Application of the General Theory of Verbal Humor to texts in *The Onion*

Christian Jarnæs Saude

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) through the analysis of articles in the satirical news publication *The Onion*. The GTVH is a semantic/pragmatic joke representation theory, which proposes that all jokes production must draw from 6 interdependent parameters (knowledge resources). The theorists have since stated that the theoretic framework can be applied to longer humorous texts as well. The goal of this thesis is to investigate that claim.

This thesis finds that the GTVH cannot be directly applied to other text types than jokes, because the formulation of the knowledge resources are too joke-centric. Certain Knowledge Resources only function as such in jokes, and others do not have any formal basis for identification.

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1   Introduction

We all know that there is no quicker way to empty a joke of its peculiar magic than to try to explain it—to point out, for example, that Lou Costello is mistaking the proper name Who for the interrogative pronoun who, and so on. And we all know the weird antipathy such explanations arouse in us, a feeling of not so much boredom as offense, as if something has been blasphemed.

-- David Foster Wallace

The Script Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH) and the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) are two of the most influential linguistic theories of humor. They have been widely accepted as thorough formal accounts of the mechanisms driving jokes, and have served as jumping off points for much contemporary linguistic work done on humor. (Attardo, 2017b) They were first formulated on the basis of jokes, but they have since been utilized in order to understand verbal humor as it appears in all types of texts.

This thesis is an investigation of the extended model and some theoretical claims posited by Attardo (2001). First and foremost, the proposals made regarding whether the GTVH is applicable to all humorous text-types or not. My points against the GTVH are not strictly concerning the formal validity of the theory as a theory of jokes. My arguments against the GTVH are about what has been lost in the transition of a theory of jokes to a theory of other humorous texts. The theory's ability to serve as a model for analysis of jokes is well established and partially empirically proven (Ruch, Attardo & Raskin, 1993), but its ability to serve as a model for other humorous texts has not truly been established.

The proposed expansion to handle longer texts presented in Attardo (2001) is exclusively concerned with long-form narratives such as novels and sitcoms. It is my opinion that the differences between humor in jokes compared to other humorous texts are easier to identify and discuss in more joke-adjacent text types. I claim that certain aspects of humor have been lost in transition, due to the ambitious leap from short, simple texts to the eclectic novels analyzed in Attardo (2001).

For this reason, I will utilize texts from *The Onion* to illustrate my points. The news parody genre has global appeal and takes many forms. Baym and Jones (2013) suggest that the main appeal of news parody is "deconstructing the artifice of news – the naturalistic illusion that news is (or could be) an unmediated window on the world" (p. 4). *The Onion* was first published in 1988 at the University of Wisconsin as a free newspaper, but its audience was

widely expanded with the launch of theonion.com (Bell, 2009). The articles are presented in a traditional news format, but with ridiculous fictitious content. They are similar to jokes in certain key aspects which make them great subjects of study. In particular, Onion-articles are relatively short and have humor as their primary goal of communication.

A list of the analyzed articles and their GTVH classifications is included as an appendix. They have all be collected from *The Onion's* website where they are archived.

2 Theory

2.1 Theories of Humor

There have been many proposed theories of humor over the years. Figures of historical importance range from Plato and Aristotle, to Cicero, Kant, and Freud. Their contributions as well as modern theories are discussed in Raskin's extensive survey in *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (Raskin, 1985) and Attardo's discussion in *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (Attardo, 1994). Generally, the theories of humor that have been proposed are placed into three groups: hostility theories, release theories, and incongruity theories. The grouping is based on the different aspects of humor they denote (Attardo, 1994; Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017).

Hostility theories (including aggression theories, superiority theory etc.) are concerned with social aspects of humor. Central to these theories is the idea that laughter derives from the joy of feeling superior to some other, or that humor is a social corrective that corrects deviant behavior (Attardo, 1994). According to these theories, all humor is based on a discourse of included groups and excluded groups. Central figures in these types of theories are Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Bergson.

Release theories are based on psychoanalytical theory, with Sigmund Freud as their most influential proponent. The basic idea of these theories is that humor involuntarily occurs when an inner tension is released. "The pleasure of humor (in this restricted meaning of the word) arises from the release of energy that would have been associated with this painful emotion but has now become redundant" (Martin, 2010, p. 35). In other words, humor stems from recasting something painful into something light-hearted. It is a strategy for coming to terms with misfortunate aspects of life.

Incongruity-based theories generally attribute the occurrence of humor to a cognitive dissonance that occurs when incongruent elements clash. Kant and Schopenhauer are generally regarded as pioneers of incongruity theory. Mcgee as cited by Attardo (1994) defines incongruity as:

> "The notion of congruity and incongruity refer to the relationships between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth. When the arrangement of the consitituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous." (p. 48)

The theories within these categories are all essentialist theories, which is to say that they attempt to identify the essential properties of all instances of humor. Their common quest is identifying the sufficient conditions that make some things funny. These three groups of do not directly contradict each other, but differ in their disciplinary roots and emphasis.

The SSTH and the GTVH are commonly seen as cases of incongruity theory (Oring 2016; Simpson 2003), a label which their main theorists themselves have resisted due to the informal character of other incongruity theories (Raskin, & Attardo, 2017). Attardo (1997) indicates that the concept of incongruity closely corresponds to the concept of script opposition. The introduction of Knowledge Resources in the GTVH borrows and includes certain aspects from hostility theories and release theories as well as being based on a model similar to incongruity theories. (p. 55)

2.2 The Script Semantic Theory of Humor

Victor Raskin presented his Semantic Script Theory of Humor in his landmark work *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (Raskin, 1985) It is the first formal theory of humor developed (Attardo, 1994) with the goal of presenting "the necessary and sufficient conditions, in purely semantic terms, for a text to be funny" (Raskin, 1985, p. xiii). In other words, what semantic properties a text needs to be recognized as a joke.

The Main Hypothesis of the theory is this:

> "A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions in (108) are satisfied.
>
> > (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
> >
> > (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (Raskin, 1985.
>
> p. 99)

According to Raskin, these are the necessary conditions for a text to be a joke. While this framework can be applied to longer texts in principle, Raskin (1985) is adamant that this theory is formulated from an analysis of jokes and therefore only concerns itself with sources of humor that can be found through semantic analysis in jokes.

2.2.1 What is a Script?

The term and concept of scripts originally comes from psychology, but came into usage in linguistics during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Attardo, 2001). Scripts are organized clusters of information tied to an entity.

> "It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how a given entity is structured, what are its parts and components, or how an activity is done, relationship organized, and so on, to cover all possible relations between entities (including their constituents)." (Attardo, 2001, p. 2)

A script is the surrounding information we relate with an entity, which could be an object, a concept, an activity etc. "The script is a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it" (Raskin, 1985, p. 81). The most basic level scripts are almost equivalent to the lexical definition of the word. The word *cup,* for example, would activate a series of scripts roughly equal to all of the different senses of the lexeme *cup*. It is the other words surrounding *cup* in a text that activates the script relevant to that particular context.

Raskin differentiates between different levels of scripts in terms of complexity and abstraction. Scripts containing many other scripts can be *macroscripts* and/or *complex scripts*. Macroscripts are clusters of scripts that are organized chronologically. RESTAURANT is an example of a macroscript since it activates ideas of a certain order of events that is expected. Scripts like WAITING TO BE SEATED/RECEIVE MENU/DECIDE WHAT TO ORDER etc. figure in chronological order of events. Complex scripts are also clusters of different scripts, but without a chronological ordering. A complex script like WAR for example, is comprised of many different scripts: ARMY/VICTORY/WEAPONS etc. It is a cluster of many different scripts, but not in an expected order of events. Obviously RESTAURANT is also a complex script in the sense that it also activates scripts beyond those that figure in the chronological order like CHEF/MENU/WASHROOM etc.

Attardo (1996; Attardo, Hempelmann, & Di Maio, 2002) makes a distinction between lexical scripts, inferential scripts, and sentential scripts. Inferential scripts are activated from the context the text figures in. For example, a letter of recommendation would evoke scripts pertaining to some expected form, format, content etc. Sentential scripts are activated inferentially through which lexemes figure together rather than directly from a single lexemic handle occurring in the text. For example, if you have a text which lexically activates the

scripts HUSBAND, LOVER, ADULTERY, WIFE, LAWYER and COURTROOM, the sentential script of DIVORCE would be activated without a direct lexemic handle in the text.

2.2.2 Script Oppositeness

Central to the theory is the notion of **script oppositeness**. For a text to be funny, it is not enough that two scripts overlap. They must be opposite in a technical sense (Attardo, 2001, p. 18). Raskin (1985, p. 107-114) introduces a number of ways scripts can be opposed on different levels. In simple cases, scripts can be lexically opposed where one script is a negation of another, such as antonyms or negation (*alive*/*dead,* for example). In other cases, scripts can be opposed in local antonymity which is defined as "two linguistic entities whose meanings are opposite only within a particular discourse and solely for the purposes of this discourse" (Raskin, 1985, p. 108). Some examples of this include relational oppositions such as *mother*/*daughter*, gradable oppositions such as *hot*/*cold,* and complementary oppositions such as *buy*/*sell* (Simpson, 2003).

Raskin says that there are three levels of abstractness to all script oppositions. There is the concrete, least abstract level opposition which is the lexical opposition as it appears in the text, the intermediate level which is the general opposition in the world it is part of, and the abstract level which is the basic type of opposition.

On the most abstract level, Raskin proposes three classes of opposition: *actual*/*non-actual*, *normal/abnormal*, and *possible/impossible*. On the intermediate level are general oppositions that are "essential to human life" (Raskin, 1985, p. 113) such as *good/bad, obscene/non-obscene, sex/no sex* etc. On the least abstract level is the opposition as it appears in the text. This is further modeled and explained in the example analysis of "the Doctor joke" below.

2.2.3 The joke according to the SSTH (the Doctor joke)

This is an infamous joke which is often repeated in order to model how the SSTH handles a simple joke (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; 2001; Oring, 2016).

> *"Is the doctor home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "no," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."* (Raskin, 1985, p. 117-127)

Raskin's first step in his analysis is to list all senses of the words that occur in the text, then to look for which words evoke the same scripts. Since *doctor* evokes all the possible senses of the lexeme *doctor*: ACADEMIC/MEDICAL/MATERIAL/MECHANICAL/INSECT, the MEDICAL script comes to the forefront when the word *patient* activates the same script. In that same way, *is* has the senses of EQUAL/EXIST/SPATIAL/MUST, and *at* has the senses SPATIAL/TARGET/OCCUPATION/STATE/CAUSE/MEASURE. Since *at* and *is* have the *SPATIAL* script in common, it triggers this as the preferred reading of the text. This continues until one has reached an interpretation of the text based on these combinations.

Attardo (2001) provides this semantic interpretation of the first part of the text: "Someone who was previously treated for some illness inquires about the presence of a doctor at the doctor's place of residence, with the purpose of being treated for a disease which manifests itself by a whispering voice" (p. 21). Raskin argues that when the wife invites the patient in despite the doctor not being home it creates a puzzle for the reader. The text is compatible with the macroscript of DOCTOR (with the ordering of scripts being something like PATIENT IS ILL/TRAVELS TO VISIT DOCTOR/DOCTOR PRESCRIBES MEDICINE etc.) up to the point where the wife invites the presumed patient in. That the man is invited in despite the doctor not being home is not compatible with that previously activated macroscript. Why would the patient enter if the doctor is not there? The text is partially compatible with the DOCTOR macroscript, but it activates a competing script which requires the reader to go back in the text to reevaluate the situation. A competing script is inferred through the unexpected turn, and when the reader goes back and notices that the youth and beauty of the wife is emphasized, a SEX script is activated. Then the SEX script is combined with the *whisper* to sententially activate the macroscript of LOVER, which the text is entirely compatible with.

