UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

"INK AND INCAPABILITY"
Verbal humour in the TV-sitcom *Blackadder* a pragmatic and rhetorical analysis

A Pro Gradu Thesis in English

by

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
KIELTEN LAITOS

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Tutkielmassa analysoidaan kielellistä huumoria TV-sarjassa *Blackadder* sekä pragmaattisesta että retorisesta näkökulmasta. Materiaalina on käytetty sarjan 24:n jakson käsikirjoituksia. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan minkälaisia pragmaattisia ja retorisia strategioita sarjassa on käytetty kielellisen huumorin luomisessa. Ensinnäkin; onko Gricen maksimeja rikottu huumorin luomisessa, ja jos on, miten, kenen taholta, sekä missä yhteyksissä ja minkälaista huumoria maksimien rikkominen synnyttää. Toiseksi tarkastellaan huumorin luomisessa käytettyjä retorisia tekniikoita, kuinka niitä käytetään, kuka niitä käyttää, missä yhteyksissä niitä käytetään ja minkälaista huumoria retoriset tekniikat synnyttävät. Tutkimusote on laadullinen.

Aineistosta on etsitty humoristiset kohdat, joissa rikotaan Gricen maksimeja. Tapauksia kuvaillaan esimerkkien valossa suhteessa toisiinsa, suhteessa esittäjään ja tilanteeseen. Aineistosta etsitään myös tapaukset, joissa huumorin luomisessa on käytetty jotain tiettyä tai joitain tiettyjä huumorin retorisia tekniikoita. Tapauksia kuvaillaan jälleen suhteessa toisiinsa, sekä suhteessa esittäjään ja tilanteeseen. Lopussa kuvaillaan kuinka nämä kaksi strategiaa, pragmaattinen ja retorinen, toimivat yhdessä.

Kumpaakin menetelmää on käytetty runsaasti sarjassa huumorin luomisessa. Maksimeista eniten rikotaan laadun ja tavan maksimeja (”maxims of Quality and Manner”). Retorisista tekniikoista eniten käytetään nokkeluutta/sanavalmiutta (”repartee”), absurdiutta, loukkauksia ja virheitä. Eniten sekä pragmaatisia ja retorisia strategioita hyödyntää päähenkilö *Blackadder*. Tilanteita enemmän strategioiden käyttöön vaikuttavat henkilöiden persoona ja tyyli. Gricen maksimit osoittautuivat huumorin määrittelyssä jossain määrin ongelmallisiksi, kun taas retoriset tekniikat kattoivat lähes kaikki huumoritapaukset sarjassa. Tutkimuksessa pragmaattinen ja retorinen näkökulma täydensivät toisiaan hyvin. Kumpikaan ei olisi yksinään ollut riittävä.

Asiasanat: pragmatics. rhetorics. verbal humour. TV-sitcom. Grice’s maxims. Blackadder.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

History has known many great liars.

Copernicus, Goebbles, St. Ralph the Liar. But there have been none quite as vile as the Tudor King, Henry VII.

It was he who rewrote history to portray his predecessor Richard III as a deformed maniac, who killed his nephews in the Tower.

But the truth is that Richard was a kind and thoughtful man who cherished his young wards, in particular Richard, Duke of York, who grew into a big strong boy.

Henry also claimed he won the Battle of Bosworth Field, and Killed Richard III.

Again, the truth is very different. For it was Richard, Duke of York, who become king after Bosworht Field and reigned for thirteen glorious years.

As for who really killed Richard III and how the defeated Henry Tudor escaped with his life, all is revealed in this, the first chapter of a history never before told: the History of...the Black Adder.
(Atkinson et al. 1999:1)

The introduction above begins a journey through four periods of British history, following the descendants of a certain family line; the Blackadder line, and the events are recorded on a television comedy series called *Blackadder*. The viewers are taken to the courts of King Richard III, Queen Elizabeth I, Prince Regent (who later became King George IV) and finally to the trenches of the first world war. The viewers also meet other historical characters, such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Doctor Samuel Johnson and Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger. However, as can be seen in the preface, the account of the historical events in the series is quite different from what one would expect, but that is the point of the whole series, and the further it goes from the truth, the funnier it is.

Even though many undoubtedly find the series in question, and sitcoms in general (particularly their language), funny for a variety of reasons, verbal humour in TV-series has not received much attention from linguists. Overall, verbal humour has been studied quite extensively, for example, by Nash (1985), Attardo (1993, 1994) and Alexander (1980, 1997), but the material has mainly been jokes. Also certain techniques of verbal humour, such as irony (for example Muecke 1974), have been the subject of several studies.

Many researchers, like Alexander (1980, 1997), have also concentrated on British verbal humour, and the series in question can indeed be seen as a somewhat typical representative of it. Even though verbal humour in this particular series has not been the subject of any previous studies, the series has not gone completely unnoticed by researchers of other fields. For example Neale and Krutnik (1990) include it in their analysis on popular television comedy.

There have been a few studies analysing verbal humour in other TV-sitcoms. For example, Delisser (1996) uses Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) as the method of analysis, and the results, according to Delisser, are quite promising, proving that the SSTH can be applied to the study of verbal humour in a non-joke text. Attardo (1998), on the other hand, has modified the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo & Raskin 1991, a revision of the SSTH), to suit his purposes to analyse a humorous narrative (a sitcom). His study also shows that there are indeed many ways to analyse verbal humour in popular culture. Nevertheless, I felt that there was still a need for an even more general method of analysis of a humour in a TV-sitcom, using a large amount to data. The SSTH is not versatile enough for my purposes, and the GTVH is perhaps too detailed a method of analysis, applicable to a small amount of data, giving very specific kind of information. Since I wanted to make this study as versatile as possible, as well as use the all 24 episodes of the series as the data, I decided to choose other methods of analysis.

This study presents a more general analysis of verbal humour in a TV-sitcom, and to achieve it the analysis consists of two separate viewpoints: a pragmatic and a rhetorical one. The pragmatic account is based on the assumption that verbal humour violates Grice´s cooperative principle. I will, thus, analyse the data to see if humour has been created by violating Grice´s maxims of cooperation, namely the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Manner and Relevance. I base the rhetorical analysis on an inventory of rhetorical techniques of humour compiled by Berger (1990), and I will see if humour in the data has been achieved by using these rhetorical techniques. I believe that these two very different approaches are together able to shed some light to the question of how the humour in this series is constructed.

I will begin by introducing British comedy and verbal humour a bit, and by giving some information on humour as a mode of entertainment and on sitcoms as such. After that I will turn to modern humour research, introducing some of its methods of analysis.

After that I will concentrate on the methods of analysis employed in this study, and in the analysis section I will firstly deal with the strategies separately, and secondly together to see how they complement each other. Finally, in the Conclusion and Discussion section I will pull the strings together and assess the findings of the study, as well as the process, as a whole.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 BRITISH SOCIETY AND HUMOUR

As mentioned in the introduction, the data of this study are a fairly typical representative of British comedy, and I therefore think that it is appropriate to describe the overall field of British comedy a little. Humour and comedy have a long history in British society and, according to Alexander (1997), the various comic and humorous modes one encounters in the media have deep roots in British everyday life. Commercial entertainment can be said to have begun in the music halls where for example Charlie Chaplin began his career. This is actually acknowledged in the data of this study, when one of the characters says ”the reason Chaplin is funny is because he’s part of the great British music-hall tradition.” (Atkinson et al. 1999:385). The music halls and their variety scene were at the height of their popularity between 1890 and 1912. At the end of the 19th century also the seaside resorts, such as Blackpool and Brighton, offered theatre and other amusements to working-class people on their vacation. The three items used in the music hall routines (different voices and accents, use of catch phrases and the impact of funny sounds) have a place in English verbal humour even to this day, and they are present also in the data of this study. However, with the arrival of broadcasting and films the need for the music hall entertainment decreased. In Britain the radio started in 1922, and

in 1933 the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) formed a variety department. In the 1950's the wireless was joined by the television as a mass medium. (Alexander 1997:132-138). It is worth remembering, though, that even nowadays television is not the only medium of humour, as children's comics are one very influential area for transmitting topics and humorous attitudes (Alexander 1980:30), not to mention comedy in the theatre or circus as well as the comics targeted to adults.

Alexander (1980, 1997) pays attention to the status of verbal humour in the modern British society. He claims (1980:32) that "humour and comedy of various sorts make up a prominent part of the texture of everyday British life – as reflected, for example, in broadcasting; it would appear, too, to be a salient feature in much social interaction, as instanced in a fairly widespread penchant for 'taking things lightly". Alexander (1997) also finds that the culture-bound nature of the sense of humour comes from shared upbringing, which hence leads to common prejudices and common world knowledge in general. He goes further by claiming "alongside Irishmen or blacks, women may well hear their failure to laugh at the same thing as the white male collocutors occasioning the 'you've got no sense of humour'-gambit" (Alexander 1997:119). Alexander believes that it is possible to pinpoint some often-reoccurring subjects of verbal humour in English. He agrees with Greg (1923:222, as cited in Alexander 1980:29) when he states "one thing is fairly certain: that while laughing is a native response, we learn what to laugh at, for the most part, just as we learn what to fear". For example, the superiority theory, according to Alexander (1980) manifested for example in the "The Englishman, Irishman and the Scotsman"-jokes, makes an individual as well as a larger group feel superior when some other groups are made to look bad compared to them. Minorities are often the butts of these jokes, and these jokes are based on prejudices both the teller of the joke and the listener share: Scotsmen are mingy, Irishmen are chattering, bibulous half-wits and Englishmen are "cool customers with a nice line in occasional quaintness which nonetheless fails to detract from, and may even underline their fundamental 'decency'". (Alexander 1980:29). The prejudices based on stereotypes of, for example, foreigners, as well as representatives of certain professions, are certainly present also in the data of this study.

Understatement is also a form of verbal humour frequently used in English as a form of boasting. Also tabooed or socially stigmatised topics are widely used in verbal humour, as well as ”black humour”, which is accepted even in the public realm (for example on TV, in films, radio and print media). Alexander (1980) offers the treatment of drink and alcohol as an example of a socially stigmatised topic of humour. He writes ”the uneasy relationship between the work-discipline of industrial life and the need to escape it through total inebriation has left its mark in a surfeit of jokes about drinking and drunks” (Alexander 1980:30). However, that might have been the case at the time (1980), but nowadays drinking seems to bee more or less accepted as a topic of humour. Finally Alexander (1997:143) points out that, ”sadly, the world of comedy reflects and, more often than not, openly parades a sizeable proportion of the prejudices and petty-minded attitudes of the social classes in British society”. One must, however, bear in mind that that is only half on the truth. There are comedians who relish on the negative sides of their culture, but there are also those who create humour without bringing forward any negative sides of their country and culture. Rowan Atkinson and his popular character Mr. Bean, is one of those.

Chiaro’s (1992) view on the matter is somewhat less dim. In her view the British sense of humour is widespread around the world:

> A glance at shelves at any bookshop will reveal a marked preference for the comic genre: written spin-offs of situation comedy, books by well known comedians, collections of jokes and compendiums of rhymes and riddles for children. Such literature undoubtedly interests a large section of the nation’s reading public while the more ’serious’ humour can be found among the classics. If Britain’s more high-flown literature envies others for their Balzacs and Dostoevskys, as far as the comic mode is concerned, hardly any writers in English literature who have not attempted at least once to be funny with or through the medium of words. (Chiaro 1992: 2)

On the whole, as Alexander (1980:33) points out, since verbal humour indeed seems to be a prominent feature of the British culture and everyday life, it can certainly be considered as a subject worthy of study in its own right.

The series used as data in this particular study was recently voted the second best sitcom of all time in Britain (http://www.blackadderhall.co.uk/). Nothing has escaped the humorous treatment in it: for example the liking Brits have for tabooed subjects such as death, drinking and the royalty comes clearly

forward in the show. Its humour can indeed be said to be rather ”black”, and even controversial, as aka minorities and other nationalities are made fun of (superiority theory), and the butts of many of the jokes are indeed frequently as high and mighty as the royalty (a target of jokes for centuries): the criticism of the system brought forward in the series can also be seen as another feature of ”Brit-com” (British comedy), frequently portrayed in other series as well. Therefore, in my view, the series used as data in this study is a fairly typical representative of British mass entertainment.

2.2 TELEVISION, POPULAR CULTURE AND COMEDY IN BRITAIN

According to Alexander (1980:30), nowadays the mass media determine to a large extent which are suitable topics for verbal humour and joking in general, and thus it can be claimed that tastes in humour and comedy have been shaped by institutions spreading ”popular culture”, from music halls to motion pictures, and from there to radio and finally to television. Alexander (1980) claims also that the mass entertainers have had a major influence in post-war British society, leaving its mark on the socio-cultural competence.

Radio and television are not the only mediums of mass entertainment, just as comedy is not the only popular art form featured in them. This becomes evident in a table put together by Berger (1990), and in the table he distinguishes among media, popular art forms (or genres) and styles:

Table 1. Media and its genres

Media	**Popular Art Forms Found in the Media**	
Radio	Commercials	Sports
Television	Documentaries	Action-adventure programs
Newspapers	Editorials	Game shows
Magazines	Public service announcements	Soap operas
Books	News	Spectacles
Records	Reviews	*Situation comedies*
Films	Science fiction	Variety shows

(Berger 1990: 31, emphasis added)

Berger (1990) believes that the appeal of popular culture lies within its ability to provide people with a sense of familiar without making the content too monotonous and thus ensuring people’s continuing interest. One of the fields of

research interested in the study of popular culture is the study of genres. Through genre studies we get information about what texts are, or should be, like. Our expectations are shaped by our knowledge of the genres, and that spans from what we believe certain kinds of films, television shows or radio stations or even songs will be like. According to Berger (1990:31) the most important television genres are the ones presented in Table (1). He has attempted to reduce the list even further, and has come up with four basic types of television programs: 1) Actualities, 2) Contest, 3) Persuasion, and 4) Dramas. By actualities he means news and documentaries and such. Contests are basically competitions, whereas persuasions are programs that attempt to convince people to do or believe in something. Dramas, however, are the most important forms in television and in all media. They include soap operas, sitcoms, police shows, action adventure shows, hospital shows and so on. Berger (1992) actually finds elements of fairy tales in all of these, which becomes evident in the table below, and it is quite remarkable that the element connected with sitcoms is exactly what three of the four seasons of the sitcom analysed in this study are about, among other things:

Table 2. Elements from fairy tales in television genres

Genre	**Elements From Fairy Tales**
Science fiction	Magical agents, magical powers, etc.; hero leaves home
Detective	Finding kidnapped heroes
Soap Operas	Relations between members of families
Spy Stories	Finding false heroes; Hero (unrecognised) arrives in a foreign country
Situation comedies	*Reversal of problems about royal families; stories about tricksters*
Western	Hero and villain fight, a chase (reversed, with villain pursued)

(Berger 1992: vii-37, emphasis added)

2.2.1 Situation comedies

Situation comedy or ”sitcom” is usually a narrative-based comedy series containing short, 25-30 minutes long episodes with regular characters and setting. In the broadcast media it is considered a particularly suitable format for maintaining a regular audience. Typical characteristics of sitcom are, for

example, multiple storylines, multiple characters and a regular community or family setting. Neale and Krutnik (1990:233-234) add to the list the ”crucial sense of ’unfolding’ without there being a definite end to the narrative”. One of the frequently used methods of sitcoms is repetition, and at the end of each episode, everything appears to return to the initial situation. Neale et al. call this ”’refamiliarization’ of the recurring situation”. In other words, the situation will not change, but will nevertheless present a destabilization-restabilization process in each episode, and many of the events of the previous episodes are meant to be forgotten, they bear no significance to the situations of the following episodes. (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 233-234)

According to Chiaro (1992:7), stereotypes are often used in sitcoms. She mentions John Cleese’s bowler-hatted character in *Monty Python* and his hotelier in *Fawlty Towers* as well as the members of the French resistance in *`Allo, `Allo* and the British civil servant in *Yes, Prime Minister* as examples of this. She points out, however, that since many of the stereotypes are so intrinsically British, they may not necessarily be understood as funny elsewhere. Chiaro´s concern that the British stereotypes would not be understood as funny is, at least in part, unnecessary, as for example in Finland practically all British comedy series are received with much enthusiasm and are well liked. Chiaro (1992) also makes a point of sitcoms often involving a character getting into some kind of a mess. She sees it as a recurring theme during centuries of humour and comedy, since people simply seem to find other people’s misfortune a laughing matter. (Chiaro 1992:7).

In his study of TV genres Berger has also made a comparison of crime shows and sitcoms, both being popular genres on television. Even though the comparison itself is not related to this particular study, the features characteristic of situation comedies in the table illuminate the nature of the sitcom formula even further. According to Berger (1992:71-72) sitcoms are usually built around dialogue, whereas movement is restricted and mostly takes place indoors. The characters include losers and other unheroic characters, and the audience at home is encouraged (often unsuccessfully) to laugh with the help of a laugh track. The sitcom *Blackadder* is in many ways a good representative of its genre. It consists of four seasons and of 24 half an hour-long episodes. The main characters and the setting are the same, and every

episode involves one or many of the characters getting into some kind of a mess. The characters also include many unflattering stereotypes of, for example, the aristocracy, politicians and foreigners. There is also the repetition mentioned by Neale and Krutnik (1990:233-234), according to which the situation never changes permanently, which reinforces that the destabilization-restabilization process is present. In *Blackadder* movement is confined and takes place indoors, and the focus is on dialogue. There is a laugh track and most of the characters are indeed compromising, unheroic, ineffective losers. Neale and Krutnik (1990) add that *Blackadder* is an example of a sitcom which is structured around a famous comedian, in this case around Rowan Atkinson. (Neale and Krutnik 1990:246-247)

Thus the facts that the series has not been the subject of any previous studies, as well as that it is indeed a very typical, as well as popular, British sitcom, in my opinion, make it a good data for this study.

