Humorous and Non-Humorous Stories – Are There Differences in Frame-Based Reception?

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1. Story Classifications

Contemporary humour research has attempted to answer a number of pertinent research questions, such as "What are necessary and sufficient conditions for a joke to be funny?" or "Is there a humorous story genre and how it can be defined?". In answer to the first question, the notion of scripts and their opposition was postulated (Raskin 1985), as well as a set of Knowledge Resources which were to explain to what extent similar jokes differ from one another (Attardo and Raskin 1991). The second question was more difficult to answer for a number of reasons, and yet an attempt was undertaken which resulted in the following classification:

1) narratives structurally similar to jokes (but longer),
2) meta-narrative plots,
3) plots with humorous fabulae (where no amount of summarizing will delete the humour),
4) plots with serious fabulae (Attardo 2001: 92-8).

The first category involves stories which end in a punch line and where "the fabula and the plot must differ in specific ways such that the surprising aspects of the "punch line" are not given away before the occurrence thereof" (Attardo 2001: 93-4), and thus are indeed similar to jokes. The second category boils down to the play with the nature of the story itself: the stories in this category are usually crazy comedies which break with realism or parodies, where the

narrator's intervention disrupts the narrative in order to speak about the narrative or about the characters. The third category includes plots in which "the central complication involves a humorous script opposition, but does not (necessarily) end in a punch line and does not (necessarily) breach the narrative illusion" (Attardo 2000: 98). Finally, the fourth category comprises most stories, where a relatively serious plot has some humorous diversions (or 'jab-lines' to use Attardo's term).

This is a very useful classification, although purely practical and non-discrete, as several criteria seem to be involved (place of humour in the text, type of plot, type of humour). It is also not exhaustive, as examples of mixed categories: stories which have humour both in the text and at the end (e.g. some O.Henry's stories), or stories which have a meta-narrative disruption and have a humorous fabula (cf. some of Woody Allen's stories), or other seemingly separate categories, e.g. parodies (e.g. stories by Peter De Vries), etc. may easily be found. It is problematic particularly to distinguish the stories with humour in the text from those that have it at the very end, since there might be stories that have humour at the end which is not a true punch line. The linear structure of the story is thus something which (in contrast with jokes) is definitely secondary in comparison with the humorous content (at least on the present reception-oriented approach).

What I would like to argue here, in agreement with Attardo, is that there are indeed specific humorous narratives; their distinguishing features, however, are, in my view the following:

• the number of humorous diversions/humorous lines regardless of their place in the narrative (at the end or earlier in the text) - the number is naturally relative to the length of the text,

• the nature of the plot (whether is summarizable as a serious fabula or not),

• the type of narrative (narrative, meta-narrative, dramatic text).

The concept of a **"humorous diversion"** is used in order to emphasize the fact that the element thus labelled diverts from the serious narrative or from the realistic plot (as opposed to **"humorous line"** which supports/develops the narrative): it is any element which is generally non-essential to the narrative and/or the plot, and often elaborates upon serious narrative development. The exception, however, is the story with a humorous fabula, where some "humorous diversions" may turn out not to be diversions at all, but elements essential to the comic narrative (there I call them simply "humorous lines").

The above three factors contribute to the classification of humorous stories, which is postulated to be one of the following eleven types:

1) narrative stories with essentially serious plot, and comparatively a/ few or b/ many humorous diversions;

2) dramatic stories with essentially serious plot, and comparatively a/ few or b/ many humorous diversions;

3) narrative stories with essentially humorous plot and comparatively a/ few or b/ many humorous lines;

4) dramatic stories with essentially humorous plot and comparatively a/ few or b/ many humorous lines;

5) meta-narrative stories with essentially serious narrative plot and a/ few or b/ many humorous diversions;

6) meta-narrative stories with essentially humorous narrative plot and many humorous lines.

I am not claiming that the categorization is complete: there might be other specific types of narratives (such as a diary), which would contribute to the expansion of the classification. One strong point of the classification is that it seems to be consistent and based on clear criteria, although the categories are still non-discrete: the number of humorous lines is relative, and the three types of narrative do not have to be principally distinct (there are examples of mixed categories).

One explanation is due here: I do not postulate the existence of meta-narrative stories with few humorous lines as meta-narrative stories with humorous plots by definition need to have numerous humorous lines; it is this which makes them humorous since the surface narrative needs to be trivial or border on the impossible in order for the story to be "meta-humorous." (cf. the story in section 5). Further research, however, could prove me wrong on this issue

2. Textual Approach versus Reception-Oriented Approach

With regard to Attardo's research proposals, I would like to emphasize that he focuses on the linear nature of the text (in the semiotic sense - any object is potentially a text, but only some objects are potentially humorous; Attardo 2000: 32) and locates his text analyses on linear vectors. He is interested in developing the theory of jokes and other humorous narratives as text-types (as different

from genres and discourse-types) and thus he concentrates on narrative segmentation, postulating macro- and micro-narratives (cf. Attardo and Chabanne 1992, Attardo 1996).

