"OH MY GOD, THAT NIGGER SAID GUN!":

Use of ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy

Master's thesis

Ville Jakoaho and Sami Marjamäki

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty	Laitos – Department
Humanistinen tiedekunta	Kielten laitos

Tekijä – Author
Ville Jakoaho ja Sami Marjamäki

Työn nimi – Title
"OH MY GOD, THAT NIGGER SAID GUN!":   Use of ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy

Oppiaine – Subject	Työn laji – Level
englanti	Pro gradu -tutkielma

Aika – Month and year	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
helmikuu 2012	117 sivua

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten etninen huumori ilmenee modernissa stand-up komediassa. Tarkemmin sanottuna tutkielman kiinnostuksen kohde oli tutkia mihin tai keneen etninen huumori kohdistuu, ja mitä eri funktioita sillä saattaa olla. Tutkielmassa analysoitiin seitsemää eri stand-up esitystä viideltä eri amerikkalaiselta koomikolta, joista kaikki kuuluvat etnisiin vähemmistöryhmiin. Tutkielmassa käytetyt esitykset ovat live-esityksiä, jotka ovat julkaistu DVD formaattina.

Tutkielma pohjautuu kriittiseen diskurssintutkimukseen ja keskeisenä metodina käytettiin Norman Fairclough:n kolmiulotteista diskurssimallia. Kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen avulla pyrimme selvittämään sekä kielenkäytön tehtäviä että niiden vaikutuksia vitseissä, ja mitä mahdollisia implikaatioita koomikoiden vitseissä käyttämillä metodeilla on joko etnisten stereotypioiden vahvistamiseen tai heikentämiseen.

Tutkielmassa havaittiin, että koomikoiden käyttämä etninen huumori kohdistui pääasiassa yhteiskunnan niin sanottuja dominoivia ryhmiä kohtaan etnisten vähemmistöjen sijaan. Näihin vähemmistöihin kohdistuvat vitsit olivat kuitenkin usein kyseisiä vähemmistöryhmiä puolustavia. Etnisiin vähemmistöihin kohdistui kritiikkiä tai pilkkaa yleensä vain silloin, kun vitsin kertoja itse kuului kyseiseen vähemmistöryhmään. Vaikka etninen huumori pohjautuu usein vähemmistöjä negatiivisesti kuvaaviin stereotypioihin, voidaan koomikoiden nähdä heikentävän kyseisiä stereotypioita eri metodien, esimerkiksi ironian, avulla.

Asiasanat – Keywords ethnic humor, stereotypes, stand-up comedy, critical discourse analysis, three-dimensional model of discourse, joke relationship

Säilytyspaikka – Kielten laitos

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

In the past few decades, stand-up comedy has become a popular form of entertainment all around the world. The most famous performers draw large masses of viewers similar to large events, such as concerts. Some comedians have used their popularity to move on to larger ventures, such as the cinema and television series. Two of the most famous examples of this are arguably Jerry Seinfeld, who has become one of the most known characters in the history of television and Chris Rock, who has appeared in numerous movies. Stand-up comedy can therefore be seen as a highly relevant topic of discussion and study regarding culture. Ethnic humor can be seen as one of the most prominent topics in modern stand-up comedy. Furthermore, many of the prominent modern stand-up comedians represent ethnic minorities, which makes the study of ethnic humor in stand-up comedy a relevant research topic.

Humor and jokes have traditionally been researched from the point of view of humor theories. There has been a long tradition of humor research, which can be traced as far back as classical Greek philosophers. Humor research can be considered to be an interdisciplinary field, and this is evident when viewing the classic theories of humor that have been influenced by various disciplines. These humor theories each have a distinct approach to explaining humor and laughter. While it is important to take theories of humor into account, it is also necessary to view them critically since humor has evolved over time, especially in stand-up comedy.

In the past, ethnic humor has largely been associated with humor that ridicules minorities based on stereotypes. This has nearly always been achieved from a dominant group's point of view. For instance, jokes may have featured a

Caucasian group ridiculing Polish people for their stereotypical characteristics. These jokes are often short, many times consisting of a single question and an answer that serves as the punch line. Modern stand-up comedy, however, is significantly different in structure. Jokes in stand-up comedy can be very long, often featuring a narrative that the comedian uses in order to tell a story to the audience. While the structure of the jokes is different compared to traditional jokes, modern stand-up comedy still draws on ethnic stereotypes. However, it can be argued that the use of stereotypes in stand-up comedy can serve different purposes, instead of focusing solely on negative aspects that can be associated with these stereotypes.

The data of the present study consists of ethnic jokes found in seven shows performed by five different comedians. Four of these comedians are African American and one is Jewish. The present study utilizes discourse analysis in order to examine the functions behind the jokes found in the data. More specifically, the present study draws on critical discourse analysis in order to gain an understanding of the ideology and power relations that can be considered a natural part of ethnic humor. Discourse can be seen as a reflection and construction of the real world that people use to convey their views of the world. This inevitably relates to stand-up comedy, where comedians often offer their insight to the audience about current social issues and try to influence the opinions of others.

The present study consists of six chapters. What follows after the introduction in chapters 2 and 3, is a thorough investigation on the relevant literature regarding stand-up comedy and ethnic humor. In chapter 2 we will discuss the history and development of stand-up comedy. We will also take into consideration the most relevant theories of humor, which are necessary to examine regarding the topic of the present study. Chapter 3 will focus on stereotypes and ethnic humor. We will highlight the importance of ethnic

stereotypes regarding ethnic humor, and discuss the potential functions that ethnic humor may serve. In this chapter, we will also introduce discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, which is essential to the present study. In chapter 4 we will introduce the research design of the present study. We will present the research questions, the data, the analytical framework and how it will be applied in the present study. Chapter 5 will provide the analysis of the data, including the main findings. Finally, we will discuss the findings more thoroughly in chapter 6. We will also discuss the conclusions, implications of the present study, and provide suggestions for further research.

2 Stand-up comedy and theories of humor

This chapter will focus on the history and development of stand-up comedy. It is necessary to establish a thorough understanding of the roots and development of stand-up comedy to its current state. More specifically, we will highlight the significance of African American and Jewish stand-up comedians in the development of modern stand-up comedy. We will also discuss other key concepts of stand-up comedy, such as the venue and the nature of the jokes found in stand-up comedy. In the second section, we will introduce the main theories of humor. We will also provide a critical outlook of these theories when considering the purpose of the present study.

2.1 Stand-up comedy

The term stand-up comedy usually refers to a comedy show performed by a comedian in front of an audience. The contents of performances can vary greatly from one comedian to another. For instance, one comedian might be known for political satire whereas another comedian may use seemingly vulgar or indecent language. The performances can take place in various venues. We will discuss the venues of stand-up comedy more thoroughly later in this section. Stand-up comedy is a style of comedy that has it roots in American culture, and it has quickly become a significant part of entertainment and popular culture. Although modern stand-up comedy originated from small clubs and bars in the 1960′s, many stand-up comedians can be seen to perform in large arenas and theatres – even hosting important award ceremonies such as the Golden Globe awards and the Oscar award shows. Many stand-up comedians have also taken their comedy act from the stage and moved on to large budget feature films and have become respected actors. This in part

exhibits how stand-up comedy has evolved as a phenomenon in contemporary society over a short period of time.

According to Mintz (2008:284), most of the research on humor focuses on the analysis of texts. Rutter (1997:51) has also pointed out similar issues with humor research, stating that the textual elements are overly emphasized. Studies that focus on explaining more complex phenomena, such as audience reception, have been addressed to some extent in the fields of communications studies and sociology. Mintz (2008:285) notes that these studies have provided a vague idea on who is laughing at what. Rutter (1997) has researched the interplay of the audience, venue and the comedian in creating a performance – focusing significantly on the role of the audience. McIlvenny et al. (1993) have also researched the role of the audience.

Research on social aspects of humor has been largely neglected. Attardo (2008:120) comments that this situation has begun to change, however. Focus on sociolinguistic factors has been the subject of humor research increasingly ever since. Gender, for instance, has been researched extensively. Attardo points out that sociolinguistic aspects such as race and ethnicity have rarely been investigated. An exception is a study by Rahman (2007), who has examined African American stand-up humor. The study explains how comedians exaggerate linguistic features that highlight characteristics they attribute to the African American community and people outside this community. However, Rahman's study focused on highly specific linguistic features such as vowel variation in narratives describing blacks and whites. It is thus apparent that there is a lack of research on the topics of race and ethnicity regarding humor and stand-up comedy in particular. In the following, we will look at the development of stand-up comedy in more detail.

2.1.1 History and development of stand-up comedy

According to Toikka and Vento (2000:76), the history of stand-up comedy has been studied little and researchers of American popular culture have acknowledged this. However, the roots of stand-up comedy have been traced back to as far as medieval Europe. McIlvenny et al. (1993:226) note that court jesters and clowns, for instance, entertained both royalty and ordinary folk with their performances. Mintz (2008:290) goes on to say that clowns, jesters, fools and various social shamans can be seen as the forefathers of today's professional comics.

The next setting for the development of stand-up comedy took place at medicine and tent shows during the 19th century. Marc (1989:33) describes that medicine show workers offered monologue-type entertainment to assist in their sale of health tonics. Although the intentions behind these monologues were to aid in selling products to people, the monologues also served the purpose of entertaining a crowd with humor and jokes. Mintz (2008:290) goes as far as to propose that stand-up comedy was a central part of medicine and other traveling shows. The structure of these performances presented by the salesmen mirror the performances of modern stand-up comedians.

In the 20th century, stand-up comedy started appearing in different kinds of variety theatre in America. As Mintz (2008:290) demonstrates, the forms of entertainment that took place in this medium were, for example, Minstrel shows, Vaudeville, Burlesque and Broadway Variety show. The range of performances displayed in variety theatre was not limited solely to stand-up comedy. As Toikka and Vento (2000:80) explain, Minstrel shows were filled with word play and crude jokes. Vaudeville was a combination of non-connected performances, filled with monologues, singing and dancing.

Burlesque, on the other hand, contained musical numbers, obscene humor and striptease performances. Mintz (2008:290) adds that this wide variety of performances and settings helped create acts that were far more complex than pure joke telling.

Modern stand-up comedy in America and its Jewish roots originated from the Catskill mountain region of New York State. During the 1920s, tourism in the Catskill region provided possibilities for many performers in holiday resorts in the area. Mintz (2008:290) notes that many Jewish comedians and entertainers who performed in the area went on to form a nucleus for the popular entertainment community of the 20th century. Marc (1989:38-39) states that these performers, known as "Toomlers", were a mixture of social directors, tricksters and comic performers. Performing as a Toomler was also an excellent learning experience for comedians. Toikka and Vento (2000:85-86) explain that a Toomler's responsibilities were numerous. These could include acting, writing, singing, producing comedy acts and working as a master of ceremony. After a performance Toomlers still had to mingle with the guests and entertain them. Marc (1989:39) adds that all these possibilities allowed the comedians to exercise their tongue constantly, which is a comedian's most important asset.

Comedians with Jewish roots were suitable performers for stand-up comedy due to their cultural background. Toikka and Vento (2000:77) explain that Jewish humor has been defined as having genuinely vulgar characteristics that are based on everyday events. Boskin (1985:85-86) notes that Jewish humor draws on its folk sources and that the jokes reveal certain aspects of Jewish culture, wit of retaliation and revenge, for example. The roots of Jewish humor and the rise of stand-up comedy in the 1960s cannot be overemphasized. Limon (2000:1) states that during the 1960s almost eighty per cent of known stand-up comedians were of Jewish descent. Their cultural roots notwithstanding, Jewish comedians were at the right place at the right time. Limon (2000:8) proposes

that the body of stand-up comedy was idealized in New York and its suburbs, where large numbers of Jewish people resided.

Although the term "stand-up comedy" surfaced in 1966 as Limon (2000:7) points out, stand-up had already been established during the 1950s. This type of comedy that became more prominent in the 50's is often referred to as "new wave". According to Mintz (2008:290-291), it was dubbed "new" because it featured a relaxed and informal style of comedy with more developed stories built around specific themes. Most modern stand-up routines exhibit a similar structure that was developed during the new wave. Toikka and Vento (2000:86-87) suggest that although the new wave period was a time of amateur experimenting in comedy, it laid the groundwork for professional stand-up performances.

Although new wave comedy can be seen as the basis for current stand-up comedy, it was not unprecedented. Mintz (2008:291) notes that new wave comedy shared clear similarities to comic "lectures" of Mark Twain and Artemus Ward in the 19th century. Toikka and Vento (2000:84) add, however, that although Twain used similar methods in his performance as stand-up comedians, he was more of a funny lecturer – not an entertainer. Moreover, Twain performed his lectures as himself and not as a stage persona or a character. This line between the real person on stage and a fictional character is characteristic of stand-up comedians. Limon (2000:6) argues that there is a conflict between the real person performing and the character that is projected to the audience. Thus, comedians can in a sense be neither natural nor artificial. In the case of Lewis Black, for instance, the intelligent political commentator fuses with a loud, sometimes obnoxious instigator, constructing a stage persona that is neither real nor artificial but a creation of the comedian.

Comedians such as George Carlin, Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby helped popularize stand-up comedy during the second half of the 20th century. Toikka and Vento (2000:87) describe that a common trait among these comedians was the desire to develop their own material and to determine the style of their performance. Limon (2000:7) adds that stand-up comedians drew some of their inspiration from jazz improvisation and felt a similarity to jazz artists. The routines of these stand-up comedians were also similar in the sense that the topics discussed often included social commentary. Toikka and Vento (2000:87) mention that stand-up comedy routines often deal with social tensions that are relevant during the time of performance. This could include, for instance, race related issues, police brutality, wars and corruption. What separated stand-up comedy from regular social commentary, as Toikka and Vento (2000:87) note, was its delivery: comedy acts were more direct, ruthless and shameless. Mintz (2008:291) echoes that stand-up comedy served a product that was more edgy in how social issues were discussed.

Jewish and African American comedians have become the most prevalent source of contemporary stand-up comedy. Rappoport (2005:66) comments that Jewish people and African Americans have suffered the most severe kind of prejudice in western society compared to other ethnicities. This unfortunate history of prejudice and oppression has slowly started to change. Rappoport (2005:67-78) observes that significant social changes, such as the end of World War II and the civil rights movement, led to a decline of prejudice and discrimination. During this period a cultural trend emerged where the use of irony became relevant. This cultural change took place mostly in the 1970s. According to Rappoport (2005:69), Jews and African Americans have since attained a more prominent role in society and in the mass media. Furthermore, their tradition of ironic humor has spread into society and culture.

The significance of the cultural heritage of Jewish and African American stand-up comedians is easily noticeable in modern stand-up comedy. For example, it is possible for a Jewish comedian to draw attention to his heritage by making fun of stereotypical characteristics attached to Jewish people. In general, it can be observed that modern stand-up comedians base their performances largely on their own ethnicities.

2.1.2 Venue and the role of the audience

Stand-up comedians may have to work in various venues. According to Toikka and Vento (2000:64) some of these venues are, for example, nightclubs, festivals, business events, theatre shows, private shows and television and radio performances. On the basic level, these venues vary in size and in the amount of attending audience. In addition, there are also special venues dedicated to stand-up comedy. These venues, known as comedy clubs, are most prevalent in the United States. Toikka and Vento (2000:65) argue that these types of clubs should be centers for stand-up comedy. These venues provide the best medium for comedians to see other performers and evaluate their own performances. Furthermore, the audience can be seen to be somewhat committed to the show, which in turn builds up the ambience. Although stand-up comedy performances are often performed in a theatre, there are little similarities between the two. As Rutter (1997:71) notes, there are no changes of scenery or backdrops, which are characteristic of theatre performances. This often means that there is no pre-performance act to watch before a stand-up comedian takes the stage.

Audience participation is one of the only areas of stand-up comedy that has been researched to some extent. Audience participation is largely dependant on the venue in which the comedy performance takes place. Furthermore, it is also

dependant on the characteristics of the performer; some comedians may interact with the audience more than others. Stand-up comedians have to be able to respond to unexpected distractions from the audience such as extended laughter, mobile phone ring tones or heckling by the audience. According to Toikka and Vento (2000:53), such disruptions during the performance can be seen as a gift to the comedian. These interruptions open the possibility for the comedian to interact with the audience, making the performance seem more genuine and less scripted. These types of conversations with the audience can often be the highlight of a performance. Interaction with the audience provides the comedian with a possibility to use their wit and take control of the situations, exploiting the unexpected interruptions, making them a part of the performance.

The most successful comedians, however, also perform in televised shows, which are typically held at large theatres with thousands of spectators. Such a venue places restrictions on audience participation, limiting it to nearly non-existent. This is due to the fact that the performance is more tightly scripted and needs to play out within a certain amount of time. These issues combined with a large audience do not allow the possibility for audience participation for the comedian or the audience. Toikka and Vento (2000:65) add that television shows are not something to be taken lightly. Such a performance takes careful planning and years of experience from the comedian, and is normally only offered to the most skilled and famous stand-up comedians.

2.1.3 Joking in stand-up comedy

Joke topics in stand-up comedy can be of a wide variety. Jokes can be based on, for instance, politics, entertainment, ethnic jokes, or self-disparaging humor. Toikka and Vento (2000:72) comment that jokes that bring laughter to the

audience can often be considered taboo. Stand-up comedians exploit topics that are not often discussed openly or in a joking manner in society. It might be easy to assume stand-up comedy to be purely a collection of jokes. After all, a comedy act can be seen as a performance stringed together from one joke to another. Rutter (1997:69) argues, however, that this would be to neglect the social processes needed to make these acts possible. Such simplification would undermine the phenomena of stand-up comedy experience and the actions of both the stand-up comedian and the audience. Many of the jokes in stand-up comedy performances are dependant on the context that they are told in. For instance, it can be observed that comedians often use a particular broader theme for a large number of jokes. Thus, removing these jokes out of the context of the performance may result in different response from the audience.

2.1.3.1 Understanding a joke in stand-up comedy

When a joke is told, it is usually directed at a specific person or an audience. Forceville (2005:247-248) points out that for an audience to laugh and to understand a joke, its success depends on the knowledge of different types of background information by that audience. Many other researchers also share this point of view. For instance, Nash (1985:4) discusses that humor frequently rests on factual knowledge shared by the comedian and the audience. Lack of shared knowledge or background information is normally not an issue in stand-up comedy; the audience that arrives is likely to expect a certain type of show by the performer and is aware of the types of jokes that the entertainer might perform. As some stand-up comedy acts are also intended for DVD distribution and cable network broadcasts, over time the background knowledge that is critical to the understanding of certain jokes can be lost. For example, a joke made in a popular stand-up comedy act in 1982 might be difficult for an audience or a viewer to understand in 2011. Although a joke is – at the time of

the original performance – of current interest, unawareness of the background knowledge of that time may result in not understanding a particular joke.

Cohen (1999:12) describes that jokes could be divided – in theory – into pure and conditional ones. A conditional joke relies on background knowledge and is meant for specific audiences. This is a vital feature of joking in general, and this feature is also something that the audience can get satisfaction from by knowing this about itself. Cohen goes on to state that the pure joke does not exist. A pure joke would have to be universal and thus understandable by anyone, anywhere. This is not possible as the minimum requirement to understand a joke is to understand the language used, and likely much more than that is needed to fully grasp the nature of a joke. Jokes are thus always conditional to some degree.

2.1.3.2 Self-disparaging humor and irony

It is typical for stand-up comedians to use their ethnic identity as a foundation for their performance and stage persona. Many Jewish and African American stand-up comedians are known to exercise self-disparaging humor due to the ethnic struggle that their ethnic groups have faced in history. Rappoport (2005:76) describes that in the case of Lenny Bruce and many successive Jewish comedians, their ethnic identity allowed them to ridicule Jews. Rappoport (2005:40) mentions that using self-disparaging humor and telling jokes about yourself or of your ethnicity shows that you are a person who can enjoy a little self-ridicule. Self-disparaging humor is a way to win the audience over and to relate to the audience. This type of humor is often expressed in an ironic manner. Toikka and Vento (2000:73) suggest that an ironic attitude is an essential part of stand-up comedy.