Next I will turn to the more formal study of verbal humour presenting some of the methods of contemporary research on linguistic humour which have been used to analyse humour also in popular culture contexts.

2.3 CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON LINGUISTIC HUMOUR

Linguistic humour has been studied quite extensively over the years, and it is possible to name several different approaches on the field, e.g.: 1) the rhetorical approach, 2) semiotic analysis, 3) communication theory, 4) psychoanalytic theory, 5) sociological analysis, 6) philosophical approaches, 7) political science and 8) a feminist perspective. Naturally, all these disciplines have approached the matter from quite different points of view. The study has not, however, been as dynamic in the field of linguistics as one would assume. So far, linguists have mostly concentrated on the study of puns and wordplay as well as on the study of jokes, while other types of humorous discourse have received less attention. Attardo (1994) claims that many stylistic, semiotic and textual theories are at most merely interesting programmatic statements rather than complete and detailed theories. They all deal with humour which goes

beyond the joke, and they share some methodological tools which can be considered pragmatic. (Attardo 1994:193-194). In the following section I will introduce some of the methods used to analyse jokes and other types of humorous texts which in my opinion seem the most coherent. They help to illuminate what has been done in the field, and also show what has not yet been done. This study, in my opinion, brings something new to the field of linguistic humour research by analysing material that has not yet been analysed, as well as by using methods of analysis which have not yet been used in analysis of non-joke humorous texts.

Verbal humour has indeed been studied extensively by many researchers, including Raskin (1985, 1991), Alexander (1980, 1997) and Attardo (1991, 1993, 1998). Alexander´s (1980, 1997) approach to the matter is semiotic, and he has concentrated on how the phenomenon manifests itself particularly in the British language use and society. He points out (1997:7) that the realization of humorous texts may indeed vary from society to society, and that language is a cultural system itself. It is natural, therefore, for linguists to be interested in the relation between the language system and the context of language use. Alexander (1997) points out how from a sociolinguistic point of view, language can be seen as having two primary functions: it can be seen as an instrument of cultural and social transmission, and it can also be means of negotiating meaning. Language can therefore be seen as a way of making sense of the social and material world. Bearing in mind this view of language as a central meaning constituting (semiotic) process, according to Alexander (1997:7), verbal humour can be understood as functioning as ”social cement”.

Alexander (1997) has designed a set of criteria for distinguishing types or modes of verbal humour. They are:

1) Intention on the part of speaker or writer (i.e. whether the humour is intentional or unintentional. It overlaps with the next one)
2) Consciousness on the part of speaker or writer (i.e. whether the humour is conscious or unconscious). In these first two cases Alexander also emphasises that it needs to be specified whether the intentionality or the consciousness is on the part of the speaker or the hearer.

3) Malevolent or benevolent intention. There are differences in intention: malicious, desire to ridicule, make fun of or attack or harm verbally, and benevolent; desire to amuse, or a habit of being ”light-hearted”
4) Purpose to amuse
5) General light-heartedness
6) Witty, or taking ”wit”, intellectual pleasure (Alexander 1997:10)

These criteria Alexander then combines with sixteen ”types of humour”. The types are: Joke, gag (practical joke), epigram (a short witty poem or saying), crack (a biting comment), pun (wordplay), spoonerism (transposition of the initial sounds of spoken words), howler (”flower of speech”), misprint, irony, satire, caricature, parody, impersonation, sarcasm, and sardonic humour (heartless, bitter humour). Alexander views each of these in the light of the modes (mentioned above). These types can be divided into three clusters: joke, gag, epigram and crack are predominantly intentional and witty, whereas spoonerisms, howlers and misprints are unintentional and unknowingly witty. The rest are used for the purpose to ridicule the target and amuse others. (Alexander 1980: 2-3)

In Alexander’s (1997) view, acts of humour can be viewed in terms of ”processes”. He claims that verbal behaviour is the basis of humour to a large extent. Still, most of the analysis of verbal humour has focused on its ”product-side”, and therefore Alexander finds it important to distinguish between the possible types of verbal humour. He does, however, admit that humour is very difficult to categorize. He has divided the mechanisms of verbal humour into five levels: the graphological level, the morphological level, the syntactic level, the lexical-semantic level and a level of certain contextual properties of humour (e.g. discourse level). From these levels one can find, for example, rhythm and rhyme, punning, constructional ambiguity and allusions to sayings. Alexander (1997) also presents three case studies of the fore mentioned. (Alexander 1997: 21-64)

The set of modes of verbal humour offered by Alexander (1997:7) would work well with many kinds of data, especially the intentionality and the consciousness of the humour, as well as the malevolent / benevolent intention of the humour are all both interesting and important factors in defining

humour. Also the combination of the modes and the sixteen types of humour would well serve the purpose of examining verbal humour in many kinds of contexts, as would the five levels of mechanisms of verbal humour (for example graphological and morphological levels). These tools of verbal humour analysis introduced by Alexander would undoubtedly work also with the data of this study, especially the six modes of humour would give useful insight into the nature of the humour in the series. For my purposes, however, I have chosen approaches which in my opinion offer more knowledge of the verbal humour in the series.

In his study of verbal humour, Nash (1985:12) sees the language of humour as the focus of concern. In his opinion linguistics cannot cover the humorous activity of language since humour is an occurrence in a social play, and therefore it must be understood in the broad context of persons in situation and culture. In his study he examines for example joke explanation, the structure of jokes, allusion and parody, humour as manipulation of meaning, and humour as the staging of recitals (for example rhymes). Attardo (1994), however, considers Nash a representative of the ”British School” of humour research, who, owing an intellectual and academic background, writes very intelligible works covering a broad range of phenomena, but who lacks a theoretical approach and makes weak generalizations. According to Attardo (1994), Nash’s study is not based on linguistic research but is rather more interested in the literary value of the many examples presented. (Attardo 1994: 192). For my purposes Nash (1985) concentrates too heavily on jokes and their explanation and gives hardly any tools for the analysis of any other kinds of data.

Neale and Krutnik (1990: 48-49), in turn, point out that jokes imply control of language, since language has been manipulated in order to create humour, and joking in general implies an awareness of the decorum and rules of social intercourse. In addition, Neale and Krutnik argue that linguistic humour can result from an ”unwitting misuse of language, or rather a comic misuse of language marked unintentional in some way (as the product of impediment – deafness, for instance, or for a stammer – or uncontrollable psychological propensity for mixing metaphors, perhaps, or for mispronunciation)”. (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 48-49). Neale and Krutnik

(1990), like Nash (1985), offer plenty of general knowledge about verbal humour without giving any specified tools to work with to analyse it. All in all, they both help the reader to form a more concise picture of the phenomenon, but offer little tools for any further study, at least with data other than jokes.

Next I will turn to the theories that in my view are the most prominent for the analysis of humour other than jokes.

2.3.1 Script theories

Among theories within the framework of generative grammar, the most important aspect is the notion of "script", and the theories are often referred to as "script theories". A script is a mental scheme of an activity or situation. We build these mental schemes of practically everything in our lives and assume that things go along these schemes/scripts. We all have a script, for example, of what happens when a person goes shopping; he/she enters a store, picks up as item, goes to the cash desk, pays for the item and leaves. One of the theories that are built around the notion of scripts is the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH). It was developed by Raskin (1985), and the main hypothesis of the theory is that a text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the following conditions are satisfied: i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts, ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposed (Raskin 1985:99). Raskin offers the following joke as an example of this (1985:100):

Example 1.

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No", the doctor´s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

In the example there are two distinct scripts DOCTOR and LOVER which overlap and cause the joke to be perceived as funny.

In Raskin's (1985) view a semantic theory needs not only the set of available scripts but also a set of combinatory rules, and the rules combine the compatible scripts and discard the ones that would make the outcome

senseless. Therefore, if there is at least one reading that makes sense, the text may be classified as well formed. Every now and then, however, one encounters texts with more than one meaning or reading. This overlap of scripts is used not only to generate humour, but also to use language metaphorically, figuratively or allusively, among other things. Therefore, if the text is to be considered funny, the scripts must be opposed. (Raskin 1985:100). This means that the text is deliberately ambiguous, and the punch line takes the reader from one script to the other by ”making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning” (Attardo & Raskin 1991:308). Attardo and Raskin (1991) continue by explaining that in the SSTH there are three levels of script opposition. The first and the most abstract level is the opposition of *real* and *unreal*. This level can take three different forms: *actual vs. nonactual, normal vs. abnormal* and *possible vs. impossible*. At the lowest level these three can be divided into oppositions of good *vs. bad, life vs. death. sex vs. nonsex, money vs. no-money, high stature vs. low stature*, etc. (Attardo & Raskin 1991:308)

Delisser (1996) has used the SSTH to analyse verbal humour in Anglo-American TV-sitcoms. Her aim has been to find out the extent to which verbal jokes in the sitcoms of her choice can be explained though the theory. In the analysis she used the following six categories (1996:20):

i) verbal jokes with two scripts (two opposing scripts)	VER +
ii) verbal jokes without two scripts (no two opposing scripts)	VER –
iii) combined jokes with two scripts (both a visual and a verbal element)	COM+
iv) combined jokes without two scripts(no two scripts, visual element)	COM –
v) extra-verbal jokes (funniness neither verbal nor visual)	EXV
vi) visual jokes (solely visual)	VIS

The results of her study show that from the corpus of 1328 jokes or laughing points 70,3 % were caused by the existence of two opposing scripts, and thus, according to Delisser (1996:29), the SSTH can indeed be successfully applied to the analysis of verbal humour in TV-sitcoms.

Attardo (1994) also presents an evaluation of the SSTH. According to him, it is actually the first and the only formal and coherent

theory of semantic, meaning-based humour, and therefore has no point of comparison. He calls (1994:208) the SSTH ”the most powerful epistemologically and promising theory available in the field of linguistic-based theory of humor research”. Attardo points out, nevertheless, that the theory is not without flaws. He disagrees (1994:208) with Delisser by stating that since it was developed using jokes as material, applying it to other humorous texts is very difficult.

2.3.2 General Theory of Verbal Humour

A revision of the SSTH was introduced by Attardo and Raskin (1991), and they named the new theory “General Theory of Verbal Humor” (GTVH). It also concentrates on jokes. Attardo and Raskin describe it as a “hierarchical model of joke representation consisting of six levels and an indexed taxonomy of joke variance and invariance” (1991:294). The revision can be viewed basically as an extension of the SSTH with the difference that, whereas SSTH is a linguistic (semantic) theory of verbal humour, the GTVH is a more general, and less linguistic-based theory. This has been achieved, among other things, by adding six Knowledge Resources (KR) to the SSTH. The KR:s are: the script opposition (SO, explained earlier), the logical mechanism (LM, the reversal of some logical factors in the joke, as in a joke where the table has to be moved around in order for the person standing on it to screw in a light bulb), the target (TA, the target of the joke), the narrative strategy (NS, the genre of the joke, whether it is, for example, a riddle or a question-and-answer sequence), the language (LA, for example the differences in the choice of words and syntactic constructions) and the situation (SI), and each of the KR:s is an entity from which jokes are built. (Attardo & Raskin 1991:312-321). The SSTH takes into account only two KR:s; SO (script opposition) and LA (language) and includes the rest in the LA. This is naturally a very simplistic view of the GTVH, as it also incorporates other elements into it.

In addition to the GTVH, Attardo (1998) has presented a method for the analysis of humorous texts larger than jokes, such as short stories, plays and even television sitcoms. He adds yet another set of components to the

GTVH which deals with the narrative aspect of the text. In detail, the components are: jab and punch lines, levels of narrative (metanarratives), strands of lines, stacks of strands and intertextual jokes. In the method the text is divided into smaller components. A micronarrative consist of one action or event, whereas a macronarrative consists of a combination of micronarratives. Punch lines, on the other hand, are usually found in a final position of a joke, whereas jab lines occur also in other positions in the text (therefore the only difference between the two is their position in the text), and the narrative structure component should be able to deal with the differences between the two as well as with their combinations (strands or stacks). A strand is a sequence of punch or jab lines that are linked formally or thematically, and stacks are groups of strands that are also related formally or thematically. Attardo (1998:236) presents an example of this: in the American sitcom *Cheers* one of the characters, Norm, says something witty every time he enters the bar and the bartender greets him. If Norm does this three times in a given episode, that constitutes a strand. Considering all the episodes of the series, all his witty sayings in that particular context constitute a stack. Attardo (1998:250) argues that ”realistic humour, even the kind evidenced by Jane Austen, is composed of a serious central narrative line (macronarrative) with a few jab lines scattered throughout the text. A more humorous text, such as a sitcom, is composed of a serious text with jab lines (probably in greater number than the realistic humorous text) with a number of micronarratives capped by a punch line”. He also applies the theory to an analysis of a TV-sitcom in practise. Attardo believes that the GTVH can be applied to longer texts quite easily since he sees longer texts merely as being made of shorter texts combined in different ways. He has, however, felt the need to account for the narrative aspect of longer texts and finds the tools proposed as fulfilling this gap. In my view Attardo´s (1998) method is the most precise attempt yet done to analyse verbal humour in a TV-sitcom, and thus clearly shows that sitcoms are not a completely untouched area in humour study.

2.3.3 Register-based Humour

The last theory introduced here is the theory of Register-based Humor. In this particular type of theory attention is no longer on jokes, but on other kinds of humorous texts. The theory concentrates on humour that is caused by an incongruity generated by a clash between different registers. Attardo (1994) defines registers as language varieties associated with, for example, a given situation, role, or social aspect of the speaker's experience, and he argues that most literal humour is of this sort. He also points out that the linguistic research on register humour has been scarce. (1994:230-231). Attardo offers, however, an example of the theory in use. The example is a short passage by Woody Allen, quoted in Alexander (1984) (Attardo 1994:235-236):

> He was creating an Ethics, based on his theory that "good and just behaviour is not only more moral but could be done by phone." Also, he was halfway through a new study of semantics, proving (as he so violently insisted) that sentence structure is innate but that whining is acquired. (Woody Allen *Remembering Needleman* In *Side Effects*. New York: Ballantine. 1981.)

Attardo continues by offering Alexander´s analysis of the passage:

> Allen builds up expectations of a particular level of style and even of field of discourse – *Ethics* (with a large E) and *good and just behaviour* – only to deflate them by introducing *done by phone*. Similarly he introduces incongruity in following up *new study of semantics* and *phrase structure* with *whining*. (Alexander 1984:60)

Besides applying the theory of Register-based Humor on its own, Attardo proposes a symbiosis of the GTVH and the Register-based theory (1994:246).

So, why not use any of these fore mentioned theories in this study? The SSTH and the GTVH as well as the theory of Register-based Humour would undoubtedly have been possible vehicles for the analysis of the data in question. The reason for choosing otherwise was basically the need to find some commonsensical answers to the question of what makes this particular sitcom so funny, and by commonsensical I mean results that could be understood without previous knowledge on linguistics. Naturally some theoretical tools would be required to achieve this. By using the SSTH the

results, in my opinion, would have been quite one-sided, concentrating on script opposition, and the level of detail offered in the GTVH would have forced me to reduce the amount of data considerably, and would otherwise as well provided the kind of semantic information I simply am not looking for. One of the things I wish to accomplish in this study is a versatile and commonsensical way to explain the results to people with no previous knowledge of linguistics, and with the GTVH that would have been difficult.

The theory of Register-based Humour is also very interesting, and together with the GTVH would undoubtedly have offered insight into the humour of the series. Nevertheless, I have decided to approach the data from a somewhat different perspective which will be introduced in the following chapters. The perspectives are pragmatics and rhetorics, and the reasons for choosing just these approaches will be explained later. I believe, however, that someone else, with different expectations, will find the theories discarded in this study most useful in analysing verbal humour, perhaps even in the same data.

In the next section I will introduce more closely the theoretical framework and methodology of this particular study.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 THE PRAGMATICS OF VERBAL HUMOUR

Pragmatics is the first of the theoretical ”tools” employed in this study. Pragmatics is primarily concerned with what people do with discourse rather than with the linguistic or cognitive processes involved in it. One of the most important concepts in pragmatics is *conversational implicature* (Levinson 1983, Pratt 1977, Thomas 1995). It is meant to provide an account of how it is possible to mean more than is actually said. According to Pratt (1977:154), what a speaker implicates on a given occasion is distinguishable from what he says, that is, from the literal meaning of the words used. Therefore, what is said and what is implicated together form the meaning of the utterance in a given context. In the following chapters I will firstly explain the connection between

implicature and Grice´s Cooperative Principle, and secondly the connection between the Cooperative Principle and verbal humour.