Raskin identifies three levels levels on which the *doctor*/*lover* scripts are opposite. An opposition between *actual*/*non-actual* on the most abstract level since there is a contention between the actual situation of the text and the non-actual situation the reader was presented initially. On an intermediate level, the scripts are opposed on the nodes of SEX/NO SEX in the two competing macroscripts, since it is the main negatory opposition between the two macroscripts. The expected professional relationship does not allow for sex between patient and doctor. The most basic level is the verbally inferred *doctor/lover* opposition.

2.3 The General Theory of Verbal Humor

Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo (1991) proposed the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) as a revision of the SSTH. The GTVH is a broadening of SSTH out of semantics to a broader multidisciplinary theory of humor. The GTVH aims to be a joke representation model, indicating all aspects of the joke from the abstract joke-concept identified by the SSTH, to the language it is being expressed in. The theory proposes that constructing a joke into a text would need to draw upon six parameters. These parameters are called "Knowledge Resources" (KRs). The GTVH includes five Knowledge Resources to jokes in addition to Script Opposition carried over from the SSTH. These knowledge resources are Language, Narrative Strategy, Target, Situation, and Logical Mechanism. Raskin and Attardo (1991) borrow concepts from a wide array of adjacent fields such as cognitive linguistics, psychology, stylistics, folklore etc. Central to the theory is that it proposes a hierarchal structure between these knowledge resources that is supposed to predict perceived joke similarity. The theory predicts that jokes that share more knowledge resources will be perceived as more similar to each other. If jokes of comparison have the same number of identical knowledge resources, the joke that share higher leveled knowledge resources will be commonly considered more alike. This hypothesis is claimed to have been generally proven by Ruch et al. (1993). The theory also states that higher level resources may dictate and limit lower leveled resources.

2.3.1 The Knowledge Resources

The knowledge resources of the GTVH were initially presented in Raskin & Attardo (1991) by first presenting an anchor joke and then varying the joke six times by changing one knowledge resource. The knowledge resources are presented from lowest in the hierarchy (Language) to the highest (Script Opposition).

Anchor joke: *How many Poles does it take to screw in a lightbulb? 5. One to hold the lightbulb and four to turn the table he is standing on.*

Language

Joke variation 1: *What number of Pollacks do you need to screw in a light bulb? 5 – one to hold the light bulb and four to rotate the table.*

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This knowledge resource is how the concept and information central to the joke is being presented and finally realized.

> "The Language knowledge resource contains, at the very minimum, a full phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical description of the text. It also contains statistical information about the frequency of occurrence of units and clusters of units at each linguistic level (i.e., phonemes and clusters of phonemes, as well as the frequency of occurrence of morphemes, phrases, etc.)" (Attardo, 2017, p. 128).

The Language KR accounts for linguistic variation and paraphrase of the same joke. The anchor joke and this variation is both the same joke and not, as they share all other aspects other than their exact expression. Many jokes cannot be paraphrased as easily since the exact language of the joke is necessary for it to be functional. This is the case for jokes where the punchline is a pun, for example. Language was initially said to be responsible for the position of the punch line, but this has since been changed to be part of the Narrative Strategy instead. (Attardo, 2017)

Narrative Strategy

Joke variation 2: *It takes five Poles to screw in a light bulb. One to hold the lightbulb and four to turn the table he is standing on.*

This variation of the joke varies in its narrative strategy. The narrative strategy was initially termed the genre or microgenre of the joke. Attardo and Raskin (1991, p. 300) claim that the anchor joke utilizes the narrative strategy of a riddle while the variation is expository. Attardo (2001) reevaluates this term as the narrative in which a joke is cast. He goes on to admit that not much work has gone into the description of this KR as it seems to just consist of taxonomy of Narrative Strategies from which jokes can be organized (p. 23). Attardo (2017) presents the NS like this: "the narrative strategy describes the way the text is organized in terms of the distribution of its parts as well as the placement of the humor" (130). The NS has thus changed from a simple identification of genre to representing the organization of humorous elements.

Target

Joke variation 3: *How many Irishmen does it take to screw in a lightbulb? 5. One to hold the lightbulb and four to turn the table he is standing on.*

The target is identified as what is commonly known as the "butt" of the joke. A joke which is *aggressive*[1] towards an individual, an ideology, etc. contains a Target. Jokes that are not aggressive do not have a Target, making the Target an optional Knowledge Resource. According to the theory, the choice of target depends on the stereotypes and myths surrounding that group, individual etc. In this variation *Poles* are substituted by *Irishmen* because both groups are associated with stupidity in American jokelore[2]. A variation wherein *Poles* were substituted with *Nobel Prize winners,* for example, would theoretically render the joke not functional since *Nobel Prize winners* are not culturally associated with stupidity.

Situation

Joke variation 4: *How many Poles does it take to wash a car? Two. One to hold the sponge and one to move the car back and forth.*

The Situation is the basic situation wherein the joke takes place. Originally, it was defined as the assortment of characters, actions and objects that figure in the joke. It has since been sharpened to denote "the overall macroscript that describes the background in which the events of the text of the joke take place" (Attardo, 2017, p. 131). In this variation, all the other KRs are still intact, but the situation of the joke has been changed from a light bulb changing-macroscript, to car washing-macroscript. In the doctor-joke, the background macroscript is the doctor-script which is opposed in the punch line of the joke.

Logical Mechanism

Joke variation 5: *How many Poles does it take to screw in a lightbulb? 5. One to hold the lightbulb and four to look for the screwdriver.*

The logical mechanism of a joke is the local logic (or pseudologic) in the joke that must be accepted for the joke to be functional. It is the means of creating the script compatibility within the text, i.e. the cognitive reasoning required to make sense of the joke. Jokes often employ a playful pseudo-logic to partially resolve their inherent incongruity (Attardo, 2017, p. 133). The Logical Mechanism of the anchor joke is a *figure-ground reversal,* since that

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[1] "Aggressive" jokes are those that aim to ridicule or criticize. A joke may be aggressive without being bigoted. See the vast number of satirical soviet jokes, for example (Davies, (2011a). On the other hand, a joke can also evoke stereotypes without being aggressive by utilizing positive stereotypes.

[2] Jokelore is a term for the assortment of different assumptions and comic scripts that figure in a joke culture. See Oring (2016)

which is expected to remain stationary is moved while that which expected to move remains stationary. In this variation, the logical mechanism is *false analogy* since the Poles wrongly assume that a screwdriver is necessary to screw in the light bulb. A list of known Logical Mechanisms is presented in Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio (2002) which is presented in section 4.6. Not all jokes employ a logical mechanism. Therefore this is regarded as the second optional KR.

Attardo (2001) recognizes that this is the most problematic KR of the GTVH, and it has been the most controversial element of the theory in recent literature (Attardo and Hempelmann, 2011; Davies, 2004; 2011b; Oring, 2011; 2016).

Script Opposition

Joke variation 6: *How many Poles does it take to screw in a lightbulb? 5. One to screw in the lightbulb and four to wave away the stench from his feet*

The Script Opposition KR is inherited directly from the SSTH. When discussing the Script Opposition, it is essentially the same formal framework presented in the SSTH. The Script Opposition of the anchor joke is *stupidity/intelligence* according to Attardo and Raskin (1991). On the most abstract level it is a *normal/abnormal* script opposition, since the stupid method employed by the poles is opposed against an expected intelligent, common sense approach. The variation is also a *normal/abnormal* opposition, but with the basic Script Opposition being *cleanliness/dirtiness*. The rest of the text can remain as being dirty is also something attributed to Poles in American jokelore.

2.3.2 The Knowledge Resource Hierarchy

Raskin and Attardo (1991) propose that the Knowledge Resources are hierarchically organized[3] and have a determining relationship to each other. They claim that the higher level KR's will determine the lower level Knowledge Resources by limiting the number of forms they can take. Certain script-oppositions will only work through certain Narrative Strategies or Targets, for example. The also propose that the degree to which jokes can be said to be similar, is based on whether or not they vary on the lower level KRs or the higher level ones.

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[3] The hierarchy is as follows: ordered from highest to lowest: Script Opposition -> Logical Mechanism -> Situation -> Target -> Narrative Strategy -> Language

2.4 Longer humorous texts

Since the introduction of the SSTH in 1985, there have been attempts by several scholars to apply the theory to longer humorous texts. In an overview in Attardo (2001, p. 37-45) he presents several authors who have contributed to this end. He splits the contributors into two groups: expansionists and revisionists. Expansionists propose that jokes in the SSTH-sense share essential properties with all humorous texts and therefore can be applied to all types. The revisionists see the theory as a theory of jokes as a text-type, and therefore revisions to the theory must be made in order to make it applicable to other text-types (Attardo 1994; 2001).

In light of this, Attardo (2001) elaborates on the GTVH in order to render the theory able to serve as a framework of analysis to humor in longer humorous texts. He is mainly concerned with humorous narratives, but claims that the model should be applicable to non-narratives as well. This elaboration provides several tools that expand the scope of the theory outside of the realm of jokes, including ideas of a semantic storage area, typography of analysis according to a linear text vector, systems of line-relation and more. Since some of these tools are conceived with far longer texts in mind such as novels, I will refrain from presenting them all here. Instead I will only introduce the concepts that are relevant for applying the theory to *The Onion*-articles. They are briefly presented here, but are discussed more in depth with examples in the discussion section.

Attardo (1996; 2001) introduces the notion of the **jab line** as a possible trigger mechanism in addition to the **punch line**. Jab lines are semantically and functionally identical objects to punch lines in that they both trigger script oppositions, but they differ on two points. By definition, punch lines are positioned at the end of the text, while jab lines can occur at any position of a text. Punch lines are disruptive elements while jab lines are fully integrated into the text (Oring, 1989). In addition, Attardo introduces **strands**, which are groups of lines that are "formally or thematically linked" (2001, p. 83).

The storage area is according to Attardo (2001) "a dynamic construct, which is changed by the information it is exposed to" (p. 54). It is the set of semantic and pragmatic propositions that are part of the common ground assumed by the text. When analyzing longer texts, information introduced in the text itself will also become part of the storage area. Following

this, he also introduces the **Text World** which is the mental representation of the reality of the text which is presented.

Hyperdetermined humor is defined by Attardo (2001) as "the presence of more than one active source of humor at the same time, or as the simultaneous activity of a given source of humor in different contexts" (p. 100). The analytical framework of the SSTH and the GTVH does not handle simultaneous activation of humorous elements well, something that is prevalent in non-joke humorous texts in forms such as **register humor** (explained below).

2.5 Idealization

The SSTH and the GTVH are developed as theories of **competence**, not performance. They are proposed theory of a speakers' potential production/interpretation of humorous texts. Attardo (2001) proposes the need for **idealization** when addressing these texts, which means to abstract away from the reception of a text from any given audience. "Their reaction is essentially irrelevant, since what is being investigated is an abstract "ideal" reader's analysis of the text" (p. 30).

3 Method

According to Attardo and Raskin (2017) a theory should be:

> "• adequate, if it provides an accurate account of all the phenomena in its purview;
>
> • effective, if it comes with a methodology for its implementation;
>
> • formal, if it submits itself to logical rules, whether it does or does not use a specific formalism—confusing formality with formalism is one of the worst and unfortunately common offenses in discussing a formal theory;
>
> • constructive, if that implementation can be completed in finite time;
>
> • decidable, if there is an algorithm for its implementation in principle;
>
> • computable, if this algorithm can actually be demonstrated,
>
> • explicit, if it is fully aware of all of its components and provides a full account of each of them." (p. 113)

I have elected to use articles in *The Onion* as a frame of reference to test the GTVH's ability to account for non-narrative humorous texts. *The Onion*-articles are great subjects for humor research due to their relatively short length and their limited goals. I will first present discussion of the applicability of theory given that they are longer texts, then present and discuss each of the six Knowledge Resources.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have applied the GTVH framework, including the highlighted tools above, to 20 articles published by *The Onion* on their website between January and April 2018. This includes listing lexical senses, identifying inferences and presenting the result through the GTVH's six Knowledge Resources.