Irony is an extensive topic, which can be examined and discussed in great length. There are various opinions as to what constitutes irony and how it can or should be defined. Barbe (1995:17) states that an ironic meaning has been commonly defined as the situation where the sentence meaning is in opposition, negation or contradiction to the actual meaning. According to Attardo (2000:794-795), irony can be divided into situational and verbal irony. While verbal irony deals with linguistic aspects of irony, situational irony deals with a view of the world that is seen as ironic – for instance, a police station being robbed. Muecke (1970:25) suggests, however, that to define irony in a manner that accounts for both situational and verbal irony is immensely difficult. Muecke proposes that to do so, one needs to account for different properties, elements and features that are common in all forms of irony. Toikka and Vento (2000:73-74) comment that when using irony in stand-up comedy, the true and non-true meanings are mixed and rarely placed in opposition. This places certain expectations for the interaction in stand-up comedy. The audience needs to be willing to understand and accept any possible changes in the meanings created by the comedian that take place during the performance.

2.2 Theories of humor

There is a long tradition to the research of humor and humorous discourse. Many theories of humor have been influenced by famous philosophers, for instance by Plato and Aristotle. Thus, many of these theories are philosophical of nature. Attardo (1994:15) states that humor research is an interdisciplinary field, ranging over various disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, literature, medicine, philosophy, philology, mathematics, education, semiotics and linguistics. Attardo maintains that humor research is better understood when one takes into account the broad range of contributions from various fields and subfields. Attardo (ibid, 46) notes that linguistics did not show any interest in humor until the 19th century, and little more after that.

According to Raskin (1985), principal theories of humor can be classified into three groups:

1. Incongruity theories

2. Hostility theories

3. Release theories

There are similar classifications in the literature, although there is some variation to the terminology used among different researchers. Ours will be drawn from the work of Raskin (1985). The next sections will provide an overview of these theories and their basic concepts. We will also examine and discuss The General Theory of Verbal Humor proposed by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, as it is one of the most recent additions to the field of humor research.

2.2.1 Incongruity theories

According to Meyer (2000:313), incongruity theories emphasize cognition over physiological and emotional effects of humor. Raskin (1985:31) reports that the central idea of incongruity theories is the notion of laughter experienced through incongruous changes in jokes. Inappropriateness, paradox and dissimilarity, for instance, are all characteristic of these approaches. When incongruity or dissimilarity becomes evident between joke components, they are brought together and synthesized by the joke teller. In a joke, the surprise is generally delivered through a punch line. The punch line in this instance

provides a seemingly incongruous or paradoxical idea compared to the rest of the joke.

Incongruity theorists have argued that one can enjoy a joke multiple times when the surprise is experienced from a new perspective (Meyer 2000:313, Raskin 1985:33). According to this view, it is the lack of a surprise that kills a joke when it is heard for the second time. However, people often laugh at jokes and performances that they have experienced before. Although the performance or show may be the same as previously, the situation is still found humorous. For instance, a stand-up comedy act or a movie that one has already seen, can still produce laughter similar to the first viewing.

Raskin (1985:31) states that humorous instances where there is something incongruous, stimulating surprise, or a sense of superiority in the laughter, are likely the most common kind of causes for laughter. One could thus argue that incongruity based jokes make up the bulk of jokes. Meyer (2000:314) remarks that incongruity plays a crucial role in humor as a social phenomenon, as most humor is based on violations of socially or culturally agreed norms. Many popular television shows, for instance Seinfeld, have utilized incongruity in its characteristics. The characters may act or behave in an unusual or inappropriate manner.

2.2.2 Hostility theories

The second group of theories comprises various approaches under the name of hostility theories. Raskin (1985:36) lists that hostility, superiority, malice, aggression, derision and disparagement make up the approaches that are generally referred to as hostility theories. Raskin reports (1985:36) that many

researchers who follow and support hostility theories consider themselves followers of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a 17th century English philosopher, who considered humor to be a result from a glory felt when recognizing one's superiority over others (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). Hostility theories hold that laughter is caused, for instance, by misfortune or ignorant actions of others, or feelings of malice or envy. Meyer (2000:314) agrees and posits that such laughter sends a clear message of superiority and hostility to others. This type of humor is not always pleasant to those subjected to it.

Meyer (1985:315) states that two significant effects of superiority humor are installing order by laughing at those who disobey the norms of society, and reinforcing group membership by laughing at people outside the group who are subjected to ridicule. Raskin (1985:36) reports, however, that this type of humor should only be based on minor mishaps. This type of view can be considered to be a mild form of hostility humor. Meyer identifies examples of this in entertainment shows, such as Candid Camera and different situational comedies.

2.2.3 Release theories

The third group of theories of humor is called the release theories. Raskin (1985:38) reports that the basic principle behind these theories is that laughter is the cause of relief of tension and anxiety. Meyer (2000:312) agrees with this notion and states that humor springs from experiences of relief when tension is removed from an individual. Raskin (1985:39) and Carrell (2008:313) point out that there is a special kind of relief which helps break inhibitions created by the constrains of society. The use of release humor is relatively common in certain communicative situations. For instance, Meyer (2000:312) notes that a joke can

be used at the beginning of a communicative event in order to defuse a potentially anxious situation.

These three theories characterize the nature of humor from different perspectives, supplementing rather than contradicting each other. Incongruity-based theories explain the stimulus, hostility theories explain the relationship between the speaker and the hearer whereas release theories concentrate on the mental processes of the hearer (Raskin 1985:40).

However, some researchers have pointed out that there are flaws to these three theories and their understanding of the nature of humor. Meyer (2000:315) argues that each of these theories of humor can only illustrate a fraction of the functions of humor. Meyer (ibid.) reports that some proponents of each theory have attempted to explain all humor with a single theory. Meyer (ibid.) debates that a biased approach towards a particular theory will result in a phenomenon which Meyer (ibid.) calls "theoretical sunglasses". This phenomenon means that one can explain all humor from a perspective of their choice. Although there can be issues of bias, these theories can aid in comprehending some functions of humor. Meyer (ibid, 316) states that this can be achieved if each theory is utilized in a specific situation. For example, release theory can be used in a communicative situation to explain how tension is released.

2.2.4 The General Theory of Verbal Humor

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) is a theory of verbal humor proposed by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin in 1991. The theory is a revised version of Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humor (SSTH) and Attardo's five-level joke representation model. We will provide an overview of

Raskin's original theory given that the script opposition component it proposes is a significant part of the refined GTVH. However, we will not examine Attardo's five-level representation model as thoroughly, as only some parts of it have been retained within the new theory of GTVH.

2.2.4.1 Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor (SSTH)

In his theory Raskin posits the idea of script opposition (SO). Essentially, a script is a piece of semantic information. According to Attardo and Raskin (1991:307-308), a script is the interpretation of a text, which constitutes a joke. The main idea of SSTH is that each text, which constitutes a joke, must be fully or in part compatible with two different scripts that need to be in opposition in order for the joke to be funny. As Raskin states, a joke is often deliberately ambiguous. Therefore the punchline will trigger a switch from one script to another. In his analysis of GTVH, Oring (2011:204) expresses his opinion of SSTH being more of a variant of the incongruity theory, instead of being a completely separate theory. Raskin (2011:224) responds by stating that in his view incongruity-based theories have not contributed very much to SSTH or to the later refined GTVH. However, one can argue that the notion of script oppositeness is closely linked to the concept of incongruity, thus linking SSTH and incongruity theories.

2.2.4.2 The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)

Raskin's SSTH was later connected with Attardo's five-level model of joke representation, which led to a joke representation model in an abstract form. When refining SSTH into GTVH, GTVH retained the idea of oppositions and compatible scripts from Raskin's original theory. The revision of Attardo's five-level model and Raskin's SSTH resulted in the birth of six "Knowledge

Resources" (KRs), which, according to Attardo and Raskin (1991) function to describe the construction of a joke in verbal humor. The six knowledge resources are:

1. Script opposition (SO), as discussed before, two different scripts that are opposed to each other in a specific way.

2. Logical mechanisms (LM), which represents the logic in the two scripts and how they create the joke.

3. Situation (SI), objects, instruments, people who are included in the joke.

4. Target (TA), describes that which is the butt of the joke.

5. Narrative strategy (NS), describes the genre of the joke, for instance a riddle.

6. Language (LA), is the product and how a joke is realized.

According to Oring (2011:204), these knowledge resources can be used to examine variants of a same joke. An anchor joke may have several different variants, which differ in one of the six knowledge resources. For instance, the narrative strategy (NS) of a joke might change from a plotted narrative into a poem.

Attardo and Raskin (1991:330) state that GTVH is a general theory of verbal humor and it is used to answer the question what constitutes humor. Attardo and Raskin point out that GTVH does not explain how people use humor. Oring (2011:219) criticizes GTVH as an attempt to impose abstract categories on the analysis of jokes. When used in analysis, GTVH focuses more on the terminology and categories that the joke has been placed in, instead of the

actual joke and its properties. Thus the analysis of the joke and the actual production of humor are ignored. Norrick (2009:261) argues that any complete theory of humor must account for humor in interaction and its exploitation. Theories such as GTVH concentrate solely on textual analysis and overlook context, the participants and the uses of humor. One could argue that relying on textual analysis of jokes alone may lead to situations where the joke and its meaning may be completely missed. Theories of humor should not be focused purely on pragmatic categories of jokes. Consequently, joke analysis should not be based only on joke texts found in books.

Despite promising a means for analyzing verbal humor, GTVH offers little to the present study. For a theory of verbal humor that is based solely on analysis of texts, GTVH seems to contradict itself. As Attardo and Raskin (1991:330) note, GTVH is not meant to answer how humor is used. Therefore, it is not a viable option for the analysis of stand-up comedy acts. However, stand-up comedy acts are based on written texts that have been worked on by the comedian for an extended period of time. This seems to indicate that GTVH as a theory of verbal humor is not able to analyze or explain the use of verbal humor. Furthermore, the notion of opposition that GTVH proposes is not always present in jokes in stand-up comedy.

Thus it seems that current theories of humor are unsuitable to analyze stand-up comedy in a meaningful way. Consequently, they are not beneficial to the present study. Since the present study is based on not only the textual properties of the joke, but also the social implications and use of power in discourse by the comedian, discourse analysis seems more feasible an approach. Discourse analysis, and more specifically the study of critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be seen relevant to the study of stand-up comedy and humor in general. We will discuss the fields of discourse analysis and CDA

in depth in the following chapters and thus provide an approach for analysis for the present study.

3 Stereotypes, ethnic humor and discourse analysis

The following section will examine stereotypes and ethnic humor, and how they are intertwined. We will also take a broad look at discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis in particular, as this will serve as the foundation of the theoretical framework for the present study.

3.1 Stereotypes and ethnic humor

Stereotypes and ethnic humor are intrinsically connected. Many, if not all jokes about ethnic groups are based on commonly known stereotypes. Ethnic humor plays an important part in how people interact socially within different cultures. According to Lowe (1986:439), ethnic humor provides pleasure and is related to the mythos of struggle and hostility. Moreover, humor seems to be fundamental to our understanding of the world. Consequently, stereotypes and ethnic humor are important areas of study that should be carefully examined from different viewpoints. The following section will provide definitions to stereotypes and ethnic humor and examine their relationship.

3.1.1 Stereotypes

Stereotypes are widely held impressions of people or groups that we all share. They can be simplified of nature, based on appearances or cultural traits. Indeed, Ford and Tonander (1998:372) state that one of the main features of stereotypes is to simplify the understanding of other people by providing information about them based on group membership. McGarty et al. (2002:2) propose three guidelines that can be identified to understand the nature of

stereotypes. First, stereotypes are assistance to explanations. They can help one to understand or make sense of a situation. Secondly, stereotypes are energy-saving tools. They can be used to reduce the effort of understanding for the hearer. Thirdly, stereotypes are group beliefs that are shared by people. They should be formed in accordance with established norms and views of these groups and their characteristics. Mindiola et al. (2002:37) explain that stereotypes that are experienced daily are created and preserved by an intricate set of forces. These forces include media, social science research and racism, for example.

Although stereotypes can help one identify or relate to certain groups, they are not always of positive nature. Mindiola et al. (2002:36) note that stereotypes can be positive or negative impressions about people or groups. Furthermore, these impressions can vary significantly in their accuracy. McGarty et al. (2002:4) share this view and add that stereotypes can be helpful in understanding different groups, but can also lead to misunderstanding of groups and their characteristics. Niemann et al. (1998, 1999) suggest that stereotypes generally tend to be negative. Nieman et al. (1998:103) also report that stereotypes can lead to stigmatization of ethnic minorities either on an in group or a personal level. One can argue that stereotypes not only simplify the world, but also justify discrimination and hostility against different out groups.

Peffley and Hurwitz 1998, as quoted by Mindiola et al. (2002:37) argue that stereotypes are destructive forces that have over time developed severe and prejudiced responses towards ethnic, racial and religious groups. Mindiola et al. (2002:37-38) agree with this view and add that stereotypes can help justify racism. Throughout the history of United States, powerful forces that are politically and economically connected have attempted to label various ethnic and racial groups in a manner that is convenient for their personal agendas. More specifically, this had led to an institutionalized racial hierarchy that

separates the "superior" groups from the "inferior" groups and justifies their status in society. Van Dijk (1993:179) defines this phenomenon as elite discourse and adds that the elite – the more prestigious members of society – have control and access to utilizing public communications such as media and politics. Without other sources of information, the public has little resistance against prevalent messages that precipitate ethnic discrimination.

Stereotypes and their various uses are a central part of stand-up comedy. Furthermore, they can be seen as closely connected and bound to ethnic humor. Rappoport (2005:45) argues that ethnic slurs – often based on stereotypes – are the backbone of racial, ethnic and gender humor. Furthermore, stereotypes can be seen as the inspiration of jokes for many stand-up comedy acts. The next section will examine the relationship between stand-up comedians and their use of stereotypes.

3.1.2 Ethnic humor

Stand-up comedians can be seen to use stereotypes in a relatively different manner, for example, compared to users of elite discourse. Instead of strengthening stereotypes, it can be argued that stand-up comedians use stereotypes and ethnic humor to diminish negative effects of stereotypes. Furthermore, what separates stand-up comedians from users of elite discourse is the fact that many stand-up comedians are of ethnic minorities – minorities that have traditionally been targeted by elite discourse.

There are several ways to describe ethnicity and ethnic humor. Rappoport (2005:4) notes that ethnicity is a slippery term, which is difficult to define. Davies (1982:384) for instance, describes the concept of boundaries of ethnic

groups. Davies suggests that there are two sets of boundaries, which are important to members of ethnic groups. These are the social and geographical boundaries of a particular group. These boundaries define who belongs within a group and who doesn't. This view can be seen as problematic due to the fact that the geographical boundary may not always be a valid way to determine ethnicity. For instance, a Jewish person living in Israel and a Jewish person living in New York belong in the same ethnic group, but are not geographically comparable.

Allen 1983, as quoted by Rappoport (2005:4) defines ethnicity as "any racial, religious, national origin or regional category of sub-culturally distinct persons". Ethnic humor can be characterized by jokes that make fun of a particular race or an ethnic group. Religious humor is often discussed as a separate category due to the fact that many different ethnic groups practice religions. Sienkiewicz and Marx (2009:17) define ethnic humor to include all religions, regardless of ethnicity. As they discuss, the use of the term ethnic humor is more appropriate than religious humor as the jokes deal more with cultural stereotypes as opposed to questions of faith. Jokes that target and ridicule gender and sexual minorities cannot be intrinsically seen as ethnic humor due to the fact that ethnic identity plays no part in their origin. However, jokes that target sexual minorities are a significant topic in stand-up comedy. Rappoport (2005:101) argues that gender related humor shares the same emotional and social motivation with racial and ethnic humor and is also based on slurs and stereotypes. Thus it seems evident that gender humor demands attention when discussing ethnic humor. We agree with this sentiment and include sexual minorities within our definition of ethnic humor.

There are different views among researchers as to what the potential effects of ethnic humor may be. For instance, Rappoport (2005:152) mentions that within social sciences there is critique of ethnic humor that is based on accepted

behaviorist theories of learning. Rappoport reports that according to these theories, the more one is exposed to ethnic jokes, the more likely it is that one will accept negative connotations that surround stereotypes. Meyer (2000:317) considers disparaging humor towards different ethnic groups to be both uniting and divisive. Meyer (2000:316-318) argues that such humor can create and strengthen negative stereotypes and prejudice toward the group the joke is focused on. Ford and Ferguson (2004:79) differ from this view, and posit that ethnic humor is unlikely to increase prejudice towards ethnic groups. However, they add that ethnic humor has a negative social consequence for people who are already highly prejudiced towards an ethnic group. Exposure to ethnic humor in these instances can increase tolerance to discrimination. Rappoport (2005:153-154) explains that it is unlikely that the question of whether or not ethnic humor encourages prejudice to be ever settled in a manner that is satisfactory to everyone.

There have been many approaches to studying ethnic humor. The work of Christie Davies, in particular, is considered to be influential in the field. Davies (1982:383, 1984) suggests that ethnic jokes occur in opposed pairs. These pairs include categories such as "stupid and crafty" and "cowardly and militaristic". Jokes express issues caused by conflicting norms and values within groups. Davies (1984:175) provides an example of an ethnic joke within the category of cowardly and militaristic:

How do you train Italians to be soldiers? First teach them to raise their hands above their heads.

This joke contains a clear pair in opposition. In this case, the supposedly cowardly Italians are placed in opposition to soldiers that are expected to be brave. However, finding opposing pairs in jokes that appear in stand-up

comedy is not always clear and in many cases there can be multiple pairs in a single joke. The following excerpt shows where problems arise with Davies' approach:

You know what's fucked-up about taxes? You don't even pay taxes. They take tax. You get your check, money gone. That ain't a payment, that's a jack. Got all these taxes: City Tax, State Tax, Social Security tax. You don't get the money until you're 65. Meanwhile, the average black man dies at 54. Shit we should get Social Security at 29! What the fuck, man? We don't live that long. Hypertension, high blood pressure, NYPD, something will get you.

The extract above does not feature any clear opposing pairs that fit Davies' approach. Thus it cannot be analyzed by the fixed categories that Davies suggests for ethnic humor. Even if one were to look for opposing pairs they would be likely to differ from the pairings that Davies proposes (for example, government versus people). In the case of this joke, one would end up with multiple pairings. Another issue with Davies' approach is that the jokes that are analyzed are almost always told from a dominant group's point of view. For instance, Caucasian Americans making fun of African Americans. In stand-up comedy, this situation is often the exact opposite: many prominent stand-up comedians are of Jewish or African American descent and their use of ethnic humor rarely concentrates solely on discrimination or mocking minorities.

In order to rectify the issue of studying the dynamics of ethnic humor with a narrow focus, Leveen (1996:33) proposes four basic combinations regarding joke relationship. This relationship is concerned with the membership of the joke teller or the hearer regarding the ethnic group that is discussed in the joke. These categories are:

1. Group member telling a joke to another member

2. A member telling a joke to a non-member

3. A non-member telling a joke to a member

4. Non-member telling a joke to a non-member

Leveen states that these basic combinations may be complicated in several different ways – most notably if there is an interethnic audience present, which is common in the case in stand-up comedy. The joke teller can shift from member to non-member depending on the joke. According to Leveen (1996:32), ethnicity affects the dynamics of joke relationships, adding additional risk to the joke depending on the ethnicity of the joke teller and joke hearer. In stand-up comedy, it can be argued that these risks are negated because the audience has paid for the performance and is likely to expect a certain style of humor. Thus the chance of being offended is generally reduced.

Therefore, instead of working with fixed categories, one can argue that it is more beneficial to examine the dynamics of ethnic humor and what its effect might be regarding the stereotypes that are involved. The rest of this section will examine how ethnic humor operates and what some of its functions are. According to Leveen (1996:30), using a derogatory stereotype about one's ethnicity can be seen as expressing a sense of pride when sharing a joke with individuals of various backgrounds. Rappoport (2005:1) agrees with Leveen, stating that using ethnic humor in this way is a way of demonstrating pride in one's group identity. Rappoport relates this phenomenon to a metaphor, which he calls the sword and shield. The sword and shield metaphor holds that depending on the context, an ethnic joke can be seen as either offensive or defensive. For example, ridiculing a group based on a stereotype can be seen as offensive. However, an ethnic joke based on stereotypes can also be aimed at

protecting one's group from ridicule. Rappoport adds that in some cases the joke can be seen as both offensive and defensive, depending on the context and who the hearer is.