3.1.1 Implicature and Grice's Cooperative Principle

H. P. Grice was the first to propose the key ideas of implicature in 1967 (Levinson 1983:100). To Grice, implicature is a theory of how people use language. He distinguishes between two types of implicature: conventional and conversational implicature. As Thomas (1995:57) points out, the difference between these two is that, even though they both convey an additional level of meaning which is beyond the semantic meaning of the words uttered, in conventional implicature the implicature remains the same regardless of the context, whereas in the case of conversational implicature what is implied varies according to the context of the utterance. Herman (1998) describes implicature in the following way:

> the concept of implicature is important because it enables us not to restrict a concept of meaning in communication only to the code. The use of conceptualised implicatures means that 'meanings' can be created with particular context and the conditions that obtain within it. Such 'meanings' need not transfer to any other context unless similar intentions and conditions obtain. They could be produced whenever the occasion demands and then they disappear, since they are not coded. (Herman 1998:176)

Grice (1989) believes that there is a set of assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation, and these assumptions may be formulated as guidelines for efficient and effective use of language. The guidelines, according to Grice, are four basic *maxims of conversation* which together express a general *cooperative principle*. The principle is: make your contribution as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or directions of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1989:26). The maxims are:

- *The maxim of Quality*: try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically: (i) do not say what you believe to be false (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

- *The maxim of Quantity*: (i) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange (ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required
- *The maxim of Relevance*: make your contribution relevant
- *The maxim of Manner*: be perspicuous, and specifically: (i) avoid obscurity (ii) avoid ambiguity (iii) be brief (iv) be orderly. (Grice 1989:26-27)

Basically, these maxims specify what we have to do in order to converse as efficiently, rationally and cooperatively as possible. In brief, we should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information (Levinson 1983:102). Thomas (1995:56) reminds us that even though Grice's work is sketchy and in many ways problematic, as well as frequently misunderstood, it has proved to be one of the most influential theories in the development of pragmatics. According to Grice (1989:29) it is, however, important to understand that the maxims are not supposed to describe how people actually talk, they merely attempt to describe a type of conversational practise that is often reasonable for us to follow. Exceptions naturally occur when ones aim is, for example, to lie, or to tell a joke or a story. Grice's use of the term implicature refers to the different kinds of ways by which we make sense of what we hear, and in situations when it appears that the maxims are not being followed, we assume that the maxims are followed at some deeper level, and so being the utterance is also cooperative at some deeper level. Basically this means that, when we do not follow the maxims (and this is quite frequent), people still interpret what we say as conforming to the maxims at some level. The maxims help us to get from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning. (Grice 1989:30-31). Thomas (1995:63) adds that according to Grice without the assumption of the CP (cooperative principle) there is no mechanism to prompt someone to seek for another level of interpretation. So, what is the connection between humour and Grice's maxims?

Grice, among others, has claimed that most jokes violate the maxims of conversation, and therefore both the maxims as well as the different kinds of violations will be examined a bit further. As mentioned before, it is very common for speakers to fail to fulfil the conversational maxims. We often get

carried away on a subject and thus violate the maxim of Quantity, we make mistakes, become confused or speak incoherently, we often under- or overestimate what the hearer already knows of the subject and so on. Any of this does not, however, mean that we are not following the CP. The hearer has every reason to assume that the speaker is, nevertheless, at least trying to "make his/her contribution as is required by the purpose of the exchange". However, the cases in which a speaker knowingly and *deliberately* fails to fulfil a maxim are much more interesting, and that brings us to the topic of this study.

A case in which a speaker observes all the maxims basically generates no implicature since there is no distinction between what is said and what is meant, and hence no additional level of interpretation is needed. However, cases of non-observance of the maxims seem to be much more frequent. Grice (1989:49) described four different ways of non-observance. They include the following:

1) He may quietly and ostentatiously VIOLATE a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead.
2) He may OPT OUT from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP; he may say, indicate or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to co-operate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, for example, *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed.*
3) He may be faced with a CLASH: he may be unable, for example, to fulfil the first maxim of Quantity (Be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxim of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say).
4) He may FLOUT a maxim: that is, he may BLATANTLY fail to fulfil it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfil the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in the view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall CP? This situation is one that characteristically gives raise to

> the conversational implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being EXPLOITED.

Mooney (2004) points out that this aspect of Grice's work has not been the issue of much study, and that the most extensive and systematic work on these lines has been carried out by Thomas (1995).

Thomas (1995) mostly agrees with Grice when it comes to the different ways of failing to observe the maxims. There are, however, some differences. She reports that there are five different ways of failing to observe a maxim, which are: *Flouting a maxim* (1995:65)*, Violating a maxim* (1995:72)*, Infringing a maxim* (1995:74)*, Opting out of a maxim* (1995:74) and *Suspending a maxim* (1995:76). The most important category, according to Thomas, is the first one, flouting a maxim. A flout occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim with the deliberate intention of generating an implicature. This may happen, for example, by giving either more or less information than is required in the situation, saying something that is blatantly untrue or by making responses or observations which are obviously irrelevant.

By the violation of the maxims, Grice (according to Thomas 1995:72) means the unostentatious non-observance of a maxim. Violation differs from flouting in that generally you do not find out that you have been misled by violating a maxim, whereas floutings of maxims are meant to be noticed. The infringing of a maxim, on the other hand, happens when a speaker with no intention of generating an implicature fails to observe a maxim. The reason for this is imperfect linguistic performance, which can be due to, for example, imperfect command of the language, because the speaker's performance of the language is somehow impaired, because of some cognitive impairment or because the speaker is constitutionally incapable of speaking clearly, and so on (Thomas 1995:74). Thomas (1995) continues by stating that by opting out of a maxim, on the other hand, the speaker may indicate unwillingness to cooperate in a way that the maxims require. An example of this could be a person who, for legal reasons, refuses to give information. In a case of suspending a maxim a speaker does not give adequate information in a given situation because there are certain events and situations in which there is no expectation on the part of any of the participants that they will be fulfilled.

The reasons for this may be, for example, culture-specific or specific to particular events or situations. Thomas points out that often all these cases of non-observance of the maxims are incorrectly called violations. (Thomas 1995:64-78)

Thomas (1995) argues that there are a number of problems associated with Grice's theory. She lists five main problems, which are:

1) Sometimes an utterance has a range of possible interpretations. How do we know when a speaker is deliberately failing to observe a maxim and hence that the implicature is intended?
2) How can we distinguish between different types of non-observance (e.g. distinguish a violation from an infringement)?
3) Grice's four maxims seem to be rather different in nature. What are the consequences of this?
4) Sometimes the maxims seem to overlap or are difficult to distinguish from one another.
5) Grice argued that there should be a mechanism for calculating implicature, but it is not always clear how this operates. (Thomas 1995:87-91)

One of the biggest problems with the he maxims is that they are not of the same order. The maxim of Quality, as Thomas (1995) points out, is the most straightforward; someone is either telling the exact truth or is not. The maxims of Quantity and Manner, on the other hand, are much more difficult to define since it is rarely possible to give precisely the right amount of information, or to speak with perfect clarity. In addition, the maxims of Manner and Quantity often seem to overlap and co-occur. (Thomas 1995:91). Also the other problems identified by Thomas make all analysis using Grice´s maxims challenging but, in my opinion, not impossible.

Next I will examine more closely the connection between humour and the maxims.

3.1.2 Verbal humour as a violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle

Attardo (1994) discusses jokes and humour in the light of Grice's Cooperative Principle. He argues that it is established that a large number of jokes present a violation of one of the four maxims composing the CP (1994:27, 1993:541). Grice himself, who also considered irony as an example of implicature, was the first to propose that jokes violate the maxims. Attardo presents the following as examples of jokes that violate Grice's maxims (1994: 272):

(1) Quantity: 'Excuse me, do you know what time it is?' – 'Yes.'
(2) Relation: 'How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?' – 'Fish!'
(3) Manner: 'Do you believe in clubs for young people?' – 'Only when kindness fails.'
(4) Quality: Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?' – 'Because the fighting was over.' (Johnny Carson 1-9-90)

Example (1) violates the maxim of Quantity by not providing enough information, whereas example (2) violates the maxim of Relation by associating surrealists with a completely bizarre answer. In example (3) the submaxim of the maxim of Manner "avoid ambiguity" is being violated (the double meaning of the word "club"). This is an often-used method in e.g. puns and word play. Example (4) deliberately violates the maxim of Quality by insinuating that the Vice President is a coward. (Attardo 1994:273)

Attardo (1994:273) claims, thus, that the jokes mentioned above, do not, for example, flout or opt out of a maxim, but that they specifically violate the maxims in question, in other words, they fail to conform to their "recommendations''. Attardo (1994:276) continues by stating that, according to Grice, by violating the maxims the speaker '"will be liable to mislead", and this is actually the case in the literal meaning of jokes. So being, the understanding of a joke can be seen as a discovery of a second sense or meaning. That can be said to be the basis for interpretation of all humorous texts; reaching an interpretative dead-end and going back to find another interpretation to the text. In practice this often means that the speaker or writer

uses the violation of the maxim to mislead the hearer that "normal" information is being provided, while the utterance is actually spiced with the unexpected presence of a second sense. (Attardo 1994:276). Mooney (2004:915), on the other hand, makes a distinction between successful and unsuccessful violation. The reason for this is that while a successful violation actually generates no implicature, an unsuccessful violation does so. A successful violation is quiet and unostentatious and thus will go unnoticed by the hearer even if the violation has been intentional. Thus the violations can be considered as successful as long as they are not detected. She points out, however, that successful violations differ from humour, since humour is meant to be detected, and can be considered as failed if this does not happen. She claims that if humour is considered to belong to the category of violation, it cannot belong under the category of successful violation. Mooney (2004) adds, however, that there are cases in which humour is not meant to be noticed by the hearer. The speaker may violate the maxims, for example, purely for his/her own amusement.

Also Mooney (2004) recognizes that the CP has received criticism. She points out that the CP "seems to be describing ideal, and thus unproblematic, exchanges" (2004:900). Mooney adds, however, that this is actually not the case. She attempts to solve the apparent dilemma of the maxims by adding the notion of *activity types,* introduced by Levinson (1983), to the CP, and she considers it as an explanation for interactions which do not follow the CP but still exploit the maxims to generate implicature. Mooney also discusses the way Attardo deals with the issue. Attardo (1994:205-6) points out the way Raskin (1985) believed that jokes, instead of violating Grice's maxims, followed a different set of maxims and thus presented his own cooperative principle. Raskin introduced a set of four maxims, which together formed the so-called *non-bona-fide* (NBF) communication mode of joke telling or humour. The NBF communication mode an the maxims are (Raskin 1984:103):

1) Maxim of Quantity: Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke;
2) Maxim of Quality: Say only what is compatible with the world of the joke;

3) Maxim of Relation: Say only what is relevant to the joke;
4) Maxim of Manner: Tell the joke efficiently.

Attardo points out, however, that this joke-telling mode tells nothing of the status of the text in relation to Grice's CP, and the NBF must be considered as an alternative to the CP. Therefore, whether jokes are cooperative or not tells nothing of their relation to the CP of non-humorous communication. (Attardo 1993:544). Nevertheless, Attardo (1994:334) reminds that the neo-Gricean analysis of humour is very likely to become increasingly important in the process of combining humour research with mainstream linguistics, and that the violations of the maxims as well as the idea of the hierarchy of the CP's are the "mainstays" of this approach.

In this study I will take Grice's maxims and their non-fulfilment as the starting point for humour analysis. I find the level of analysis offered by this pragmatic approach well suited for my purposes; it does not go into too much detail, thus enabling a large amount of data, but still giving exact information about the pragmatic nature of the humour in the series. I will not, however, take into account the different kinds of non-fulfilments of the maxims; in my opinion the way the violations have been carried out is not as important in this context as whether a violation has occurred at all or not. Nevertheless, in some instances I will make a distinction between what, in my opinion, are the two main kinds of non-fulfilment: intentional and unintentional violation (infringement) of a maxim, since in my view that brings forward essential information about the characters and their personal styles in the creation of humour.

To bring more versatility to the study, I will analyse my data also from another perspective; a rhetorical one, and I base my analysis on an inventory of rhetorical techniques of humour compiled by Berger (1990). I will begin, however, with a more general account of rhetorics, moving on to its connection to the study of humour in this case.

3.2 THE RHETORICS OF VERBAL HUMOUR

The traditional meaning of rhetorics is the art of persuasion. These days, however, the term is used much more broadly. According to Covino and Jolliffe (1995:10-24) the major elements of rhetorical theory are the *rhetorical situation*, the *audience*, the *pisteis* or "proofs" and the five canons of rhetoric: *invention, arrangement, style, memory* and *delivery*. Of these, memory reminds us the most of the ancient roots of the rhetorical theory. In the classical period the rhetors were expected to remember their speeches by heart. Thus the art of memory was practised with the help of association. The rhetor associated parts of his speech with visual images in some physical setting. As the importance of memorizing diminished and written texts became a prominent part of rhetorics, the importance of memory also diminished. Primeau (1979:21, as cited in Berger 1995:52) agrees that there is a connection between *memoria* and modern rhetorics. He connects memoria to the "techniques used by message inventors to make memorable what they had created, arranged, stylised and delivered, such as the alliteration, repetition, use of figurative language and so forth". Berger (1995:51) claims, that modern rhetoricians are concerned with for example how written communication works, the nature of narrativity and stylistics in general. Further, according to Foss (1996:6), rhetorics is no longer limited to written or spoken discourse, but any form of communication; be it speeches, conversations, television programs, art or dance, they all fall in the scope of rhetorics.

In this study the data consist of a television series and the focal point is humour, and as Hart (1997) points out, some argue whether the study of unserious texts is even worth the while. Can, for example, different modes of popular culture tell us something important about the world? According to Hart (1997), many critics say yes for these reasons:

(1) rhetoric is the most powerful when it is not noticed, and nobody notices popular culture;
(2) people are easiest to persuade when they are in a good mood, and entertainment creates such moods;

(3) some of our most basic values come to us when we are young, and the young consume entertainment voraciously; and
(4) the mass media disseminate entertainment far and wide, thus affecting millions. (Hart 1997:24)

Hart (1997:24) continues by claiming that the only thing sillier than studying popular culture is actually not studying it at all. Berger (1995:51) reminds that rhetorics has indeed been used to analyse popular culture, for example to interpret television and televised texts. The data in this study is a good example of mass entertainment, the series has been seen not only in Britain, but all over the world, and this study attempts to adapt Berger´s analysis of the rhetorical techniques of humour to it.

3.2.1 The rhetorical techniques of humour

In his analysis of humour, Berger (1995) approaches the subject from a rhetorical perspective. It involves using rhetorics in a fairly wide sense of the word, but a connection between his methodology and the traditional rhetoric (mainly in the concept of *memoria*) can still be found. Berger (1995:53) is not concerned with techniques that can be used to make people believe something, but rather in the techniques that can be used to 'persuade' people to laugh. So being the focus is on techniques, or what the classical rhetoricians would call *memoria*. Berger (1995:54) has analysed humorous material from writers, artists, stand-up comedians and so forth, and has come up with an inventory of 45 techniques that have been used to generate laughter. He has divided the techniques into four categories: humour involving language, humour involving logic, humour involving identity and humour involving sight or action, which he calls visual humour (Berger 1995:54). Berger claims that these techniques have been used to create humour from the earliest comedies to the present day. The techniques are presented in the following table:

Table 4. The rhetorical techniques of humour

Language	**Logic**	**Identity**	**Visual**
Allusion	absurdity	before/after	chase
Bombast	accident	burlesque	Speed
Definition	analogy	caricature	slapstick
exaggeration	catalogue	eccentricity	
facetiousness	coincidence	embarrassment	
Insults	comparison	exposure	
Infantilism	disappointment	grotesque	
Irony	ignorance	imitation	
misunderstanding	mistakes	impersonation	
overliteralness	repetition	mimicry	
puns and wordplay	reversal	parody	
Repartee	rigidity	scale	
Ridicule	theme/variation	stereotypes	
Sarcasm		unmasking	
Satire			

(Berger 1990: 59)

Berger (1990, 1995) acknowledges that the techniques are quite different. Whereas some of them are quite straightforward, some, like irony, are so complex and versatile that the entire study could be devoted to them. However, the more unfamiliar terms relevant to this study (expressed through language) are explained in more detail in an appendix. Some of the explanations are from Webster's *Dictionary and Thesaurus*, and some from Berger himself.

As I have explained earlier, one of the reasons for doing this study is to find a way to explain and talk about humour with normal everyday words, and to me, personally, that is a key element when studying humour. Naturally I understand the need for more theoretical studies, such as the one proposed by Attardo (1998), but in my opinion, since humour is such an intrinsic part of people´s everyday lives, its study and analysis, as well as the results, should not be aimed and confined solely to the scientific community. To get to my aim, in this study I will use Berger´s inventory of techniques to identify the techniques of humour used in the data. I will not, however, limit the concept of verbal humour to apply solely to the techniques under the heading of "Language based techniques of humour". The techniques of logic and identity are just as applicable to my study, providing, naturally, that they have been mediated through language. In my opinion, this approach gives the study exactly the kind

of connection to familiar concepts and ideas people generally associate with humour. Berger's rhetoric modification simply provides a more theoretical frame to it.

Next I will present the research questions of this study as well as introduce the data and the methods of analysis a bit further.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The aim of this study is to analyse verbal humour in a TV-sitcom from two perspectives: pragmatic and rhetorical. The reason for choosing two separate methods is the attempt to make the analysis as comprehensive as possible (although I realise that is virtually impossible); verbal humour is such a complex issue that it would be very difficult to cover it with just one method and viewpoint, or even with one study. The methods chosen for this study differ from each other greatly, and thus complement each other well.