The stated goal of the GTVH is to provide a bottom-up theory of analysis that does not need to lean on the reader's intuition to properly identify and classify instances of humor. (Attardo, 2001, p. 33) The only way to test and evaluate the theory is to first attempt to apply it, then to evaluate the analysis it invites in light of the claims made by Raskin and Attardo (2017).

This thesis is a discussion of humor theory with examples from the Onion. What I am concerned with is what these types of texts suggest about the General Theory of Verbal Humor. To utilize a theory to answer humor-related questions in *The Onion,* one would need quantitative data. Before anyone can do that research, one needs to trust that the model is adequate to analyze these types of texts. If the theoretic framework does not properly handle the humor of these texts, then the results from such a study would be suspect at best.

4 Discussion

4.1 Longer texts

First, I will present an example analysis of a text to test and model how the theory handles *The Onion* articles. This is one of few articles that I will comment on in depth for the sake of analysis, and it will be referred to throughout the thesis. The analysis below is simplified somewhat for the sake of the reader. A presentation of the full formal treatment of these articles is not attempted here, mostly because presenting each possible sense of every word produces long lists of irrelevant information.

4.1.1 The difference between jokes and *jokes*

The primary issue when applying a humor theory meant for, and formulated on the basis of, analysis of verbal jokes is figuring out what it should be aiming to identify. Some difficulties are caused by the word *joke* being used to mean two different things in the literature.

The main advantage jokes have over other text types when it comes to humor research is that the humorous element and the text can be virtually analyzed as one. The word *joke* is used both colloquially and technically for both the text type of jokes and for the humorous elements in a text. A sitcom will have many humorous elements, only tangentially related to each other, which are structurally and verbally dissimilar to jokes, yet all humorous elements are colloquially (and formally) still known as *jokes* despite this. A slapstick gag like an actor slipping on a banana peel might be called a joke, so can a more abstract concept such as the reversal of roles between children and adults in the TV-show *South Park,* for example. All humorous elements are jokes in the sense that they involve a central script opposition, but they are not jokes in the sense that they share text features with the joke text-type (i.e they do not have a set up- punch line organization, for example).

Theories of humor should be concerned with identifying and explain humor in the text, but in larger complex texts it becomes impossible to simply insert different aspects into six parameters. Recall the claim of Raskin's (1985) Main Hypothesis: "a text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of these conditions in (108) is satisfied" (p. 99). The text carries or includes a *joke* if it has script opposition, but that does not mean that

the text itself is a joke. Raskin studied jokes because they are short and have a single humorous element within them. A general theory of humor should be that of the humorous element in jokes not the text type, since the ultimate goal of the theory is to identify the sufficient conditions for a text to be funny. The original formulation of the SSTH seems conscious of this distinction, yet the original formulation of the GTVH seems not to have been, since the definition of certain Knowledge Resources are defined by the text-type of jokes (The Narrative Strategy being a term for the "genre" of jokes, for example). This criticism will be elaborated on in the discussion of the individual Knowledge Resources below (Section 4.2 – 4.7).

Playing loose with the term *joke* can create confusion when discussing the theory, but I hope to be clear enough in this thesis. When I talk about a *joke,* I generally mean a humorous element, not the text type[4]. I will elaborate on this point later, since our main criticism of the GTVH stems from this distinction not being in clear in the description of the theory. For now, this is sufficient background for the first step of the analysis.

4.1.2 Articles in *The Onion* as joke-like texts

The strategy for analyzing longer texts in the SSTH/GTVH framework introduced by Attardo (2001) is to generate lists of jokes that occur in a text, identifying their relative positions in the text, and classifying their individual Knowledge Resources. According to Attardo (2001), the first step in analyzing humorous texts through the GTVH is to identify whether or not the text type is structurally similar to jokes. If it is, then one can reasonably apply the GTVH to it without need for modification. Generally, analyzing complex humorous texts requires identifying the Knowledge Resources of each humorous element line by line. When analyzing jokes, only an identification and analysis of the Knowledge Resources of the text as a whole is necessary, since the humorous element encompasses the entire text. The *joke* is the text, in a sense.

Two distinct approaches to longer texts are presented here. The first approach is identifying the single *joke* concept that accounts for the humor of the entire text. The second approach is identifying each and every instance of humor and classifying them within the GTVH framework, to chart where they occur, how often and so on. The reason for why one would

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[4] Therefore the term *joke* referring to a humorous element will be in italics. When I am talking about the joke as a text type, it will not be.

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need to choose one approach over the other, and why the text being "joke-like" is important for that choice is not clear. These two approaches denote two different things in terms of humor.

Attardo and Chabanne (1992) attempt to identify jokes as a text type by finding text features shared by all jokes. They claim that jokes are very short fictional narratives which are oriented towards a disruptive punch line. The punch line is defined as a complete break with predictability. The preceding narrative is presented in order to create the necessary object against which the punch line can introduce script opposition. Therefore, the narrative only needs to be detailed enough for the punch line to function, which explains the short length of most jokes. Like Oring (1989), Attardo and Chabanne (1992) claim that the punch line is the crucial element that defines the joke. Structurally similar texts must also follow this path to an incongruous punch line. If a text is structurally similar to jokes, then it will build towards a final punch line.

Attardo and Chabanne (1992) also mention that one of the main reasons that humor research has almost exclusively been concerned with jokes, is because of their short length and self-contained sources of humor. I claim that articles in *The Onion* share these advantages. Like standard jokes, the texts are short and they have the "perlocutionary goal of being perceived as funny" (Attardo, 2001, p. 33), but they do not contain the ordering of elements that defines jokes. Below I show that *Onion* articles are not necessarily structurally similar to jokes, but a semantic analysis of the lexically evoked scripts and combinatorial rules can produce similar results as the analysis of verbal jokes.

4.1.3 The Lobster-article

This first analysis will be an attempt at applying the theory as it is presented in Attardo (2001). Questions and problems it raises are discussed afterwards. This article was published on January 18, 2018. It is a parody of science reporting.

> **"Study Reveals Lobsters Feel Pain And Get Off On It Like The Kinky Little Perverts They Are**
>
> DURHAM, NH—A new study released Friday by researchers at the University of New Hampshire's Aquatic Institute revealed that lobsters are capable of feeling pain, and, what's more, get off on it like the sick little fucking perverts they are. "Our experiments confirmed that lobsters are most likely able to experience physical suffering, and, beyond that, seem to be such dirty little freaks that they get a kind of sexual high from being cooked alive," said study co-author Dr. Adrianne Williams, adding that from the

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moment a lobster spots the pot of scalding water, researchers were able to detect a sort of irresistible carnal yearning in their beady eyestalks, practically begging for ever-higher temperatures to satisfy their depraved kinks. "In fact, we've discovered these marine deviants turn red when boiled, because they feel sexually humiliated to the point of climax and are craving more pain to push them over the edge. It turns out lobsters are some very fucked-up crustaceans." Williams added that the most aberrant of such sea creatures are not only conscious of their ultimate fate of being cracked open, dunked in butter, and devoured piece-by-piece by humans, but actually seem to desire that end as some sort of revolting fetish" (*The Onion*, 2018, January 18).

For the sake of line by line analysis, I will divide the text into six lines. Each line is carrying a single basic *joke*.

> *[1] Study Reveals Lobsters Feel Pain And Get Off On It Like The Kinky Little Perverts They Are*

> *[2] DURHAM, NH—A new study released Friday by researchers at the University of New Hampshire's Aquatic Institute revealed that lobsters are capable of feeling pain, and, what's more, get off on it like the sick little fucking perverts they are.*

> *[3] "Our experiments confirmed that lobsters are most likely able to experience physical suffering, and, beyond that, seem to be such dirty little freaks that they get a kind of sexual high from being cooked alive," said study co-author Dr. Adrianne Williams*

> [4] *, adding that from the moment a lobster spots the pot of scalding water, researchers were able to detect a sort of irresistible carnal yearning in their beady eyestalks, practically begging for ever-higher temperatures to satisfy their depraved kinks.*

> [5] *"In fact, we've discovered these marine deviants turn red when boiled, because they feel sexually humiliated to the point of climax and are craving more pain to push them over the edge. It turns out lobsters are some very fucked-up crustaceans."*

> [6] *Williams added that the most aberrant of such sea creatures are not only conscious of their ultimate fate of being cracked open, dunked in butter, and devoured piece-by-piece by humans, but actually seem to desire that end as some sort of revolting fetish*

I will reference this text several times throughout this thesis when discussing different aspects of the theory. From this point forward, as the heading suggests, it will be referred to it as "the lobster article".

This text is composed of a headline followed by five sentences that can be analyzed as six individual jokes. Individually, these lines can be analyzed as structurally similar to jokes due to their set up-punch line organization. Since they share the same basic script oppositions they are connected together in one single **strand**. This article is comprised of one basic *joke* that is

rephrased to fit the news article form. Scripts are presented in all capital letters, nodes in italicized capital letters.

[1] Study Reveals Lobsters Feel Pain And [Get Off On It Like The Kinky Little Perverts They Are]

First, I will model the identification of the basic script opposition. The first line of the text is the headline. The part in brackets acts as a punch line, with the preceding part acting as a setup. Initially, from its presentation, the script of NEWS ARTICLE is inferentially activated just from the presentation of the article. The noun "study" activates the script of STUDY (SCIENCE) which in tandem with the NEWS ARTICLE script activates the node *SCIENCE NEWS REPORTING*. "Lobster" activates the script of LOBSTER (*ANIMAL*) and the node of *MARINE BIOLOGY* to STUDY. "Pain" activates the node of *DEBATE SURROUNDING ETHICS OF BOILING LOBSTERS ALIVE* to LOBSTER which is part of a presupposed common ground, and also the node of *SEAFOOD*. The script PAIN will in relation to the other scripts so far have the nodes of *UNDESIRABLE* and *UNETHICAL* activated. These are the scripts activated from the setup of the first line.

"Get Off On It", "Kinky" and "Perverts" activate the script of SEXUAL FETISHISM (*DEVIANT HUMAN BEHAVIOUR)* and several nodes to previous scripts which establishes the primary script opposition. The first part of the headline is congruent with expected news reporting on the study of pain and lobster, but these phrases are incongruous to that. The primary opposition is between *animal/human* since sexual fetishism is a sort of sexual fixation known only to be occurring with humans. Related to this is an even clearer opposition. "Get off on it" ("it" referring to "pain") activates the node *SEXUAL PLEASURE DERIVED FROM PAIN* within SEXUAL FETISHISM which in turn creates an negatory script opposition within PAIN (*undesirable/desirable*).

In terms of Raskin's three levels of script oppositions, the most abstract script opposition is that of *normal/abnormal*. Normal discourse and assumptions about lobsters and pain is opposed by introducing obscene human traits to lobsters. The concrete basic script opposition is between *animal/human,* and on the intermediate level is between *obscene/non-obscene* .

The logical mechanism in this line is a sort of *differential potency mapping*. Primarily elaborated in GTVH terms by Paolillo (1998) and Attardo et al (2002), it is a type of logical mechanism where elements of one script are mapped onto another. In this text certain exclusively human characteristics are mapped onto an animal script. The script pertaining to

SEXUAL FETISHISM from the complex script HUMAN is mapped onto the script of LOBSTER where it is not native.