Ethnic humor can thus be seen as a valuable tool to enhance communication, although there remains potential for misunderstandings. Although ethnic humor can be used negatively by asserting power against ethnic groups, Leveen (1996:36) notes that ethnic jokes can also be used to overcome different stereotypes. For instance, by mocking jokes that are derogatory towards in-group members – Jewish comedian making fun of a Jewish stereotype – the joke teller undermines the stereotype, thus lessening its effect. Leveen (1996:43) argues that in this case it is not the individual or group that is laughable, but rather the stereotype. In other words, the joke teller and the joke hearer are laughing at the stereotype and at those people who believe that particular stereotype to be true. Bakhtin (1981:59) proposes a theory of parody, which states that the intention of jokes could be to provide the reparative of laughter and criticism. People are thus forced to think and experience outside the existing categories to see things differently. Leveen (1996:47) agrees with this theory, stating that parody of a stereotype can negate the accuracy of the stereotype.

Another characteristic of ethnic humor that Leveen (1996:33-34) proposes is a way of criticizing society through the use of humor. For instance, in a situation where both the joke teller and joke hearer belong in the same ethnic group, a joke enables them to express frustration and anger towards the system and its injustice. Although Leveen's idea holds that this type of critique is seen in situations where a group member is telling a joke to another member, one can argue that in stand-up comedy such critique can cross the boundaries of joke relationships. For instance, a stand-up comedian can critique issues in society to an interethnic audience, but also critique his or her own ethnicity to non-

members. Criticism towards group members in a joke that is performed to an interethnic audience presents a risk of strengthening negative stereotypes. However, it can also be seen as a means to discuss issues in society concerning other members of a particular ethnic group.

The discussion of Leveen and Rappoport about the characteristics of ethnic humor is important when considering the nature of modern stand-up comedy. As many prominent stand-up comedians belong to an ethnic minority, it is clear that the bulk of their jokes deal with ethnic issues and stereotypes. These characteristics are useful when discussing the various functions of jokes that appear in modern stand-up comedy.

3.2 Discourse analysis

There are several definitions of discourse and discourse analysis. Discourse is generally viewed as language in action. Van Dijk (2002:146), for example, defines discourse as a specific communicative event, which is realized through written or oral form of language use. Fairclough (1995:131) posits a similar view, stating that discourse is primarily written or spoken language use, but extends his definition of discourse to include semiotic practice such as photography and non-verbal communication. Blommaert (2005:3) agrees that the term discourse should comprise of all significant semiotic human interaction. Discourse analysis is thus interested in understanding the influences of discourse through the study of texts. Given the interactional nature of language use, discourse analysts cannot restrict the analysis of texts purely to descriptions of linguistic forms. Brown and Yule (1983:1) note that the aim of discourse analysts is to investigate what language is used for, thus looking at both the linguistic form and how language is used.

3.2.1 The nature of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is used widely in a variety of disciplines and there are many different approaches that comprise discourse analysis. Phillips and Hardy (2002:19) report that studies of discourse analysis can be classified along two different theoretical dimensions. The first dimension deals with the significance of text versus context. The second dimension is concerned with the extent of studies that focus on power relations versus studies that focus more on processes that constitute social reality. Phillips and Hardy (2002:19) identify four major perspectives that are used in empirical studies from these two axes: social linguistic analysis, interpretive structuralism, critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis.

Figure 1 (Phillips and Hardy 2002:19)

The continuum between text and context can be seen in the vertical axis in figure 1. Studies may focus more on the microanalysis of certain texts while other studies will examine the discursive elements of certain contexts. The horizontal axis represents the possibilities between constructivist and critical approaches. Studies with constructivist approaches investigate how social reality is constructed while studies with critical approaches examine how power and ideology affect discourses. The classification of studies into the four dimensions is a matter of degree of focus, since constructivist theories may

analyze aspects of power to some extent, while studies of power and ideology may also examine processes of social construction.

The following section will focus more on the critical aspects of discourse studies, critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with how power and ideology shape discourses and social structures. As Van Dijk states (1993:179), discourse plays a significant part in the reproduction of ethnic and racial stereotypes. Blommaert (2005:2) states that the most profound effect of power everywhere is inequality. As Van Dijk (1993:179) argues, the elite control or have better access to public communications such as political media or corporate discourse, which may result in legitimating stereotypes and racism to the general public. Critical discourse analysis can be used to analyze how discourses shape stereotypes and social structures. Blommaert (2005:1-2) posits that discourse analysis and its relation to power should be an analysis of power effects. It should investigate what power does to people, groups and societies. We will discuss critical discourse analysis in general and Fairclough's social theory of discourse, which provides tools for such analysis of power and ideology.

3.2.2 Critical discourse analysis

Pietikäinen (2000:191-192) describes critical discourse analysis (often abbreviated CDA) as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that combines both linguistic and social study of discourse. Discourse analysis and CDA both share a common focus on how language is used. Blommaert (2005:21) mentions that CDA is most often used to examine discourse in order to understand politics, media, ideology and racism. Van Dijk (1996:84) agrees that CDA is a study focused on the relationship of discourse and social power. Many researchers (Fairclough 1992:12, Pietikäinen 2000:201) state that CDA is

concerned with how discourse is influenced by power relations and ideologies. Furthermore, CDA is focused on constructive effects of discourse on social identities and relations. Foucault (1981:101) argues that discourse channels, produces and reinforces power. However, discourse can also undermine and expose power, making it fragile and thus diminishing its effects. Discourse and power are thus intrinsically connected. Critical approaches to discourse thus attempt to link texts and their possible power structures in society through the use of language. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:60) point out that there is some confusion regarding the name of CDA. Normal Fairclough (1992, 1995) uses the label both to describe his own approach and a larger movement, which consists of different approaches within discourse analysis. The different approaches within this broader entity have similarities and differences.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:60) report that there are five common features that are found among different approaches to critical discourse analysis. The first feature encompasses the idea that discourse analysis sheds light on linguistic-discursive aspects of social and cultural phenomena. It is through discourse practices – such as text production and consumption – in everyday life that social and cultural reproduction takes place. The second feature contains the notion that discourse is a type of social practice, which does not just contribute to the production and reproduction of social structures by shaping them but also reflects them. The third feature discusses the need to analyze language within its social context empirically. Approaches in critical discourse analysis deal with systematical linguistic text analysis of language use in interaction. The fourth feature holds that discourse practices function ideologically. In critical discourse analysis it is suggested that discursive practices help create or reproduce unequal relations of power in society. The fifth and final feature is that critical discourse analysis is a critical approach, which is committed to social change and is thus not politically neutral.

The next section will examine and discuss Normal Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse. Fairclough's model is essentially a framework for analyzing the relationship between text and context. Fairclough originally developed his approach in 1992, but has since revised and developed his model. Thus there can be some confusion to the terminology and concepts that vary slightly in his different works. We will provide an overview of Fairclough's model based on his work in Discourse and Social Change (1992), Media Discourse (1995) and Analyzing Discourse (2003). The terminology of the framework is based on Fairclough's work in 1992.

3.2.3 Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse

Fairclough's (1992:72) approach to discourse analysis is an attempt to unite three traditions of analysis. The first is detailed textual analysis within linguistics, which includes Michael Halliday's functional grammar. The second is macro-sociological analysis of social practice, which includes Foucault's theory, notwithstanding the lack of a concrete methodology. Finally, the third is the micro-sociological interpretative analysis within sociology that views social practice as something which people take part in and interpret. Fairclough (1995a:133) characterizes the three-dimensional model of discourse as a tool for analyzing and exploring discursive events.

According to Fairclough (1995b:56), any form of analysis regarding discourse involves two dimensions that are important:

- Communicative events

- The order of discourse

When analyzing communicative events, Fairclough (1995a:133, 1995b:57) suggests that the analysis should involve relationships of three dimensions: **text**, **discourse practice** and **social practice**. A text is a piece of discourse, which can be spoken or written language, or even visual (for instance, television). It is a discourse practice, which involves the production and interpretation of the text. It is also social practice, which focuses on a political viewpoint, involving power and domination. The order of discourse is the configuration of genres and discourses used within a specific social field. Genres and discourses form the order of discourse. This will be elaborated on in a later chapter. Fairclough's model is illustrated in the following figure.

TEXT

DISCURSIVE PRACTICE
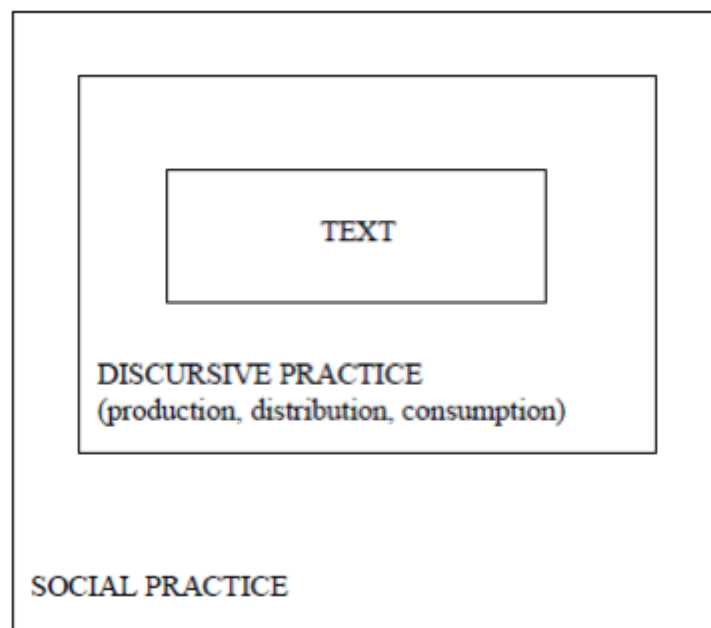(production, distribution, consumption)

SOCIAL PRACTICE

Figure 2 (Fairclough 1992:73)

Fairclough (1992:85) believes that analysis of discursive practice should involve an integration of micro- and macro-analysis. Micro-analysis is the analysis of how participants produce and interpret texts. Macro-analysis complements

micro-analysis by helping the researcher to ascertain the nature of the participants' resources. Macro-analysis is essentially the tradition of analyzing social practice, which alone does not provide methods for the analysis of texts.

According to Fairclough (1992:73), there is overlap between the analysis of the linguistic features of the text and the analysis of the discursive practice. However, text and discursive practice are two separate entities in Fairclough's model and should be focused on individually. Fairclough (1992:225, 1995b:62) stresses that there is a possibility for different emphasis within his framework. For instance, one could choose to focus more on discourse practice. Alternatively, one could choose to focus more on the text. There can be no set procedures to conducting discourse analysis as individuals approach their research in different ways. Pietikäinen (2000:209) adds that each three levels have multiple options that one can focus on.

3.2.4 Discourse as Text

Fairclough (1992:75) posits that text analysis concentrates on four categories that are: **vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure**. These categories can be viewed as ascending in order. Vocabulary deals with individual words, grammar is concerned with the relationship of words, clauses and sentences, cohesion is concerned with ways in which sentences are linked together, while text structure at the other end deals with the larger organizational properties of the text. Fairclough also mentions three additional categories (the force of utterances, coherence and intertextuality), which however, are more related to discursive practices although they also pertain to formal features of texts. These seven categories together provide a framework for analysis, which covers the production and interpretation of texts, as well as their formal properties.

Fairclough (1992:77) provides some examples of how these categories can be used in analysis. Vocabulary can be investigated in many ways. One possible focus is to analyze alternative wordings and whether they are politically or ideologically significant. Another possible focus is upon word meaning. More specifically, how different contexts affect the meanings of words. A third possible focus is upon metaphor and particularly on the political and ideological nature of metaphors.

Fairclough (1995b:57) notes that analysis of texts deals with both the meaning and form, which however, can be difficult to separate. Meanings are realized through forms, and differences in meaning cause differences in forms. Fairclough (1995b:58) argues that analysis of texts in the case of press, television and media in general, needs to be multisemiotic. In other words, the analysis needs to include images, film and sound effects and any visual cues offered by the source of media discourse.

3.2.5 Discursive Practice

Fairclough (1992:78) describes discursive practice as a process of text production, distribution and consumption. The dimension of discursive practice is concerned with text production in particular ways in particular social contexts. Texts can be produced, for instance, collectively by the means of various people working together (newspaper article, political speech) or individually (casual conversation, phone call). Fairclough (1992:79) notes that the consumption of texts varies in different social contexts. As with text production, consumption can be individual or collective. Different institutions have specific ways for text processing, and text consumption may result in different outcomes, for instance, sparking a war or changing the beliefs of people. Fairclough states that texts are distributed in a simple or complex

manner. Texts with simple distribution can be, for example, casual conversations whereas texts with complex distribution can involve political speeches or arms negotiations.

As was mentioned before, Fairclough (1992:75) distinguishes three additional categories along the four of discourse as text, which are used for analysis of discursive practice. These headings are **force of utterance**, **coherence**, and **intertextuality**. Fairclough (1992:82) states that the force of utterance is the action that the text producer takes. For example, how speech act or acts are used to perform the text, for example, giving an order or threatening someone. Interpretations of the force of utterance are not always clear. Sometimes, for example, a simple question might also be a request to do something. Fairclough reminds that an understanding of the context helps reduce ambivalence in interpretation of force. A coherent text, according to Fairclough (1992:83), is one whose parts are related meaningfully so that the text makes sense. Fairclough (1992:83-84) notes that even though there may be limited formal markers within the text's constituent parts, one can still understand the text by the means of inferring meaningful relations in the text. Fairclough (1992:84-85) explains the last of the seven dimensions – intertextuality – which is the condition whereby texts draw on earlier texts. Relating to text production, the intertextual perspective focuses on historical perspective of texts. Relating to text distribution, intertextuality can help explain transformations from one text type to another. Relating to text consumption, intertextuality helps interpret not only the current text, but also other texts that help constitute it.

3.2.6 Discourse as Social Practice

The social practice dimension of discourse, according to Fairclough (1992:86), deals with ideological effects and hegemonic actions, which discourse is seen to

operate in. Fairclough (1995b:62) notes that the analysis of social practice can be conducted at different levels of abstraction within a specific event. The analysis may involve the immediate situational context or a broader context of institutional practices where the event is situated in. Furthermore, the event may be analyzed from a yet wider perspective of society and culture. The analysis of social practice involves considerations about the effects discursive practices may have for the broader social practice. The discursive practices may reproduce or restructure existing discourses and thus effectuate change.

Fairclough (1992:87, 2003:9) understands ideology as more than just beliefs and values, but as representations of the world that contribute to maintaining and changing social relations. In Fairclough's view, discourses can be more or less ideological. Moreover, ideology contributes to the production and transformation of relations of power or domination. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:75) question Fairclough's view on ideology by stating that it can be difficult to differentiate between what is ideology and what is not. Blommaert (2000:31) agrees in the sense that CDA can provide biased interpretations from the viewpoint of the analyst. Fairclough (1992:89) mentions, however, that it is not possible to read off ideologies from texts alone, but thinks that ideology is built into norms and conventions. Texts can be interpreted in many ways, thus possibly containing bias from the person conducting the analysis. However, it can be argued that when conducting any type of analysis based on abstract concepts, it will always leave room for prejudice and bias.

There are many dimensions to the definition hegemony. According to Fairclough (1992:92) hegemony is leadership across various domains of society. These include, for instance, economic, political and cultural fields. Hegemony is a constant struggle for power. In other words, those in possession of that power try to retain it while those who seek power try to challenge the structures of power. Fairclough (1992:92) adds that hegemonic struggle presents itself in

many institutions of society, for instance in education or trade unions. As with ideology, hegemonic struggle contributes to the reproduction and transformation of discourse by the means of discursive practices. Furthermore, hegemonic struggle is one side of discursive practice and the production, distribution and consumption of texts.

There has been some criticism towards Fairclough's theory and CDA in general. Widdowson (2004:166-167) criticizes CDA of being vague in terms of analytical procedures. Furthermore, Widdowson (1998:139) states that a fundamental problem within CDA is the fact that semantic meanings are projected into pragmatic use. Widdowson (1998:148, 2004:169) continues that there is some bias to the interpretations of discourse mistakenly labeled as critical analysis. Widdowson argues that the ideological meaning found in texts by the analyst is forced upon the reader. Fairclough (1999:67) addresses this issue by stating that the interpretation process of texts is a complicated and multilayered process, which leads to the fact that texts may be interpreted in different ways. Different interpretations of texts rely on the characteristics of the interpreter. Fairclough stresses that CDA does not promote a specific understanding of a text, though it may promote a specific explanation. Blommaert (2000:37) shares similar views and ambitions with Fairclough, but stresses the importance of considering history in discursive practice. Power, inequality, social structures and linguistic expressions have been shaped over a long period of time and thus need to be accounted for. Although Fairclough's framework does not address the historic dimension, which affects discursive practice, it can be argued that a researcher may include a historic perspective if needed.

Criticism notwithstanding, Fairclough's model has also been well received. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:89), for instance, view Fairclough's three-dimensional model as the most sophisticated approach for analyzing discourse among various approaches to CDA. To summarize the theoretical concepts of

the framework, the three-dimensional model attempts to investigate the connections between language use and social practice. The focus of Fairclough's approach is how discursive practices maintain social order and how they cause social change. Communicative events – language use – are seen capable of reproducing, restructuring and challenging orders of discourse.

3.2.7 The order of discourse

The order of discourse is a concept, which Fairclough has added to his original framework for analyzing discourse. Fairclough (1995b:55-56) states that the order of discourse is not an alternative to analyzing communicative events, but rather a complementary perspective. The order of discourse deals with the relationship between different discursive types within a social setting. For instance, within a school system, the discourse of classroom and playground. The order of discourse examines whether the boundaries of discourse types stay intact or whether they are mixed together. Fairclough adds that this focus also extends to relations between different orders of discourse, for example, between school and home. According to Fairclough (1995b:56), the order of discourse is concerned with the genres and discourses and their relationships and how they make up the order of discourse. Genre is use of language within a particular social practice, such as doctor-patient consultations in a hospital. This can be seen useful in media discourse analysis, given that there can be multiple genres and discourses within the order of discourse.

3.2.8 Previous discourse studies on race, ethnicity and humor

As we have previously discussed, current humor theories focus excessively on the textual elements of humor. Furthermore, as Rutter (1997:51) notes, most of the humor research is based on the theories of incongruity, hostility and release.

These theories fail to understand and account for the complex nature of contemporary humor. Humor research on ethnic humor has previously focused on the point of view of a dominant group over a minority. However, modern stand-up comedy and contemporary humor often feature jokes that are different from traditional ethnic jokes in many ways. Discourse analysis can be utilized to help make sense of ethnic humor and its motives.

Ethnic humor – although not inherently negative or discriminatory – can deal with stereotypes that can be prejudiced towards minorities. Van Dijk (1993:145) notes that although discourse is not for the most part associated with discrimination and racism, it plays a role in strengthening negative stereotypes and the reproduction of racism. Ethnic humor in stand-up comedy is often based on ethnic stereotypes that discourse can either strengthen or weaken. Therefore, it can be argued that discourse analysis can provide a suitable method for analyzing race and ethnicity in stand-up comedy. Critical discourse analysis and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework in particular, are able to look beyond the purely textual elements of discourse and deal with the social aspect of discourse – for example, issues dealing with power and how discourse affects and is affected by it.

There have been a number of discourse studies regarding race and ethnicity. De Fina (2003) has researched ethnic identity in narrative by focusing on local expressions of identity and social processes that surround migration in narrative discourses. Reisigl and Wodak (2000) have investigated racism and anti-Semitism in contemporary society, why it persists and how it is reflected in discourse. Other studies, for instance, include those of Kerrigan (2011) and Upadhyaya (2011), who have examined the social construction of race in reality TV and how discourses in the constitution of Nepal have denied ethnic and cultural rights of various groups, respectively.

While there have been a number of discourse studies on race and ethnicity, humor has been largely neglected as a research topic. One exception is a study by Holmes and Marra (2002), who have examined the use of subversive humor between colleagues and friends at work. Holmes and Marra used CDA in order to examine how humor is used to subvert the status quo of workplaces, and how it can destabilize power relations in different social relationships. Using humor as a means to challenge power relations between individuals, groups or institutions in society is something that is undeniably present in modern stand-up comedy. Therefore, it can be argued that humor research can benefit much from CDA, and Fairclough's approach in particular.