The pragmatic strategy used in this study is based on the claim that acts of verbal humour violate Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims of conversation: maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance and Manner. The rhetorical strategy, on the other hand, stems from an inventory of rhetorical techniques of humour introduced by Berger (1990). Berger has divided the techniques into four categories: language, logic, identity and visually based techniques. The ones that will be taken into account in the present study are language and logic, because they all can be expressed through language and can thus create verbal humour. Naturally neither of these strategies is without flaws, particularly Grice´s cooperative principle has encountered much opposition, but since it is still seen as a prominent idea in pragmatics, I have decided to include it in my study. The precise research questions are:

1. What kind of pragmatic and rhetorical strategies are used to create verbal humour in the TV-sitcom *Blackaddder*?
   1.1 Are the maxims of conversation violated to create humour?
      a) if they are, how, by whom, in what context?

b) what kind of humour is created with the help of the violations of the maxims?

1.2 What kinds of rhetorical techniques are used to create humour?

a) how are they used, by whom, in what context?

b) what kind of humour is created with the help of the rhetorical techniques?

The data of this study consist of 24 half-hour long episodes of the series. The main source has been the book *Blackadder The Whole Damn Dynasty 1485-1917* (Atkinson et al. 1999) which consists of the scripts of the episodes. I have also watched the episodes on DVD, mainly to get a good overall picture of the series. From the data all instances of both the pragmatic and the rhetorical techniques were taken into account for the analysis.

The series *Blackadder* was made between the years 1983-1989, consisting of all together four seasons (24 episodes), plus some extra episodes. Each of the four seasons is situated in different eras of the English history, though the representation is "grossly distorted", as Neale and Krutnik (1990:246-247) put it. The seasons and the eras involved are: 1) *The Black Adder* – the end of the 15th century, courts of Richard III and Richard IV; 2) *Blackadder II* – the end of the 16th century, Queen Elizabeth I's court; 3) *Blackadder the Third* – somewhere between 1811 and 1820, the court of Prince Regent who was later to become George IV; and 4) *Blackadder goes Forth* – year 1917, the first world war. Neale and Krutnik (1990:246-247) see the characters in the series as stereotypes of people's commonsense ideas of the history, which in its own right reveals the "banality of popular conceptions", as they put it. The location of three of the seasons, the royal court, also reinforces Berger's conception of the elements of fairytales in sitcoms (see Table (2), p.10).

The central character in the series in each season is a descendant of the Blackadder line (in the first season Blackadder is called by his first name Edmund), and in general it can be said that a class based hierarchy exists between the characters; there is the witty but frustrated Blackadder who is caught between the silly, smelly Baldrick and his often infantile superiors, for example royalty. Therefore, the characters that will come up in the following

examples are Blackadder/ Edmund himself, the servant Baldrick (examples from all seasons), from the first season King Richard, Queen, Prince Harry (an eccentric royal family) and another very silly servant Percy. From the second season the characters (besides Blackadder and Baldrick) that will appear in the examples are Queen Elizabeth I (a very infantile character), Nursie (the Queen´s old wetnurse, both silly and infantile), lord Percy (simpleminded and gullible) and lord Melchett (rather vicious, not in good terms with Blackadder). The most prominent character in the third season, besides Blackadder and Baldrick, is Prince George (simpleminded and uncultured), other characters include for example Mrs. Miggins (the coffee shopkeeper), Dr Samuel Johnson (pompous, heavily satirical) and the Prime Minister Pitt the Younger (pimple-faced teenager, also a satirical character). In the final season the roles of the characters are somewhat different. Blackadder is a captain, whereas Baldrick is a private. Like in the other seasons, they have their superiors, in this case General Melchett (pompous and rather stupid). Blackadder also has an opponent in Captain Darling who strongly dislikes him, and Lieutenant George Barleigh has the role of the ignorant simpleton (alongside private Baldrick). The examples may also present characters which are not mentioned here, but their role will be explained in context of the example.

In my opinion the series in question provides good and versatile material for any kind of research, as in the course of its 24 episodes, apart from the few constant characters, the other characters change for each of the four seasons, and, in addition, every episode presents a few new characters. This ensures that the material is versatile and interesting.

In section four I will present the findings of this study, and I will deal with the two strategies first separately, at first concentrating on the pragmatic strategies and their relation to the verbal humour in the series and then turning to the rhetorical techniques of humour and their distribution in the data. I will do this by presenting examples of the series which represent the use of the rhetorical techniques of humour. Finally I will present longer extracts of each of the four seasons of the series, analysing them from both the pragmatic and the rhetorical viewpoint. This is primarily to demonstrate the way they differ from and complement each other. The reason the findings of the two strategies

are mainly presented separately is that in my view that ensures a clearer picture of how the strategies function.

4 ANALYSIS

4.1 THE PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES

In this section I answers the research question concerning the pragmatic strategies used in the series to create humour. I will deal with the question of how the pragmatic strategies, more precisely how the Gricean maxims, are used in the series to create humour. I will concentrate on the questions of *how, by whom,* and *in what context* the maxims are violated. I will also attempt to sum up the kind of humour the violations of the maxims have created in the series as a whole.

4.1.1 How are the Maxims violated in the data?

All the maxims are violated in the series for humorous purposes. In more precise terms, on many occasions implicatures are created by means of violating the maxims either deliberately or by mistake. The maxim that is violated the most is the maxim of Quality (try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically: (i) do not say what you believe to be false (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence). The maxim is violated fairly regularly (thirteen to fourteen times per episode on an average) throughout the whole series, mainly by characters saying something they know to be false; e.g. by simply lying, by exaggerating or by using figurative language that does not comply even with the reality of the show. The maxim of Quality is violated also unintentionally several times (for example by the simpleminded Baldrick), mainly by stating something that the character him/herself believes to be true, but the other characters in the exchange know to be false, in other words by mistakes and misunderstandings.

The other maxim that is violated extensively (approximately eleven times per episode) in the series is the maxim of Manner (be perspicuous, and specifically: (i) avoid obscurity (ii) avoid ambiguity (iii) be brief (iv) be orderly). This is mainly achieved by using extremely meandering language; being brief and orderly has clearly not been a goal for the writers of the show. I will clarify later which of the characters use this technique the most.

The maxims of Quantity ((i) make your contribution as informative as required for the current purpose of the exchange (ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required) and the maxim of Relevance (make your contribution relevant) are also violated, but not as extensively as the two former, on an average they are both violated from two to three times per episode. The violations of the maxim of Quantity occur for example when a character blabbers things that s/he should not be saying, or when a character gives sarcastic answers to silly questions (examples will be given later). The maxim of Relevance, on the other hand, can be seen to operate on two levels; that of the reality of the series, and the reality of the reader/viewer. The irrelevant absurdities the characters often utter comply with the reality of the series as it is intended to be irrelevant and thus funny and relevant, but from the perspective of the ”real” reality, much of what the characters say is irrelevant.

4.1.2 Edmund/ Blackadder and the violations of the maxims

The character who is responsible for most of the verbal humour in the series is Edmund/Blackadder. One obvious reason for that is that he has more lines than anybody else; he is, after all, the main character of the series. Therefore it is hardly surprising that he also violates the maxims the most. The maxims he violates the most are Quality and Manner. At this stage it must be mentioned that the character of Edmund/Blackadder is not constant throughout the series. In the first season *The Black Adder*, Edmund is considerably less intelligent than what he is in the later three seasons. This does not, however, seem to have any impact on the distribution of the violations of the maxims. Throughout the whole series his character violates the maxims of Quality and Manner very

effectively. The maxims of Quantity and Relevance are also violated, but not as systematically. However, even though the distribution of the maxims Blackadder violates does not change, the way in which he violates them does change in the course of the series, and the most drastic change occurs after the first season. In the first season Edmund violates the maxim of Quality by exaggerations and lies. He gets into situations where he attempts to raise his profile and therefore he resorts to exaggeration, or he gets into trouble and sees lying as the best way to get out of it. Edmund is not, however, too stupid to come up with occasional witty remarks, and so being one of the ways of violating the maxim of Quality is by insults (for example name-calling) or some other type of figurative language.

The next two examples demonstrate Edmund´s tendency to violate the maxim of Quality in the first season. In example (1) Edmund has accidentally cut off the head of King Richard III. As the rumour of the King's death spreads in the castle, Edmund is asked whether it s true that the king really is dead, and he reacts to it (naturally) by lying. It must be emphasised that no one has any reason to think that he would have anything to do with the incident, at least so far. The first example actually violates other maxims as well; it violates the maxim of Quantity, since Edmund gives far more information than is needed, and maxim of Manner, since what he is actually saying remains fairly obscure:

Example (1)

Edmund

Yes, well I would´t know really. I mean I was nowhere near him at the time. I just heard from someone that he'd, er… I mean I don't know where he was killed. I was completely on the other side of the field. I was nowhere near the cottage. Not that it was a cottage. It was a river. But then I wouldn't know, because I wasn't there. But apparently some fool cut his head off. Or at least killed him in some way: perhaps took an ear off. In fact I think he was only wounded. Or was that somebody else? Yes, it was: he wasn't even wounded, in fact. Why, did somebody say he was dead? (Atkinson et al. 1999:8)

In the second example Edmund is discussing the colour of his bride´s (a Spanish Princess) eyes with Percy when Percy makes a comparison to praise the eyes, which Edmund finds most useless in the situation (he does not want

to marry the Princess). Edmund thus violates the maxim of Quality by exaggerating (Percy is as much use to him as a hole in the head) and insulting Percy (Percy has never had a brain):

Example (2)

Edmund

Percy, in the end, you are about as much use to me as a hole in the head, an affliction with which you must be familiar, never having a brain. (Atkinson et al. 1999:61)

In the first season Edmund does not violate the maxim of Manner as much as in the other seasons, but it is nevertheless violated considerably more than the remaining two maxims. The way Edmund violates the maxim of Manner is mainly by complete absurdities and insults, and example (2) provides an illustration of this as well, just like example (1), which violates the maxim as it clearly is not as ”brief” as it could be. In the example Edmund keeps on blabbering when he could have just said “yes”. The same applies to the violation of the maxim Relevance. Even though Edmunds wisecracks are relevant from the point of view of the series, they seem irrelevant in their context and thus the reader reacts to them and finds them funny. In the next example Edmund is convinced that the men riding towards the castle under King Richard´s flag are in fact enemies trying to fool him and the others in the castle into staying, and he argues with Baldrick whether it is a cunning trick or not. Edmund´s last, slightly sarcastic comment can be seen as irrelevant, as it does not really bring anything to the conversation and as it obviously cannot be true. It is, after all, very unlikely, that some third party had come up with a plan to pretend to be King Richard and raid the castle and then “borrowed” the idea to someone else:

Example (3)

Baldrick

I’m not sure it’s a cunning trick.

Edmund

Well, no, it’s not a particularly cunning trick because we’ve seen through it…

Edmund locks the door.

But obviously they thought it was cunning when they thought it up.

Bladrick

I'm not sure they did think it up.

Edmund

Oh, you think someone else thought it up and they borrowed it for the occasion.

(Atkinson et al. 1999:7)

In the later three seasons the character of Blackadder is much more constant. He has now changed into a witty, rather mean spirited, selfish character, and this can be seen in the ways the maxims are violated. He violates the maxim of Quality by mean, witty remarks and wisecracks (which obviously are not true, like in example 4), and he can be fairly sure that the other characters will not understand the sting. He also insults people by name-calling, he uses irony and he exaggerates (this is shown in later examples). Absurd comparisons are not unknown to him, as are not simple lies he uses to save his neck, or to get what he wants. He also uses the most bizarre sayings to emphasise his points (this will also be shown in later examples). The next two examples illustrate the ways he violates the maxim of Quality. In example (4) from the second season of the series the Queen has played a silly trick on Blackadder, she has sent him a message "demanding his urgent presence on pain of death" (Atkinson et al. 1999:180), whereas, in fact, she has no real reason to see him, and when Blackadder arrives she pretends that she does not know why he has come. Blackadder´s response is utterly sarcastic and untrue (and thus violates the maxim of Quality). The Queen does not, however, notice this:

Example (4)

Queen

I *do* know why I wanted to see you, and I just pretended I didn't and I fooled you and it worked *brilliantly*, didn't it?

Blackadder

It was terrific, madam. Thank God I wore my corset, because I think my sides have split.

(Atkinson et al. 1999:180)

In the next example, also from the second season of the series, Blackadder violates the maxim of Quality by lying to the Queen. He has led her to believe

that he is incredibly wealthy, when in fact he is constantly broke. In this scene the Queen has asked Blackadder for some cash and Blackadder has claimed that he does not have any with him, even though he has a thousand pounds he got from selling his apartment, which he desperately needs. The Queen, however, notices a huge wedge in his tights:

Example (5)

Queen

But Edmund, what's that in your tights?

Blackadder takes it out, most surprised.

Blackadder

Good Lord!

Queen

It looks like a thousand pounds.

Blackadder

So it is!

Queen

I thought you said you didn't have any?

Blackadder

Yes, sorry, I meant *real* money: this is just a bit of loose change. I must have left it in the codpiece when I sent these tights to the laundry. (Atkinson et al. 1999:187)

Violations of the maxim of Manner are very closely tied to the violations of the maxim of Quality. The violations in this case are often done by exaggeration, (like in example (4), in which Blackadder exaggerates the effect of the Queen´s joke) vicious comments and name-calling, sarcasm and wisecracks, vivid and often rude language and comparison (these will be shown in later examples). Basically it is safe to conclude that most of what Blackadder says is not absolutely needed and definitely not orderly. In the next two examples Blackadder violates the maxim of Manner by insult and exaggeration. In example (6), which is from the fourth season of the series, taking place in the first world war, the characters argue whether Charles Chaplin is funny or not. Blackadder´s response violates the maxim of Manner by an exaggeration of some of the characteristics of the British music-hall tradition:

Example (6)

George

The reason why Chaplin is funny is because he's part of the great British music-hall tradition.

Blackadder

Ah, yes. The great British music-hall tradition. Two men with incredibly unconvincing Cockney accents going: 'What's up with you then? What's up with me then? Yeh, what's up with you then? What's up with me then? I'll tell you what's up with me then. I'm right browned off, that's what's up with me. Right browned off? Yes, right browned off.' *Get on with it!* (Atkinson et al. 1999:385)

In example (7), from the third season of the series, Blackadder is leaving his job as Prince George´s butler and says goodbye to Baldrick. In this case Blackadder violates the maxim of Manner by using rude language ("Sod off") and by insulting Baldrick and exaggerating ("if I ever meet you again, it will be twenty billion years too soon"):

Example (7)

Blackadder

Baldrick, I would like to say how much I will miss your honest, friendly companionship.

Baldrick

Thank you, Mr B.

Blackadder

But, as we both know, it would be an utter lie. I will therefore confine myself to saying simply, 'Sod off and if I ever meet you again, it will be twenty billion years too soon.'

(Atkinson et al. 1999:302)

In the later three seasons Blackadder sometimes obtains information to fool the other characters, he exaggerates often and sometimes says more than is needed by making sarcastic comments. At the same time he often violates also the maxims of Quality and Manner. Frequently he does this for mischievous reasons of his own, often simply to amuse himself. In the following example Prince George (third season of the series) has just explained how he has been insulted by the roaring crowd, and that he wishes he had thought of something clever to say back. Blackadder's response can be seen to violate the maxim of Quality (Sir Thomas More hardly kicked himself for not thinking of recanting

his Catholicism) as well as Quantity (his parable is hardly needed for the exchange):

Example (8)

Prince George

You see, if only *I*'d thought of saying that.

Blackadder

It is often the way, sir. Too late one thinks of what one should have said. Sir Thomas More, for instance, burned alive for refusing to recant to Catholicism, must have been kicking himself as the flames licked higher and higher, that it never occurred to him to say 'I recant my Catholicism'. (Atkinson et al. 1999:253)

The violations of the maxim of Relevance have a lot to do with the characters style and personality. Relevance is often violated unintentionally by saying something absurd and irrelevant. None of these cases fit the style or the character of Blackadder. He does, however, occasionally make comments, which superficially seem irrelevant. Usually it is a wisecrack of some sort, or a sarcastic remark using figurative language. In the next example from the third season of the series Blackadder has been inquired by the coffee shop keeper why women are not eligible to vote, and he thus lists up different groups besides women who are in the same situation. There are, however, some very notable irrelevancies in the list:

Example (9)

Blackadder

Of course you didn't. You're not eligible to vote.

Mrs Miggins

Why not?

Blackadder

Because virtually no one is – women, peasants, chimpanzees, lunatics, lords.

(Atkinson et al. 1999:235)

There are cases where Blackadder appears to violate all of the maxims at the same time. In the next example from the third season of the series he violates the maxim of Quality by exaggerating ("Something is always wrong") and insulting Doctor Johnson ("globulous fraud"), the maxim of Quantity by giving

excessive information about his wishes (to be a millionaire aristocrat with the sexual capacity of a rutting rhino), the maxim of Relevance by bringing up the whole eccentric wish, and the maxim of Manner by not being ”brief and orderly”:

Example (10)

Blackadder

Something is always wrong, Balders. The fact that I am not a millionaire aristocrat with the sexual capacity of a rutting rhino is a constant niggle. But today something is even wronger. That globulous fraud Dr Johnson is coming to tea. (Atkinson et al. 1999:254)

4.1.3 Baldrick and the violations of the maxims

Baldrick is the only character besides Blackadder who is present throughout the series. Like Blackadder, his character and role is somewhat different in the first season than in the later three. During the first season Baldrick is much more in the background, and he acts as what I call a ”mirror” to Edmund, and this means that he mostly enables and allows Edmund to make the funny comments. In the later seasons Baldrick is a much more prominent character. He can be found to violate all of the maxims, but not as systematically as Blackadder. He occasionally infringes the maxim of Quality (violates unintentionally) by saying something he thinks is true, but clearly and obviously is, and cannot be so (usually a case of mistake of misunderstanding), and this is the case in example (11) from the fourth season of the series. In the example Baldrick has been asked to pose for a painting pretending to be a nun, and the conversation turns into Baldrick´s father´s occupation:

Example (11)

Baldrick

You know, the funny thing is – my father was a nun.