This would be the GTVH analysis of the two highest level Knowledge Resources in the first line. The script opposition and the logical mechanism that realize them are the same in all of the lines, and therefore the *joke* of the text as a whole. They vary in word choice and detail (the language parameter), but they are structurally identical to the headline.

The structure is six humorous lines all ending in a punch line. Since they all share the same script opposition and logical mechanism, the text consists of a single strand of the script opposition *human*/*lobster*. The situation (SI) of the text is that of studying lobsters. There is no identifiable target (TA) as the text is not ideologically aggressive towards anybody. The narrative strategy is that of a series of jokes connected in one strand.

A GTVH analysis of this article could therefore look like this:

> SO: *human/lobster; normal/abnormal; good/bad*
> LM: differential potency mapping
> SI: study of lobsters and pain
> TA: none
> NS: 6 jokes, no end punchline
> LA: news parody, obscenity

This is a functional GTVH analysis of the central script opposition of the joke in the text. Since a line by line analysis would repeat the same Knowledge Resources for each line, a line by line presentation is not necessary. They all belong to the same strand since they all play with a central *joke*. If the text included several strands differing on their central script opposition, a more line-focused analysis would be required, but due to the simple nature of the text, a joke-like simple analysis is sufficient.

All of the twenty *Onion* articles are simple in the sense that they have a single *joke* the text is oriented around. From this point, I will label the *joke* that the strand of the articles is linked by the *basic joke* of the article. For example, in the lobster article the basic joke being the one analyzed as the SO above, *human/non-human*. A formal, line by line analysis of the lexically activated scripts and their inference has identified the humor in this text.

This serves as an example of how Attardo's (2001) first step regarding longer texts is misguided:

> "The basic starting point of the theory is that humorous texts divide in two classes: those texts that are structurally similar to jokes (i.e., they end in a punch line) and those which are not." (p. 29)

The structural similarity to jokes does not seem to be what informs the need for expansionist tools, but the amount of different humorous elements in a text. *Simple* humorous texts can be handled in the same terms as jokes, *complex* texts cannot. The GTVH framework can be utilized virtually unchanged and still produce the intended results, because it is a simple humorous text in this sense. Like jokes, the Onion-articles seem to be single-joke carrying texts, without ending in a punch line. The humor can be identified as a single *joke* which the text rephrases six times.

4.1.4 Punches and Jabs

The distinction between the text type of the joke and the *joke* as a humorous element is at the heart of this discussion. Since the defining aspect of jokes is the punch line, the definition of punch lines and jab lines should be discussed. Attardo (2001) mentions this type of line organization as a "mere sequence of jab lines with final punch line".

> "The jokes would be loosely strung together on formal or content basis, without any continuity from beginning to end of the chain. The last joke in the chain would be "promoted" to punch line status by its position." (p. 91)

According to Attardo, this article is joke-like in its structure because the final line [6] becomes a punch line by the virtue of being the last humorous element. The other lines are jab lines since they are not in final position. If that is the case, then the punch line term loses virtually all meaning besides its final position in the text. Final position is important to punch lines, but it is important due to its relation to the setup phase. Oring's (1989) definition[5] stresses the triggering effect of the punch line:

> The punch line is a device that triggers the perception of an appropriate incongruity. It reveals that what is seemingly incongruous is appropriate, or what is seemingly appropriate is incongruous. In any event, the recognition brought about by the punch line must be sudden (Raskin 1985a: 33, 42, 146). The punch

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[5] Oring defines punch lines through the framework of appropriate incongruity theory. "The perception of an appropriate incongruity" is for all intents and purposes the same as overlapping script opposition. Hempelmann and Attardo (2011) attempted to unify these two theories.

line must bring about an abrupt cognitive reorganization in the listener. As such, the punch line is not a necessary element of humor but a literary device that characterizes the particular form of humor I label "joke." (p. 351)

In terms of its role in the text, the final line is not disruptive, nor does it bring about a script opposition in relation to the rest of the text. It is the same basic joke as the lines previous, which means it does not have a disruptive effect.

If the distinction between punch lines and jab lines are to be useful in the theory, they must have clearer definitions and limitations. Punch lines are disruptive, script opposition-triggering mechanisms in the end position of jokes. Jab lines are non-disruptive, script opposition-triggering mechanisms that can figure in any position of a text. A jab line can still occur in end-position of a text without being regarded as a punch line if the line does not function as a disruptive element. Similarly, punch lines can occur within texts by acting as disrupting elements, creating a structure similar to that of jokes.[6] Punch lines and jab lines are discussed further in section 4.1.6.

4.1.5 Register humor and hyperdetermination

The difference between jab lines and punch lines can be illustrated through the use of register humor in this article. The surface level source of humor, the basic *joke,* is appropriately handled by an unmodified GTVH analysis as shown above. However, there is a secondary source of script opposition that only figures on the level of register, which an unmodified application of the framework does not account for.

Attardo (1994) discusses the notion of register based humor as a potentially important factor when analyzing humorous texts (p. 235). In the case of *The Onion* articles this is very relevant, since the form itself parodies or satirizes another text type (a newspaper article, or online news article). According to Attardo (2001), register humor is mostly realized through jab lines where a choice of lexeme does not fit the expected register of the text. (p. 109)

As an example, Attardo uses *Nightmare Abbey* by T.L. Peacock in which there is a quarrel between a father and his son is presented in terms of a metaphysical debate on necessity. They are actually quarrelling about the son's choice of woman to wed, but the text is in the form and language of a philosophical debate. This creates a Script Opposition between the expected

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[6] Such as in the Grumblethor-article discussed below.

familiar/lowbrow style and subject matter of a family quarrel, and the formal language and style of a metaphysical debate.

Similarly, there is a Script Opposition in the lobster article that is not realized through a joke-like structure, but in certain word choices. There is an expected degree of formality and neutrality in a news reports, but in the lobster-article, there are certain obscene and charged phrases such as "fucked-up", "kinky little perverts" and "dirty little freaks". This creates the Script Oppositions *formal/informal* and *obscene/non-obscene*.

These script oppositions are created on a different level than the *animal/human* opposition identified above. While the *animal/human* is created through a logical mechanism of differential-potency mapping within the text, the *formal/informal* opposition is created through textual expectations. They also have to be analyzed separate from each other, since the jab lines that trigger the register script oppositions figure in the middle of both setups and punch lines of the *animal/human* lines.

Lines [2], [3] and [5] include the obscenities mentioned above. These stick out because of their obscenity and they are connected through a strand of register humor through sharing the same script oppositions. This is a secondary strand of the article, and the second level humorous element.

This means a secondary source of humor can be identified and presented in GTVH terms just based on the register humor.

> SO: *formal/informal; normal/abnormal; obscene/non-obscene*
> LM: none
> SI: study of lobsters and pain, scientists etc.
> TA: none
> NS: scattered jab lines
> LA: profanity in a formal context

This illustrates the difficulty the GTVH framework has to account for hyperdetermined humor. Textually, the lines making up these two strands appear virtually simultaneously. The obscenity in line [2], functioning as a jab line for the second strand is part of the punch line in the same line that is part of the primary strand.

The issues are how to hierarchically arrange hyperdetermined humorous elements, and what this means for the simple/complex text distinction above. If the text does seem to have several strands of humor, then a simple GTVH approach would theoretically not be possible. If it is possible, what determines the relative positions of the different humor elements? These two script oppositions clearly differ on how they are realized. The *animal/human* opposition is achieved in content, *formal/informal* in form. Intuitively, the *formal/informal* opposition seems secondary to the text, but there is no formal approach modeled to account for this in the theory.

There might be ways in which hyperdetermined register humor can be said to involve the same strand as the basic *joke* of the article. The register jab lines in this article activate an intermediate *obscene/non-obscene* Script Opposition, just like the primary strand, but this requires further research. How hyperdetermined humorous elements relate to each other has not yet been studied to my knowledge.

4.1.6 Punches or Jabs

The humorous lines making up the central joke in the lobster-article might be analyzed either as punch lines or jab lines according to the presentation of the terms in Attardo (2001). This is difficult distinction to make when transitioning the theory from jokes to longer texts, but reducing the difference of punch lines and jab lines to only textual position makes them virtually meaningless. I propose that the difference between punch lines and jab lines should be considered in light of their position in relation to the setup phase of the joke they activate.

The Main Hypothesis of the SSTH might be useful in making this distinction. Since Attardo (1994) and Oring (1989) establish that punch lines figure exclusively in jokes, for the endings in the lines presented above to be punch lines, they must be in final position of jokes. Since all the lines are partially compatible with two different scripts, and they can be shown to be opposite on the *sexual fetish/no sexual fetish* opposition of the HUMAN and LOBSTER complex scripts, they are jokes according to the SSTH. Since the script switch occurs at the end of each respective *joke*, they should be considered punch lines. On the other hand, the script opposition triggered by the register humor activated by the obscenities in the article function as jab lines. The set-up, the expected script, is the FORMAL script. This initial script is not activated through lexemic handles, but inferentially through expectations brought from the genre and context the text figures in. Technically, the expected register script is within the

presuppositions in the storage area concerning proper language within a news story on this topic. The lexemic handles triggering the script opposition is activated through the obscenity scattered throughout the text. The significant difference is that the *informal/formal* script opposition does trigger a reevaluation of the text, but is not in final position in relation to what it opposes. The position of the jab line could be anywhere in the text and would still function.

Since jab- and punch lines both function in the same way, why should we identify them as different entities? One could just identify all humorous lines as jab lines, and analyze them as jokes independently of where the script-trigger appears. I argue that a more strict distinction can help identify the different possible variations of Narrative Strategy (discussed below).

While punch lines disrupt the text by triggering a reevaluation of the preceding proposal in the text, jab lines trigger an opposition outside of the text, exclusively in the storage area. It becomes the difference between the humorous element creating script opposition upon a sentential or lexical script preceding it textually (punch lines), and an inferential script that is activated outside of the text (jab lines).
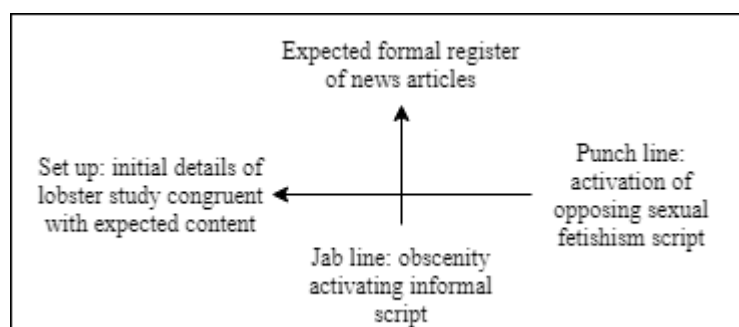
Model 1: The script opposition activation of jab- and punch lines

Consider Attardo's (1997) claim that a joke has three phases. The first phase chronologically processed is the setup phase. Second: an incongruity phase, that which introduces a Script Opposition, presupposes a presence of an interpreted setup phase. A setup phase can be introduced either textually such as in verbal jokes, or it "may present itself as purely contextual" (p. 412). A punch line will introduce an incongruity phase at a textually initiated setup phase, while a jab line introduces an incongruity phase to a contextually interpreted setup.

4.1.7 The Grumblethor-article

The lobster-article is a somewhat special case in that all the lines making up the text can be considered jokes. Other *Onion* articles analyzed have a more dynamic organization of lines. For a point of comparison, consider this satirical article. For the sake of brevity, I will not present a full script inferential analysis of the lexical senses and so on. This article, from this point on referred to as the Grumblethor-article, includes both punch lines and jab lines realizing the same script opposition. It also ends on a punch line based on my definition above.