4 The present study

The following chapter will provide more information about the present study. The first section will discuss the aims of the present study. The second section will introduce the data used and how it was selected. The chapter will be concluded with a discussion of the methods used in the analysis of the data.

4.1 Research questions

The present study examines the use of ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy. More specifically, we will investigate how ethnic humor and the stereotypes involved are used by comedians who themselves belong to an ethnic minority. This can be considered unconventional in studies of ethnic humor, which are usually based on the viewpoint of a dominant group ridiculing a minority. Thus the focus of the present study is the analysis of jokes that deal with ethnic humor and possible motives for use of such humor. The research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. How does ethnic humor manifest in modern stand-up comedy? In other words, who or what is the target of the jokes and what methods do the comedians use in their jokes. For instance, is there irony or dialogue present?

2. Do stand-up comedians strengthen or weaken ethnic stereotypes in their performances?

3. Based on Leveen's proposed categorization of joke relationships, will there be any significant differences in how ethnic humor is used when the comedian is talking as a member or a non-member of an ethnic group?

Based on the literature on ethnic humor that we have discussed earlier, we assume that ethnic humor performed by comedians who belong in ethnic minorities differs significantly from traditional ethnic humor, which mostly targets minorities. Thus, we will assume that the targets of the jokes can vary greatly and that the jokes can have different functions. In addition, we also assume that traditional functions of ethnic humor, such as ridiculing minorities based on stereotypes, are comparatively rare in our data. We will examine these joke relationships based on Leveen's categorization.

4.2 Data

The present study is a qualitative study of ethnic humor in stand-up comedy. The data consists of 53 jokes that have been selected and transcribed from seven different live stand-up performances. Some of these jokes consist of several smaller jokes or punch lines within one larger joke. In these cases, we will analyze each of the smaller jokes if they are relevant to our research questions. We will note this in our analysis and discuss the findings thoroughly. The performances have been carefully viewed from a DVD format, after which we selected jokes that were appropriate for the purposes of the present study. We have transcribed the data by watching the performances. The performances used for the present study do not feature any significant overlap in speech, as there is no real audience participation – aside from laughter by the audience – and the only one speaking is the comedian. Furthermore, as the analysis will focus on understanding the motives and ideological effects of ethnic humor

through discourse, the main emphasis will be on textual analysis rather than analysis of talk in interaction. We have, however, included facial expressions, changes in the tone of the voice and significant pauses in our transcriptions, when they contribute to the interpretation of the joke.

The comedians who were selected to the present study are Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, Dave Chapelle and Lewis Black. We selected jokes from two performances from both Black and Rock, whereas we only used a single performance from Pryor, Murphy and Chapelle. In the case of Pryor, Murphy and Chapelle, only one performance from each comedian that was available contained enough relevant data for the present study. The performances needed to feature multiple examples of ethnic humor to be included in the study. More specifically, if a performance contained only a few jokes that dealt with ethnic issues, they were omitted.

One can identify a significant continuum from Pryor to Chapelle. Pryor was one of the first successful African American comedians who used profanity in his performances. Moreover, Pryor was an important part of the new wave of stand-up comedy as we have discussed earlier. Pryor was also a successful actor and served as a mentor for Eddie Murphy regarding stand-up comedy. After Murphy became famous as an actor, he often provided opportunities and worked as a mentor for promising young talents in his movies. For example, both Chris Rock and Dave Chapelle have appeared in Murphy's movies before they became widely known stars. One can observe and notice similarities in the style of all these four comedians. The fifth comedian, Lewis Black, who is a Jewish, has several similarities with the other four comedians. One can argue that Black's performances contain more profanity than any of the comedians included in the present study. Although Black is known more as a political commentator, his topics also include ethnicity and religion. In addition, the structure of Black's jokes is very similar to the other comedians.

The data of the present study was selected based on various different factors. The first criterion was to select comedians that reflect the history and rise of modern stand-up comedy – in other words, comedians who were either Jewish or African American. This criterion pertains to how ethnic humor is used. The present study examines how ethnic humor is used from the point of view of a minority group, as opposed to traditionally being used from a dominant group's viewpoint. The second criterion was that the performances and jokes had to feature a similar style and structure. For instance, the comedians selected perform to a large audience in a theatre or stadium-like setting. Furthermore, all of these performances were of similar length and were also aimed at either movie or DVD distribution. The third criterion was that the comedians selected had to use a significant amount of ethnic humor in their performances. In addition, these performances had to reflect the nature of modern stand-up comedy by containing jokes that discuss social issues that affect minorities in society. Finally, in order for a joke to be qualified as ethnic humor, there needed to be a clear target for the joke. In other words, simply mentioning an ethnicity or a minority was not counted as an ethnic joke. The target of the joke can be either a dominant or a minority group in society, as long as an ethnic group is the basis for the creation of the joke.

There were some comedians that had to be omitted, although their performances and background were fairly similar to the selected comedians. Sarah Silverman, for instance, is of Jewish descent and her performances often feature topics such as racism and religion. However, Silverman's style is significantly different from the selected comedians. Silverman's style can be called edgy, with the intention of shocking the audience. This is usually achieved by taking stereotypes too far, resulting in performances bordering on inappropriateness. Moreover, Silverman's jokes are often shorter of length, and although they are ironical by nature, they do not offer any significant social commentary compared to the other comedians. Finally, we chose not to include

Silverman, as the present study does not seek to investigate gender differences as a variable. Jerry Seinfeld, who is widely known for his television sitcom "Seinfeld", is a famous stand-up comedian also of Jewish descent. Seinfeld, however, does not have a similar style to the selected comedians and does not focus on ethnicity as a source of humor. The late George Carlin, on the other hand, had a style very similar to the comedians selected. Carlin focused on similar topics of race, politics and ethnicity, including social commentary on sensitive issues. Unfortunately, Carlin is neither Jewish nor African American, therefore barring him from selection to the present study.

4.3 Methodology

In this chapter we will outline the methods applied in the present study. We will begin this section by discussing the groupings for the analysis of the present study, and explain how these groupings were formed. A significant focus within this section will be the three-dimensional model by Norman Fairclough, in which he proposes tools for the analysis of discourse. We will also discuss an approach to categorizing the dynamics of ethnic humor by Lois Leveen, and how this concept will be adapted for the present study.

3.3.1 Content analysis and identifying joke categories within ethnic humor

After transcribing and selecting the data, it was necessary to examine it thoroughly in order to identify categories for the analysis. We have applied content analysis in order to devise a cohesive description of the phenomenon in question. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:91) state that content analysis is a method of analysis that can be used in all traditions of qualitative research. Content

analysis can be considered a research method on its own or as a guideline that can be applied in various forms of analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (ibid, 95-96) note that there are three different approaches to content analysis. These are data-based, theory-guided and theory-based. We will discuss the data-based method more thoroughly, as it is employed in the present study.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:95), data-based analysis attempts to form a theoretical body on the basis of the data. Units of analysis are selected from the data based on the purpose and research questions of the study. A significant idea in this approach is that the units of analysis are not predetermined. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (ibid, 108-113) report that data-based content analysis is an inductive approach, and can be divided into a three-part process: First, the data is reduced in the sense that unnecessary parts are disregarded. This can be done, for instance, by transcribing only the necessary parts of the data regarding the research questions. Secondly, the data is categorized by concepts that reflect the similarities and/or differences in the data. These concepts are categorized into different groupings and named appropriately to reflect the nature of the category. The unit that is categorized can reflect the qualities, characteristics or concepts of the phenomenon that is subject to analysis. Thirdly, theoretical concepts are formed on the basis of the selected data. This process is continued by combining the concepts and categorizations as long as it is possible regarding the content of the data. The data is combined with theoretical concepts, thus reflecting the concepts or ideas that are identified in the data.

The categorizations of the data for the analysis follow the guidelines of data-based content analysis. We examined the data in order to find the logical functions of ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy. We identified four different functions of ethnic humor, which were placed under two larger

categories. We will discuss these categorizations more thoroughly in the following.

4.3.1.1 Sword and Shield

The Sword and Shield category deals with a common and traditional way of using ethnic humor. Jokes of this type are usually concerned with an ethnic trait or characteristic, and these characteristics are used in a humorous way. The motive behind these jokes is not to be ideological by nature. A sword-type joke can be seen as a joke which uses aggressive or offensive humor as a means to ridicule a particular ethnic or minority group. A shield-type joke, on the other hand, deals with self-disparaging humor. This type of humor can be seen as a sign of pride in one's ethnicity. In some cases, however, ethnic humor can be seen to have both of these qualities within a particular joke. We have adopted the name of this category from Leveen (1996) and Rappoport (2005), who have discussed the use of ethnic humor in a similar manner.

4.3.1.2 Social criticism and reshaping discourse

The second category, which we identified from the data, is social criticism and reshaping discourse. First, ethnic humor can be seen as a means to critique social issues. Secondly, the comedian may use parody as a means to ridicule stereotypes, thus shaping the way it is perceived. It is common that the parody of stereotypes is linked with social criticism. Therefore, these parts are often interconnected. Ethnic humor that can be assigned to this category can be seen as reshaping discourse. More specifically, depending on the dynamics of the joke, the comedian can be seen to weaken stereotypes or strengthen them.

The joke relationships of the comedian will affect the jokes within these groupings. We will examine these differences within member and non-member jokes when applicable. The joke relationships will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

4.3.2 Joke relationships within ethnic humor

Lois Leveen (1996:33) has discussed joke relationship within the dynamics of ethnic humor. The four basic combinations are:

1. Group member telling a joke to another member

2. A member telling a joke to a non-member

3. A non-member telling a joke to a member

4. Non-member telling a joke to a non-member

Leveen notes that these combinations may be complicated, for instance, by an interethnic audience. As stand-up comedy performances are often performed in front of an interethnic audience, the present study will focus on the group membership of the comedian only. In other words, the present study will examine whether the comedian is a in a position of a member or a non-member when telling the joke. For example, a Jewish comedian telling a joke about Jews will be categorized as a joke performed from a member's viewpoint. This is relevant due to the fact that in some instances the comedian's membership may change within a joke. Therefore, the categories of joke relationships relevant to the present study are:

1. Group member telling a joke to an interethnic audience

2. Non-member telling a joke to an interethnic audience

We will examine how jokes are affected by the group membership of the comedian. The jokes told by the comedian will always be told either from a group member or a non-member viewpoint. In other words, we will examine whether or not the comedian is a part of the ethnic group he is discussing. The analysis of the data regarding the joke relationships, and discourse analysis, were completed alongside each other.

4.3.3 Fairclough's method for analyzing discourse

As we have discussed earlier, a significant tenet of Fairclough's method is the concept that it is not necessary to use all of the methods that his framework proposes in a given research project. The selection of these tools depends on the scope of the research and the data analyzed. Therefore, we will apply this concept in our analysis by carefully examining the jokes and applying the suitable and necessary components of Fairclough's framework. Fairclough (1992:231) distinguishes between three levels of analysis in his three-dimensional framework. These levels are discursive practice, text and social practice. According to Fairclough, these levels can be analyzed individually and the analyst may begin from any level he or she chooses. In the following, we will examine each of these levels and present the tools that we will utilize when conducting discourse analysis in the present study.

4.3.3.1 Analyzing discursive practice

Fairclough (1992:232) states that analysis of discourse practice entails text production, distribution and text consumption. For the purposes of the present study, we have chosen to focus on analyzing the intertextuality and coherence within the level of discursive practice. Intertextuality is concerned with both text production and text distribution, while coherence is concerned with text consumption.

According to Fairclough (1992:84), **intertextuality** draws upon previous texts when producing a new text. Intertextuality thus deals with the history of texts. Intertextuality can manifest in texts as drawing on previous speeches or direct quotations, for example. Fairclough (2003:47) has revised his definition of intertextuality since, and comments that intertextuality can also involve voices that are relevant to the text that is analyzed. Fairclough (2003:49) notes that these relevant voices can either be quoted directly or the speaker can reproduce the content of what was said earlier.

The objective of **coherence** is to examine how coherent the text is to the interpreter. This can be achieved, for instance, with research on how texts are actually interpreted. As Fairclough (1992:83) notes, a coherent text is one that makes sense as a whole. Issues that may impede the understanding of a text and thus make the text difficult to understand can include intertextual references to earlier texts, or discussions on subjects that the interpreter is not aware of. Fairclough (1992:233) has provided guidelines on coherence for the analyst as follows:

- Is the text heterogeneous and ambivalent for the interpreter, and is there any inferential work needed?

- Does the discourse sample receive resistance from the reader? If so, from what type of reader?

4.3.3.2 Analyzing discourse as text

Analyzing discourse as text will provide information as to how discourses construct reality or interpretations at the text level. From the discussion of Fairclough (1992:234-237), we have chosen to focus on the interpretation of vocabulary and grammar.

According to Fairclough (1992:236), **vocabulary** deals with wording and word meaning. Word meaning emphasizes key words that are of certain significance in the text. For instance, these words might have a local or cultural importance. It also focuses on the meaning of words that are variable and changing. The meaning potential of words is also an important focus. Wording deals with ways how meanings are worded. Furthermore, it also focuses on how these meanings are worded in other types of texts. Fairclough (ibid, 237) proposes some guidelines as to how to proceed with analysis of vocabulary:

- Are there new lexical items that appear in the text? What are their cultural or ideological significance, if any?

- Are there any intertextual relations that can be drawn upon in the wording?

Fairclough (1992:235-236) makes a distinction of three dimensions of **grammar** regarding the clause. The categories, which he differentiates, are: **transitivity**, **theme** and **modality**. For the purposes of the present study, our analysis will

only focus on transitivity found in texts. The objective of transitivity is to analyze how events and processes are connected. Fairclough (ibid, 180) notes that there are four main process types in English: action, event, relational and mental processes. Action processes investigate where the agent of the clause acts upon a goal (for example, medical personnel in a hospital discourse). Action process can further be distinguished into two groupings: directed and non-directed action. The difference between the two is that non-directed action involves an agent and an action but does not contain and explicit goal. Event processes entail an event and a goal and is usually realized through an intransitive clause (for instance, two hundred demonstrators died). Relational processes investigate where the verb signifies a relationship (for instance, "being" or "becoming"). Finally, mental processes entail cognition, perception and affection. Transitivity investigates the ideological consequences that different forms can manifest. In addition, Fairclough (ibid, 179) mentions the aspect of voice. The voice can either be active or passive. In texts, this can be realized through reported speech. The last feature of transitivity is the aspect of nominalization. Nominalization reduces agency and emphasizes the effect. The following are Fairclough's suggestions for the analyst to consider:

- What process types are most frequent in the text?

- Does the text feature passive clauses or nominalizations? What functions do they serve?

4.3.3.3 Analyzing discourse as social practice

Fairclough (1992:237) points out that analyzing **social practice** is a more complicated procedure, which cannot be described by a checklist of questions. The objective is to answer the following questions: First, what is the nature of the social practice that the discourse practice is a part of? Secondly, what are the

effects of the discourse practice on the social practice? Fairclough (ibid.) notes that the following headings are meant only as rough guidelines for analysis of social practice.

Fairclough (1992:237-238) discusses three separate heads, which will be presented in the following. The first heading is the social matrix of discourse. The objective is to identify the social and hegemonic relations that form the social and discursive practices. Furthermore, the aim is to examine how social practice affects or contributes to discourse by reproducing or transforming them. The second head is orders of discourse. The aim here is to investigate the social and discursive practice and the relationship to orders of discourse that may be drawn upon. Again, the focus is on the effects of reproduction or transformation of orders of discourse, which social and discursive practice affects. The third head is ideological and political effects of discourse. According to Fairclough, it is useful for the analyst to focus on systems of knowledge and belief, social relations and social identities, which are ideological and hegemonic effects.

Thus it is evident that Fairclough's methodology presents the analyst with various alternative tools to analyze discourse. Fairclough (1992:238) reminds that it is up to the analyst to justify the analyses that he or she has put forward. Therefore, it is also a question of selecting and justifying the tools, which are most suitable for a particular analysis of discourse. We will therefore utilize these tools that we have introduced and discussed in this section. The selection of the tools has been based on our data. More specifically, each of these tools discussed can be found in our data, thus providing more reliability to the analysis.

5 Analysis and results

5.1 Sword and Shield

This part of the analysis is concerned with jokes that we have characterized as sword or shield. Sword-type jokes can be seen as offensive towards a particular ethnic group. Shield-type jokes, on the other hand, can be seen as expressions of pride. We will begin by introducing how the jokes spread among this category, and also provide more information about the targets of the jokes. We will discuss the purpose and possible targets of the jokes in each individual case.

Out of the 53 jokes in the data, 26 were identified as sword or shield jokes. 20 jokes were found to have sword characteristics and 12 jokes were shield-type jokes. In addition, six of these jokes contained aspects of both categories. Ethnic humor has traditionally been classified as joking about the characteristics of minorities. However, this does not seem to be the case in modern stand-up comedy. Out of the 20 sword jokes, 12 were aimed towards a dominant group in society, such as the Caucasian population in the United States, or politicians. The remaining eight jokes and their targets varied from different ethnicities, such as Italians and the Chinese to sexual minorities.

This example shows how an ethnic joke can be very offensive towards a minority group. In this joke, Eddie Murphy describes what a hypothetical trip to San Francisco would be like for him. Murphy mentions that he has previously upset members of the gay community with crude jokes in his previous performance (Murphy, 1987). This joke differs from more recent jokes in stand-up comedy that involve sexual minorities. This will elaborated on more thoroughly later in the analysis.

Example 1 (Murphy, 1987)

I[1] can't travel the country freely no more. I can't go to San Francisco. **They**[2] got **24-hour homo watch**[3] waiting for me in the airport. Soon as I get off the plane, they'd be like: "He's here, yes. Yes, it's him. Yes, it's him!" [with a really feminine voice] And the cars would come rushing across town. It'd be: "wow-wow-wow-wow!" And it won't be no siren, it'll be **a real fag**[4] sitting on the roof going: "wow-wow-wooooooooo! Pull over. Pull over. [with a really feminine voice]. Pull over. **I'm gonna read him his rights.**[5] **You have the right to remain silent**[6]. Anything you say can and will be held against you. You have the right to an attorney. Turn around. I'm gonna frisk you. You carrying any concealed weapons? Are you carrying…? What is this? What is this? [grabs his genital area]. Lay down on the floor and spread them. Woooooooo!"

Murphy mentions some key words such as *I*[1] and *They*[2], indicating relationships between the two parties involved in the joke – the comedian who is narrating the story and the members of the homosexual community who are upset with him. By doing so, Murphy distinguishes the two sides in the story. The joke is very coherent to the audience given the discussion that leads to the joke and the division into two opposing sides. When arriving at the airport, Murphy suggests that there would be a *24-hour homo watch*[3] waiting for him upon landing. This expression can be seen as an intertextual reference to a phenomenon in the US called neighborhood watch. A neighborhood watch is comprised of an organized group of citizens, who aim to prevent crime and vandalism in a certain location. In the joke, Murphy creates a portrayal of a homosexual group that is trying to prevent "vandalism" against the homosexual community. The comedian positions himself as the villain in the story.

The *24-hour homo watch* clause also marks a change in the narrative, where Murphy begins to report the events of the story from the viewpoint of the homosexual participants. The joke features significant use of reported speech in

the form of the narrative. Furthermore, the narrative includes reported dialogue, although only from the perspective of the homosexual participant in the story. When Murphy is narrating the story from viewpoint of homosexuals, he uses imitation in portraying the gay community. Murphy uses elaborate gestures and a high-pitched voice in order to exaggerate stereotypical characteristics of homosexuals. In addition to the ridicule through gestures and over exaggerated voice, Murphy also uses an ethnic slur as a key word – *a real fag*[4] – when referring to the homosexual police officer. Murphy describes a scene where he is chased by a police car with a homosexual character sitting on the roof of the car, thus replacing the siren with his feminine screams.

