominating kind of humour in *Gilmore Girls* because of their strong role in the characters' identity-building processes.

Studying verbal humour in *Gilmore Girls* emphasizes the importance of the subjectivity of humour. Nothing in a television series is funny in itself. It is the viewer's gender, age, culture and country as well as general background that make television funny. *Gilmore Girls* is a very American television series, promoting American values such as independence, confidence and courage. Lorelai Gilmore's rise from a teenage mother to an inn owner is also a version of the American dream. In analyzing *Gilmore Girls* humour, it is essential to remember the effect of culture. Writers of *Gilmore Girls* use America-based allusions, but widen the themes of allusions to the Western culture in general. Though being very American, *Gilmore Girls* attempts to deliver something for everyone. It portrays different generations, different social classes, different nationalities, bookworms, privileged party animals, young parents, religion, and people of all sizes. The writers have emphasized that it is impossible to recognize all allusions made in the series, but they also see understanding new references as one returns to the series as a part of the series' charm.

Analysing *Gilmore Girls* from the perspective of the cooperative principle and Gricean maxims provided an interesting point of view to humour. The cooperative principle gives specific rules for effective communication, and in *Gilmore Girls*, all the rules are disobeyed and still the communication between characters can be seen to function well. The length of a bachelor's thesis does not provide enough space for in depth analysis on Gricean maxims' role in *Gilmore Girls*, but exploring the phenomena of flouting and violating the maxims in *Gilmore Girls* in a more detailed manner could provide interesting results. The way Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, as well as other *Gilmore Girls* characters communicate with each other requires more research.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources:

- Palladino, D., Polone, G. and Sherman-Palladino, A. (2001). *Gilmore Girls*. Season 1, Episode 14.
- Palladino, D., Polone, G. and Sherman-Palladino, A. (2001). *Gilmore Girls*. Season 2, Episode 4.
- Palladino, D., Polone, G., and Sherman-Palladino, A. (2003). *Gilmore Girls*. Season 3, Episode 18.
- Palladino, D., Polone, G., and Sherman-Palladino, A. (2004). *Gilmore Girls*. Season 4, Episode 15.

Secondary sources:

- Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic theories of humor*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Attardo, S. (2001). *Humorous texts: a Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Da Ros, G. (2010). TV Dramey and the Double-sided liturgy of *Gilmore Girls*. In Diffrient, D. S. and Lavery, D. (eds). *Screwball television : Critical perspectives on Gilmore Girls*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 57-75.
- Goatly, A. (2012). *Meaning and humour*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalliomäki, L. (2005). *"Ink and incapability": Verbal humour in the TV-sitcom Blackadder : A pragmatic and rhetorical analysis*. Jyväskylä.
- McCabe, A. (2011). *An Introduction to linguistics and language studies*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Mills, B. (2009). *The Sitcom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Montgomery, M. (2007). *Ways of Reading*. London: Routledge.
- Rodriguez Rosique, S. (2013). The power of inversion: Irony, from utterance to discourse. In Ruiz, L., & Alvarado Ortega, M. B. (eds). *Irony and humor: From pragmatics to discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. 17-38.
- Sborgi, A. V. (2010). The Thing that Reads a Lot. In Diffrient, D.S. and Lavery, D. (eds). *Screwball television: Critical perspectives on Gilmore Girls*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 186-202.