Blackadder

No he wasn’t.

Baldrick

He was so, I know because whenever he was in the court and the judge used to say ’Occupation’, he’d say ’Nun’. (Atkinson et al. 1999:356-357)

Baldrick also violates the maxim of Relevance on more than one occasion. Although what he says is perfectly relevant from his own perspective, from the point of view of what is generally considered normal in a given situation it can be seen as irrelevant, as is evident in the following example from the second season of the series. In the example Blackadder is planning to have a party, and he intends it to be held in Baldrick´s bedroom. Baldrick surprisingly (but not uncharacteristically) expresses his gratitude in a most peculiar context (I must emphasise that it is not a case of a sarcastic remark):

Example (12)

Blackadder

Firstly, a total piss-up involving beer-throwing, broken furniture and wall-to-wall vomiting, to be held in Baldrick's bedroom.

Baldrick

Thank you very much, my lord. (Atkinson et al. 1999:199)

All in all, even though Baldrick violates the maxims, it is clear that what makes him funny cannot be exclusively explained through the violations of the maxims, since it is mainly due to his simple nature and his tendency to misunderstand and make mistakes, which does not necessarily violate any of the maxims (these will be discussed in more detail later).

4.1.4 Other characters and the violations of the Maxims

I will now briefly introduce some of the minor characters of the series in relation to the violation of the maxims. In the first season the character of King Richard IV (Edmund´s father) violates the maxims quite extensively. He violates the maxims of Quality by insults, exaggeration and absurdity, and the maxim of Manner by repetition and rudeness. In the next example the King has returned from a battle and is welcomed back by his other son, Prince Harry. In the example he violates the maxim of Manner by using rude language:

Example (13)

Prince Harry

We're so pleased you're back, Father.

King

I'm not. I miss the smell of blood in my nostrils, and the Queen's got a headache.

Prince Harry

But we do have a fascinating week ahead. The Archbishop of York has asked me if you'd care to join his Italian formation dancing class, and I really ought to give him an answer.

King

Do you want me to be honest or tactful?

Prince Harry

Oh, tactful, I think.

King

Tell him to get stuffed! Has that little hooligan McAngus left? (Atkinson et al. 1999:34)

In contrast, the Queen (Edmund´s mother) in the first season violates the maxim of Relevance by making rather absurd, irrelevant comments (tied to the violation of the maxim of Quantity; the information given is not needed for the exchange) The absurdity is clear in the following example where she demonstrated how good she is at keeping secrets:

Example (14)

Edmund

Oh, yes all right. Mother, you won't tell anyone about my oversleeping this morning and what have you, will you?

Queen

Would I? Do I tell people that your brother is afraid of spoons, or that your father has very small private parts?

Edmund

Ahm, no. (Atkinson et al. 1999:14)

Nursie (Queen Elizabeth I´s old wetnurse) in the second season of the series presents a good example of the violation of the maxim of Manner in a very distinct way; she talks a sort of motherese to the Queen, as if the Queen were a child. Therefore it can hardly be stated that she is perspicuous and avoids ambiguity, and this is evident in the next bit of conversation between

the Queen and Nursie. The Queen (Elizabeth I) pretends to be sorry for a practical joke she has played on Blackadder, and Nursie scolds her for it:

Example (15)

Queen

It was naughty and bad of me.

Nursie

It was, my little rosebud, and if you weren't quite so big, it would be time for Mr and Mrs Spank to pay a short sharp trip to Bottieland. (Atkinson et al. 1999:183)

It is interesting to compare Prince George (the third season), who is a very funny character, to Blackadder (Prince´s butler). Whereas Blackadder's main strategy is violating the maxims of Quality and Manner, Prince George violates mostly the maxim of Manner. In my view this is caused by the differences in the characters; whereas Blackadder is malicious and clever, the Prince is benevolent and simple. He violates the maxims of Manner by saying absurd, silly things, by making childish insults and by general playfulness. The Prince also violates the maxim of Relevance by sheer absurdities, and he infringes the same maxim by ignorance; by not having a clue what is going on. The character Lieutenant George in the fourth season is clearly the same as Prince George in the third, and the strategies are the same as well; he violates mostly the maxim of Manner by playfulness, childishness and facetiousness. In the next example Prince George violates the maxim of Manner by childish comments; his idea of a good response to an insult made by the Prime Minister is "bugger off, you old fart", and his idea of a best possible praise is also somewhat questionable:

Example (16)

Prince George

Well, quite. Why, only the other day Prime Minister Pitt called me an idle scrounger. It wasn't until ages later that I thought how clever it would have been to have said, 'Oh bugger off, you old fart!' I need to improve my mind, Blackadder, I want people to say, 'That George, why he's as clever as a stick in a bucket of pig swill'. (Atkinson et al. 1999:253-4)

4.1.5 The violations of the Maxims in the data in general

The maxims are clearly connected to each other, as has been mentioned earlier. All of the maxims can be violated individually, but some of them frequently co-occur. Quality and Manner are such a pair; they are often violated simultaneously, for example by exaggeration. When the maxim of Quality is violated on it's own, it is often a case of a lie. One comes to the conclusion that in this data humour is not primarily created through violations of the maxim of Relevance, even though it is violated occasionally by some characters. When this happens, it is usually an unexpected response to a question or comment. This is the case in the next example; in the first season Edmund tries to warn his mother of an imminent danger (enemy at the gate), and the Queen's reaction is somewhat unexpected, implying that in her mind the arrival of the enemy is not as unpleasant as one might think:

Example (17)

Edmund

Within seconds, Henry Tudor will be here at our gates.

Queen

Oh, Edmund, I'm not ready. I haven't had a bath or anything.

Edmund

Mother, Henry is our *enemy*. When his men get here they'll brutally ravish you and every woman in the castle.

Queen

I shan't bother to change then. (Atkinson et al. 1999:6)

Like the violations of the maxim of Quality, the violations of the maxim of Quantity are usually tied to the violation of the maxim of Manner, and this happens when a character either says too much, or remains obscure and does not say enough.

The violations are not tied to any specific situations, they are more closely connected to the characters and their style. There is the one that is prone to bending the truth (and thus violates the maxim of Quality), many of them exaggerate a lot (violating Quality and Quantity), some make irrelevant, absurd comments (violating Manner and Relevance). The amount of

information one gives is also used for comical purposes: saying too much means blabbering or saying something one should not be saying, and saying too little often means lying or using sarcasm to create an implicature. However, there are characters in the series that are very comical, but the humour is not created through violations of the maxims, and the implications of this will be discussed later.

Naturally the series also needs characters that are not so funny as such. They are needed to create situations and opportunities for the main protagonists to be funny, and I call these characters ”mirrors”. Naturally all of the characters occasionally act as mirrors, since it would be impossible for any character to be comical all the time, they must give others a chance to be funny also. Blackadder is, however, a character whose lines are almost without exception funny. Nevertheless, in the next example from the second season of the series he gets to act as a mirror to Percy (yet another very silly character) who thinks he has discovered a way to create gold. The following extract is also an example of humour that, apart from one infringement of the maxim of Quality (Percy believes that the green stuff in his hand is gold), does not violate any other Maxims; both characters say what they believe to be true, they both give sufficient amount of information, their contributions are relevant and they are perspicuous and brief:

Example (18)

Percy

After literally an hour’s ceaseless searching, I have succeeded in creating gold, pure gold!

Blackadder

Are you sure?

Percy

Yes, my lord… behold!

He uncovers a silver platter, which has a lump of something green on it.

Blackadder

Percy… it’s green.

Percy

That’s right, my lord.

Blackadder

Yes, Percy. I don’t want to be pedantic or anything, but the colour of gold is gold. What you have discovered, if it has a name, is some ’green’.

Percy's face holds an expression of joyous amazement. He holds the green out in front of him.

Percy

Oh Edmund, can it be true? That I hold here in my mortal hand, a nugget of purest green?

Blackadder

Indeed you do, Percy, except, of course, it's not really a nugget, is it? It's more of a splat.

Percy

Well, yes, a splat today, but tomorrow… who knows or dares to dream?

(Atkinson et al. 1999:184)

Thus, the verbal exchange between the characters as well as the relationships between them is the necessary environment needed for the humour to be created. For example Blackadder needs the sillier characters to make his remarks to, for example by violating the maxim of Manner by exaggeration.

Next I will consider the impact the violations of the Maxims have on the humour of the series.

4.1.6 What kind of humour is created through the violations of the maxims?

What would the series be like if the only humour in it was created by violating the maxims? Violations of the maxim of Quality provide a variety of humorous techniques which are employed regularly throughout the series, more by some characters than others. Some of these techniques are lies, exaggeration, facetiousness, insults and repartee. Mistakes are often realized through infringement of the maxim. The maxim of Manner has also been violated regularly in the series. In contrast to Quality, it is violated fairly steadily by all characters. By violating this maxim the result in the series is, for example, the vivid language employed by the characters, and the humour in the series is indeed very verbal. The whole point of the language of the series obviously is not to be orderly, and thus much of the humour is created through the use of vivid and meandering language. The techniques which cause the violation are, for example, insult, metaphors, comparison, exaggeration, wordplay, generally just ”being funny” (for example facetiousness) as well as ”being mean” (for example sarcasm, irony).

As mentioned earlier, even though the maxim of Relevance is not violated as frequently as the maxims of Quality and Manner, it is a part of the style of some characters, for example Baldrick´s. It can also be stated that, although the total number of the violations remains fairly small, all irrelevancies do, however, fit perfectly the overall character of the series. After all, all of the characters of the series could be described as eccentric, to say the least, and one would almost expect them to be irrelevant at least occasionally. The way this is achieved in the series is, for example, by paying attention to totally irrelevant matters, or by articulating them to the wrong person, or by saying something completely absurd and unexpected. Naturally this also depends on the character; whereas Blackadder violates the maxim by repartee and sarcasm, the others do it, for example, by absurdity and ignorance.

The violations of the maxim of Quantity happen when a character gives either too much or too little information. When the maxim of Relevance is violated at the same time, the character usually ends up giving more information than is needed; he/she blabbers things that are not relevant to the situation, makes unnecessary comparisons or exaggerates. When too little information is provided, it is usually the case of a lie, or unwillingness to reveal all the details. In cases where the maxim of Manner is violated together with Quantity, the result is usually vivid, figurative language, which is used, for example, to make an insult.

As I have mentioned earlier, all instances of humour in this series cannot be explained through the violations of the Maxims, and therefore I have turned to another possible method of analysis to tackle the task. In this study, the other method consists of Berger´s (1990) inventory of rhetorical techniques of humour, and next I will present the findings of the rhetorical analysis.

4.2 THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

Quite many of the rhetorical techniques of humour have actually already been mentioned above in order to clarify the violations of the maxims. In this section, however, I will examine and analyse their use in the series in more detail, paying attention to how they are used, who uses them, and in which

contexts they are used. I will also draw some conclusions about what kind of humour the general use of the techniques brings about.

4.2.1 How are the rhetorical techniques of humour used in the series?

The rhetorical techniques of humour (Berger 1990:59, see p.31) are used so regularly and extensively throughout the series, that one could even argue that they define the type of sitcom in question. Since I was interested in the verbal humour of the series, I primarily looked for the language-based techniques of humour (as opposed to logic, identity and visually based techniques). However, I wanted to include all instances of verbal humour in the analysis, and in my opinion most of the logic-based techniques could also be expressed through language (for example absurdity, comparison, ignorance, repetition, reversal and rigidity), and therefore I included them into the analysis as well. Before getting into the characters and the techniques they use the most, I will briefly introduce the techniques that are used the most in the data in general, beginning with the language based techniques, and then moving on to the logic based techniques of humour.

All of the language-based techniques of humour are used at some point in the series; some only occasionally, others fairly constantly. In addition, most of the logic-based techniques are used as well. The language-based technique that is used the most is repartee (wittiness, ready wit; see example (19), used approximately ten times per episode); it often manifests itself in colourful, vivid language used by many of the characters. Insults are the second language based category found frequently in the series. Insults (used approximately eight times per episode) are cast regularly by the characters, and they can vary from basic name-calling to more sophisticated sarcastic remarks. Insults often occur together with repartee, as in Blackadder's response in the following example from the fourth season of the series. In the example Blackadder disparages the pompous Flying Ace Squadron Commander Lord Flashheart, and refuses to be impressed by his sudden arrival. Blackadder manages to insult Flashheart ("most of the infantry think you´re a prat") as

well as use repartee (the infantry would rather meet a toilet cleaner than Flashheart) in his response:

Example (19)

Flashheart

Yeah? Like hell! You've probably got little piccies of me on the walls of your dug-out, haven't you? I bet you go all girly and giggly whenever you look at them.

Blackadder

Ah! I'm afraid not – unfortunately, most of the infantry think you're a prat. Ask them who they'd prefer to meet – Squadron Commander Flashheart or the man who cleans the public toilets in Aberdeen and they'd go for Wee Jock Poo-Pong McPlop every time.

(Atkinson et al. 1999:404)

Also sarcasm (used approximately five to six times per episode) is a frequently employed technique in the series. It is found in mean-spirited, sharp remarks, uttered usually by the main protagonist, Blackadder, and this is illustrated in the next example from the trenches of WW1. In the example Blackadder is suspecting that the moment has come for them to leave the trenches and start fighting. His view of Field Marshal Haig´s war efforts is, however, very sarcastic, illustrating well his inclination to both question, as well as to ridicule, his superiors:

Example (20)

George

Great Scott, sir, you don't think the moment's finally arrived to give Harry the Hun a darn good British-style thrashing, six o' the best, trousers down?!

Blackadder

If you mean are we all going to get killed, the answer is 'yes'. Clearly Field Marshal Haig is about to make yet another gargantuan effort to move his drinks cabinet six inches closer to Berlin. (Atkinson et al. 1999:350)

Exaggeration (used approximately four to five times per episode) is yet another language based technique commonly used in the series. Nearly all characters exaggerate, and they do it for many reasons, for example to insult. The next example (more examples of exaggeration will be given later) is again from the fourth season of the series, and the situation is that General Melchett is looking

for someone to paint an inspiring picture to the cover of *King and Country* magazine, and he is shown a horrible picture allegedly painted by Lieutenant George (but actually painted by Blackadder). When Lieutenant George asks for permission to speak to reveal that he has not done the painting, General Melchett´s reaction is exaggerating, to say the least:

Example (21)

Melchett

Quite right. If what happens when you open your mouth is anything like what happens when you open your paint box, we'll all be drenched in phlegm. This isn't what we're looking for at all, is it, Darling? (Atkinson et al. 1999:359)

The terms "wordplay and puns" cover a large area, but at least some forms of wordplay can be found in the language of the series (approximately three times per episode). Alliteration (the repetition of the same initial consonance or consonantal cluster) is one, and assonance (the repetition of the same or similar vowel in successive words) is another. In the following example, from the fourth season of the series, the soldiers must find a woman to sing at their concert party, and Blackadder describes the situation using alliteration. This example illuminates well the kind of verbal play that comes strongly across from the data:

Example (22)

Blackadder

You can say that again, George. We're in the stickiest situation since Sticky the Stick Insect got stuck on a sticky bun. We are in trouble. (Atkinson et al. 1999:397)

A peculiar kind of wordplay is found in one of the episodes. This is the case of portmanteau words, which means self-coined words. In the episode *Ink and Incapability* from the third season of the series Blackadder makes up words to confuse Doctor Johnson, who has just finished writing *The Dictionary of the English Language*. The words he comes up with resemble real words appropriate to the situation, but are nevertheless utter gibberish. In the following example Blackadder uses some of his portmanteau words ("contrafibularatories", "anaspeptic", "phrasmotic" and "periconbobulations")

to tease Dr Johnson as he congratulates him for managing to get every word in the English language in to the dictionary:

Example (23)

Blackadder

Every single one, sir?

Johnson

Every single one, sir.

Blackadder

In that case, sir, I hope you will not object if I also offer the Doctor my most enthusiastic contrafibularatories.

Johnson

What, sir?

Blackadder

Contrafibularatories, sir. It is a common word down our way.

Johnson takes a pencil from behind his ear. He is furious.

Johnson

Damn!

He starts writing in the dictionary.

Blackadder

Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I am anaspeptic, phrasmotic, even compunctious to have caused you such periconbobulations.

Johnson

What, what, what? (Atkinson et al. 1999:256)

The techniques of logic are used as frequently as the techniques of language, and even the second most used technique, absurdity, is a technique of logic. Absurdity (used approximately nine times per episode) is quite difficult to explain or describe with any other word than absurdity itself. It is usually something weird, unexpected and poignant in some very peculiar way, and very funny. In the following example from the second season of the series Baldrick appears with a piece of cheese hanging on a string from his nose. The function of the scene is clearly to emphasize Baldrick´s eccentricity, as well as the absurdity of the whole series:

Example (24)

Blackadder

Baldrick!

Baldrick enters with a piece of cheese hanging from his nose on a string.