As the narrative continues, Murphy describes a scene where the homosexual character is arresting him. Although the scene only appears to include Murphy as the villain and the homosexual police officer, there's a reference to other homosexual police officers that might be nearby: *I'm gonna read him his rights*[5]. From this context, there is no certainty of how many other police officers are present at the scene. The narrative continues with the phrase *You have the right to remain silent*[6] and the following dialogue is an intertextual reference to a police procedure when apprehending criminals. Murphy combines serious dialogue taken from law enforcement with exaggerated stereotypes, which feature gestures and a feminine voice. This leads to an absurd situation in the story, which is entertaining to the audience. This also subjects the homosexual community to ridicule by exaggerating the stereotypes that are often related to gay people. After receiving critique from his previous show about his jokes on homosexuals, Murphy seems to retaliate by lashing out against homosexuals even more aggressively than before. This has a lot to do with the comedian's image: at the time of the performance, Murphy was known as an aggressive comedian who was not afraid of sensitive topics.

When comparing the style of the joke to present stand-up comedy, joking about sexual minorities has become more of a sensitive topic. The following joke illustrates how a similar topic is approached in a different manner by a comedian.

Sword-type jokes can vary in their offensiveness. This can be seen in the following example, which is a joke by Lewis Black. In this joke, Black is discussing a situation where he had attended a horse show because of his girlfriend.

Example 2 (Black, 2006)

I know because **I**[1] used to go to horse shows! Not on my volition, I had a **girlfriend**[2] and her sister was an equestrian. **Equestrian**[3], by the by, that's the **gayest word in English language**[4]. As a matter of fact I thought **Brokeback Mountain**[5] should've been called **Two Equestrians**[6].

Black mentions few key words that indicate the various parties involved in the joke. The joke is told from the comedian's point of view. This is evident when Black begins the joke by drawing attention to the fact that he has experience of attending horse shows – *I*[1] [used to go to horse shows!] – albeit against his own will. Black reveals the reasoning to the audience – his *girlfriend*[2] – whose sister was an equestrian. Black is reporting past events in the joke, although no precise time of events is made explicit to the audience. After providing reasoning for attending horse shows, Black shifts his focus on the word *equestrian*[3]. This is accomplished by using the expression by the by, which is accompanied with a short pause. After this brief pause, Black goes on to state that equestrian is the *gayest word in the English language*[4]. By referring to the properties of the word as being gay, Black is drawing on a common negative

stereotype about homosexuality. In this case, the word equestrian can be seen as having a feminine connotation.

Making fun of the word equestrian leads to the punch line of the joke. Black states that in his opinion, the movie *Brokeback Mountain*[5] should have been called *Two Equestrians*[6]. This marks an intertextual reference in the joke: Black refers to the movie Brokeback Mountain, which features two homosexual characters who can be frequently seen horseback riding in the movie. Referring to a movie with gay characters is another way of the comedian to further mock the word equestrian as being gay. When considering the coherence of the joke, this intertextual reference to a specific movie can cause issues to some of the audience, should they be unaware of the movie and its plot. During the time of the performance, Brokeback Mountain was a well-known Oscar-winning movie, hence it was likely that most of the audience were aware of the reference. However, given that this performance was also released on DVD for sales, this could lead to coherence if viewed much later on.

Although homosexuality and the stereotypes involved are important in this joke, the joke itself does not target homosexuals, but the English language. The stereotype about homosexuality is used for a comedic effect to illustrate the properties of the word equestrian. When comparing this joke to the previous one by Eddie Murphy, one can identify significant differences in how homosexuality is portrayed and used as a component in the joke. Although the crudeness of Murphy's jokes were accepted in the 80s, comedians have since adapted to the changes in society, thus leading to humor that does not portray homosexuals in a similar manner. In fact, it can be argued that many comedians defend homosexuals against prejudice. This will be illustrated more specifically later in the analysis.

Ethnic humor often focuses on ridiculing minorities. However, it is relatively common that jokes in modern stand-up comedy ridicule the dominant groups in society. The following joke by Dave Chapelle illustrates this. In this joke, Chapelle makes fun of the differences in language used by African Americans and Caucasians. The joke is about a phone conversation between the comedian and his lawyer, who happens to be Caucasian.

Example 3 (Chapelle, 2000)

Show business brings a lot of races together. Sometimes it works, sometimes it don't. This is one thing that happens that's funny. You know, sometimes **I'll**[1] be on a business call, right? You know, like with a lawyer or something. **You know, my lawyers be white**[2]. And, uh... [chuckles] So, like, we'll be on a call, right? And they'll be like, "uh, okay, Dave. We're gonna close the deal. Is that fine with you?"
I'll be, like, "yeah, that's good for me! "
"Great. Great. You have a good weekend Dave."
I'll be like "**yeah you too man, peace**[3]!"
"Ooh... [hesitation] all right bye bye!" [starts laughing] **They don't know what to say, right**?[4]
Sometimes I'll make up shit that's not even slang just to see how they handle it[5] and shit. It'll be the same, they just go, "all right, we're gonna close the deal."
"Yeah, it sounds good to me."
"Great. you have a great weekend Dave."
"All right, buddy. **Zip it up and zip it out**[6]."
"Ooh… all right … **zippediduudaa**[7] bye bye!"

Chapelle begins the joke by mentioning that show business brings a lot of races together. This cue informs the audience about the contents of the joke. Chapelle identifies the parties involved with key words and wordings: *I'll*[1] and *You know, my lawyers be white*[2]. This division makes the opposing sides clear to the audience: the comedian who is black, and his lawyers who are white. Chapelle emphasizes his own ethnicity by using African American Vernacular English

(hereafter referred to as AAVE) when referring to his lawyers: my lawyers be white. The joke is in the form of a narrative, where the comedian is using reported speech involving two separate phone conversations that may or may not have happened. The phone conversation features reported dialogue between Chapelle and one of his lawyers. During the dialogue, Chapelle is imitating his Caucasian lawyer who speaks in a very official manner: Chapelle's imitation of the lawyer sounds very grammatically correct, strict and businesslike. Meanwhile, Chapelle portrays himself as relaxed and also uses slang in his speech, typical of African Americans. At the end of the first phone conversation, Chapelle ends the discussion with a phrase: *yeah you too man, peace!*[3] This surprises the lawyer, who is at a loss how to respond and hesitates briefly. This is humorous to the audience: the intertextual reference to the procedure of finishing a regular phone conversation is atypical: Chapelle uses a slang word to express his satisfaction with the business deal.

Chapelle himself points out how his lawyer was at a loss when trying to respond by stating: *They don't know what to say, right?*[4] By referring to the humorous part of the first phone conversation, Chapelle helps the audience understand the purpose of the joke. This dialogue also separates the first conversation from the second, and makes the joke more coherent. The coherence of the joke is further aided by statement by Chapelle: *Sometimes I'll make up shit that's not even slang just to see how they handle it*.[5] This is a connector to the second phone conversation that follows, and helps in understanding the punch line of the joke. In the second conversation Chapelle finishes the dialogue with a made up phrase: *Zip it up and zip it out*.[6] Chapelle is teasing his lawyer and attempting to provoke an unusual response. The lawyer hesitates once again, and unsure as to how to respond blurts out: *zippediduudaa bye bye!*[7], quickly ending the conversation.

The punch line is humorous due to the differences of the two sides that are present in the joke. Chapelle mocks his Caucasian lawyer by portraying him as a strict, businesslike person who only speaks in Standard American English. This is made humorous by portraying the lawyer as unable to understand and respond to a simple use of slang, as is the case in the first phone conversation. Although this joke is clearly based on ethnic differences, the joke targets the dominant group instead of a minority. Ethnic humor has been commonly perceived as jokes aimed towards ethnic minorities based on stereotypes. However, this is not the case in modern stand-up comedy. This is further illustrated in the next joke.

This particular joke by Dave Chapelle features an interesting contrast to the first example in the data by Eddie Murphy. When observing the grammar of the jokes, one can identify Chapelle being the agent in this joke. He is showing his pride in his own ethnicity by using his own language – in this case, AAVE. This is done by making fun of the linguistic differences between AAVE and Standard American English used by his lawyers. However, in the joke by Eddie Murphy, Murphy is clearly the target of the joke. In his joke, Murphy is targeted by the agent of the joke, the homosexual police officer. Although the agent of the joke is persecuting Murphy who is the object of the joke, the butt of the joke is the agent, in this case the homosexual police officer. This is accomplished by Murphy's imitation, which includes high-pitched voice and feminine gestures.

The following joke by Chris Rock features a scene where Rock has just entered the stage and has picked up the microphone. Rock begins the show with a racial related joke aimed at the Caucasian audience.

Example 4 (Rock, 1999)

Is Brooklyn in the house? Shit, look at this. **White people**[1] **up top**[2] tonight!

At the beginning of his performance, Rock is warming up the audience by greeting them – specifically people from Brooklyn due to spending some of his childhood there. What follows is a surprisingly meaningful joke based on race relations. The joke features two distinguishable parties: The African American performer and the Caucasian part of the audience that the comedian is referring to. Although the comedian does not mention his own ethnicity explicitly, the venue is a significant part in understanding the nuances of the joke. Before Rock enters the stage, the master of ceremonies introduces Rock to the audience by stating: "Live, from the Apollo Theater", which is known as the most famous club in Harlem, New York. Furthermore, the Apollo Theater is associated almost exclusively with black performers in its long history. Therefore, it can be argued that it is not necessary for Rock to emphasize his own ethnicity because of the venue and its history.

There are some key words that are significant in the joke. *White people*[1] refers to one of the parties in the joke and also the target of the joke. *Up top*[2] is used by the comedian to refer to the location where some of the Caucasian audience is seated in the theater. After this, Rock looks at the audience who are seated at three different levels in theater. After glancing at the top level, Rock seems surprised to see so many white people up on the top row. The clause White people [are] up top tonight! features an AAVE form, where the verb are is omitted. However, when analyzing the full sentence, one can identify a transitive clause, which features a directed action process. The social motivation behind this comment is to remark the comedian's surprise at the seating arrangement of the show – more specifically, the Caucasian audience sitting on the top row.

When analyzing the key word *up top* further, one can identify an intertextual reference to historical events. *Up top*, in this case, means sitting in the upper balcony, or at the back of the venue. Historically, this can be seen to refer to the segregation of African Americans in the US history. For example, it was common for the African American community to be forced to sit at the back of the bus when using public transportation. The seats at the front of the bus were normally reserved for the Caucasian population – hence the seats at the front were more prestigious. The Apollo Theater and its ticket prices can be metaphorically compared to the seating arrangement in the bus during the time of segregation. The theater consists of the stage level, lower balcony and the upper balcony. In this case, *up top* refers to the upper balconies, which are considered the worst, and least prestigious seats in the theater. These seats are also the cheapest. The comedian's remark and surprise at the seating in this instance creates an image of the white audience sitting at the back of the bus.

Although a short joke that takes in the audience is a common way for a modern stand-up comedian to begin his or her performance, there may be issues with the coherence of the joke. The joke may not be clear to some of the audience – especially viewers who watch the show from DVD. Differences in ticket pricing are obvious to the audience that attends the show. Therefore, they are likely to understand the comedian's reference to the Caucasian audience sitting on less prestigious seats in the theater. Connecting the racial history and segregation into the joke is likely to be even more difficult for the audience. This is also due to the fact that the joke happens in such a short timeframe and the comedian moves onto a new narrative story immediately after. However, the joke can be enjoyed and laughed at without making this particular connection. Although one can identify significant racial connections in this joke, the purpose of the comedian is to warm up the audience for the upcoming performance and not concentrate on the racial issues in more detail. This is evident when viewing the

show from the DVD: one can see that the audience is mixed at all levels of the theater. In other words, the top row has audience from all ethnicities.

The next excerpt features a joke by Richard Pryor, where he is discussing various minority groups in penitentiaries. Prior to this joke, Pryor has discussed a movie project that took place in the Arizona state penitentiary.

Example 5 (Pryor, 1982)

In the penitentiary, man, they got all **them racist groups**[1]. They got the white groups. Hate... they act like they're in New York. And they got the **Nazi party**[2]. And what they call it? A **Ku Klux Klan**[3]. The Mexicans got them gangs, **you can't pronounce their names**[6], and they don't wear no shirts. The black people got the **Mau Maus**[4]. And the **Muslims**[5], **double Muslims**[7]. Them's the one you don't fuck with, them double Muslims, '**cause them motherfuckers can't wait to get to Allah... and want to take eight or nine motherfuckers with them**[8].

After mentioning his movie project in the Arizona state penitentiary, Pryor begins a discussion about several different groups that can be found within the correctional system. Pryor's joke features several important key words. One can identify a division between the comedian and the others, in this case, *them racist groups*[1]. This also makes the joke very coherent to the audience, as the target of the joke is identified in a broad sense. The mention of racist groups should be enough to indicate what the joke will be about as no unrelated key words are mentioned. The key words that relate to *them racist groups* include: *Nazi party*[2], *Ku Klux Klan*[3], *Mau Maus*[4] and *Muslims*[5]. These groups are mentioned in this context simply in order to make the joke that follows more coherent by drawing on strong negative connotations. After discussing few of the different racist groups, Pryor describes the Mexican gangs differently from the previous groups. Pryor introduces the Mexican gangs by stating that: *you can't pronounce*

their names[6]. This is a transitive clause in which the agent you refers to anyone outside the Mexican ethnicity trying to discuss Mexican gangs. In addition, the clause contains an action process, where the agent is not able to pronounce the gangs' names. This clause is a turning point in the joke: before the Mexican gangs were introduced, Pryor's joke could have been about serious topics regarding the gangs in prison. However, after this clause it is evident that the joke is targeting the gangs humorously, based on ethnic stereotypes. Another example of this is when Pryor mentions that the Mexican gangs also have a habit of not wearing shirts in general. Pryor uses these stereotypes about Mexicans that relate to language and physical appearance in order to bring laughter to the audience. Furthermore, by mocking the Mexican gangs, Pryor is setting up the punch line of the joke. Pryor then proceeds to discuss the African American groups – The black people – found in prison, which also reveals the main target of the joke.

After the main target of the joke has been revealed, Pryor moves on to the punch line, which discusses so called *double Muslims*[7]. Pryor states that one should be aware of double Muslims as *them motherfuckers can't wait to get to Allah... and want to take eight or nine motherfuckers with them*[8]. Here Pryor is also reporting what the behavior of the double Muslims would be in a confrontation. In addition, this can also be seen as an intertextual reference. Fairclough (2003:47) states that intertextuality can also deal with voices in texts that are potentially relevant to the meaning of the text. Although Pryor does not incorporate the voice of the double Muslims, he is mainly talking about the group. In other words, he is representing what the actions of the group would be. As this sentence finishes the joke, it is the most important part of the text. Therefore, the actions of the double Muslims is the most relevant part for understanding the joke, as their actions make the joke humorous.

Pryor's use of the term *double Muslim* is interesting on several levels. First of all, Pryor separates "regular" Muslims from double Muslims. By double Muslims, he is referring to the more extremist proponents of Islam, who are known for terrorist attacks, for example. Normally, when a joke is referring to the Muslim community, one could assume that the joke is targeting the Middle Eastern ethnicities. However, in this joke Pryor associates Muslims in penitentiaries primarily as African American ethnic origin. Therefore, the main targets of the joke are the African American gangs in penitentiaries, who are the extremist supporters of Islam. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Pryor's joke can be seen as a sword-type joke towards his own ethnicity. This does not seen to be common, as most sword-jokes are aimed at other ethnicities. In fact, this was the only joke found in the data, which featured a sword-type joke which was aimed at the comedian's own ethnicity.

When an ethnic joke is aimed at the comedian's own ethnicity, it is generally used differently when compared to the previous joke by Richard Pryor. Most commonly, jokes aimed at the comedian's own ethnicity can be characterized as self-disparaging humor. In this case, the comedian can be seen as taking pride in his or her own ethnicity. The following joke by Lewis Black makes fun of traits associated with Jewish people.

Example 6 (Black, 2006)

I am not a **hunter**[1]. For those of you who probably thought "**wow, he'd look good in orange!**"[3] But I don't hunt because, I was born and raised **Jewish**[2], and there's a um... a group of the Jewish people **who have no motor or mechanical skills**[4]... and I am one of them. **It's just by the grace of god I can actually wipe myself**[5].

In the joke, Black is discussing hunting, which is a reference to the earlier part of his performance. The key words in this joke are *hunter*[1] and *Jewish*[2]. Black

states in the beginning of the joke that he is not a hunter nor can he be characterized as one. This is made humorous by the following where Black is using reported speech: *wow, he'd look good in orange!*[3], where Black is reporting the thought process of members of the audience. Furthermore, this sentence also has an intertextual property: look good in orange can be seen as referring to orange safety vests or jackets worn by hunters that are required by law. Black then proceeds to elaborate why he is not a hunter. Black argues that the reasoning behind this is his Jewish background. He states that there is a group of Jewish people *who have no motor or mechanical skills*[4] and that he belongs to this group. This relates to several Jewish stereotypes. Jewish people are often seen as intelligent – perhaps working in finance or as lawyers, or some other prestigious positions. However, Jewish people are rarely portrayed or characterized as athletic.

This lack of athleticism or lack of motor skills is the stereotype that Black uses to make the joke humorous. After informing the audience of lacking in motor skills, Black concludes the joke with a punch line stating that: *It's just by the grace of god I can actually wipe myself*[5]. This type of ironic, self-disparaging humor can be seen as characteristic for shield-type jokes. Black is using self-disparaging humor by stating that he can barely clean himself after using the restroom. Using irony in this manner can be seen as a sign of pride in belonging to an ethnic group, but also allows the person to make fun of his own background. Such self-disparaging humor is not offensive by nature.

The next excerpt features a joke by Chris Rock, where he is making fun of his own ethnicity. This is another example how a comedian can display pride in his ethnicity through self-disparaging humor. Rock is discussing the lack of black leadership and moves on to discuss one of the more important African American leaders, Louis Farrakhan.

Example 7 (Rock, 1999)

What else **we**[1] got? **Farrakhan**[4]? Farrakhan got everybody together for the **Million Man March**[5] and everything. But Farrakhan don't like the **Jews**[2], **which is bugged**[9]. I get my hair cut on **DeKalb Avenue**[6]. I never been in a barbershop, and heard a bunch of brothers talking about Jews. **Black people don't hate Jews. Black people hate white people!**[3][7] [humorous emphasis on white people] We don't got time to dice white people up into little groups. "I hate everybody! I don't care if you just got here." "Hey, I'm Romanian." "**You Romanian cracker!**[8]"

Chris Rock is discussing the situation with African American leaders in society, which leads to a discussion on racism. There are several key words in the joke that the comedian uses in order to distinguish the groups involved in the joke. *We*[1] is used to refer to African Americans in general. This also indicates that the joke is told from an African American viewpoint. The ethnic others in this joke are *Jews*[2] and *white people*[3]. Finally, *Farrakhan*[4] refers to Louis Farrakhan, a known African American nationalist who is known to have made callous remarks towards the Jewish community and Caucasians. Rock is discussing the positive accomplishments of Farrakhan, which leads to an intertextual reference, *Million Man March*[5]. The Million Man March was a gathering of social activists, held in Washington D.C. in 1995. Farrakhan was a keynote speaker at the march. The purpose of the march was to attract attention to urban and minority issues in the US. After this, Rock moves on to mention that Farrakhan does not like Jewish people, which leads to the second intertextual reference in the joke. Rock mentions a barbershop in *DeKalb Avenue*[6], which is a street that goes through Brooklyn and Queens, and is populated by a substantial African American community. Rock is talking about his barbershop visits, and mentions that he has never heard a black man speak ill of Jewish people. This discussion leads to the actual ethnic joke that is present in this text.

In an ironic tone, Rock states that *Black people don't hate Jews. Black people hate white people!*[7] This humorous comment leads to a dialogue between two unnamed characters, whose voice Rock is presenting to the audience. One of the characters is African American, and the other is Caucasian Romanian. In the punch line, the African American character is telling that he or she hates every Caucasian, regardless of their origin. The second character introduces him- or herself to the African American by stating that he or she is from Romania. This leads to the punch line, where the African American character responds by stating: *You Romanian cracker!*[8] The term *cracker* is an insulting term used towards Caucasians by other ethnicities, most often by African Americans.

Although on the surface the joke appears to mock Caucasian people, there are clear markers that the comedian is not intending to attack white people. In fact, the joke can be seen as an ironic example of an African American stereotype about their relations to white people. Before Rock begins his rant about African Americans hating Caucasians, he clearly passes judgment on Farrakhan's mentality towards Jewish and Caucasian people. Rock goes on to state that Farrakhan's mentality *is bugged*[9], thus showing his disapproval. Therefore, one can see the joke as ridiculing an African American stereotype regarding their relationship and attitudes towards white people. This is another way of discussing a sensitive topic relating to the comedian's own ethnicity in an ironic and humorous way.