[1]**Grumblethor The Mischievous Pleased With Mayhem His Magical Antics Have Wrought Upon White House–FBI Relations**

[2]THE REALM OF MISDOING—[3]Cackling with glee while observing the turmoil brought about by his consternating ways, enchanted goblin Grumblethor the Mischievous—creator of the world's chaos and confusion—revealed Wednesday that he is pleased with the mayhem his magical antics have wrought upon White House–FBI relations. [4] "Look at the halfwits in Washington as they fall under my bewitching spell, sniping at each other like the hapless fools they are—Oh, it has all been so devilishly simple!" said the Lord of Mischief and Mayhem, peering into his smoke-filled Globe of Deceit with visible delight as resentful tweets appeared from Andrew McCabe, Donald Trump, John O. Brennan, and James Comey, among others. [5]"Soon, I will befuddle the dunces in the Supreme Court into posting Facebook statuses about their anger toward Congress, and so Grumblethor's diabolical plans will come to fruition! Fye-dee-dee, dum-dee-dee, another triumph for rascally me!" [6] At press time, Grumblethor was seen cantering in joy through his Cavern of Disorder after a minion brought word that millions of Americans believed that a "deep state" in the government pulled levers behind the scenes. (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21d)

First, the *joke* in the headline, line [3], and [4] must be said to be realized through punch lines. Something akin to an ad hoc constructed EVIL MAGICAL FANTASY GOBLIN script is initially activated, before activating the opposing WHITE HOUSE-FBI RELATIONS script. This might include complex scripts such as GOVERNMENT and POLITICS, but also refers to the inferential script activated by its time of publication which was at the same time of very bad relations between these branches of government. This is an interesting case since what is fantastical and absurd is part of the setup, and the grounded and realistic is part of the punch line. The boring, factual phrase *white house-FBI relations* must be said to function as a punch line due to the stark contrast it has to the text immediately preceding it. Additionally, in line 3 the elaborate description heightens the opposition when the short punch line comes in. It

disrupts the fantastical language of the first part of the sentence and activates a script opposition between *fantasy/real world.*

This pattern holds true in lines [1] [3] [4] and [6]. Line [5] must be considered a jab line since its incongruity points to a setup that has become part the mental storage area throughout the text, and it is not in end position relative to that. The setup of the joke has been established in the storage area by the previous jokes, freeing line [5] to be more free form. This line is arguably less about the central script opposition of the text, and more of establishing the target.[7]

Citing THE REALM OF MISDOING [2] as the location of the article must also be considered a jab line. This is an independent activation of the *fantasy/reality* script opposition by citing a, comically ridiculous, location for this story to take part in. It is a sort of register humor, as it is the position of the line that activates the opposition in this independent joke. The setup is contextually inferred by the form the text is in, namely that of a news article.

The final line of this article functions as a punch line to the text. This is due to it activating a different script opposition than the preceding lines in the article. The central strand of the article is about explaining the then current political chaos by way of ridiculous fantasy. The article presents a fictitious explanation for the governmental chaos which is the basic *joke* of the article. The final line concerns *deep state* conspiracy theory, which is a comparably ridiculous explanation some people present in earnestness. It creates an equation between the ridiculous fantasy posited by the text, and *deep state* conspiracy theories. The reason this line acts as a punch line is because it is in final position of the text, and it is functionally disruptive to the rest of the text. Rozin et al. (2006) shows how jokes that employ an AAB or AAAB form instead of an AB form, are both more common and regarded as more funny. According to them this is because one repetition is sufficient to create a pattern, which the punch line violates. This is a similar case, the previous lines establish a pattern and the final line breaks it, thus becoming a punch line.

The Grumblethor-article highlights some inherent problems with the two different approaches discussed. If we consider the final line a punch line, does it mean that the actual joke of the article is about *deep state* theory, not *White house-FBI relations*? Does it change the Target from the *government* to *deep state theorists?* I argue that the central joke in this article is the

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[7] Establishing the Target is modeled and discussed further in section 4.4

one concerning *white house-FBI relations* still. This is because of text type. The punch line defines the *joke* in joke texts, but it does not follow that a punch line would do the same in other types of texts.

Being a news parody, it seems that *The Onion* structures its humorous elements in the same way traditional news articles are structured. Breaking news stories are most often written in an *inverted pyramid style*.

> "A traditional news writing form in which the key points of a story are put in the opening paragraph and the news is stacked in the following paragraphs in order of descending importance" (Itule & Anderson, 1987, p. 703)

If we apply this concept onto humorous lines, then it follows that the most important humorous elements are introduced up front, and the least important at the end of the article. A complete inversion of how we think of jokes. This seems to be intuitively true, and shows how we cannot assume that humorous texts act like jokes even if they have what one might call a punch line.

4.2 Narrative Strategy

Although the Language KR is at the bottom of the hierarchy, the Narrative Strategy will be handled first. This is because discussion of one inevitably turns into a discussion of the other, and the Narrative Strategy has been subjected to the most change over the years. Since the inception of the theory from Raskin and Attardo (1991) to Attardo (2017) these two Knowledge Resources have had their roles are confused. The blurry line between the Language and the Narrative Strategy KR's was commented on at the GTVH's inception (Raskin & Attardo, 1991, p. 335-336). Over the years certain aspects thought to be belonging to one parameter has been transported to the other, such as the position of functional elements.

First I will present the evolution of these two Knowledge Resources, then what the analyses of *The Onion* have shown us. The confusion of the theory mainly comes from the initial grouping of jokes as text types and as humorous elements as the same thing. The Narrative Strategy parameter is handled first because it has been reduced to a single aspect of humorous texts while the Language KR has been expanded.

4.2.1 The GTVH and narrative

In spite of having made several theoretical claims about narratives, Attardo (2001) does not attempt to define narrative in any detail. When confronted by Oring (2016) with the lack of research in this area inspired by the GTVH, Raskin (2011) responds that it "is a problem for narritivists to explore"(p. 225). Attardo (2001) seems to operate with a common sense definition of narrative. "There are lots of visual humor (e.g., cartoons) which are not obviously narrative (in the sense that it does not "tell a story," which is to say that it cannot be paraphrased as one)" (p. 23). I claim that since Onion-articles cannot be paraphrased into a story either, they should not be considered narratives either. In addition, the tools of extension that Attardo (2001) proposes are first and foremost concerned with the linear text organization and space in between jokes of longer narrative texts, which is not an issue when it comes to Onion-articles.

To properly define narrative is not a simple task, and Raskin (2011) is right to point out that even narrativists struggle with this question. Ryan (2007) proposes that one should refrain from "regarding narrativity as a strictly binary feature" (p. 28-29). Even though it might seem pointless to discuss, this becomes important because Attardo (2001) presents strong claims such as "there are no significant differences between narrative texts, from the point of view of humor" and "To my mind, the biggest problem is that there seems to be a lack of examples of non-narrative texts that do not fall under the SSTH's purview already" (p. 207). These strong statements are made with an intuitive understanding of narrative in mind.

What to label the Narrative Strategy of jokes becomes an interesting issue in longer texts. While Attardo (2001) is adamant that NS is not another term for *genre*, but "What the NS KR is trying to capture is rather that any narrative joke will have to be cast in a given type of narrative" (23). Attardo (2001) would need to adjust the focus of the NS away from the term *genre* in his attempt to extend the theory to longer texts. It simply is not applicable with jokes that figure inside other texts. The term *genre* itself is typically reserved for varieties of complete texts (Biber & Conrad, 2009, p. 16).

Attardo (2017) admits that the term "Narrative Strategy" is poor because it might imply that the theory can and should tackle narratological concerns. The KR now denotes the organization of humorous elements, something previously perceived as belonging to the Language KR. (Raskin and Attardo, 1991; Attardo, 2001) The "genre" aspect of the NS has

been revitalized for when utilizing the framework on complete texts. Joke genres are now presentations of the humorous organization of the text. This way the intuitive role the Narrative Strategy previously had have been handed over to literary scholars, as it should have been in the first place.

However, this suggests that the Narrative Strategy is only really applicable and useful with full single-joke texts, where the "genre" of the text (for want of a better term) informs the realization of the joke. See Rozin et al. (2006) who uses this aspect to identify recurring patterns and compare them in terms of funniness. In this sense, Narrative Strategy is a perfectly useful knowledge resource to identify when dealing with humor in simple humorous texts such as jokes, but not to individual *jokes* as they occur in other text types. Seeing that the *Onion* articles are simple humorous texts, one would expect that the Narrative Strategy is a useful parameter the analysis of them.

4.2.2 Narrative Strategy and *the Onion*

This reformulation presented in Attardo (2017) is welcome, but should not be amended to the theory of longer texts. In the lobster-article, I show how the text is essentially a single joke rephrased throughout the text. All six lines can be seen as as separate jokes within a GTVH-framework, but then the narrative strategy becomes difficult to pin down. It would not be right to say that line [6][8], for example, employs the "narrative strategy" of reported speech or statement like the theory previously implied, as it does nothing for accounting for the realization of humor in the text. It is a joke due to the element triggering a script opposition to the preceding proposal. Attardo (2017) seems to suggest that the NS of these lines should be "joke" if the last humorous element is a punch line.

> However, a very important aspect of jokes, and namely the position of the punch line, belongs properly to this knowledge resource, because, for example, Oring (1989) has claimed that the absence of a punch line in final position in the text is the defining difference between jokes and anecdotes. (Attardo 2017. 130)

Functionally, each line in the lobster-article may be regarded as a joke. The Narrative Strategy of the text is a series of jokes in a single strand, not ending in a punch line. If one conducts a

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[8] "Williams added that the most aberrant of such sea creatures are not only conscious of their ultimate fate of being cracked open, dunked in butter, and devoured piece-by-piece by humans, but actually seem to desire that end as some sort of revolting fetish"

line by line GTVH KR analysis, the Narrative Strategy should include whether or not the incongruity is presented through a jab line or a punch line. On the individual line level, that is the only aspect that is related to the Narrative Strategy KR as it is now presented.

This reorientation of the Narrative Strategy brings about certain questions regarding certain humorous texts. Not all humorous texts include humorous elements that can be identified and classified as lines. Some aspects that previously were obvious to attribute to this KR must now be excluded, most notably the "register humor" notion. This will be discussed further in the next section.

The Narrative Strategy only functions as a knowledge resource in jokes or joke-like texts, as it now only denotes the organization of humorous lines within a humorous text. The results of which is something akin to a humorous text genres in terms of line positions. This can easily be applied to Attardo's (2001) model by means of the text vector, and it is unclear whether texts not including clear humorous lines have a narrative strategy. The KR has gone from being joke text type centered, to being too general, to being only clearly applicable to jokes again.

4.3 Language

The Language knowledge resource of humor is wide and encompasses many elements. This is the KR which is furthest removed from the SO due to the choices of word and structure being largely irrelevant for a joke, especially since the organization of humorous elements have been transferred to the Narrative Strategy KR. Although the redefinition of the Narrative Strategy KR necessitates the Language KR to handle register humor concerns, register humor brings about certain interesting questions in regard to the notion of local oppositeness and line position.

While the obscenities in the lobster-article are lexical markers of register that really stand out, there could be other subtle markers that refer to another, weaker script opposition. When accepting the "special sense" definition in Raskin (1985), it follows that even weaker deviations in register from the expected must be seen as oppositions in this special sense. In other words, other deviations from the news article register would necessarily constitute script opposition and therefore *jokes*. As a matter of fact, any variation could be abstracted into a type of news article-text/non-news article-text Script Opposition on this basis.