Why have you got a piece of cheese tied to the end of your nose?

Baldrick

To catch mice, my lord. I lie on the floor with my mouth open and hope they scurry in.

Blackadder

And do they?

Baldrick

Not yet, my lord. (Atkinson et al. 1999:194)

Mistakes are another technique of logic (used approximately six times per episode), and they are made regularly throughout the series. In my opinion mistakes are often made (by other characters than Blackadder) to accentuate the differences between Blackadder and the other characters. Mistakes made by other characters give Blackadder perfect opportunity to feel superior and make vicious comments. Mistakes are usually caused by bad judgement, lack of knowledge or sheer stupidity, as in the following example, in which Nursie (Queen Elizabeth´s old wetnurse) from the second season of the series talks about Blackadder's need for a bath. The situation is that Blackadder is trying to explain that he cannot take part in the Queen plans that evening, and Nursie is very upset because, for some reason, she thinks that Blackadder is trying to get out of taking his bath, and she fears that soon he will not bathe at all. When the Queen points out that Blackadder is not talking about taking a bath, Nursie replies that he should be, since how else is he going to keep clean. Nursie´s mistake is that for some reason she assumes that Blackadder is either incapable or inclined not to use the lavatory, and needs either a nappy or very frequent bathing. Also this example reinforces the nature of the humour in the series; it is absurd and weird because the characters are absurd and weird.

Example (25)

Queen

He isn´t talking about baths, Nursie.

Nursie

Well, he should be. How else is he going to keep clean? Soon he'll be saying he doesn't want to have his nappy changed.

Queen

Lord Blackadder doesn't wear a nappy.

Nursie

In that case, it's even more important that he has a bath. (Atkinson et al. 1999:199)

The last technique that I will discuss here before getting deeper into the characters and their personal styles is comparison (used approximately once or twice per episode). Even though it is not the most frequently used technique, it is one of the most prominent, because it partly creates the colourful language which makes the series what it is. Next I will present some of the comparisons found in the series. In example (26) from the second season of the series Blackadder describes his aunt and uncle, Lord and Lady Whiteadder, as "two of the most fanatical puritans in England" (Atkinson et al. 1999:195), and agrees with Percy that they are also most frightful bores. In Blackadder´s view they have, however, one redeeming feature, and he describes it very colourfully by comparing the size of their wallets to the size of an elephant´s scrotum. This is a typical comparison in the data since it consists the mentioning of a scrotum, as the lower body parts, as well as their functions, are a frequently used source of humour in the series:

Example (26)

Blackadder

Yes, but they have one great redeeming feature: their wallets. More capacious than an elephant's scrotum and just as difficult to get your hands on. At least until now. For tonight they wish to 'discuss my inheritance'. (Atkinson et al. 1999:194)

In example (27) from the third season of the series Blackadder has managed to get Prince George to make Baldrick an MP, but unfortunately Baldrick has once again made a mess of Blackadder´s plans. However, it does not take long for Blackadder to come up with a new scheme, and he comes up with a comparison to describe his new plan:

Example (27)

Blackadder

I have a plan so cunning you can put a tail on it and call it a weasel. (Atkinson et al. 1999:248)

Example (28) is also from the third season of the series. In the scene Blackadder has promised Doctor Johnson that he will get Prince George to patron Johnson´s dictionary. However, Johnson has little faith in a servant´s ability to help him and he describes his feelings in the following two comparisons. These comparisons also build a very satirical picture of a real historical character, which is also typical of the series.

Example (28)

Johnson

Oh, will you, sir? I very much doubt it. A servant who is an influence for the good is like a dog who speaks. Very rare.

Blackadder

I think I can change his mind.

Johnson

Well, I doubt it, sir. A man who can change the prince's mind is like a dog who speaks Norwegian – even rarer. I shall be at Mrs Miggins's literary salon in twenty minutes. Bring the book there. (Atkinson et al. 1999:259)

Examples (29) and (30) are in many ways similar to each other. The first comparison ("as happy as a Frenchman who´s invented a pair of self – removing trousers") is uttered by Prince George from the third season of the series, and the following example ("as thick as a big print version of the Complete Works of Charles Dickens") is uttered by Lieutenant George from the fourth season of the series. One could argue that the Georges of these different seasons are in fact the same character. Both comparisons clarify the characters´ personality (mostly their simplicity) as well as the absurd nature of the humour in the series:

Example (29)

Prince George

Of course, now that I've got my lovely fire I'm as happy as a Frenchman who's invented a pair of self-removing trousers. (Atkinson et al. 1999:261)

Example (30)

George

I'm thick. I'm as thick as the big print version of the Complete Works of Charles Dickens. (Atkinson et al. 1999:379)

Example (31) is another comparison used to describe a cunning plan. I have included this particular comparison here because I think it is one of the most interesting ones in the series. In the example, which is from the fourth season of the series, Blackadder and Baldrick have again gotten into trouble, and Baldrick, once again, announces that he has come up with a plan. Blackadder then compares Baldrick´s plan to a fox who has just been appointed Professor of Cunning at the Oxford University. This example also illustrates a certain kind of continuum of humour in the series, as example (27) includes the same elements as the following example:

Example (31)

Baldrick

I have a plan, sir.

Blackadder

Really, Baldrick, a cunning and subtle one?

Baldrick

Yes,sir.

Blackadder

As cunning as a fox who's just been appointed Professor of Cunning at Oxford University?

Baldrick

Yes, sir. (Atkinson et al. 1999:452)

Next I will discuss the way the different characters in the series use the rhetorical techniques of humour.

4.2.2 Edmund/Blackadder and the rhetorical techniques of humour

Blackadder is the character that used the techniques by far the most. However, it must again be taken into account that his character changes in the course of

the series, and therefore I will deal with him in two sections. In the first season the technique he uses the most is insult; Edmund, the very silly and mean character insults others by simple name-calling, or more eloquently by sarcastic remarks, and example (1) illustrates this tendency well. Edmund is also prone to mistakes; in accordance to his personality, he assesses situations wrongly, which causes him to make plenty of mistakes. Absurdity is another technique typical to Edmund; he makes weird, obscure, unexpected comments and gives irrelevant knowledge one could do without. Edmund also exaggerates to make a point, usually to his own benefit. The following example illustrated well the absurdity of his character as he comes up with a new name for himself (The Black Vegetable) and the real inventor of the name Blackadder is revealed. The example also clarifies Edmunds character as a somewhat dim-witted individual, which shows in his attempt to take credit for the invention of the new name:

Example (32)

Edmund

Prince…

Baldrick and Percy

… Edmund, Duke of Edinburgh!

Edmund

Precisely. Or, as I shall be known from now on…

It is a heroic moment, the birth of a legend…

The Black Vegetable!

He turns for applause.

Baldrick

Erm. My lord, wouldn't something like the Black Adder sound better?

Edmund

No, wait… (*he steps back*) I think I have a better idea. What about (*he steps forward*) the Black Adder?

They all cheer. A hero is born. (Atkinson et al. 1999:11)

In the following three seasons the character of Blackadder is much shrewder, smarter and meaner. In all three seasons his most prominent feature is repartee. He makes wisecracks about anything to anybody, in whatever situation. His remarks are always mean-spirited, and often they are geared

towards making someone, a group or an individual, look bad. It may also be sheer self- indulgence, because the character knows that the sting will not be noticed by the less intelligent characters (while viewers naturally get them). In the following example from the third season of the series Percy has used the expression "beshrew me", which is not to Blackadder´s liking. He thus makes yet another witty and mean remark ("how did you come to choose that ugly mug you´ve got on now"). The example also illustrated how the other characters either do not understand the insult, or are simply not offended by them:

Example (33)

Blackadder

Don't say 'beshrew me'. Percy. Only stupid actors say 'beshrew me'.

Percy

Oh, how I would love to be an actor. I had a great talent for it in my youth – I was the man of a thousand faces.

Blackadder

How did you come to choose that ugly mug you've got now, then?

Percy laughs.

Percy

Oh, tush, my lord. (Atkinson et al. 1999:193)

As in the first season, in seasons two and three the smarter Blackadder also uses a great deal of insults in his speech. Many of the insults are, however, closer to sarcasm than in the first season, even though simple name-calling occurs also. The absurdity is much the same as in the first season as well, but now perhaps more closely connected to other techniques. Its usual companions are repartee and exaggeration. Sarcasm is the new arrival which was not very prominent in Blackadder's speech in the first season. After all, it could be argued that the use of sarcasm requires some degree of intelligence from the user. The sarcasm is often found together with insult, exaggeration, repartee and absurdity, but also on it's own. Its link to insult is understandable, because Blackadder's sarcasm is without exception malicious, as is evident in his comment to Captain Darling in the following example from the fourth season of the series. The situation is that Blackadder has been arrested, and in the trial

Lieutenant George is acting as his solicitor while Captain Darling is the prosecutor:

Example (34)

Darling

Good luck, Blackadder.

Blackadder

Thank you, Darling. What's your big job today? Straightening chairs? (Atkinson et al. 1999:372)

When Blackadder uses sarcasm on it's own, it is usually not a straightforward attack on someone's person, it is more a general notion concerning the state of affairs, as in the next example from the second season of the series. In the example Blackadder has just expressed his desire not to be disturbed, when a messenger comes to inform him that the Queen wishes to see him immediately. In my opinion this example clarifies the emphasis verbal humour has in the series compared to visual humour; vivid and elaborate language is used in every possible situation, like in this one:

Example (35)

Messenger

My lord. The queen does demand your urgent presence on pain of death.

Blackadder

Damn! The path of my life is strewn with cowpats from the devil's own satanic herd. (Atkinson et al. 1999:180)

Like absurdity, exaggeration in Edmund/Blackadder´s part is much the same in the later seasons as it was in the first. It does, however, now occur more often together with repartee, which in it's own part suggests some level of wittiness Edmund lacks. In the last season repartee is still Blackadder's most defining feature. However, instead of insults, the character resorts to sarcasm more often than before, practically in every situation. The sarcasm in very cynical, and it relishes on other people's mistakes and stupidity. He does make direct insults too, but they are not as frequent as in the earlier seasons. His sarcasm is somewhat more sophisticated than the insults in the second and third

season, not to mention the first. Otherwise the character is the same as in the two former seasons. In the following example from the fourth season of the series (taking place in WW1) Blackadder is shown an issue of *King and Country* magazine by his superior, General Melchett, and his opinion about the magazine (suitable to be used in the lavatory) illustrates his sarcasm well:

Example (36)

Melchett

Take a look at this – I'm sure you know it. *King and Country*.

Blackadder

Yes, sir – without question my favourite magazine. It's soft, it's strong and thoroughly absorbent. (Atkinson et al. 1999:354)

Next I will discuss some of the characteristics of the other main protagonist, Baldrick, in relation to the rhetorical techniques of humour.

4.2.3 Baldrick and the rhetorical techniques of humour

Baldrick, as mentioned before, is much more in the background during the first season than he will be later, in some episodes he is hardly present at all. In the first season he shares the role of the stupid companion with another character, Percy, and he is not even as stupid as he later will be, even his "trademarks", the cunning plans, are not as absurd. He acts more as a mirror to other characters allowing them to make the funny comments. In the first season his comic traits have more to do with his identity and character (appearance, for example) than with the language he uses. In the later seasons Baldrick really takes his place as Blackadder's "sidekick", and his character remains fairly constant throughout the three seasons. His most defining features are absurdity and his tendency to make mistakes, mainly due to lack of knowledge as well as limited understanding. The things he says often seem quite irrelevant from the point of view of what one normally would expect, and this is evident, for example, in his "cunning" plans. It is worth noticing that both absurdity and mistake are techniques of logic, not language (based on Berger´s 1990 division;

they are, nevertheless, expressed through language). They both have to do with Baldrick's eccentric personality.

Also in the later three seasons Baldric acts as a mirror to Blackadder's character, allowing Blackadder to make comments exploiting the language based techniques of humour, but he does get opportunities to do it himself as well. Repetition, another technique of logic, is used whenever Baldrick utters the famous sentence "I have a cunning plan…". Even though this does not happen as frequently as the use of some other techniques, it is something that stands out. In the following example from the third season of the series Blackadder and Baldrick have been imprisoned once again, and execution is imminent. As expected, Baldrick comes up with a plan to save their lives. In this particular example it is, however, Blackadder who utters the words "cunning plan", but it is Baldrick who brings the element of absurdity into the conversation by suggesting that after they have been beheaded they run away like chicken. Baldrick´s idea is also based on a mistake according to which it is actually possible for a person to run around after a his/her head has been cut off:

Example (37)

Blackadder

Am I jumping the gun, Baldrick, or are the words 'I have a cunning plan' marching with ill-deserved confidence in the direction of the conversation?

Baldrick

They certainly are.

Blackadder

Forgive me if I don't jump up and down with joy – your record in the cunning plan department is not exactly 100 per cent. So, what's the plan?

Baldrick

We do nothing.

Blackadder

Yep. It's another word-beater.

Baldrick

Wait – I haven't finished. We do nothing *until* out heads have actually been cut off.

Blackadder

And then we spring into action?

Baldrick

Exactly! You know when you cut a chicken's head off, it runs round and round the farmyard.

Blackadder

Yeees.

Baldrick

Well, we wait until our heads have been cut off then we run round and round the farmyard, out of the farm gate and escape. What do you think?

Blackadder

My opinion is rather difficult to express in words, so perhaps I can put it this way.

And he tweaks Baldrick's nose with vigour. (Atkinson et al. 1999:282-283)

Besides absurdity and mistake, Baldrick uses other techniques as well, for example misunderstanding, but the logically based techniques mentioned are used the most frequently and systematically.

4.2.4 Other characters and the rhetorical techniques of humour

Next I will introduce techniques used by either other main characters of each season (besides Blackadder ad Baldrick), or by characters that appear in only one episode, but use a certain technique so systematically and effectively that they deserve to be mentioned. I will also introduce a couple of techniques that are used more generally in the series, in a way that they are not tied to any specific character.

As I have mentioned earlier, in the first season Baldrick shares the role of the stupid companion with another servant, Percy. His character appears also in the second season, and the techniques he employs the most are mistake and logic, the same as Baldrick's (see example (18), p.49). King Richard from the first season, on the other hand, often resorts to insults, which are mainly targeted at his stupid son, Edmund. The King is an interesting character, he is partly non-comical but makes sudden leaps into comedy, and this reversal is one of the things that make him comical. The following example relishes on this reversal and mixing of styles (registers). The King begins his speech with a very solemn Shakespearian style, but finishes it by urging his men to kill more prisoners with him. The speech itself can indeed also be considered to contain an allusion to Shakespearean literature as well as be a parody of it. This is very typical of the series; it takes real characters, real places and real events and

distorts them into humorous parodies. In the following example King Richard III has been proclaimed dead and the people are ready to receive the new King, King Richard IV. The new King´s response is very peculiar indeed:

Example (38)

All

(Kneeling) Long live King Richard IV!

The new king responds in a manner most sombre and Shakespearian.

King

This day has been as 'twere a mighty stew,
In which the beef of victory was mixed
With the vile turnip of sweet Richard slain
And the gristly dumpling of his killer fled.
But we must eat the yellow wobbly parts
the Good Lord serves
In life, each man gets what he deserves.

There is a moment of philosophical consideration by all.

Come on, let's go and kill some more prisoners. (Atkinson et al. 1999:9)

Queen Elizabeth I from the second season is a satirical character with infantilism as one of her characteristics. She acts and often speaks like a malicious six-year-old, and she has a counterpart in Nursie (her old wetnurse, see example 25, p.56), who speaks baby talk to her, therefore also using infantilism. The next example illustrates the Queen's character, as well as, to an extent, the nature of the whole series as a satire of certain periods in the history:

Example (39)

Queen

It all started last night about two o'clock. I was tucked into bed, having this absolutely scummy dream about ponies, when I was awakened by a terrific banging from Lord Melcett.
(Atkinson et al. 1999:195)

Nursie, apart from using infantilism, also makes absurd mistakes regularly. In the next example the Queen has come up with an idea how she can spy on Blackadder´s party disguised in a cloak. Nursie thinks it is a good idea and

finds it necessary to warn her what might happen if one is too clever. The warning is very absurd and it is based on a very silly mistake, according to which there is a connection between having a good idea and a person´s foot falling off:

Example (40)

Nursie

Another good idea. You're so clever today, you better be careful your foot doesn't fall off.

Queen

Does that happen when you have lots of brilliant ideas – your foot falls off?

Nursie

Certainly does. My brother, he had this brilliant idea of cutting his toenail with a scythe and *his* foot fell off. (Atkinson et al. 1999:197)

Prince George from the third season (situated in the beginning of the nineteenth century) is an extremely comical, as well as satirical character, whose main ambitions in life are to enjoy himself and gather as much socks as humanly possible. Most of his comments and ideas are absurd and based on misunderstandings and mistakes. He is not, however, a malicious character like Queen Elizabeth I in the former season. As mentioned before, there is a character called George, played by the same actor, also in the fourth season (situated in WW1). Lieutenant George Colhurst St Barleigh is a very similar character to Prince George, simple and good-natured, prone to making mistakes. He is also playful and facetious, he makes fun of things, but does not mean any harm. In the next example Prince George talks with Dr Samuel Johnson about Johnson's Dictionary, and the poor Prince is both ignorant, and keeps making mistakes as he does not really understand what a dictionary is. This example strengthens the view of the series as a satire of real people:

Example (41)

Prince George

So, Dr Johnson. Sit ye down. Now, this book of yours. Tell me, what's it about?