The following example illustrates how an ethnic joke can have qualities of both sword and shield. In this joke, Eddie Murphy is discussing a stereotype on how African American people from New York act in confrontational situations.

Example 8 (Murphy, 1987)

Black people[1] **from New York have this trick**[3] we use on **white people**[2]. It works. Even if you can't fight, **you have to act like you can fight, because that gets you out of a lot of fights**[4]. It works. If you have some problem... walk up to a white dude and step on his foot. And he says: "**Hey, you got a problem?**[5]" You go, "Yeah, motherfucker, I got a problem! [aggressive, high voice, making his eyes really big] **I just lost my motherfucking job to a white man, look just like you!**[6] So I say I'm gonna step on some feet till I feel I've redeemed myself. You got a problem?" And white guys will go, "**Hey, I didn't know about your job**[7]." [imitating a Caucasian man in a humorous tone] They leave and brother be standing there like this: "**That was close. I almost got fucked up**[8]." [a relieved voice, wiping sweat of his forehead and smiling]

There are two distinguishable groups in the joke. This is evident by the comedian's use of key words. Murphy mentions *Black people*[1] and white *people*[2] in the very beginning of the joke, thus creating a clear juxtaposition between the two parties. By doing so, the joke is also made very coherent to the audience. It is very clear who the participants are in the joke and what the joke will discuss. There is also an intertextual reference at the beginning of the joke. Murphy states that *Black people from New York have this trick*[3] that is common for African Americans living in New York. By referring to a behavioral pattern by African Americans, Murphy is emphasizing the significance of the trick, which is the focus of this joke. The trick that Murphy is talking about relates to a stereotype about African Americans. According to this stereotype, black people can be very vocal and aggressive when in arguments and appear almost as if ready to fight for their argument. Murphy describes the trick by saying that: *you have to act like you can fight, because that gets you out of a lot of fights*[4]. This is illustrated in the joke by Murphy's exaggerated imitation where he is talking in a high-pitched voice with aggressive facial expressions that include an aggressive stare, for example.

Murphy's joke is in the form of a narrative that features reported speech in a form of a dialogue between an African American and a Caucasian male. Murphy suggests to the African American part of the audience to step on a Caucasian person's foot, which is a starting point for the dialogue. The Caucasian character in the joke asks the African American character: *Hey, you got a problem?*[5] This is said in a fairly normal manner, without any indication of a confrontation. Murphy begins a profanity filled imitation of a black male, who is stating that his aggressive behavior towards the white male is a result of him losing his job to a white man. At this point, Murphy emphasizes the aggressive behavior in a confrontational situation by stating that *I just lost my motherfucking job to a white man, look just like you!*[6] As the African American character states that he lost his job to a similar looking Caucasian person, he is indicating that there is a perfectly fine reason for his aggression. Therefore, he is suggesting that it would be better for the Caucasian man to back off from the confrontation – thus avoiding a potential physical altercation. The white male responds in an apologetic manner, *Hey, I didn't know about your job*[7]. This is the second time when Murphy is imitating the voice of the Caucasian male. In the beginning, Murphy was talking in a normal manner. However, at this point in the joke, Murphy is portraying the Caucasian character in a humorous tone. This can be seen as slightly mocking towards Caucasian people, who are the targets of the trick in the joke. After the Caucasian character has left the scene, Murphy resumes the dialogue from the black male's perspective, stating *That was close. I almost got fucked up*[8]. This is combined with an imitation of relief in his voice and physically through smiling and pretending to wipe sweat of his forehead. This makes it clear that the African American character did not actually wish to fight, but was trying to avoid the confrontation with his pseudo-aggressive behavior.

While the joke slightly mocks the Caucasian people through imitation and falling for the trick, Murphy is also making fun of the African American

stereotype of "fake fighting", which includes very vocal, seemingly aggressive behavior towards the target. By showing how relieved the African American character is after having avoided the fight, Murphy is making fun of these characteristics that are associated with African Americans. Thus, the punch line is another example how self-disparaging humor can be used by the comedian.

This section of the analysis examined jokes that mock ethnicities, often through use the use of stereotypes or ethnic characteristics, such as physical features. Earlier studies on ethnic humor have presented ethnic humor as solely targeting ethnic minorities. However, it is evident from the analysis so far that ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy can be seen to attack dominant and minority groups equally. When looking at the data, one can argue that the comedians in the present study attack the dominant and elite groups in society more often than choosing to ridicule ethnic minorities.

The methods that the comedians used in order to create humor were irony, narratives, imitation and exaggeration and linguistic differences between different ethnicities. Furthermore, in the case of shield-type jokes, the comedians always used self-disparaging humor in order to laugh at ethnic stereotypes regarding their own ethnic groups. These means became evident when analyzing the jokes with the aid of CDA: to fully understand the nature of the jokes, one needs to take all three levels of Fairclough's framework into consideration. This is illustrated perfectly in example 4 by Chris Rock: the textual level establishes the target of the joke, the discursive level contains an intertextual reference which illustrates the irony of the situation and also points out the social implications of the topic. The next section of the analysis will focus on jokes that discuss issues in society and the critique that the comedians express in their performances.

5.2 Social criticism and reshaping discourse

There were 27 jokes in this category, all of which discuss issues in society and criticize them in some manner. The critique was carried out in two significant forms. First, the comedian could be seen criticizing social issues, which we have labeled as social criticism. Secondly, some of the social critique is achieved by parody of ethnic stereotypes, thus reshaping discourse – the effect of the stereotypes involved. More specifically, the comedian can be seen to either weaken or strengthen the stereotypes depending on the contents of the joke. It should be noted that in none of the jokes does the comedian criticize an ethnic group that he is not a member of.

The following excerpt is an example by Chris Rock, where he is criticizing police behavior and prejudice towards African Americans.

Example 9 (Rock, 1999)

You know what's fucked-up about taxes[1][5]**?** You don't even pay taxes. **They take tax**[6]. You get your check, money gone. That ain't a payment, that's **a jack**[2]. Got all these taxes: City Tax, State Tax, Social Security Tax. You don't get the money until you're 65. Meanwhile, the average black man dies at 54. Shit, we should get Social Security at 29! What the fuck, man? **We**[3] **don't live that long**[7]. Hypertension, high blood pressure, **NYPD**[4], something will get you.

There are several notable key words in the joke. These include *taxes*[1], *a jack*[2], *We*[3] and *NYPD*[4] (New York Police Department). Rock begins the joke by mentioning taxes and that something is seriously wrong about them. This is emphasized through the use of profanity: *You know what's fucked-up about taxes*[5]. This is a common method for the comedians in the present study, when they wish to emphasize something in their performance. Rock goes on to tell

the audience that taxes are not actually paid; instead *They take tax*[6]. One can identify a directed action process from this transitive clause. The agent in this clause is acting upon a goal, in this case, the taxes. This is an important structural part of the joke, as the comedian is emphasizing the action that is most important regarding the joke. Rock continues talking about taxes, stating that taxes are not a payment, but *a jack*. This is an intertextual reference to car jacking, which is a form of hijacking. A carjack involves stealing a vehicle while armed, and while the owner occupies the vehicle.

By using such an intertextual reference, Rock is further emphasizing the inequality of the taxation system. Next, Rock mentions that retirement payments are due when a person reaches the age of 65. Rock then proceeds to inform the audience that the average African American man dies at the age of 54. Rock also states his membership to this group by stating *We don't live that long*[7]. While listing the issues that affect the life expectancy of the African Americans, Rock also moves the joke to its surprising punch line. Rock is talking about medical conditions such as high blood pressure that can be the demise of African Americans. When finishing the list of these conditions, Rock mentions *NYPD* as one of the reasons for short life expectancy of African Americans. Although the earlier discussion in the joke was focused on the taxation process, the punch line reveals the real target of criticism in this joke, the police. The comedian, therefore, distinguishes the two opposing parties in the joke – the African Americans and the police. This type of execution of a joke is quite typical to the comedians in the present study. The comedian can begin a discussion by talking about a certain issue, only to lead the joke to the punch line, which may come as a surprise to the audience – such as the NYPD in this joke. This type of execution of the joke also involves the manipulation of the coherence of the joke. The comedian first starts by discussing an issue, which is very clear to the audience only to change the target completely in the punch

line. This is done in a way that cannot be missed, as the NYPD is not a health related issue as the others mentioned by the comedian.

The NYPD is mentioned as a reason for the short life expectancy of African Americans. By doing so, Rock is concerned about the police conduct and prejudice towards African Americans in large urban areas. This is a way by the comedian to highlight some of the issues that the African American community is facing. For example, an African American man who is driving an expensive car could be pulled over by the police for no apparent reason. This type of conduct by the police is typical when they suspect theft. Furthermore, there have been famous instances in the US, where police officers have used unnecessary force when apprehending African Americans – for instance, the Rodney King incident, which ultimately led to the Los Angeles riots in 1992. Rock continues this joke and criticism about the police, which we will return to later in this section.

The following example is another joke by Chris Rock, where he is discussing the problems and inequality in the American school system.

Example 10 (Rock, 2004)

Lot of people say: "**If you are the smartest and the brightest**[6], you don't need **affirmative action**[1], we'll be able to get rid of affirmative action altogether, if you just strive to be the smartest and the brightest". They say that as if the whole country is run by the smartest and the brightest. Now, **I**[2] was in **black schools**[3] and in **white schools**[4] **so you can't fucking tell me shit**[7]! Now, when you go to a class, there are 30 kids in a class: five smart, five dumb, and the rest they're in the middle. And that's all America really is: a nation in the middle, a nation of B and C students. That's all it fucking is! A nation of B and C students. But lets keep it fucking real ok?! A black C student can't run no fucking company! **A black C student can't even be the manager**

of Burger King![8] Meanwhile, **a white C student just happens to the President of the United States of America**[5][9]**!**

There are several important key words in this joke. These include *affirmative action*[1], *I*[2], *black schools*[3], *white schools*[4] and *the President of the United States of America*[5]. Rock begins the joke using a form of reported speech by stating: *if you are the smartest and the brightest* […][6]. It is not made clear who the speaker is, but it can be deduced that he or she is against affirmative action and is arguing on the behalf of the school system. Before the reported speech, the comedian states that this is an opinion shared by many people. By introducing the topic and emphasizing the point of view early in the joke, the comedian is making the joke very coherent to the audience. The issues with coherence are likely to be related to unawareness of the term affirmative action and what it involves. Affirmative action is also an intertextual reference. Affirmative action covers policies that take race, gender and sexual orientation into consideration in an attempt to counter the effects of discrimination. In other words, affirmative action is realized through quotas for minorities in employment, for instance. The unknown speaker whose voice is reported states that if you work hard in school, there would be no need for such policy.

Rock then continues the joke by sharing his personal experience on the topic: *I* […]. He informs the audience that he has attended both black schools and white schools. He emphasizes this by stating: *so you can't fucking tell me shit!*[7] By stating so, he argues that he is aware of the differences between black and white schools. Rock proceeds to discuss the nature of classrooms in black and white schools, stating that most of the students in any school belong in the middle. In other words, these students are B and C students. Rock moves on to talk about average students in black schools versus average students in white schools. Rock tells the audience that a black C student cannot be in charge of any company, *A black C student can't even be the manager of Burger King!*[8] This leads

to the punch line, where Rock states that *a white C student just happens to be the President of the United States of America!*[9]

The criticism in this joke is largely focused on the American school system. In addition, the joke also discusses the inequality within the society towards people of lower socioeconomic status. In this case, having access to a more prestigious school is likely to provide one with more opportunities in the future. One could interpret the unnamed speaker whose voice Rock is reporting as a person[6] who is somehow involved with the elite that control policies such as affirmative action. This could be argued on the basis of the speaker being against affirmative action, and also arguing on behalf of the school system. Furthermore, the remark about the President of the United States is used to illustrate the difference and inequality between black and white schools. In other words, receiving similar education in two different schools is likely to result in two very different outcomes with regards to one's employment and future prospects.

In the following example, Lewis Black is performing a joke that is slightly unusual. In the joke, Black is discussing the hardships that the homosexual community is facing.

Example 11 (Black, 2006)

I believe[1] that the reason that it's difficult um for **the gay community**[2] to be integrated into the society at large the way they should be, is because there are no champions for them, in congress or the White House. And that is the way every group of people um has basically been integrated into the society. That's the way it works. Instead you have people like **Rick Santorum**[3], senator from Pennsylvania, who says things that he should think, and shut his fucking mouth. Things like [small pause] you can go ahead and think it that's fine, but you don't say aloud that **homosexuality is a**

threat to the American family[4]. Because that's [small pause for applause] that's prejudice. **That's complete and utter prejudice and ignorance on a level that is staggering at this point in time**[5].

In this Joke, Lewis Black is defending a gay rights issue as a non-member of the group. His position is evident from the key words *I believe*[1] which starts this particular joke. Other key words in the joke are *the gay community*[2] and *Rick Santorum*[3]. Black is discussing the difficulties that the gay community faces when trying to integrate into society. Black argues that for the integration to be successful, a group needs someone to champion their cause in the political field. Instead of having a champion, the gay community has to endure prejudice. Black mentions Rick Santorum, who is a senator from Pennsylvania. This is an intertextural reference to a statement by Santorum, where he is talking about homosexuals and the American society. After this reference to the politician, Black is using reported speech to inform the audience of what Santorum has said publicly: *homosexuality is a threat to the American family*[4]. The statement by Santorum and the early remark of his profession make the joke very coherent to the audience, even if one is not knowledgeable about the United States politics. There should be no mistake about what Black is attempting to convey to the audience.

The reported speech used by Black leads to the punch line of the joke. In this case, it is slightly unusual in the sense that it only contains social criticism towards the prejudice of the politicians. The punch line does not contain any real joke that is humorous. As Black states: *That's complete and utter prejudice and ignorance on a level that is staggering at this point in time*[5]. Instead of laughter, the audience responds with applause, thus showing agreement with the comedian. This joke is a great example how a modern stand-up comedian can defend a minority, even when he is a non-member of the group. In this case, the

Jewish comedian is defending the homosexual community from the prejudice of the politician.

The next excerpt is another example of how a comedian can support a minority as a non-member of the group. In this joke, Chris Rock is discussing racism in the United States of America.

Example 12 (Rock, 1999)

Racism[1] everywhere, everybody pissed off. **Black people**[2] yelling: "Racism." **White people**[3] yelling: "Reverse racism." **Chinese people**[4] yelling: "Sideways racism!" And the lndians ain't yelling shit 'cause they dead. So everybody bitch about how bad their people got it. Nobody got it worse than **the American lndian**[5]. Everybody need to calm the fuck down. lndians got it bad. lndians got it the worst. You know how bad the lndians got it? When's the last time you met two lndians? You ain't never met two lndians. **Shit, l have seen a polar bear ride a fucking tricycle in my lifetime**[6]**.** I have never seen an lndian family that's chilling out at Red Lobster. Never seen it.

There are many significant key words that convey the theme of the joke and the participants in it. These include *Racism*[1], *Black people*[2], *White people*[3], *Chinese people*[4] and *the American Indian*[5]. At the very beginning of the joke, Rock makes it clear that he is about to discuss racism. Rock uses several ethnic groups as examples of being unhappy and complaining about racism that they are facing. This is done in an ironic manner, which is evident from the way Rock uses reported speech by reciting the arguments by the various groups. For instance, White people are complaining about reverse racism and Chinese people are complaining about sideways racism. Although the remarks about sideways racism and reverse racism could be seen as offensive towards the particular groups, the comedian is using these expressions simply for

humorous effect. Reverse racism in this case is used to refer to racism that Caucasian people would be subjected to by ethnic minorities. Sideways racism is more of a reference to the racism that Chinese people face, and it is dubbed after the stereotypical Asian physical features. The laughter that these remarks elicit from the audience allows Rock to move on to the actual target of discussion – *the American Indian*.

Rock states that the American Indians are not complaining, because they are dead. He makes this point to emphasize how bad the situation is for the Native Americans. Rock proceeds to ask the audience if they have ever met two Indians. The question is asked because the expectation of the comedian is that a large part of the audience has never met two Indians. This emphasizes the hardships and difficulties that Native Americans have had to endure. Rock then moves on to the punch line, which consists of two parts. At this point, Rock makes an intertextual reference to a circus act by stating that: *Shit, I have seen a polar bear ride a fucking tricycle in my lifetime*[6]. This reference is to make a point that witnessing such a circus act is more likely than finding a Native American family dining at a Red Lobster restaurant. The way racism and the plight of the American Indians are illustrated by the comedian makes the joke very coherent to the audience. Even if one would have no previous knowledge of American society, one can understand the distress of the minority group that the comedian is discussing.

This particular performance by Rock features many discussions about racism and minorities. This particular discussion about the Native Americans and their hardships is a reminder to the other ethnic groups that things might not necessarily be as bad as they may seem. By discussing the difficulties of the Native Americans, Rock is highlighting the seriousness of the situation that is facing American Indians in modern society. Therefore, one can argue that Rock

is supporting the Native American community and wishes that the circumstances would be more positive.

The social criticism that can be identified in stand-up comedy is not always presented from a non-member viewpoint. For instance, the comedian can be seen to criticize his or her own ethnicity. The following joke by Richard Pryor illustrates this. In this joke, he is discussing a movie that he has recently filmed. The setting for the movie was a state penitentiary, and Pryor is discussing his experiences during the filming process.

Example 13 (Pryor, 1982)

I went to **penitentiary**[1]... **Gene Wilder**[2] and **I**[3] did a movie. I went to the... Not me, personally. I mean, I went to do a film in a penitentiary and I was up there six weeks, **Arizona State Penitentiary**[4]. It was something... [small applause] You're applauding for that? Arizona State Penitentiary real popular? Man it was strange, 'cause it's like 80% **black people**[5]. And what's strange about that is that there are no black people in Arizona. I'm not lying! They bus motherfuckers in. And I was up there, and I just looked at all the **brothers**[6]**,** and it made my heart ache, you know. I see all these **beautiful black men**[7] in the joint, **goddamn warriors**[8] should be out there helping the masses. And I felt that way. I was real naive, right? Six weeks I was up there, I talked to the brothers, you know, and I talked to them... and **thank god we got penitentiaries!**[9] [with a scared voice] I asked a dude, I said**, "Why did you kill everybody in the house?**[10]**".** The guy said, **"they was home**[11]**".**

There are several key words in the joke. At the very beginning, Pryor mentions words such as *penitentiary*[1], *Gene Wilder*[2] and *I*[3]. Another key word mentioned later in the joke is *black people*[5]. In this joke, Richard Pryor is narrating a story based on his experience while filming a movie with Gene Wilder in a penitentiary. This leads to an intertextual reference, *Arizona State Penitentiary*[4], which Pryor names as the location for the movie. Pryor then

states that roughly 80 per cent of the inmates in this particular penitentiary are African American. Pryor makes a humorous remark about this, noting that there are not that many African American people in Arizona in general. From this comment onwards, Pryor seems to sympathize with the African American inmates. This is evident from the way he is describing the black inmates. Pryor talks about *brothers*[6], *beautiful black men*[7] and *goddamn warriors*[8], while talking about how his heart aches at the sight of all the African American men in prison.

However, Pryor's stance begins to change in the joke when he states that he was really naïve. Pryor mentions that he has talked with the inmates and became familiar with some of them. Based on these experiences, Pryor screams out to the audience: *thank god we got penitentiaries!*[9] This shows a clear change in Pryor's attitude towards the African American inmates. Pryor switches from an overly positive view of the inmates to a horrified state and it is apparent from his body language that he is genuinely happy that these inmates are in prison. This leads to the punch line of the joke, which features reported dialogue between Pryor and an unnamed inmate. Pryor asks the inmate who apparently has murdered someone: *Why did you kill everybody in the house?*[10] This leads to a humorous but sociopathic response by the inmate, as he states: *they was home*[11]. Therefore, the murderer had no discernible reason for his actions.