Parody of a genre or register necessitates certain markers that make the connection to the parodied text type clear. It follows that deviating markers of registers probably denote certain humorous elements. Deviations from the target register or genre that does not contribute to the humorous seems doubtful since it would not contribute to either the humorous goals of the text nor the wanted associations to the target. This aspect of register seems to be lacking in Attardo's (1994; 2001) exploration of the notion, probably because of the lack of research into parody preceding this. It seems especially lacking because the stated goals for the SSTH and the GTVH is to provide formal, non-intuitive methods of identifying and explaining humor and this would be matter where intuition is not sufficient (Attardo, 2001, p. 33). Through the comparative method of counting situational and linguistic markers present in the parody text and the parodied text-type, one could discover humorous elements that occur verbally, but occur neither as jab nor punch lines.

Consider the lobster-article again. It *seems* to have a relatively high number of adjectives, for example. The GTVH necessitates a formal approach to this claim. The best recourse for making a claim like that would be a comparative discourse analysis of Onion-articles and other real news articles. Doing this research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but let us for argument sake say that this article or *Onion*-articles in general do have more adjectives than normal news reporting. What would this mean for the descriptions of humorous elements as equal to lines? In terms of Attardo's terminology, each instance of an adjective would be a jab line, but this would be a faulty analysis. The sum of these register variations would constitute a single *joke* sententially and inferentially activated. There is no model in the theory for this, but this would have to be the case if we follow the widened scope of scripts and local antonymity to the end. As a matter of fact, it is questionable that humor as a result of parodist register variation is possible to quantify at all.

This may seem like a niche argument only relevant to Onion-articles and similar parodies, but the concept of register itself necessitates comparison between two registers (Biber & Conrad, 2006). Whenever there is language incongruous to the expected register, it must be because of certain unbefitting markers. Register humor as it is presented by Attardo (1994; 2001) only note cases where the register humor can be tracked to single incongruous lexemes (see: the lobster article), but no approach is modeled for more subtle variation between expected and unexpected register. Only intuitively incongruous elements like obscenities can truly count as *jab lines* in this sense since their activated script opposition can be identified into a position.

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The theory's application to parody humor needs more radical tools than that in order to differentiate itself from intuition-based readings.

Widening the scope of scripts to include sentential and inferential scripts poses new questions. Can script opposition in register humor be activated by sentential scripts? Do they then act as jab lines? Some articles employ only register humor without the use of punch or jab lines, does this all fall under the purview of the Language KR?

4.3.1 The Family article

This is the "family-article". It has its basic *joke* realized through register humor without obvious jab lines:

> Family Has Way Too Many Daughters For Them Not To Have Been Trying For Son
>
> JUNEAU, AK—Saying it was clear the parents never intended to have such a large brood, sources confirmed Wednesday that the Greene family has way too many daughters for them not to have been trying for a son. "Obviously, after Jess and Katie, they started to get desperate for a boy, otherwise they wouldn't have had Ashley," said family friend Lisa Contreras, who noted that the Greenes showed no signs of stopping even though they were both nearing 40 and had daughters in daycare, elementary school, and middle school. "I thought for sure they'd be done once Sophia was born, but then a year and a half later, along came Charlie. For everyone's sake, I hope the fifth time's the charm." Sources later confirmed that the Greenes had posted a photo of pink balloons on Facebook to announce their latest pregnancy. (T*he Onion*, 2018, April 4)

This article employs exclusively register and genre humor. It is fictitious neighborhood gossip presented in a news-article form. The representation in GTVH terms looks like this:

> SO: gossip/news reporting, private/public, normal/abnormal
> LM: none
> SI: gossip
> TA: none
> NS: none
> LA: gossip register and topic in news parody format

The central script opposition is between what is expected to be exclusive to a private setting, but is presented in a public space through a news article. It is not obvious that one could actually analyze the humor of this article in terms of lines. Attardo (2001) suggest that register humor is realized through jab lines, but limiting what is a jab line and not within this article is

not possible. There is no clear identifiable point where the Script Opposition is activated. It seems that a sentential script is activated by the article against the inferential script of the news article register. The only functional KRs left to denote the realization of this *joke* is Language and Script Opposition.

By limiting the Narrative Strategy, the Language parameter is tasked with attributing large aspects of certain humor texts. Giving an analysis of parodical articles through the GTVH seems to yield unwieldy data. Information about the humor of the article is split between the Script Opposition and Language Knowledge Resources, where the Language can only colloquially account for it. This severely limits the GTVH model can be used with quantitative data of *Onion* articles, for example.

4.4 Target

4.4.1 Targets in jokes

Attardo (2017) suggests that the Target is "the least sophisticated one (KR) and the easiest to understand" (p. 131). To reiterate, Targets are "butts" of jokes. In other terms: subjects that are targeted for aggression by the *joke*. Initially, this seems like a great proposition in the perspective of texts bordering on the line between parody and satire, since the difference generally is defined by the appearance of a Target. "The distinction between parody and satire is not an easy one to draw, but it is commonly assumed that satire has an aggressive or critical element that is not necessarily present in parody." (Simpson & Bousfield, 2017, p. 162) Some jokes have Targets while others clearly do not. Likewise, some *Onion* articles have a Target, others lack them, but there are also some borderline cases. Despite that, the most interesting finding is that Targets function entirely different in jokes compared to *Onion* articles, which creates problems when applying a joke model to them.

I will attempt to define the scope of the Target precisely. Targets are not merely the group belonging to a stereotype that is the topic of a joke (cf. Oring 2016) "what of jokes that employ a stereotype that might easily be regarded as positive- for example Frenchmen as sophisticated lovers. Would Frenchmen be targets?" (p. 20). Frenchmen in this example would not be a case of a Target, because of the Target's theoretical roots in hostility theories. The knowledge resource reflects the social aspect of the joke. It is the aggression, the negative

association, which defines the Target. "Targets are groups of people who are the butt of jokes upon whom a conventional comic script pins some undesirable quality" (Davies, 2011a, p. 6). All jokes employ some sort of stereotype or established comic ideas[9] to function, but only some can be said to reflect some negative script that is accepted by the common ground.

Oring's (2016) most convincing criticisms regarding the GTVH is the Target's place in the knowledge resource hierarchy. He correctly identifies that "it is not the SO that determines the TA, but the TA that determines the SO" (p. 25) (cf. Attardo 2001). Whichever determines which is secondary, the most interesting observation is that the Target and Script Opposition seem interdependent. Because of this, a thorough investigation of targets and their relation to the Script Opposition may unearth some formal rules that will put this parameter more in line with the rest of the theory.

Jokes with targets seem to have their main script opposition activated by a script activated by the target itself, or some script relating to the target must be part of the central script opposition. This is crucial to develop into a theory of longer texts, because it would provide a needed method of identifying targets. Targets do behave differently in longer texts than in jokes.

4.4.2 Targets in longer texts

The GTVH notion of Target is a joke-centric definition. Targets function differently in jokes from longer humorous texts. For this theoretical point, consider the Polish jokes. This is related to Oring's point about Targets and how the Target itself decides the Script Opposition, not the other way around (Oring, 2016, p. 25). In longer texts, jokes can establish an ad hoc comic script to a target which is not related to a stereotype or comic script.

Take the joke frame "Why did the _____ carry a car door in the desert? So he could roll down the window if the weather was too hot". The basic script opposition is the same as the LBJ discussed above: *stupidity/intelligence*. This joke's punch line is more difficult to separate from the Script Opposition than Oring's variation (2016)[10]. One could put any group in the blank slot, but the joke arguably only works with targets that activate the *stupidity* script. So

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[9] For example, Davies (2013) remarks that "there are the Canadian jokes about dirty Newfoundlanders which have no corresponding stereotype" (9).

[10] Oring argues that there is nothing inherently stupid in the punch line of the LBJ jokes above. In "How many Teamsters does it take to screw in a lightbulb? 5. One to hold the lightbulb and four to turn the table he is standing on" we would not consider it a stupid act, but an act of creating more work hours artificially.

Nobel Prize winner would simply not function, but *Irishman* would due to the stereotype of the Irish being stupid in American jokelore. Whether certain Targets will function or not function depending on the discourse the joke appears in (socialist, captitalist, man etc.). This is arguably because the necessary *stupidity* script is never properly activated; therefore the punch line does not serve as a sufficient explanation of the premise. There is no discernible reason for why the *Nobel Prize Winner* would do that, therefore the joke would not function.

If a joke is not read by itself, but as a part of a longer text, the number of possible targets increases. The text can introduce scripts relating to groups that are ad hoc for the *joke*. Say I preceded this joke by attributing the stupidity script with Nobel Prize winners directly. "Nobel Prize winners are so stupid. Do you know why the Nobel Prize winner carried a car door in the desert? So he could roll down the window if the weather got too hot." The joke may not be funny still if you do not accept the premise, but the joke is made functional by presenting the normally underlying premise directly. Even if the listener does not agree with the premise, the Target and the negative characteristics are presented as connected. This aspect is introduced into the theory by Attardo's (2001) introduction of the storage area and text world representation, but what it implies for the Target is not discussed. In the context of satirical articles, this can be used to establish a criticism within the text without it necissarily corresponding to a commonly held belief in the common ground. The Target does not only decide the Script Opposition in some cases, the Target's place in the knowledge resource hierarchy must be reevaluated due to its ability to influence all aspects of the joke.

4.4.3 The John Kelly article

This is a satirical article written in reaction to president the White House's handling of the situation after the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting on February 14th, 2018.

> [1]John Kelly Struggles To Maintain Believable Trump Impression During Phone Calls With Parkland Survivors
>
> [2]WASHINGTON—Finding it difficult to refrain from basic human compassion and instead make everything about himself in the face of horrible tragedy, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly struggled Friday to maintain a believable Trump impression during phone calls with the teenage survivors of the mass shooting in Parkland, FL, administration sources confirmed. [3]"This was a bad dude, a really bad dude, and, uh, we're going to win, and it's going to be unbelievable," said the retired four-star Marine Corps general [4]whose adherence to Trump's unrefined speech patterns, 160-word vocabulary, and erratic vocal cadence was undercut by his inability to fully capture the commander in

chief's meandering, self-centered arrogance. [5]"My heart truly breaks for you and all who have suffered—uh, no, I mean—what a huge thrill it must be for you to get to talk to me." [6]The Parkland survivors later indicated that Kelly's refusal to voice any commitment for gun control measures had successfully convinced them they were indeed speaking to the president. (*The Onion,* 2018, February 23b)

The primary script opposition in this article is *presidential/un-presidential, human/inhuman*. That John Kelley is attempting a Trump impression, and struggling with it, may be humorous in an absurd sense, but the explanation for why is only inferable further into the article. The complex script TRUMP may activate an uncountable number of nodes. The specific nodes that activate the opposition are inferred from the added information in the article. The second line, "refrain from basic human compassion and instead make everything about himself in the face of horrible tragedy" activates the nodes of the TRUMP script that creates the opposition. Those characteristics are added to the TRUMP complex script for the realization of the Target in the text.

The text makes jokes on several points in a PRESIDENTAL complex script. Line [2] and [3] oppose *compassion*/*no compassion* which can be abstracted into *presidential*/*un-presidential*. Line [4] and [5] deal with poor speech opposed to being well spoken, which would also part of a general *presidential*/*un-presidential* script opposition.

The negative associations, the criticisms, are manually added ad hoc to the TRUMP script in order to present the satirical element. The relationship between the Target and the Script Opposition discussed earlier seems to hold true. The nodes that is part of the TRUMP script is activating the primary Script Opposition. Those scripts pertaining to TRUMP are part of the *abnormal* abstract script. It is that which opposes the common ground expectations of what is or is not presidential. In the lightbulb-joke, the Poles' supposed stupidity is opposed to a presupposed more efficient way to screw a light bulb. Compare this to the lobster-article in which the scripts included in LOBSTER are part of the expected normal circumstances. The scripts relating to fetishism and sex oppose the LOBSTER script, but since there is no character in the article that contains these scripts, there is no Target in the joke.