Johnson

It is a book about the English language, sir.

Prince George

I see. And the hero's name is what?

Johnson

There is no hero, sir.

Prince George

No hero? Well! Lucky I reminded you! Better put one in pronto. Call him George, that's a good name for a hero. What about heroines?

Johnson

There is no heroine, sir – unless it is our Mother Tongue.

Prince George

Ah – the mother's the heroin. Nice twist. So how far have we got then? Old Mother Tongue is in love with George the hero… Now what about murders? Mother Tongue doesn't get murdered, does she? (Atkinson et al. 1999:258)

The next example, on the other hand, exhibits Lieutenant Gerge's facetiousness in the fourth season; George enters the stage and announces a typical (appropriate for the period of time, as well) greeting of his:

Example (42)

George

Well, tally ho! With a bing and a bong and a buzz buzz buzz! (Atkinson et al. 1999:371)

The following characters have only appeared in only one or two episodes. Flashheart (Seasons II, *Bells*, and IV, *Private Plain*) is a lively character who uses repartee, bombast and exaggeration (see example (19), in which Flashheart arrogantly suggests that Blackadder has pictures of him in the walls). Lady Whiteadder, Blackadder's aunt (Season II, *Beer*), is an interesting character employing very specific type of techniques: her austere and over-the-top religiousness causes her to use rigidity together with absurdity ("chairs are an invention of Satan", "two spikes would be an extravagance") in her speech. As mentioned earlier, one of the features of British humour is its tendency to use tabooed subjects as a source for humour (Alexander 1980), and Lady Whiteadder provides a good example of this, with religion as the tabooed subject. In the next example the Whiteadder's are paying Blackadder a visit and Blackadder asks his aunt to help herself to a chair:

Example (43)

Lady Whiteadder

Chair! You have chairs in your house?

Blackadder

Oh… yes.

Lady Whiteadder

Wicked child! (*She hits Blackadder*) Chairs are an invention of Satan. In our house, Nathaniel sits on a spike.

Blackadder

And yourself?

Lady Whiteadder

I sit on Nathaniel. Two spikes would be an extravagance. (Atkinson et al. 1999:201)

Prime Minister Pitt (Season III, *Dish and Dishonesty*) is another satirical interpretation of a real historical character. The boy casts insults to anyone not supporting him, and mixes the affairs of the nation with his own personal problems, which leads to reversal. In the following example he is speaking in the House of Commons and he manages to combine such topics as his duty as Prime Minister and his Nanny, as well as the evil dictator Napoleon Bonaparte and his old geography teacher Banana-breath Scrigshanks:

Example (44)

Pitt

Mr Speaker and Members of the House, I shall be brief as I have rather unfortunately become Prime Minister right in the middle of my exams.

Mixture of cheers and boos.

I look forward to fulfilling my duty in a manner which Nanny would be proud. I shall introduce legislation to utterly destroy three enemies of the state. The first is that evil dictator, Napoleon Bonabarte.

Hum of approval.

The second is my old geography master, Banana-breath Scrigshanks.

Another hum.

But, most of all sirs, I intend to pursue that utter slob, the Prince of Wales.

All

Here, here! (Atkinson et al. 1999:237)

Doctor Johnson (Season III, *Ink and Incapability*) is also a real character portrayed as a complete ass, much like Queen Elizabeth, Prince George and Prime Minister Pitt. In his speech he uses bombast and exaggeration, and his comparisons are unparalleled, as was seen in example (28).

Next I will discuss the rhetorical techniques in the data in a more general level.

4.2.5 The rhetorical techniques of humour in the data in general

The techniques that are used generally, in other words techniques that are not tied to the character´s styles in the series, include the satire mentioned before on several occasions: the whole setting of the series, as well as the real historical characters portrayed in it, are dealt with in a very satirical manner. A good example of this (a preface to the first episode of the first season of the series) has been included in the beginning of the introduction of this study. The royalty are depicted as fools with only their own best interest at heart, and the other ”national heroes” as well as the course of the historical events are not exactly loyal to the truth, but rather more like a mockery of it, which is characteristic to satire. All this comes clearly across in the language of the series.

One can also find traces of parody in the language of the series (see example (28), p.58; a parody of Shakespearean poetry). Even though Berger (1990) lists parody as a technique of identity (not of language or logic like the other techniques mentioned here), there is a special case I wish to include here, because it is so clearly expressed through language. The case I am referring to are the names of the episodes of the third season of the series, and the names are: *Dish and Dishonesty, Ink and Incapability, Nob and Nobility, Sense and Senility, Amy and Amiability* and *Duel and Duality*. The names are a clear parody of the names of Jane Austen’s novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. The names can be seen to employ also other humorous techniques, such as wordplay (the repetition of the initial consonants or vowels), allusion (intertextuality) and irony. The irony in this case is Irony of simple incongruity, and the name is given by Muecke (1974:61) to a

phenomenon where two highly incongruous or incompatible items are found in close juxtaposition.

Finally, in addition to the frequent allusions to the historical figures and events, the series also includes allusions to literature, intertextuality, in other words; Jane Austen is one, and Shakespeare is another. In my view intertextuality has a very big role in the data; the writers of the series have clearly wanted to bring elements already familiar to (at least most of) the viewers. At this point one must, however, agree with Chiaro (1992:7), who claims that some aspects of British comedy may not necessarily bee understood as funny elsewhere. Allusions to Shakespeare and other cultural figures and their works may indeed not be understood by people outside Britain for the simple reason that they do not recognize the allusions. This writer recognized at least two clear allusions to Shakespeare´s plays in the data (undoubtedly there are more), and they are direct quotations with a twist (parodies), and they are presented in the following two examples. Example (45) is also a case of reversal, as the character changes his style from Shakespearean to infantile in a second:

Example (45)

Richard III

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

Then he spies Edmund's horse tied up before him. There is a shuffling in the bushes nearby and the odd metal limb showing. Edmund is relieving himself.

Ah! Horsie! (Atkinson et al. 1999:5)

Example (46), on the other hand, incorporates new elements directly into the Shakespearean quote:

Example (46)

Edmund

And when all is done, the Black Seal shall rule England. We few, we happy few, we band of ruthless bastards! (Atkinson et al. 1999:102)

There are also biblical allusions in the language, or rather parodies of biblical texts:

Example (47)

King Richard

As the Good Lord said: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself unless he's Turkish: in which case, kill the bastard!' (Atkinson et al. 1999:19)

There is a clear pattern in how the techniques work together. Repartee is usually accompanied by insult and exaggeration, exaggeration with absurdity, comparison and sarcasm. My findings comply with Berger's (1990:61) observation that exaggeration often occurs together with insult and comparison. In the series sarcasm is frequently reinforced by insult and repartee, and mistakes are found together with absurdity. Naturally some of the techniques could stand alone; insult, for example, but absurdity, to name one, is usually defined by another technique, but that also depends on the character; Blackadder hardly uses absurdity as the only technique, but Baldrick, on the other hand, does so frequently. As mentioned before, the techniques used are to an extent tied to certain characters and their roles in the series; whereas Blackadder, the only clever character in the series, uses repartee, insult and sarcasm, the sillier characters employ for example absurdity and mistake. That defines quite many of the humorous situations as such: Blackadder says something witty and insulting, the other party does not understand the malicious undertone of the utterance and says something absurd, and the conversation continues along the same lines.

4.2.6 What kind of humour is created through the use of the rhetorical techniques of humour?

All in all, it would be very difficult to discuss the humour in the series without mentioning at least some of the rhetorical techniques listed by Berger (1990:59). The reason for this is undoubtedly the method of how the inventory was gathered; instead of first making a list of techniques and then seeing how it could be applied to different kinds of material in practise, Berger (1990) took real, versatile humorous material as his starting point and made the list based

on what he found. The techniques have, however, different roles in the series. Some of them, even if not used as frequently as some others, can be said to define the whole nature of the series. Satire is one of those techniques. The premise and the setting of the show create a satirical frame to the characters as well as to the events. Absurdity is another defining technique, as it is evident in both the language and the characters, and the unexpectedness of it is responsible for a great deal of the laughters the show raises. A third feature which stands out in the series is the overall colourful and meandering style of the language the characters use. One of the techniques responsible for this is comparison. The rule in the series seems to be that the more absurd the comparison is, the better. Even though it is not among the most frequently employed techniques, it has created many of the funniest bits of humorous language in the series. It is used by several characters with different flavours; whereas Blackadder uses it with insult, others use it for example with facetiousness. In this context one must mention also sarcasm and insult, both of which are closely connected to the character of Blackadder, and on their part give a very specific flare to the series.

It can, therefore, be concluded that, based on Berger's (1990:59) inventory of techniques, a great deal of the humour in the series is indeed created through language. In terms of Berger's division of the techniques (language, logic, identity and visual), the techniques are more specifically those of language and logic.

Next I will consider the way the two strategies used in this study worked together by presenting examples from the data and analysing them using both the pragmatic and the rhetorical strategy. The aim is to examine whether they truly complement each other.

4.3 THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PRAGMATIC AND THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

What is the relation between the pragmatic and the rhetorical strategies of humour used in this study, are they together able to bring forward a more coherent picture of the humour in the data? Due to the different nature of the

maxims, they co-occur with certain rhetorical techniques in the series. The violation of the maxim of Quality (for example lying) co-occurs often with insults and sarcasm (see Blackadder´s turn in example (4), p.40), repartee, exaggeration and absurdity. The violation of Quantity; saying too much or too little, in turn, tends to occur together with exaggeration (see Blackadder´s turn in example (9), p.43), definition, repartee, sarcasm, insult, absurdity and mistake. Violating the maxim of Relevance has a clear counterpart in absurdity (see example (8), p.42), and comparison and repartee are found also. The co-occurrence of the strategies usually depends on the character. For example, for Blackadder the violation often occurs together with repartee, whereas for the others the technique used the most is absurdity. The violation of the maxim of Manner occurs together with a variety of techniques, including, for example, comparison, insult, facetiousness, infantilism, bombast, absurdity, repartee and exaggeration (see example (2), p.38). However, there are also plenty of examples in which no violation of the maxims can be found to account for the humorous effect. One can, nevertheless, find a suitable rhetorical technique to 99% of the cases. I will return to the remaining 1% later and make some suggestions for further rhetorical techniques, besides the ones suggested by Berger (1990:59).

What are the cases like in which the maxims are not violated? Often in cases of absurdity the utterance can also be counted as a violation of the maxim of Relevance, but in certain cases the utterance is in fact logical in the situation (or logical considering the source, for example Baldrick), but still totally absurd (see example (24), p.55; Baldrick´s attempt to catch mice). Mistakes cannot mostly be explained through the violation of any maxim; rather, they are logical errors, which can seem quite harmless, but still are funny. The same goes for misunderstandings, which are also unintentional on the part of the one making the mistake (see Nursie´s mistake in example (40), p.67). Providing that sarcasm is not insulting in a way that would violate the maxim of Manner, it also may pass as not violating any of the maxims. If the remark is subtle enough, it does not violate any maxims, but can still be funny (see Blackadder´s turn in example (35), p.62). Satire is yet another technique that does not require the violation of a maxim. When a character whom everybody knows, one of the royalty, for example, speaks totally unlike one

would expect him/her to speak, it is certainly funny, but not against any of the maxims as such (see example (39), p.66). There is, however, one special case, in which a violation of a maxim occurs, but no rhetorical technique of humour is used; lying (violation of the maxim of Quality) (see Blackadder´s last turn in example (5), p.40-41). In general, lying is not considered funny (which also shows in the way Berger (1990) has executed it from his inventory of the rhetorical techniques of humour). In the data, however, it is one means of creating humour. For example Blackadder lies a great deal, as is evident also in example (23), in which he lies to Doctor Johnson that the word contrafibularatories (which he has just made up) is a common word where he comes from.

To clarify the way in which the two strategies work together, I will present some examples from each of the four seasons of the series, analysing them from both the perspective of the violation of the maxims and the use of the rhetorical techniques of humour. The examples are mostly from conversations between the main protagonists Edmund/Blackadder and Baldrick. The first example is from the first season, from an episode called *The Foretelling*, and in the scene Edmund has just met Baldrick for the first time, and they are talking with Percy, another servant, about a battle they will shortly take part in. Edmund feels that it is time to make it known to everyone that he is a man:

Example (48)

1. Percy

2. It will be a great day tomorrow for we nobles.

3. Edmund

4. Well, not if we lose, Percy. If we lose, I'll be chopped to pieces. My arm'll end up in Essex,

5. my torso in Norfolk and my genitalia stuck up a tree somewhere in Rutland.

6. Baldrick

7. No, my lord. With you at the helm, we cannot lose!

8. Percy

9. Well, we *could* if we wanted to.

10. Edmund

11. Edmund*:* No, we won't, Percy, and I shall prove to all that I am a man.

12. Percy

13. But you are a man, my lord.

14. Edmund

15. But how shall it be proved, Percy?

16. Percy

17. Well, they could look up that tree in Rutland! (Atkinson et al. 1999:3)

The example begins with Edmund (Blackadder) violating the maxims of Quality, Quantity and Manner (lines 4-5). He has no evidence that if they indeed were to lose, he would be chopped to pieces with his hand ending up in Essex, his torso in Norfolk and his genitalia up a tree somewhere in Rutland (Quality). He thus offers more information than is needed (Quantity), and the utterance cannot be described as orderly (Manner). In these particular lines (4-5) he can also be stated to exaggerate to a certain degree as well as be overliteral. For Percy's part, the conversation continues as a succession of mistakes. First he thinks that Baldrick means literally that they could not lose the battle (line 9). Next he thinks that Blackadder literally thinks that his sex must somehow be proven (line 12), and finally he shows that he has taken literally also Blackadder's exaggerating remark of the future whereabouts of his genitalia (line 17). It must be emphasized that Percy's last comment in not made in jest, he sincerely means what he says. There is a sense of absurdity in the whole conversation, but apart from Blackadder's lines no other maxim except Relevance is clearly violated, and that happens in the sense that, what is normally expected to be the level of understanding in a conversation among adults, does not take place.

Example (49) is from the second season of the series, from an episode called *Money*. The situation in the scene is the same as in example (4); the Queen has sent for Blackadder because she supposedly has some urgent business to deal with him. The joke is that when Blackadder arrives, the Queen pretends not to know why he has come. Blackadder is upset because the Queen has wasted his time and vents his anger on Percy:

Example (49)

1. Blackadder

2. I cannot believe it. She drags me all the way from Billingsgate to play about the weakest
3. practical joke since Cardinal Wolsey got his nob out at Hampton Court and stood at the end
3. of the passage pretending to be a door. (Baldrick snorts with merriment) Oh shut up,

4. Balders. You'd laugh at a Shakespeare comedy.

5. Percy emerges from Blackadder's room and hugs Blackadder emotionally

6. Percy

7. Edmund, oh Edmund, I have awaited your return.

8. Blackadder

9. And thank God you did, for I was jus thinking, 'My God, I die in twelve hours. What I
10. really need now is a hug from a complete prat.'

11. *He pushes Percy away, goes into his room and pours himself a stiff drink.*

12. Percy

13. But fear not, for I have a plan to save the life of my dear, dear friend.

14. Blackadder

15. Look, I'm not interested in your bloody friends. What about me?

16. Percy

17. (*Thinks he's joking*) Ha ha, not bad, Edmund, that's a good one.

18. Edmund

19. Oh, all right then. What´s your big plan, blockhead? (Atkinson et al. 1999:181)

This example also begins by Blackadder violating the maxims of Quality, Quantity and Manner (lines 2-4). Again he exaggerates, and he compares the practical joke to an event he possibly has made up (Quality). Even if the incident he refers to has actually taken place, the joke the Queen played on him was hardly comparable to it. In addition, the amount of information is greater than needed (Quantity), and the manner of the utterance is not exactly civil and orderly (Manner). Blackadder´s turn ends (line 4) in a peculiar allusion that Shakespeare's comedies are not particularly amusing, or that they are appreciated merely by very simple characters indeed.

In his next turn (lines 9-10) Blackadder again violates the maxim of Quality by saying something that is not true. The technique he uses to do it is irony (irony usually violates the maxim of Quality, since even according to the definition the exact opposite of that is said in actually meant, see appendix), which basically means saying one thing, but meaning another, usually the exact opposite, and in this case he obviously means the opposite of what he says. He manages to slip in a couple of insult as well ("a complete prat" and "a blockhead"). In his third turn (line 15), Blackadder, who usually does not make mistakes, actually makes one. He does not understand that Percy is referring to him as a "dear, dear friend". The word "bloody!" in the utterance causes it to

violate the maxim of Manner. Also Percy makes a mistake (line 17) by thinking that Blackader is only joking; his mistake does not, however, violate any maxims, unless one considers all mistakes and misunderstandings as violations of the maxim of Relevance. The example ends with yet another insult and violation of the maxim of Manner on Blackadder's part (line 19). Example (49) shows well how both strategies, the pragmatic and the rhetoric one, are used in the series to create humour. It also shows how they are both coincide, as well as compliment, each other.

Example (50) is from an episode called *Dish and Dishonesty* from the third season of the series. In the example Blackadder has come up with a scheme to better his own position, and to achieve this he has to use Baldrick, and in the scene he is helping Baldrick to fill in an application for the position of a Member of Parliament:

Example (50)

1. Blackadder

2. Right now, all you have to do is fill in this MP application form. Name?

3. Baldrick

4. Baldrick.

5. Blackadder

6. First name?

7. Baldrick

8. Not sure.

9. Blackadder

10. You must have some idea.

11. **Baldrick**

12. Well it might be Sod Off.

13. Blackadder

14. What?

15. Baldrick

16. When I used to play in the gutter I used to say to the other snipes 'Hello, my name is
17. Baldrick' and they used to say 'Yes, we know. Sod off, Baldrick.'