The joke should be very coherent to the audience, as Pryor has provided ample detail of the background for his narrative. The only unclear part is Pryor not stating which particular movie he was filming. However, this is not an important detail for understanding the joke. Pryor uses very distinctive key words and body language that illustrate his positioning towards the inmates at different stages of the joke. Pryor begins the joke by discussing the African American inmates in a positive light, suggesting that some of them may have been convicted unjustly. This refers to the belief that many African Americans

are serving time in prisons that the Caucasian population would not be convicted so severely of. However, Pryor turns the joke from expressions of pride to criticism of his own ethnic group. This is done by ridiculing an African American murderer who has killed people for no apparent reason. Although the imprisonment – and in some cases, unjust imprisonment – of African American youth in the USA is a recognized social issue, it is not always without reason. This may also be a result of poor socioeconomic status with some African American families. One could argue that Pryor is wishing that African Americans who come from poor backgrounds would not choose the life of crime despite the challenges they may face. Although Pryor's joke was performed in 1982, the criticism of the issue is still relevant currently. According to statistics published in 2009 (U.S. Deparment of Justice), African Americans males are six times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Hispanic males. When compared to the Hispanic community, African Americans are almost three times more likely to end up in prison. These statistics show that the situation has not significantly improved.

The next joke by Chris Rock features a similar example of how a member of an ethnic minority can criticize his own ethnicity. In this joke, Rock is discussing an encounter with a woman in a nightclub.

Example 14 (Rock, 1999)

I[1] was at the **club**[2] the other night, down a**t Life**[4], chilling at the club. I'm chilling with **this girl**[3]. She was dancing. It was about 2 a.m., I'm talking to her, and realized she had two kids at home. I don't mind the two kids at home, that's all good. But I'm like, "What the fuck is you doing in a club, at 2 in the fucking morning, on a Wednesday night? What the fuck are you doing here? **Is it your birthday? Did you get a raise?**[5] Well, you got to get the fuck out. You gone. I'm kicking you the fuck out. Yes, bye! Go **take care of them kids before they rob me in ten years**[6]**.**" You got to get your kid on or your groove on. You can't get both on at the same time. I'm tired of this

shit. And a bunch of girls are like: **"You don't need no man to help you raise no child**[7]**".** Shut the fuck up with the bullshit! Yeah, you can do it without a man but that don't mean it's to be done. **Shit, you could drive a car with your feet if you want to. That don't make it a good fucking idea!**[8]

The key words in this joke are *I*[1], *club*[2] and *this girl*[3]. It is apparent from the key words who the participants in the joke are. In this joke, Rock is narrating a story where he is visiting a club at nighttime and happens to meet a young woman. At this point, there is an intertextual reference to this particular nightclub, *Life*[4]. During the time of the original performance, the significance of this particular nightclub was most likely more important than it is currently. Rock is most likely referring to a prominently African American club, given that he is discussing a black social phenomenon, which we will specify during the analysis of this joke. The narrative of the joke features a significant amount of reported speech. The first instance of reported speech is when Rock mentions a conversation that took place between him and the woman. Rock tells the audience that from this conversation, he has learned that the woman is a single parent who has two children who are at home. This is followed by Rock reporting his own thoughts on the matter, which is he now stating to the audience. Rock tells the audience that he is not bothered by the two children, but is upset about the fact that a single parent of two children is at a club during the night in the middle of the week, instead of being at home with the children.

Rock continues to mock the woman in an ironic tone, asking her questions such as: *Is it your birthday? Did you get a raise?*[5] Rock then proceeds to tell the woman that she needs to go home and *take care of them kids before they rob me in ten years*[6]. Rock is referring to the same stereotype as Richard Pryor before him in the previous joke; this stereotype holds that poor living conditions combined with an unstable home may lead to poor choices in the future by the individual such as crime or drugs, for instance. In the narrative, Rock mentions

a counter-argument, which is spoken with a women's voice: *You don't need no man to help you raise no child*[7]. Use of the negative in this manner is characteristic of AAVE. Therefore, it is clear that Rock is referring to this as an issue that concerns the African American community. The joke is very coherent to the audience from the beginning, where the comedian is clearly informing who the participants in the joke are. However, it is not until the latter part of the joke that the ethnicity of the woman in question is revealed to the audience. This slight ambiguity is primarily a result of taking the joke text out of context of the complete performance. If one would view the entire show from the beginning, there would be little possibility for misunderstanding the ethnicity of the woman in this joke. Once Rock has established the ethnic identity of the single parent woman in the joke, he moves on to the punch line. In the punch line, Rock makes a counter-argument to the statement that a man is not needed for raising a child by saying: *Shit, you could drive a car with your feet if you want to. That don't make it a good fucking idea!*[8] This clearly conveys the comedian's disapproval of the issue.

This particular joke by Chris Rock clearly discusses the issue of single parenthood in the African American community. According to statistics from 2009 (KIDS COUNT Data Center), 67 per cent of African American children live in single parent families in the United States. By comparing the figures between single parent homes and crime rate, one can argue that there is something askew with the African American community. Rock is arguing that single parenting combined with a poor socioeconomic situation can lead to a detrimental future for the African American children. The last two jokes have illustrated how the comedian can criticize his or her own ethnicity or the issues that the ethnicity is facing. This could be seen as strengthening the stereotypes in question. However, it is likely that the comedians see these issues as of great importance and thus wish to bring them up for discussion.

The following excerpt is a joke by Chris Rock. In this joke, Rock is discussing a legal issue that an African American sports player is facing.

Example 15 (Rock, 2004)

Kobe Bryant[1] lost his mind. What the fuck is Kobe thinking?! What is on Kobe's mind going to **Colorado**[2], around all these white people... and not bringing **Johnny Cochran**[3]! You gotta bring Johnny to that shit! **The girl is still alive, Johnny will knock this out in two weeks!**[4] "Is she breathing? Don't worry about it, shit...". Kobe wouldn't miss a practice if he had Johnny. What the fuck man... "it don't look right"... **some people are**[6] "you can't hire Johnny Cochran, 'cause if you hire Johnny Cochran then you look guilty!". **Yeah, but you go home! What, you wanna look innocent in jail? I'd rather look guilty at the mall!**[5]

There are many significant key words that identify both the participants and an important location regarding the joke. These key words include *Kobe Bryant*[1], *Colorado*[2] and *Johnny Cochran*[3]. Rock is discussing Kobe Bryant and is upset about his behavior in Colorado around Caucasian people. Kobe Bryant is an African American basketball superstar who at the time of the performance played for the Los Angeles Lakers. Bryant was visiting Colorado because of knee surgery. During his visit, he stayed at a hotel where one of the employees accused him of rape. He was later acquitted of all charges. Chris Rock, however, is very upset with Bryant as he is a role model for the African American youth and also married. Therefore, the comedian feels that a successful African American should not put himself in a position that cast him or her in a negative light. Rock then states that it was stupid of Bryant to go Colorado and not bring Johnny Cochran with him. This also leads to an intertextual reference, as Rock states: *The girl is still alive, Johnny will knock this out in two weeks!*[4] This intertextual reference refers to the O.J. Simpson trial that took place in 1994. Simpson was accused of murdering his ex-wife and her friend. Despite being a highly controversial ruling, the jury found Simpson not guilty. During the trial,

one of Simpson's attorneys was Johnny Cochran. Cochran was one of the most prominent defense attorneys in the United States.

Rock brings Cochran's name up in order to draw attention to the American legal system. Rock is arguing that if one can hire an expensive and talented defense attorney, it is more likely that they will be freed whether they are innocent or not. Rock's narrative then introduces reported dialogue by an unknown person. In this instance, Rock states: *some people are*[6], which is an AAVE form of some people say or some people are saying, when he introduces the unknown speaker. This unnamed person is arguing that bringing in such a well-known defense attorney would seem as if the person is guilty of the crime they are accused of. This dialogue leads to the punch line, where Rock states: *Yeah, but you go home! What, you wanna look innocent in jail? I'd rather look guilty at the mall!*[5] Here Rock once again emphasizes the importance of having a good defense attorney when in court. This is a reference to the inequality of the legal system: if one is able to hire a talented attorney, it is possible that one could get away with a serious crime.

There are a number of issues with coherence in the joke. The first deals with Kobe Bryant and the specific legal issue that he faced during the time of the performance. Furthermore, it is possible that the viewer is not aware of who Bryant is. Secondly, this same problem could be the case with Johnny Cochran. If one is not aware of who Cochran is, the intertextual reference to the O.J. Simpson trial will be missed, thus creating confusion. In the joke, Rock is criticizing the behavior of a well-known member of his own ethnic group. Rock also points out some of the issues in the legal system in America, and how unequal it can be: the more wealth you have, the more likely you are to get good representation from your lawyer.

The previous seven jokes featured criticism towards social issues in a fairly straightforward manner. The next five jokes will illustrate how the comedian can use parody to negate the power of stereotypes. The next excerpt features a joke by Dave Chapelle, where he is discussing a racist incident that comes up as a surprise to the hearer.

Example 16 (Chapelle, 2000)

Have you ever had something happen that was so racist, you didn't even get mad?[5] You were just like "god damn that was racist!". It was so blatant you were like "wow!", almost like it didn't even happen to you it was like a fucking movie. **Like you was watching "Mississippi Burning"**[6], "wow…". That happened to me, **I**[2] was **in Mississippi**[1] [humorous tone] I was in Mississippi doing a show, and I go to the restaurant to order some food and I said at **a guy**[3], I said "I would like to have…" and before I even finish the sentence he says: "**The chicken!**[4]". **What the fuck?**[7] [looks confused] I could not believe it! **This man was absolutely right!**[8] I asked him "how you know that? How did you know I was gonna get some chicken?". He looked at me like I was crazy. "Now come on buddy... come on buddy! Everybody knew as soon as you walked through the god damn door, you're gonna get some chicken. **It ain't no secret around here that blacks and chickens are quite fond of one another**[9]." Then I finally understood what he was saying and I got upset! I wasn't even mad I was just upset. I wasn't ready to hear that shit. **All these years I thought I liked chicken because it was delicious, turns out I'm genetically pre-disposed to liking chicken! I got no say in the matter!**[10]

The key words in this joke that are significant refer to the participants and the setting. These include *Mississippi*[1], *I*[2], *a guy*[3] and *The chicken*![4] Chapelle begins the joke with a question to the audience: *Have you ever had something happen that was so racist, you didn't even get mad?*[5] Chapelle thus informs the audience that the joke will discuss racism in some form. This questions leads to an explanation by Chapelle how this racial situation feels like to the hearer. Chapelle describes this type of blatant racism by comparing it to a surreal

situation, as if being a character in a movie: *Like you was watching Mississippi Burning*[6]. This is a significant intertextual reference in the text. Chapelle is referring to a famous movie that deals with racism. More specifically, Mississippi Burning has a plot dealing with racial issues, including the Ku Klux Klan. After the reference to the movie, Chapelle begins to narrate a story from his own experience while doing a show. The first sign of parody in the joke is when Chapelle states that he was in fact, in Mississippi when this incident occurred. Chapelle states this in a humorous tone, right after mentioning the movie Mississippi Burning.

After mentioning the location, Chapelle begins to report a dialogue between him and *a guy*. This man is an employee of a restaurant, which Chapelle has entered. In the dialogue, Chapelle attempts to order food, when he is interrupted. The employee yells out: *The chicken*! This utterance refers to the stereotype of African Americans eating a lot of chicken. This racial stereotype is likely to refer to the times of slavery in the United States. Common food of slaves during this period was chicken and watermelon, due to the fact that this food was in abundance and easy to obtain. Therefore, it is a stereotype with negative connotations. Although Chapelle reacts somewhat confused by stating: *What the fuck?*[7] – his confusion has nothing to do with the racist stereotype. Chapelle disregards the stereotype, and instead is generally surprised at the employee knowing what he was about to order: *This man was absolutely right!*[8] This is a second instance of parody in the joke, where the parody is accomplished by the means of irony. Chapelle's exclamation is ironic in the sense that he is aware of the stereotype involved, but reacts in an opposite manner, disregarding it completely. Chapelle proceeds to ask the employee how he knew what Chapelle was about to order. Once again, Chapelle completely disregards the racism and continues the parody. The employee responds in an offensive manner: *It ain't no secret around here that blacks and chickens are quite fond of one another*[9]. At this point, Chapelle finally

appears to realize the intent of the employee as racist. This leads to the punch line, where Chapelle once again seems to disregard the racism and makes fun of the stereotype: *All these years I thought I liked chicken because it was delicious, turns out I'm genetically pre-disposed to liking chicken! I got no say in the matter!*[10]

There are a number of issues with the coherence of this joke. Although the participants are made clear to the audience, the unawareness of the intertextual reference and the stereotype in question might make the joke less humorous. If one is not aware of the chicken and watermelon stereotype, the joke can lose some of its humorous effect at midpoint, when the employee yells out: The Chicken! In addition, the intertextual reference to the movie helps in understanding the joke. This joke is a good example how the parody of a stereotype can be seen to negate the effects of the stereotype. By using an ironic tone and acting as if completely unaware of the racist stereotype, Chapelle succeeds in making fun of the stereotype. Instead of viewed in a negative manner, the stereotype becomes something that is laughable and humorous.

The next joke by Chris Rock is another example of parodying a stereotype. In this joke, Rock is discussing a situation where he has been pulled over by a police officer.

Example 17 (Rock, 1999)

What the fuck is up with the police[1][3]**?** My God! **I**[2] am scared. **I didn't get rid of no guns**[4]. Fuck that shit. And I had a cop pull me over the other day, scared me so bad, **made me think I stole my own car**[5]. "Get out the car, get out the fucking car! You stole this car!" I'm like, "**Damn, maybe I did. Oh, Lord, I done stole a car!**[6]".

The key words in this joke involve the two parties involved: *the police*[1] and *I*[2] – which refers to the comedian. Rock begins the joke by questioning the police behavior in general by posing a question: *What the fuck is up with the police?*[3] The joke is in the form of a narrative, where Rock is describing why he is upset and afraid of the police. Rock quickly moves on to state that *I didn't get rid of no guns*[4]. This clause features a double negative, which is characteristic of AAVE. Rock is therefore strongly identifying himself with his own ethnicity. By stating that he has not disposed his firearm, Rock is emphasizing how scared he is of the police. Rock continues his story by describing an incident where a police officer has pulled him over for an undetermined reason. Rock informs the audience that he was extremely scared for being pulled over. This leads to a very ironic remark by Rock: *made me think that I stole my own car*[5].

After this, the narrative features the use of reported dialogue from both the police officer and the comedian. The police officer forcefully states that Rock is to exit the vehicle immediately. Furthermore, the police officer emphasizes his statement with the use of profanity and by accusing Rock of grand theft auto. This statement by the police officer makes Rock seem unsure of his ownership of the vehicle. Rock reports his thoughts to the audience, which also serves as the punch line of the joke: *Damn, maybe I did. Oh lord, I done stole a car*[6]. This punch line also contains an intertextual reference. The wording in the phrase Oh lord, I done stole a car is characteristic of the language of African Americans in days of yore, when there was open prejudice and discrimination towards black people in the United States. This intertextual reference is significant for the effect of the punch line due to its historical roots. Rock is once again emphasizing his own ethnicity, which is the target of police misconduct in the joke.

The joke is extremely coherent to the audience. Rock clearly introduces the parties involved, and very explicitly goes on to wonder about police behavior.

The ironic tone and the parody of stereotype in question are very obvious to the audience: Rock is parodying a stereotype, which holds that young African American males driving an expensive car are often suspected of grand theft auto or other criminal activities. This stereotype can lead to police suspicion where an African American person can be pulled over based on their ethnicity. The irony in Rock's absurd story is also very clear: There is no possible scenario where Rock would forget or question his ownership of his own vehicle. This scenario makes it very clear to the audience that Rock is exaggerating, which also makes the situation humorous. At the same time, Rock is making fun of the stereotype by making it laughable. Rock places himself in the middle of the stereotype while making fun of the situation, thus demonstrating the foolishness of the stereotype in question by ridiculing it.

The following is another example of the fear and suspicion that the African American community feels towards the police. In this joke, Dave Chapelle is discussing calling 911 after someone had broken into his house.

Example 18 (Chapelle, 2000)

I'm not saying **I**[1] don't like **the police**[2]... I'm just scared of 'em. Sometimes **we**[3] **wanna call them too!**[4] Somebody broke into my house once, that's a good time to call them but I... mm-mm, mm-mm... [shaking his head] House is too nice! It ain't a real nice house but they'd never believe I lived in there "**Ooh! He's still here!**[5] [smacks the mic stand with his baton, as if knocking the burglar out cold] **Oh my god! Open and shut case, Johnson!**[6] **I saw this once before when I was a rookie**[7]**. Apparently this nigger broke in and hung up pictures of his family everywhere**[8]**.** Well, let's sprinkle some crack on him and get out of here**.**"

The key words in this joke identify the parties involved. These are *I*[1], *the police*[2] and *we*[3]. Chapelle narrates a story, which he begins by informing the

audience that he has nothing personal against the police – he is only afraid of them. In addition, he adds that *sometimes we wanna call them too!*[4] By this he refers to African Americans as a whole and emphasizes his membership with his ethnicity. Chapelle continues the story by telling the audience that his house was broken into, and that this would have been a good time to call the police. However, Chapelle shakes his head to the audience and denies this as a possibility by mumbling in a humorous manner. He states that his house is too nice, and that the police would never believe that he actually lived there. Chapelle is referring to the stereotype of African Americans owning something of value and therefore seeming suspicious.

The narrative of the joke continues with a dialogue presented by the comedian. This dialogue features the voice of a police officer that has arrived at Chapelle's house after the 911 call. When the police officer arrives at the house, he is clearly surprised to find an African American male in the house: *Ooh! He's still here!*[5]. This transitive clause is a turning point for the joke: the police officer is under the impression that Chapelle is the burglar and not the house owner. In this action process, Chapelle, who is the agent in the clause, is still present at the crime scene. The police officer reacts by knocking the "suspect" unconscious with his baton, which is demonstrated by Chapelle punching the microphone stand with his microphone. This serves as the first punch line of the joke, where the audience reacts with laughter. The parody in this joke becomes evident when the police officer in question begins to talk to his partner about the situation. First, the officer states: *Oh my god! Open and shut case, Johnson!*[6] This is followed by another comment by the police officer: *I saw this once before when I was a rookie*[7]. This is an intertextual reference to a crime that has happened before this incident. The police officer is referring to the earlier crime that he or she has witnessed in order to highlight the similarities. This is also the reasoning behind him stating that the case is open and shut – in other words, the case is cleared by the apprehension of the "suspect".

Finally, the parody of the joke becomes absolutely clear when the police officer describes the similarities between the two cases: *Apparently this nigger broke in and hung up pictures of his family everywhere*[8]. By describing such a crime, it becomes clear to the audience that the comedian is only being ironic – it is highly unlikely that such a crime has ever happened. The absurd situation also makes the joke very coherent, and it is unlikely that the audience will not grasp the comedian's intent. This ridiculous scenario refers to the prejudice by the police officers towards African Americans who have acquired some wealth, or in this case, a nice house. Although the scenario is fictional, Chapelle uses this parody of a stereotype to make a point about police brutality and prejudice.

The next example shows how a parody of a stereotype can be used in a slightly different manner. In this joke, Chris Rock is discussing issue of school safety.

Example 19 (Rock, 1999)

Damn, the world's coming to an end. You'll have little **white kids**[1] saying: "**I want to go to a black school where it's safe!**[2]".

Due to the shortness of the joke, there is only a single significant key word. The key word *white kids*[1] identifies the group that the comedian is talking about. Prior to this joke, Rock has discussed the Columbine school shooting in Colorado. Rock then moves on to state that the world is coming to an end because of such horrible incidents. Rock then proceeds to parody the Caucasian children that appear in this joke. Rock uses reported speech from the point of view of the white children who state: *I want to go to a black school where it's safe!*[2] The use of reported speech is also the punch line in this joke. The parody in question refers to the school system in general: African American schools are usually located in less prestigious areas that often have issues with

crime. The Columbine school shooting took place in a school that is predominantly a white school in a prestigious neighborhood. The irony of a white student wanting to attend a black school because of worries of safety is used to make the joke funny. The use of parody of a stereotype differs from the previous examples. The comedian is not defending or attacking the stereotype – he only acknowledges its existence. The real issue in the joke is the Columbine shooting, which Rock has discussed extensively before this joke. By using such parody, Rock is attempting to lighten the mood after discussing such a serious topic.