The Grumblethor-article also contains a Target, but through a different mechanism. The *abnormal* script, the *bad* general script, is that which constitutes the set-up of the first line (the fantastical register with magical antics, mayhem etc.). By citing something otherworldly, evil and absurd as the cause of the current situation in the American political sphere equates *White*

house-FBI relations with the previously established scripts. The FBI and the White House are acting as if their strings were being pulled by some evil munchkin.

4.4.4 The issue with the ideal reader and the Target

The John Kelly-article has a clear Target. Some articles clearly do not have a Target such as the family article, but there are some which are difficult to parse:

> Adorable 23-Year-Old Yelling About Economic Injustice Must Have Just Read Howard Zinn For First Time
>
> WHITTIER, CA—Saying his regurgitated arguments about elites exploiting working-class Americans were simply precious, sources confirmed Wednesday that an adorable 23-year-old on a tirade about economic oppression must have just read Howard Zinn's A People's History Of The United States for the first time. "Aw, listen to him going on and on about robber barons and American imperialism—isn't he the cutest?" observer Amber Irving said of Kyle Green, the young man who was reportedly all in a huff about the Spanish-American War, putting a knowing smile on the face of everyone within earshot. "Oh my goodness! Now he's throwing a little fit about railroad strikes, of all things. He's really quoting chapter and verse, isn't he? And look how earnest the little guy is!" At press time, sources reported a visibly worked-up Green had taken to social media to reappraise the legacy of Christopher Columbus. (*The Onion,* 2018, March 23a)

There seems to be two possible targets in this article. One could also make the case that there is no target in the article at all. This case is not possible for the theory to handle elegantly, and indicates that the Target KR should not be considered when applying the GTVH to humorous texts. The ideological stance you hold will not only decide the appearance or not of a target, but also decide the central script opposition of the text itself, making the entire analysis one of audience. Either the target is young ideologues being adamant believers after their first reading of a political book, or the target is an adult establishment that does not take young people's plight seriously whose condescending viewpoint is being ironically represented by the text.

The joke of this article is entirely register based. It is using a register thought to be exclusive to describing the act of young children to describe a young adult. The central opposition is created through simply inserting evaluative adjectives. The adjectives used to describe the youth are in contrast to the serious political topic. It is opposed on *adult/child* on the basic level, *serious/non-serious* and *normal/abnormal* on the more abstract level.

There are a few other evaluative words that signal the reading that *young ideologues* are the target, such as "regurgitated" and "tirade", which invites this interpretation due to the reasons introduced above. This does not weaken the alternate interpretation however, since this would still be congruent with the text being another joke analyzed from a different discursive stance. The text could be read as tragically and ironically presenting the condescending attitude of an imagined establishment. This text has two *jokes* similar in terms of script opposition, but differing on how that opposition is activated, the Logical Mechanism, Target, Narrative Strategy and Language.

This brings into question if the notion of Target really is within the script semantic purview. I have shown how the negative characteristics that the text criticizes can be both inferred from the context, sententially and lexically. They can be represented both directly and inferred as a script lexically activated by the target. In the case above, the target of the joke depends entirely on the ideological position of the audience. The status of the Target is not inherent in the text.

The Target's status as a social aspect of joking makes it fall outside of the purview of a linguistic theory of competence. Without accounting for audience, this article can be analyzed as not having a target, but simply a mapping joke like the lobster-article. Targets behave predictably in jokes since they are much more self-contained, but context still matters when it comes to their performance. An Irish joke does have an inherent Target, but if it is told by an Irish, the Target in that performance becomes unclear. One can separate performance and audience from jokes, but not *Onion* articles.

> "Needless to say, we do not have access to the ideal readers, so the only possible choice is to idealize from our own idiolectal readings. What matters, however, is that *in principle* we may provide a formal, non-intuitive analysis of the texts and of their humorous components" (Attardo, 2001, p. 34).

We cannot truly justify an identification of Targets through such an analysis. There are two opposed Targets present in this text. Deciding that one of them is right is simply not possible in longer texts. It would call into question the appearance in several other texts if we accept this reading (such as the lobster-article). The perceived Target precedes the script activation due to the introduction of contextually inferred scripts to the theory (Attardo, 1996). The Target falls outside of the purview of the GTVH when applied to longer humorous texts because they rely too heavily on the reaction of the reader.

4.5 Situation

Attardo (2017) says of the Situation KR:

> "The Situation is essentially the overall macroscript that describes the background in which the events of the text of the joke take place. It should be clarified that "Situation" has nothing to do with the context of the telling of the joke." (131)

This is the simplest KR to grasp and identify. This latest redefinition into an overall macroscript instead of a list of "props and characters of a joke" is a welcome one. Under the previous definition aspects of hyperdetermined register humor such as in the lobster article would be lost in an analysis, and be wholly unrelated to the joke. Breaking the Situation down to a single background macroscript is an elegant solution. Some articles have Situations that are close to the topic, like the lobster article or the church article (*The Onion,* 2018, February 22), while others have Situations that simply function as contexts for the joke to be realized.

In some articles, abstracting down to a single Situation is difficult due to some jokes being based on an overlap between two macroscripts. What is the backgrounded Situation of this article?

> **God Recalls 1983 Speedboat Accident That Sent Him To Heaven**
>
> THE HEAVENS—Acknowledging that He had been behaving recklessly that night, God, Our Holy Father, recalled Monday the speedboat accident in 1983 that originally sent Him to heaven. "The last thing I remember was tearing across Lake Winnepesaukah in a Jr. Executive 21 JRV with my buddy Dave and suddenly slamming right into an outcropping of rocks," said the Almighty, admitting that He was to blame for not wearing a life jacket and having "a few too many wine coolers." "Well, next thing I know, I'm in eternal paradise, and I've been here ever since. It's pretty cool, and there's enough stuff going on that I hardly ever think about getting back on a speedboat." God went on to say that adjusting to heaven had been relatively easy since his good friend Dave had arrived mere seconds after He did. (*The Onion,* 2018, January 22)

There are two macroscripts at work in this article. There is a Situation around the recollection and the macroscript of the SPEEDBOAT ACCIDENT. Which is the background macroscript is not intuitively clear. The main Script Opposition in this article is between the divinity of the Judeo-Christian god and that human Situation. In these cases it seems that whichever macroscript is introduced first acts as the background macroscript. The speedboat accident-macroscript can be substituted with any number of situations corresponding to a *human* script. The recollection script cannot be changed without entirely altering the Script Opposition.

Questions one might raise against the Situation KR would be regarding its value in a theory of humor. All texts seem to involve situations, not just jokes, so why are they worth including in the GTVH (Ritchie 2004; Oring 2016). It seems limited in terms of generating questions and hypotheses that center around the humor of a text. It seems like a formally necessary parameter to explain the conceptual realization of *jokes.* In terms of serving as a parameter of the *joke*, this definition of Situation is functional, but there is not much to discuss.

4.6 Logical Mechanisms

"The Logical Mechanism is the part of the GTVH that accounts for the resolution of the incongruity (script opposition and overlap)" (Attardo, 2017, p. 150).The place of Logical Mechanisms in the GTVH has been the main point of contention in the theory. The definitive work on Logical Mechanisms is Attardo et al. (2002) in which the authors present a list of all currently known Logical Mechanisms (Figure 3). This is not an exhaustive list, nor does it claim to be, but is instructive on how we are meant to regard Logical Mechanisms. I will not allocate a lot of space to this KR, this is because our research did not produce much interesting insight into the functionality of this KR as a part of the model. This is not necessarily due to *Onion*-articles being deficient in this area, but the LM parameter being ill-defined. The main issue with the Logical Mechanism KR is that it needs a more narrow focus to function as intended.

role-reversals	role exchanges	potency mappings
vacuous reversal	juxtaposition	Chiasmus
garden-path	figure-ground reversal	faulty reasoning
almost situations	analogy	self-undermining
inferring consequences	reas. from false prem.	missing link
coincidence	parallelism	implicit parall.
proportion	ignoring the obvious	false analogy
exaggeration	field restriction	Cratylism
meta-humor	vicious circle	referential ambiguity

Table 3: All currently known LMs presented in Attardo et al. (2002, p. 18)

All of the five other Knowledge Resources are related to or identifiable through the central script opposition. Whenever the other Knowledge Resources are being discussed, the Script Opposition of the *joke* is central to it. Situation provides the scene on or against which the Script Opposition can occur, the Target includes scripts present in the Script Opposition, the

Narrative Strategy denotes the number and organization of Script Oppositions, and Language finally deals with how the central script opposition is presented in verbal language. In addition, these Knowledge Resources have a direct relationship to how they can be identified through lexical, sentential and inferential scripts. Logical Mechanisms are not only optional, they can be both part of the Script Opposition of a joke or not related to it at all. Logical Mechanisms are if anything only Script Opposition adjacent, making painstakingly identifying them and classifying them a process which conceivably only can result in shrugs.

Take the Logical Mechanism of the light bulb-joke used to model the theory (Raskin & Attardo, 1991). The Logical Mechanism is supposedly *figure-ground reversal* because what is usually stationary is in motion and vice versa. This acts as resolution to the incongruity posited by the joke because the method, though unintuitive, would theoretically be sufficient to screw the light bulb. As Raskin (2011) points out: "The LM deals with what is static and what rotates. It passes no judgment on the stupidity SO" (p. 227). If the Logical Mechanism is optional and inconsequential to the Script Opposition, then why should one bother including it in an analysis of humor? In this case, the reasoning that has to be involved to parse the joke is entirely separate from the central *joke*. If there is such a thing as 'reasoning' employed in parsing the joke, this analysis of the LBJ is missing the point entirely. See Oring's (2016) discussion of the Target again. The real reasoning employed as it relates to the *joke* is: "they chose to change the light bulb in that inefficient way because x". You could create an infinite list of different ways to changing a light bulb inefficiently. The incongruity of the joke is created by the inefficiency of the method. It is resolved when the reader examines why they would use such an inefficient method. In terms of humor research, it is only there to represent the *stupidity* of the Target. That it is a *"figure-ground reversal"* is absolutely inconsequential for the reasoning of the *joke*. The reasoning employed by the reader is not "would that work", that is entirely unrelated to the rest of the joke. It seems that Logical Mechanism is totally insular to the punch line and not related to the rest of the Knowledge Resources at all.

This is not to say that something like the Logical Mechanism KR could not be interesting to the theory, but they are too broad and general. The Logical Mechanism parameter should be sharpened to deal with reasoning in jokes in a similar vein to how the Narrative Strategy and the Situation have been redefined. It should be restated not only for the theory of longer texts, but the humor theory as a whole. This is because some Logical Mechanims are interesting

from a humor perspective because they are tight knit with the Script Opposition of the joke, such as mapping, for example. Aspects of a human script are "mapped" onto the lobster-script. If I were to analyze the reasoning for why the joke makes sense it would go something like this. "Contrary to what I intuitively expected, the professor is saying that the lobsters are deriving sexual pleasure from the pain they suffer. This is generally not the case for animals, but it is not unprecedented since there are humans who do this. Lobsters must have this in common with those humans in this text world". Human characteristics are mapped onto lobsters which can be shown by asking why the incongruous is presented, and it ties directly into the Script Opposition. This Logical Mechanism is not only intuitive, but it can be identified through script inferential analysis.