18. Blackadder

19. Right. Mr S. Baldrick. Now, distinguishing features? *(He thinks it through*) None.

20. Baldrick

21. Well, I've got this big growth in the middle of my face here…

22. Blackadder

23. That's your nose, Baldrick. 'Any history of insanity in the family?' Hmm… tell you what,
24. I'll cross out the 'in'… (*Reads*) 'Any history of sanity in the family...? (*Writes*) 'None
25. whatsoever'. Now then, 'Criminal record?'

26. Baldrick

27. (*Proudly*) Absolutely not.

28. Blackadder

29. Baldrick, you're going to be an MP, for God's sake. I'll put 'fraud, and sexual deviancy'…
30. and finally, 'Minimum bribe level'…

31. Baldrick

32. One turnip. Oh, hang on. I don't want to price myself out of the market.

33. Blackadder

34. Baldrick, I've always been meaning to ask. Do you have any ambitions in life part from the
35. acquisition of turnips?

36. Baldrick

37. No.

38. Blackadder

39. So what would you do if I gave you a thousand pounds?

40. Baldrick

41. Oooh. I'd get a little turnip of my own.

42. Blackadder

43. And what would you do if I gave you a million pounds?

44. Baldrick

45. Oh, well, that's different. I'd get a great big turnip in the country.

(Atkinson et al. 1999:242)

In addition to the whole situation in which Baldrick is actually applying for a position of a Member of Parliament, the first incident of verbal humour occurs in this example with Baldrick's misunderstanding of the way the term 'Sod off' was used in his childhood (lines 16-17), and the situation can be described as somewhat absurd. It does not, however, consciously violate any maxims (it does infringe the maxim of Quality, though). Baldrick continues by making the mistake of not recognizing the growth on his face as his nose (may be caused by ignorance) (line 21), which again, does not violate any maxims. Blackadder, on the other hand, insults Baldrick's family by assuming that there has been no case of sanity (lines 23-24). It is also possible that it is an exaggeration, in which case it would violate the maxim of Quality. Blackadder's view of what an MP should be like in terms of a criminal record is heavily satirical (lines 29-

31), placing politicians in a very questionable light. Baldrick's obsession with turnips, on the other hand, is an interesting case; besides from being quite absurd, it can be seen as a satire of people's desire for possession, the ”little turnip of my own” (line 41) as well as the ”great big turnip in the country” (line 45) are clear allusions to property. The whole turnip conversation can be seen as violating the maxim of Relevance, in terms of it being so far from what is considered as normal. Otherwise in this example the maxims are not violated.

The final two examples are both from the same episode, *Captain Cook*, from the last season of the series. In example (51) Blackadder has received an unpleasant phone call ordering him to Head Quarters:

Example (51)

1. Baldrick

2. Who was that, sir?

3. Blackadder

4. Strangely enough, Baldrick, that was his Holiness Pope Gregory IX inviting me to join him
5. for drinks aboard his steam yacht Saucy Sue currently wintering in Montego Bay with the
6. England cricket team and the Balinese Goddess of Plenty.

7. Baldrick

8. Really?

9. Blackadder

10. No, not really. I've been ordered to HQ – no doubt means that idiot General Melchett is
11. about to offer me an attractive new opportunity to have my brains blown out for Britain.
(Atkinson et al. 1999:352)

In this short example Blackadder's first turn (lines 4-6) is a good example of how sometimes all the maxims can be violated at the same time. What Blackadder says is not true, and therefore, as he does not answer to the question truthfully, he gives too little information. The utterance is totally irrelevant, and neither brief nor orderly. In this turn Blackadder used repartee as well as ridicule to mock both the Pope and the catholic clergy as a whole. In addition, on the whole what he says is rather absurd. In his last turn (lines 12-11) Blackadder violates the maxim of Manner by the ambiguous juxtaposition of the concepts of ”attractive new opportunity” and ”have my brains blown out”. The utterance is very ironic, and consists also of an insult (”idiot

Melchett"). This particular passage is a good example how both of the strategies also coincide on many occasions.

In the final example Blackadder has been ordered to leave the trenches to do accurate drawings of enemy positions. He has taken Private Baldrick and Lieutenant George with him, and they are examining a military map:

Example (52)

1. Blackadder

2. Now, where the hell are we?

3. *George consults his map*.

4. George

5. We-e-ell, it's a bit difficult to say. We've crawled into an area marked with little

6. mushrooms…

7. Blackadder

8. Yes, and what do these symbols denote?

9. George

10. Uhm… that we're in a field of mushrooms?

11. Blackadder

12. Lieutenant, that is a military map. It is unlikely to list interesting flora and fungi. Look in

13. the key and think you'll find those mushrooms aren't for picking.

14. George

15. Ah, yes, you're right, sir – it says 'mine' – so these mushrooms must belong to the man

16. who made the map.

17. Blackadder

18. Either that or we're in the middle of a *mine* field.

19. Baldrick

20. Oh, dear!

21. George

22. So, he owns the field as well.

23. *A star shell bursts and bathes them in light. Immediately the sound of machinegun fire is*

24. heard.

25. They're firing, sir! They're firing!

26. Blackadder

27. Thank you, George… if they hit me, you'll be sure to point it out, wont you? Now get on

28. with your drawing and let's get out of here. (Atkinson et al. 1999:362)

In this example, after examining the map, George mistakenly comes to the conclusion that they are in a field of mushrooms (lines 5-6). His ignorance is an incident of infringement (i.e. an unintentional violation) of the maxim of Quality. He does not mean to say something which is untrue, but by mistake does so. Blackadder's response is as sarcastic as it can get (lines 12-13), and he violates the maxim of Manner by not being very orderly. However, George still does not get the point, and he misunderstands the meaning of the word "mine" (line 15-16). Blackadder's last comment is again filled with sarcasm (lines 27-28). Both mistakes and sarcasm are very difficult to cover as violations of any of the maxims, and this extract is a good example of a case where a maxim is only infringed, and not violated deliberately, to create humour. The rhetorical techniques of humour, however, are used a lot.

In sum, the two approaches, the maxims and rhetorics, work together quite well. In many occasions they are able to patch up for each other, this is particularly the case for the rhetorical techniques patching up for humorous instances that cannot be counted for by violations of any of the maxims. It works the other way around also, for example in cases of lies (no rhetorical technique is used but the maxim of Quality is violated). Used on their own they both would be quite superficial, dealing with the data rather one-sidedly. However, even used together they cannot cover all cases of verbal humour, but they do come considerably closer than they would if used on their own.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to analyse what kind of pragmatic and rhetorical techniques were used to create verbal humour in the TV-series *Blackadder*. In detail; were Grice´s maxims of cooperative talk violated to create humour, and were the rhetorical techniques of humour listed by Berger (1990) used for the same purpose. The data, consisting of all 24 episodes of the TV-series *Blackadder,* was analysed using both methods. In the analysis the data was firstly analysed using the methods separately in order to make their use as clear as possible, and secondly, parts of the data were analysed using both methods together to demonstrate the way they work together and complement each

other. Examples were given throughout the analysis. Both methods of analysis proved to be useful, as they both revealed something different about the nature of the humour in the series. Unfortunately I was unable to find any previous studies in which a non-joke humorous text was analysed using either of the methods employed in this study, just as there were no previous studies concerning the humour of this particular sitcom. Hence there are no studies to which the results of this study could be compared.

All the maxims were violated in the series to create humour, but violations of the maxims of Quality and Manner were the most frequent ones. The maxim of Quality was mostly violated by saying something that was not true, in other words by exaggerating, by using irony or repartee, by absurdities or simply by lying. The maxim of Manner was violated the most by insults, repartee and absurdities. The maxims of Quantity and Relevance were violated also, but not as frequently and systematically as the others, and there were a number of difficulties in the detection of the violations of these maxims. Blackadder was the character that violated the maxims the most, mainly the maxims of Quality and Manner.

However, eventually it became evident that the maxim-violation could not account for all verbal humour in the series, and the reasons were largely what Thomas (1995) and Mooney (2001) had pointed out, mostly because the maxims differ greatly from each other. Whereas it was quite easy to determine whether the maxims of Quality and Manner were violated or not, the same could not be said of the violations of the maxims of Quantity and Relevance. They were to a large extent based on the subjective opinion of the writer. I had to rely on my own judgement on the matters concerning what is the right amount of information, as well as what can be considered as relevant in a given context and what cannot not. In some cases it was fairly straightforward, whereas in others it was quite difficult to determine.

In the matter of the violations of the maxim of Relevance, the difficulty lay in the separation of the realities of the show and the reader/viewer. What was relevant from the point of view of the series, usually was not the case from the viewpoint of the ”real world”. However, I think that I managed to show that the maxims, no matter how controversial they may be, work as underlying assumptions of ”normal discourse”, and to some extent

contribute to what is perceived as humorous. Nevertheless, looking back I now feel that the separation of the different kinds of maxim-violations would have made the analysis more in-depth, and it would also have given more tools to analyse the violations with.

Whereas the analysis of the maxims proved somewhat problematic, I was quite satisfied with the rhetorical analysis of the study. Most humorous bits were indeed created by using the rhetoric strategies of humour, mostly repartee, absurdity, insults and mistakes. I was able to notice clear patterns in the use of the techniques, as well as in the way they were distributed among the different characters with different styles. Again, Blackadder was the character who used them the most, but that can be explained through his being the main character of the series and therefore having more lines than anybody else. He used repartee, insult and sarcasm the most, which is in accordance with the vicious nature of his character. Absurdities and mistakes were made regularly by the other, more simple characters of the series, for example by Baldrick.

I noticed a couple of techniques of humour in the data which were not included in Berger´s inventory, and some of them were used more extensively than others. Lying was the one used the most, and the extent of its use can be seen in the frequency of the violations of the maxim of Quality. I understand that lying is incorporated in other techniques as well, such as exaggeration and irony, but in some cases I saw a need for it as a separate technique. ”Stating the obvious” is another technique used frequently in the series. Nevertheless, it was not counted as a separate technique, as were not sexual innuendos, which are an intrinsic part of the humour of the series. Again, I do realise that the techniques I have mentioned are incorporated in other techniques, and all in all, most of Berger’s techniques co-occur, but the ones that I have brought up here are so prominent that they could have been separated. I think that the only shortcoming concerning the analysis based on the rhetorical techniques was that it did not bring forward any new information about the linguistic properties of verbal humour as such. It only clarified the distribution of familiar techniques of humour in this particular sitcom. It did, however, work extremely well with the pragmatic analysis of this study, as it would have been very difficult to discuss the findings of the pragmatic analysis without the rhetorical techniques. I would not, however, recommend this kind

of rhetorical analysis as the sole method of analysis on any longer data, because it does not bring forward anything new in the data, it merely gives names to different phenomena, which, naturally, as such can be a valuable part of any study.

Based on this study it can be stated that the humour in the TV-series *Blackadder* is largely founded on intentional misuse of language, and the main strategies have been, as mentioned earlier, violations of the maxims of Quality and Manner, as well as, for example, repartee, insults, sarcasm, lies and absurdity. The humour of the series has, all in all, a fairly negative flair to it. Even though repartee could be benevolent, in this data it hardly ever was, and insults, sarcasm and lies can hardly be used in any other purpose that a malicious one. However, since absurdity was used mostly unintentionally by the more simple characters, it was often not used in purpose to offend anyone.

Either of the strategies used in this study could have been used together with the SSTH, the GTVH or the Theory of Register Humour, and the results would undoubtedly have revealed something different about the nature of the humour in the data. As both Delisser's (1996) study and Attardo's (1998) study of verbal humour in a TV-sitcom showed, there is a variety of possible methods of analysis for studying humour in popular culture, and they are all as valid as the methods used in this study, they just concentrate on different aspects of the humour.

I believe that the results of this study can be generalised among humour studies with certain reservations. What can be generalised is the applicability of the strategies used in this study, even in data other than sitcoms; however, when using the maxim violation strategy, its restrictions must be born in mind (for example the problems with the way the maxims differ from each other, and the way the violations of the maxims of Quantity and Relevance can be quite hard to detect), otherwise, I believe that there is still plenty to analyse about Grice's maxims. At the moment, however, someone wanting a 100 % accuracy of results should probably employ some other method which does not leave so much to the subjective opinion of the writer. The inventory of the rhetorical techniques, on the other hand, has proven to be extremely useful in giving names to normal everyday acts of

humour, and it is most likely perfectly applicable to all kinds of humorous data, just as Berger (1990) intended it to be.

Naturally, what cannot be generalized, are the exact results of this analysis. They describe verbal humour in this particular data, and undoubtedly with some other data the results would have been different.

I think that the contribution of this study to the overall field of humour studies lies firstly the choice of data; as I have mentioned before, humour in TV-sitcoms has received far less attention than deserved, considering their huge popularity. Secondly, the methods employed in this study were applied to a new kind of data, proving that they indeed work also in a longer data with a storyline (compared to jokes). It would be interesting to see the data of this study analysed with different methods, for example with the some of the methods mentioned earlier in this study (for example SSTH or GTVH), and it would be equally interesting to see the methods, namely the pragmatic and the rhetorical approach, applied to another data, for example another sitcom or perhaps even a short story or a novel. It would also be a good idea to concentrate on some specific aspect of verbal humour in the data, for example on the relationship between certain characters, and how it reflects on the verbal humour of the series. One could also examine the power structures between the characters and how humour is used to both establish and maintain them, after all, humour can be used to define the nature of a relationship, for example by making derogatory jokes or comments.

Naturally there still is a huge demand for further studies concerning verbal humour, especially in popular culture contexts. Sitcoms are just one, but a quite prominent part of it, reaching millions of people in the privacy of their homes every day. An area I personally find very interesting is the way humour in sitcoms is tied to culturally controversial issues such as racism and sexuality, and one might ask whether sitcoms actually have the power to change people´s attitudes. Since younger and younger children watch more and more television daily, have sitcoms taken over the role of an educator teaching them what is acceptable and what is not?

All in all, I do not believe that the humour and funniness of this particular series had to be in any proven by this study or by any other, it really was funny to begin with, and one only has to watch it to see that. The only

thing missing was, however, a way to explain the composition of the different elements of verbal humour which contribute to the overall funniness of the show. With this study I feel that I have achieved at least one way to explain it.

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http://www.blackadderhall.co.uk/

APPENDIX

EXPLANATIONS OF THE RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES OF HUMOUR

Language based techniques:

- Allusion: an indirect reference for example to literature (Webster).
- Bombast: pompous language (Webster).
- Definition: an explanation of the exact meaning of a word, a description of a thing by its properties (Webster).
- Exaggeration: extravagant representation; a statement in excess to the truth (Webster). A standard technique in comedy writing. It is not always verbal, it can be manifested also in some characteristics of the characters. Berger reminds that exaggeration is often tied to insult, which is a very aggressive form of humour (Berger 1995: 61-63).
- Facetiousness: joking, especially in an inappropriate manner, being witty and humorous (Webster).
- Insult: a remark or act hurtful to the feelings or pride (Webster). Targets of insults often include different kinds of groups (occupational, political, citizens of different countries, public figures, mothers-in-law etc.), and insults can be used together with comparison (Berger 1995: 61-63).
- Infantilism: being like an infant (Webster).
- Irony: an expression in which the intended meaning of the word is the opposite of their usual sense; an event or result that is the opposite of what is expected (Webster).
- Misunderstanding: a mistake as to meaning; a disagreement (Webster).
- Puns and wordplay: plays with the sounds of the words (Webster).
- Repartee: ready and witty retort; skill of making such retorts (Webster).
- Ridicule: derision, mockery – to laugh at, to expose to merriment, to mock (Webster).
- Sarcasm: a satirical remark in scorn or contempt, especially one worded ironically (Webster).
- Satire: a literary composition, originally in verse, essentially a criticism of folly of vice, which it holds up to ridicule or scorn; cutting comment, ridicule (Webster).

Logic based techniques:

- Absurdity: obviously unreasonable, ridiculous (Webster).
- Accident: an unforeseen or unexpected event: a mishap or disaster; chance (Webster.
- Analogy: an agreement or correspondence in certain respects between things otherwise different; the inference that certain resemblances imply further similarity (Webster).
- Catalogue: a classified list of names (Webster).
- Coincidence: act or condition of coincidence; the occurrence of one event at the same time as, or following, another without any causal connection (Webster).
- Comparison: an act of comparing, to set things together to ascertain how they agree or disagree (Webster).
- Disappointment: the defeat of one's hopes; frustration; vexation due to failure (Webster).
- Mistake: to understand, to perceive wrongly (Webster). Mistakes are often used methods to create humour. They are not, however, the same as misunderstandings, which involve language. Mistakes can be caused by several reasons: e.g. bad judgement, lack of knowledge or stupidity. (Berger 1995: 61-63).
- Repetition: an act of repeating; something repeated (Webster).
- Ignorance: without knowledge, uninformed, resulting from want of knowledge (Webster).
- Reversal: an act or fact of being reversed (Webster).
- Rigidity: stiffness, unbendingness, rigorousness (Webster).

Identity based techniques:

- Parody: a burlesque imitation of a literary or musical work or style (Webster).