The joke as a whole can be seen as an intertextual reference, as it refers to the school shooting. When taken out of the context of the entire performance, the joke is likely to prove problematic to the audience. If one is to view the entire performance, it becomes clear that Rock is referring to the school shooting in Columbine. However, even if one has seen the entire performance, there can still be issues with coherence. At the time of the performance, the Columbine shooting was a significant topic in the media. If the performance is viewed much later on from DVD, the viewer might not be aware of this particular incident, thus clouding the details of the original incident that the joke refers to. This joke does not criticize any stereotypes or ethnicities. The critique is aimed at society as a whole. More specifically, the comedian is worried about such horrific incidents happening in society.

The next example is a joke by Lewis Black, where he discusses homosexuality in American society.

Example 20 (Black, 2006)

Homosexuality[1] is a threat to **the American family**[2] are you kidding me? How? No

one ever explains it. How? **It's not like there's a Jehova's witnesses of gaydom**[3]. "**Hi we are here and we're queer, we're here and we are queer!**[4] I brought swatches, I brought swatches!" [high-pitched voice] But maybe I'm wrong! Maybe there are **a group of gay banditos**[5] who get into a van every day and wander from village to village. And as night begins to fall, they go back into a suburban neighborhood, to that cul-de-sac where only one house stands! And in the window, a young American family is just setting down for their first meal... and these queers... These queers! [slight pause] Their **black cloaks and hoods and matching pumps, very tasteful**[6] [longer pause for laughter and applause] they charcoal up their faces and sneak up to that house, and open the door [slight pause] and **start fucking each other in the ass! And another American family is destroyed!**[7] [shouting vehemently]

The key words that are significant in this joke feature the two parties – in this case, *homosexuality*[1], which refers to homosexuals as a whole and the *American family*[2]. Prior to this joke, Lewis Black has discussed homosexuality in his performance. This joke concludes the discussion about homosexuality in American society before moving on to a new topic. In this joke, Black is discussing the claim by some that homosexuality is a threat to the American family. It is clear from the beginning that this claim has upset Black, and he is wondering the reasoning behind it. This leads to the first instance of parody, where Black mentions that *It's not like there's a Jehova's witnesses of gaydom*[3]. This parody is also an intertextual reference. Jehova's witnesses are known to go from door to door preaching their faith in an attempt to convert new members to their religion. In this case, the reference is drawn to a homosexual group that is attempting to convert people going door to door in a similar manner – therefore being a threat to the American family and its values. This reference is followed by reported speech by the comedian. Black is reporting the voice of homosexuals that are visiting people's homes: *Hi we are here and we're queer* […][4] The parody is emphasized by the comedian's imitation of the homosexual when he uses a high-pitched voice.

The second instance of parody in the joke is when Black begins to narrate a fictional story that involves *a group of gay bandidos*[5]. In this story, the bandidos travel from town to town and look for a new family to attack. Black describes a situation where the day has changed into nighttime, and an American family has sat down for dinner. Black describes the homosexuals as wearing *black cloaks and hoods and matching pumps, very tasteful*[6], as they are approaching the family's home. This clause continues the parody of the situation but also holds another intertextual reference. Black is discussing the characteristics of homosexuality by referring to a stereotype that portrays homosexuals as very stylish and fashionable in all instances. Black describes how the homosexuals are approaching the house, ready for their attack. The joke reaches an absurd punch line, where the homosexuals open the door of the house and *start fucking each other in the ass! And another American family is destroyed!*[7] This punch line is delivered by aggressive shouting and violent body language, which makes the parody obvious to the audience.

This joke is extremely coherent to the audience. From the beginning of this topic, it has become clear to the audience that Black is discussing homosexuality in American society and strongly disagrees with the negative connotations attached to it. Furthermore, the key words clearly highlight the participants in this joke. The stereotypes that are parodied are exaggerated so strongly that it is impossible for the audience to take what is said seriously. This joke is another example of a non-member of an ethnic group defending a minority against the elite. The elite in this case, are the conservative politicians who are of the opinion that homosexuals are a threat in American society. This is another example how a comedian can parody stereotypes and lessen their effect, while at the same time defending a minority from an attack by an outside group.

This section has provided analysis on jokes that deal with various social issues regarding ethnic minorities. Out of the 27 jokes, 19 were told from a member

viewpoint. This means that the comedian is a part of the ethnic group that he is discussing in a joke. The other eight jokes are told from a non-member viewpoint: the comedian does not belong in the ethnic group that he is talking about. In these cases, the comedians do not criticize the "ethnic others" – ethnicities that he is not a member of. These social issues are discussed in ways that either defend the minorities in question or ridicule those that are opposed to these ethnic minorities. In this category, 11 jokes clearly demonstrated parody of ethnic stereotypes. As we have illustrated, the parody can be executed in various ways such as pretending ignorance of a stereotype or being overly aggressive or flamboyant regarding a stereotype. Eight of these parodies were clearly seen to weaken stereotypes by ridiculing them. In three cases, it can be argued that stereotypes were actually strengthened to some degree in the process. In all of these three jokes, the comedian is discussing issues that his own ethnic group is facing. The criticism in these jokes could be seen as strengthening stereotypes in question. This, however, is not the intention of the comedian. The comedian is attempting to discuss issues that are of significance in society. In addition, 11 of the jokes in this category could be seen to critique a dominant group in society.

6 Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to find out how ethnic humor is used in modern-stand up comedy. More specifically, we were interested in examining how comedians use ethnic stereotypes and what functions jokes may have in their performances. In the theoretical background we have discussed the characteristics of modern stand-up comedy and the potential purposes of ethnic humor, therefore arguing that critical discourse analysis is a viable tool in gaining an understanding of the ideologies and power relations within ethnic humor. This was also the basis for the research questions of the present study. The data consisted of 53 jokes that were selected from seven different stand-up performances. These shows were performed by five different comedians: Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, Dave Chapelle and Lewis Black. The first four comedians are African American, while Lewis Black is of Jewish heritage.

The analysis of the data indicated that ethnic humor in stand-up comedy could target various groups. Instead of only targeting ethnic minorities, the comedians in the present study can be seen to target dominant groups and ethnic minorities equally. These dominant groups include the police, the Caucasian population and politicians, for example. This clearly differs from traditional ethnic humor, which is based on mocking stereotypes of ethnic minorities. It also became evident that the comedian's own ethnicity clearly influenced the targets in the jokes. For example, none of the comedians in the present study placed critique on ethnic minorities that they were not members of. The criticism in jokes was directed at different social issues and dominant groups in society. When the jokes discussed other ethnic minorities that the comedian was not a part of, the tone of the performance could be seen as defensive: the comedian was clearly siding with the issues that the other ethnic minorities were facing.

In a few instances, the comedian could be seen to criticize his own ethnicity. As we have discussed earlier, criticism based on negative stereotypes could be seen as strengthening these stereotypes. However, in these few cases it seemed that the purpose of the comedian was to highlight certain social issues that his own ethnicity is facing, therefore generating discussion of an important issue. It can be argued that since the comedian is criticizing his own ethnicity through humor, the risk of alienating someone in the audience is not very high. Furthermore, the African American comedians in particular point out many issues of prejudice that the African American community faces. This critique of one's own ethnicity evens out the performance: by focusing on the responsibility of the African American population regarding some of these issues, the comedian is keeping the performance from becoming one-sided. Thus, it can be argued that criticizing one's own ethnicity through negative stereotypes does not necessarily lead to strengthening of these stereotypes.

Our findings also indicated that the use of parody about ethnic stereotypes was a significant part of the performances in the present study. In these instances, the comedians used a narrative in a manner that led to ridiculing ethnic stereotypes. In example 20, for instance, Lewis Black creates a completely absurd portrayal of the homosexual community, which leads to ridiculing the stereotype and the people that believe in it. As Leveen (1996:43) has stated, the use of parody can help negate negative stereotypes. By using parody in this manner, the comedians are making the stereotype and the people who believe in it laughable, instead of the people or the group who are represented in the stereotype.

While the overall style of performance between the five comedians is relatively similar, one can find differences in the topics of the jokes. It was apparent from

the data that the ethnic background of the comedians influenced the topics of their jokes. For example, Lewis Black who is a Jewish comedian often includes topics that discuss the Jewish community. The style in these jokes is often self-disparaging – using ironic humor about the stereotypes related to one's ethnicity, for instance. The four African American comedians also use self-disparaging humor in their performances. However, there is also a significant amount of parody regarding African American stereotypes. One can argue that this relates to the many social issues that the African American community still faces. These topics in the jokes include police brutality, racism, parenthood and socio-economic disadvantage. These jokes can be seen as more defensive in nature, in an attempt to highlight the issues that the African American community faces. This difference also relates to the fact that the Jewish community no longer faces similar issues of prejudice. It can be argued that their socio-economic status in society is much higher than that of the African American communities in general. Therefore, it is likely that Lewis Black only chooses to make fun of certain stereotypes regarding his own ethnicity.

Another finding that emerged from the data was that there are some differences to how certain topics are discussed. This has to do with the differences in society during the time of the performances. For instance, the two performances that were recorded in the 1980s discuss homosexuality in a different manner than the newer performances. This can be best explained by examining Eddie Muprhy's performance RAW in 1987. In example 1, Murphy openly mocks the gay community in a very aggressive and insulting manner. When examining the newer performances, the tone used when discussing homosexuals is more defensive: for example, Lewis Black can be seen to defend the homosexual community against a prejudiced politician. The joke by Murphy, although funny during its time of performance, is unlikely to be performed in a similar manner in current society.

There were some difficulties when organizing the theoretical framework for the present study. When considering the structure of jokes in stand-up comedy, it became clear that the classic theories of humor by themselves would not be adequate for the purposes of the present study. Since the purpose of the present study was to examine the functions of ethnic humor, there was a need for a framework that would be more flexible than the rigid humor theories. For instance, the release theories of humor posit that the relief of tension and anxiety results in laughter. However, this is rarely the case in stand-up comedy. The analysis of stand-up comedy by utilizing several theories of humor for a more comprehensive analysis would have likely resulted in forcing the jokes under specific categories, instead of analyzing the purpose and functions of the joke. This lead us to consider critical discourse analysis due to the fact that CDA also takes into account power relations and ideologies in discourse.

In addition, we encountered some difficulties when gathering the data for the present study. Our original intention was to include three African American and two Jewish comedians in our data. However, it proved difficult to find a second suitable Jewish comedian that had a similar style with the other comedians. Therefore, we decided to include Dave Chapelle as a fourth African American comedian. The second issue relating to the data was a lack of suitable performances by the comedians. Televised performances that are filmed also for DVD production are considerably rare. In the end, we decided to opt for an uneven amount of performances per comedian.

There are certain limitations to the present study. First of all, it needs to be noted that the present study focused on American stand-up comedy. All of the five comedians are from the United States. Therefore, most of the topics in the data discuss issues in American society. This can be considered a limitation due to the fact that stand-up comedy is a global phenomenon: there are performers all over the world. Stand-up comedians in Europe, for instance, are likely to

discuss topics that are relevant to their community. Therefore, there may be differences in the use of ethnic humor when comparing American and European comedians, for instance. However, it can be argued that, as America is the birthplace of modern stand-up comedy, one can gain a comprehensive understanding of modern stand-up comedy by focusing on the most known and respected American stand-up comedians.

Secondly, there are some limitations with the scope of the data. The findings of the present study may be limited in the sense that it only takes into account the African American and Jewish viewpoints. In addition, the perspective of a female stand-up comedian is missing. Due to the fact that the present study focused on stand-up performances that featured a similar structure and topics, it was impossible to include a female performer, or other ethnicities such as South American or Asian ethnicities. However, as the present study was interested in examining the Jewish and African American roots and their influence on modern stand-up comedy, the selection of the comedians became limited to a degree. If the present study were to include performers of other ethnicities, the viewpoint of the study would have had to be modified significantly.

Regardless of these limitations and problems, the study was a success. The findings of the present study proved that ethnic humor in modern stand-up comedy has various functions, and does indeed feature multiple targets aside from ethnic minorities. In fact, ethnic minorities are often defended in modern stand-up comedy, compared to the prejudiced nature of traditional ethnic humor. In addition, the ethnic membership of the comedian contributed significantly to the topics of jokes and how ethnicities were discussed. The parody of negative stereotypes was used as a tool for negating the effect of the stereotype. This finding is in line with the discussion by Leveen (1996:43), who has stated that parody can serve to negate effects of stereotypes.

As for the theoretical framework, CDA proved to be useful in analyzing ethnic humor in stand-up comedy. On a textual level, the key words in the jokes helped identify the subjects and targets of the jokes, which was significant when identifying the ethnicities involved. The grammatical aspects of the jokes contributed to the structure of the jokes, by the means of reported speech. Different process types within transitivity helped identify significant parts of the jokes – for instance, situations where the actual target of the joke became clear. On the discursive level, intertextuality and coherence were closely linked together. In some instances, the intertextual references were important in terms of comprehending the joke fully. This in turn influenced the coherence of the jokes. In other words, if a joke featured a difficult intertextual reference, it may have resulted in a less coherent joke.

The textual and discursive level can be seen to interact with the level of social practice. To understand the various social implications in the jokes, one needs to take into consideration the various aspects within the textual and discursive level. With regard to the level of social practice, the jokes that discussed power relations and the effects of stereotypes in society often featured distinctive means to accomplish such discussion. These means included, for example, parody in the form of irony, self-deprecating humor and narratives that featured various characters from different ethnicities. Therefore, it can be argued that CDA and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework provide flexibility that is necessary to thoroughly examine the meaning behind jokes in stand-up comedy. Hence, CDA is a suitable option for analyzing humor that has a complex structure, such as stand-up comedy performances.

Further study on the topic of ethnic humor in stand-up comedy could include different perspectives, such as a sample of comedians from a larger number of ethnicities. In addition, one could also choose to focus on gender differences between comedians. Another option would be to examine the historical

developments of stand-up comedy in greater depth, for example including performers from the sixties and seventies such as Lenny Bruce and Bill Cosby. However, the research design would have to be adapted to the fact that there are no video recordings of many such performances, only LP albums.

7 Bibliography

Primary sources:

Black, L. 2004. *Black on Broadway*.

Black, L. 2006. *Red, White and Screwed*.

Chapelle, D. 2000. *Killin' Them Softly*.

Murphy, E. 1987. *Eddie Murphy Raw*.

Pryor, R. 1982. *Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip*.

Rock, C. 1999. *Chris Rock: Bigger & Blacker*.

Rock, C. 2004. *Chris Rock: Never Scared*.

Secondary sources:

Attardo, S. 1994. *Humor Research, Volume 1: Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Attardo, S. 2000. Irony as relevant inappropriateness. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 32(6), 793-826.

Attardo, S. 2008. Humor and popular culture. In V. Raskin (eds), *The primer of humor research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 101-155.

Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, University of Texas.

Barbe, K. 1995. *Irony in context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Boskin, J. and J. Dorinson. 1985. Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival. *American Quarterly*. 37 (1), 81-97.

Brown, G and G. Yule. 1983. *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carrell, A. 2008. Historical views of humour. In V. Raskin (eds), *The primer of humor research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 303-332.

Chouliaraki, L. and N. Fairclough. 1999. *Discourse in late modernity: rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cohen, T. 1999. *Jokes: philosophical thoughts on joking matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

De Fina, A. 2003. *Identity in narrative: a study of immigrant discourse*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam.

Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity.

Fairclough, N. 1995a. *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. 1995b. *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.

Forceville. C. 2005. Adressing an audience: Time, place, and genre in Peter van Straaten's calender cartoons. *International Journal of Humor Research*. 18(3), 247-278.

Ford, T. and M. Ferguson. 2004. Social Consequences of Disparagement Humor: A Prejudiced Norm Theory. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. 8 (1), 79-94.

Ford, T and G. Tonander. 1998. The Role of Differentiation Between Groups and Social Identity in Stereotype Formation. *Social Psychology Quarterly*. 61(4), 372-384.

Foucault, M. 1981. *The history of sexuality vol 1, an introduction*. Penguin Books.

Holmes, J and M. Marra. 2002. Over the edge? Subversive humor between colleagues and friends. *International Journal of Humor Research*. 15(1), 65-87.

Humor [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy]. (2 Feb 2012) http://www.iep.utm.edu/humor/

Jørgensen, M. and L. Phillips. *Discourse Analysis*. London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Kerrigan, D. 2011. Individualism, Group Recognition and Social Construction of Race in Reality TV. *Critical Approaches to Discourse across Disciplines*. 5(1), 17-44.

Kids Count Data Center. (7 Dec 2011) http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=107

Leveen, L. 1996. Only When I Laugh: Textual Dynamics of Ethnic humor. *MELUS*. 21(4), 29-55.

Limon, J. 2000. *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, or, Abjection in America*. Duke University Press: Durham and London.

Lowe, J. 1986. Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing. *American Quarterly*. 38(3), 439-460.

Marc, D. 1989. *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*. Blackwell Publishers.

McGarty. C. Yzerbyt, V. and R. Spears. 2002. *Stereotypes as explanations: the formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups*. London; New York: Cambridge University Press.

McIlvenny, P. Mettovaara, S. and R. Tapio. 1993. I Really Wanna Make You Laugh: Stand-Up Comedy and Audience Response. [online]. (29 Dec 2011)   http://paul-server.hum.aau.dk/research/cv/Pubs/stand-up93.pdf

Meyer. J. C. 2000. Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication. *Communication Theory*. 10(3), 310-331.

Mindiola, T. Flores, Y. and N. Rodriguez. 2002. *Black-brown relations and stereotypes*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Mintz, L. E. 2008. Humor and popular culture. In V. Raskin (eds), *The primer of humor research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 281-301.

Muecke, D. C. 1970. *Irony*. London: Methuen.

Nash, W. 1985. *The language of humour*. London: Longman.

Niemann, Y, F. O'Connor, E. and R. McClorie. 1998. Intergroup Stereotypes of Working Class Blacks and Whites: Implications for Stereotype Threat. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. 22(2), 103-108

Niemann, Y, F. Romero, A. J. Arredondo and V. Rodriguez. 1999. What Does It Mean to Be "Mexican"? Social Construction of an Ethnic Identity. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*. 21(1), 47-60.

Norrick, N. 2009. A Theory of Humor in Interaction. *Journal of Literary Theory*. 3(2), 261-284.

Oring, E. 2011. Parsing the joke: The General Theory of Verbal Humor and approapriate incongruity. *International Journal of Humor Research*. 24(2), 203-222.

Rahman, J. 2007. An Ay For an Ah: Language of Survival in African American Narrative Comedy. *American Speech*. 82(1), 65-96.

Rappoport, L. 2005. *Punchlines: the case for racial, ethnic, and gender humor*. Praeger Publishers: Westport, CT.

Raskin, V. 1985. *Semantic mechanism of humor*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Raskin, V. 2011. On Oring on GTVH. *International Journal of Humor Research*. 24(2), 223-231.

Reisigl, M. and R. Wodak. *Discourse and discrimination: rhetoric's of racism and antisemitism*. Routledge: New York.

Rutter, J. 1997. *Stand-up as Interaction: Performance and Audience in Comedy Venues*. [online]. University of Salford, Department of Sociology. (15 Aug 2011) www.cric.ac.uk/cric/staff/Jason_Rutter/papers/rutter_phd.pdf

Toikka, M. and M. Vento. 2000. *Ala Naurattaa! Stand Up –komedian käsikirja*. Cosmoprint: Helsinki.

Tuomi, J. and A. Sarajärvi. 2009. *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Tammi.

Upadhyaya, P. K. 2011. Multi-cultural and Multi-lingual Issues: Hegemony and Denial in the Constitutions of Nepal since 1990. *Critical Approaches to Discourse across Disciplines*. 5(1), 112-129.

U.S. Deparment of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics. (7 Dec 2011) http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/pim09st.pdf

Van Dijk, T. 1993. Denying Racism: Elite discourse and racism. [online]. (29 Dec 2011) http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Denying%20racism%20-%20Elite%20discourse%20and%20racism.pdf

Van Dijk, T. 1996. Discourse, power and access. [online]. (29 Dec 2011) http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Discourse,%20power%20and%20access.pdf

Widdowson, H. G. 1998. The Theory and Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Applied Linguistics*. 19(1), 136-151.

Widdowson, H. G. 2004. *Text, context, pretext: critical issues in discourse analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.