Some logical mechanisms can be difficult to identify. Take this article: *"'I'm Going To Hell For Laughing At This Meme,' Says Man Going To Hell For Helping Little Sister Get Abortion"* (*The Onion,* 2018, February 19). There is clearly some sort of faulty reasoning done by the character of this text. Is he "ignoring the obvious" since within the fire-and-brimstone discourse presented as the text world, he would be more likely to go to hell for the abortion? That would be missing the point of the joke entirely. The logical reasoning of the joke would be something like: "Within a strictly fundamentalist Christian discourse, the expression "I'm going to hell for laughin at x" is non-sensical. The light-heartedness of that joke implies that the speaker does not believe that hell actually exists. Hell does exist within this text world and if you have committed a more serious sin beforehand then your damnation has already been decided." The text world presented by the text is incongruous with the worldview initially presented by the text. Again, this answers a *why*-question to the incongruity. That is the central mechanism of the joke. The man's apparent faulty reasoning is not relevant to that. Curiously, this article seems closer to a *figure-ground reversal* than the light bulb joke above[11] since that ironic statement presupposes the non-existence of hell, but is proven right when the opposite worldview is proposed. This would be a much more accurate description of the logical mechanism of the joke since it is congruent with the abstract *actual/non-actual* script opposition within it.

Logical Mechanisms that are central to how a script opposition is realized should be identified, counted and systematized. Categories of reasoning can yield useful insight into

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[11] "When we speak of figure/ground reversal we mean literally what cognitive scientists mean by figure/ground reversal" (Attardo and Hempelmann, 2011, p. 126)

different joke genres and techniques, but it requires the theory to refocus this KR on script oppositions. The research into Logical Mechanisms has, as of now, been centered on cognitive proof of their existence and effects. This research does not directly illuminate questions concerning humor.

> "The problem the authors' have is that either the distinctions they are making correspond to something important being said by cognitive psychologists, in which case why don't I cut out the linguistics middleman altogether and go listen to the psychologists, or the differences in Logical Mechanisms do not correspond to any differences in underlying cognitive mechanisms and they are a trivial plaything of language classifiers. (Davies, 2011b, p. 160)

Either the LMs should be reduced to a few general classes that actually answers some reasoning performed in *jokes*, or they should be discarded from the theory and be contained within the field of cognitive psychology. Not every instance of faulty or playful logic needs to be commented on by a humor theory if they do not relate to the resolution of incongruity. Being a theory of competence, Logical Mechanisms should be limited to those which I can refer to in script semantic terms. If not, as with the Target, then the theory is veering towards intuition-based literary analysis masquerading as a formal account of humor.

4.7 Script Opposition

Of all the proposed Knowledge Resources, Script Opposition stands strongest in terms of being a precise model to represent *jokes* with. It seems significant that the one aspect of the theory lifted directly from a theory of jokes, does not need further definition and formalization to be applicable to all texts. None of the twenty texts analyzed lacked a script opposition representing the basic joke concept of the article. In terms of the Script Opposition, this study has only produced superfluous supporting evidence. The SSTH is fully functional with representing the basic joke of *Onion* articles. As long as the notion of script is wide enough to include sentential and inferential scripts such as Attardo (1996) defines them, then all humorous instances seem to be explainable through an identifiable basic script opposition.

This is not to say that the effort to evolve the SSTH into the GTVH was an unnecessary development. It may be true that all *jokes* involve some sort of script opposition, but it does not follow that is sufficient for a *joke* to be realized and regarded as funny. As an example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (2011) may involve many basic script oppositions, some even central to the text as a whole (the inferential script opposition *Homeric odyssey/modern life,* for

example). This does not mean that it is a *joke*. One could identify several points were scripts are opposed, but not regard it as funny. There must something about the verbal manifestation of such script oppositions that makes them *jokes*. This is what the GTVH is attempting to handle. How the Script Opposition is communicated through the text.

This is the primary reason for why the GTVH should be limited to jokes. It is a well-founded theory in terms of indicating the parameters that jokes are constructed by. Other text-types should not be forced into its formal categories. A better approach might be to take the SSTH as the basis for a representation theory of different humorous text types. This has already been done convincingly by Simpson (2003), for example.

5 Conclusion

The GTVH can inspire both interesting and useful questions in humor research on other text types, with certain modifications. Even with some issues inherited from basing the theory on the joke text type, the core of the GTVH (the SSTH) is solid enough that those necessary modifications can be modeled. The SSTH is such a strong fundament to base humor research, because it is limited in what it claims to denote. Lexical and sentential script opposition can be used as to identify the basic concept of verbally conveyed *jokes*, but the necessary tools for expanding it to other texts should be extrapolated from the materials themselves.

The General Theory of Humor knowledge resources should not be applied blindly to other text types. The theory may function well as a model for joke representation, but since the Knowledge Resources and their hierarchy proposed in 1991 have needed constant revision and reconsideration to apply to different text types, maybe they should not be salvaged. Maybe it is best that we refrain from pushing this round peg into a square hole. Contrary to their presentation, it seems that the GTVH is a theory of the joke text-type while the SSTH is the more general theory of humor. The influence of logical reasoning in processing jokes, the way some texts have targets they attack, the organization of humor in texts, these are worthy questions to pursue in humor research, but it does not mean they should all be formalized into an all-encompassing linguistic theory of humor. These are questions that more effectively could be answered by practitioners of their field, without the baggage of a theory's complex system of KR hierarchies, interdependence and determination in addition to overly formal text processing.

The Knowledge Resources are parameters which are defined from how they function in jokes. They cannot, and should not, be considered to be the same parameters for all humorous texts. The most wonderful thing about jokes as a study subject is that they are complete. They barely necessitate contextual knowledge to make them function. This is the reason why Raskin's (1985) can stand to be so painfully formal. *The Onion* articles seem to evoke some basic *jokes*, and be joke-like in most respects, but even such a joke-adjacent text type needs thorough revision of the theory's parts.

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Appendix

Study Reveals Lobsters Feel Pain And Get Off On It Like The Kinky Little Perverts They Are (*The Onion,* 2018, January 18)

SO: human/lobster; normal/abnormal; good/bad
LM: mapping
SI: study of lobsters and pain
TA: none
NS: 6 jokes, no end punchline
LA: news parody, obscenity

John Kelly Struggles To Maintain Believable Trump Impression During Phone Calls With Parkland Survivors (*The Onion*, 2018, February 23b)

SO: presidential/non-presidental; good/bad; normal/abnormal
LM: none
SI: presidential call to show sympathy with victims
TA: President Donald Trump
NS: series of jokes, punch line final
LA: news parody

Adorable 23-Year-Old Yelling About Economic Injustice Must Have Just Read Howard Zinn For First Time (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21a)

SO: serious/non-serious, adult/adolescent, normal/abnormal
LM: Mapping
SI: political argument at home
TA: **see discussion in 4.4**
NS: none
LA: adorable child-register, news parody

Grumblethor The Mischievous Pleased With Mayhem His Magical Antics Have Wrought Upon White House–FBI Relations (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21d)

SO: fantasy/realism, normal/abnormal, chaos/order
LM: none
SI: Evil magical spellcasting
TA: White house & FBI
NS: jokes and jabs, punch line final
LA: fantastical, news parody

Study: Only 40% Of Mice Have Little Welcome Mat, Doorway Leading To Tiny Home Inside Wall (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21e)

SO: houseowner/mouse, cartoon/reality, normal/abnormal
LM: mapping
SI: study on mice habitats
TA: none
NS: none
LA: homeowner-register, news parody

Facebook Algorithm Mortified It Has To Deliver Up So Much Embarrassing News About Own Company (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21c)

SO: human/machine. Actual/non-actual, Possible/impossible
LM: mapping
SI: Internet algorithm
TA: Facebook
NS: series of jokes
LA: obscene register

Bride Has To Admit It'd Be Pretty Exciting If Someone Objected At Wedding (*The Onion*, 2018, March 21b)

SO: normal/abnormal, good/bad, film/reality
LM: none
SI: wedding
TA: none
NS: series of jokes, no end punch line
LA: news parody article

'My God, I've Discovered The Missing Link In The Russia Investigation,' Think 379,000 Reddit Users Simultaneously (*The Onion*, 2018, March 20)

SO: Unique/ordinary, Amateur/professional, possible/impossible
LM: absurd coincidence, faulty reasoning
SI: amateur investigation
Target: Internet investigators
NS: series of jab lines
LA: parody news article

Family Has Way Too Many Daughters For Them Not To Have Been Trying For Son (*The Onion*, 2018, April 4)

SO: gossip/news reporting, normal/abnormal
LM: none
SI: gossip
TA: none
NS: none
LA: gossip register in news parody format

Masturbating Mom Can't Get Bobby Flay Southwestern Eggs Demo To Stop Buffering (*The Onion*, 2018, April 11)

SO: sex/no sex, food/porn, normal/abnormal
LM: mapping
SI: masturbation
TA: none
NS: series of jab lines
LA: news parody

Badass Churchgoer Doesn't Even Have To Look At Hymnal (*The Onion*, 2018, February 22)

SO: pro-skater/church, young/old, normal/abnormal
LM: mapping
SI: church
TA: none
NS: series of jabs based on register humor
LA: extreme sports-register, parody news article

Teen On Brink Of Experiencing Incredible Journey Of Motherhood Instead Asks Boyfriend To Use Condom (*The Onion*, 2018, February 19c)

SO: good/bad, teen/motherhood normal/abnormal
LM: reversal
SI: Teen sex-situation
TA: none
NS: short series of jokes, ending in punch line
LA: news parody, familiar register

Area ladder never thought it would end up a bookcase (*The Onion*, 2018, February 19a)

SO: normal/abnormal; human/inanimate; alive/dead
LM: mapping
SI: furniture situation

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TA: none
NS: joke
LA: news parody

'I'm Going To Hell For Laughing At This Meme,' Says Man Going To Hell For Helping Little Sister Get Abortion (*The Onion*, 2018, February 19b)

SO: actual/non-actual; literal/expression; perceived sin/actual sin
LM: none
SI: internet browsing-situation
TA: none
NS: strand of punch lines.
LA: news register, fire and brimstone register.

Man Looking For Job That Plays To His Natural Talent For Half-Assing Things (*The Onion*, 2018, February 16)

SO: normal/abnormal; talent/not talent; completion/half-assing
LM: obvious error
SI: job hunt
TA: none
NS: none
LA: job application register humor

Man Who Has Clocked 137 Hours In RPG Can't Believe He Has To Waste Precious Time Watching Cutscenes (*The Onion*, 2018, February 26)

SO: actual/non-actual, much/little, perceived waste of time/actual waste of time
LM: obvious error
SI: video game-situation
TA: video game players
NS: series of jokes, no end punch line
LA: parody news article

New Evidence Suggests President George Washington Sent Woodcut Of Penis To Secretary (*The Onion*, 2018, February 23c)

SO: old/new, normal/abnormal, sex/no sex
LM: mapping
SI: sexual harassment-situation

TA: none
NS: series of jabs
LA: news parody

Author Of 'Introduction To Algebra' Recalls Textbook Being Rejected By 12 Publishers Before Getting Accepted (*The Onion*, 2018, February 23a)

SO: normal/abnormal, non-fiction/fiction
LM: mapping
SI: manuscript-rejection
TA: none
NS: series of jokes
LA: parody news article

'No Way To Prevent This,' Says Only Nation Where This Regularly Happens (*The Onion*, 2018, February 14)

SO: actual/non-actual, regularity/unpredictability
LM: obvious error
SI: post-shooting spree debate
TA: political establishment
NA: series of punch lines
LA: Satirical news representation

God Recalls 1983 Speedboat Accident That Sent Him To Heaven (*The Onion*, 2018, January 22)

SO: divine/ordinary, god/human, normal/abnormal
LM: mapping
SI: divine recollection-situation, speedboat accident-situation
TA: none
NS: none
LA: register humor