In contrast, my research, as outlined below and in my previous articles (e.g. Chlopicki 1997, 2000 and [in print]), focuses on reception of humour and postulates some cognitive constructs to explain why jokes and short stories are understood and interpreted the way they are. The key construct is the frame of character, as well as that of event, place and object. The frame of character is given particular prominence as all jokes and stories (esp. humorous stories) hinge on human characters and without them they can perhaps exist, but they certainly cannot be funny (Bergson was definitely right on this issue).

Furthermore, I argue that contrary to what script theory (Raskin 1985) and general theory of verbal humour (Attardo and Raskin 1991) hypothesize, the centrality of script opposition in humour analysis is a factor which is not as decisive or as determining the reception of humour as is claimed. This is due to the fact that in understanding joke punch lines our appreciation focuses on script oppositions only initially and soon afterwards it shifts to the relations between characters which constitute parts of character frames (see e.g. Chlopicki 2000). This is a crucial (though perhaps not very surprising) insight which brings me to the core of the present article.

Namely, I would like to discuss a very difficult but essential issue of the distinction between humorous and non-humorous stories in their reception. Again it would not be sufficient to mention the script oppositions being evoked in the minds of readers/listeners in humorous stories. More precisely, at the first stage (if one may postulate two stages, which are postulated by psycholinguistic research too, e.g. initial, very brief and superficial schema selection followed by more detailed schema deployment: Mandler 1984) script oppositions are recognised, while at the second they are attributed to characters. Now, the essential question arises how readers distinguish humorous stories of one of the types listed above from non-humorous stories, and what influence that recognition has on the shape of character frames and other frames which are postulated in essentially the same format in both cases, but some distinguishing features are predicted.

3. Character Frame

The general format of the character frame is postulated to contain the following slots, most of them having links to the character's traits and habits, which

are condensed in one Personality Trait summary slot (it is put in bold face to indicate its importance and relative permanence – its fillers are less likely to fade away quickly in readers' minds):

CHARACTER'S FRAME

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *good* ....*bad*

NAME .... -> SEX M/F

AGE ....

        BIRTH DATE ....

NATIONALITY ....

FAMILY STATUS ....

        CHILDREN ....

PROFESSION/OCCUPATION ....

SOCIAL/FINANCIAL STATUS ....

        POSSESSIONS ....

ASSOCIATED LOCATIONS (links to PLACE FRAMES) ....

APPEARANCE general ....

        features not controlled: HEIGHT ....

        features under control: BODY SHAPE .... -> WEIGHT

                HAIRSTYLE ....

                FACIAL EXPRESSION ....

                CLOTHES ....

CONCERNS (defaults) need to be fed, to quench thirst

            need to satisfy sexual urge

            need to feel safe, be healthy and live long

            need to be accepted (loved) by others, esp. family

            need to be happy with oneself, and be moral

            need to be important, wealthy and hold power

            need to know the truth about the world

            need to experience diversity, emotions, beauty

            OTHERS ....

RELATIONS TO OTHER CHARACTERS (links to other CHARACTER FRAMES)

FAMILY: FATHER ....

                MOTHER ....

                SIBLINGS ....

                SPOUSE ....

                CHILDREN ....

                OTHER ....

OTHER CHARACTERS/ASSOCIATES/COMPANIONS ....
NARRATOR ....
COGNITIVE FEATURES
BASIC FEATURES (attention. perception, motor control, memory etc.) ..
SPEECH (THINKING) CHARACTERISTICS ....
AWARENESS (of EVENTS, CHARACTERS' ATTITUDES, BELIEFS
- appropriate links)
INTENTIONS/GOALS/PLANS ....
OBSTACLES ....
BELIEFS/OPINIONS/ASSUMPTIONS ....
IDEOLOGY/WORLDVIEW
ATTITUDES/WISHES ....
EMOTIONS ....
ESTHETIC RESPONSES ....
VALUES/MORALS ....
PERSONALITY TRAITS ....
MOTIVATION/DRIVES ....
LIFESTYLE/BEHAVIOUR ....
PAST (links to SIGNIFICANT EVENT FRAMES) ....

What is important to point out is that most of the numerous slots in the frame are present there only potentially (including default values) when a character appears in a discourse; what must be filled immediately is solely the Sex slot (if it is not, the text becomes marked for its absence; cf section 4, however, where a genderless stock character is postulated) and usually the Name slot too; the Concerns slot is usually filled with at least some default fillers as well (unless indicated otherwise); indeed some concerns usually become salient in the course of the story and thus they are included in the frame, while others remain in the background unless evoked or contradicted. Reader's Assessment slot is often filled in very early too, as soon as contextual information allows it, the value being easily altered, whenever necessary, at a later stage; all the other fillers may - but do not have to - be supplied in the course of time and as the discourse develops. Thus the character frame is a highly flexible structure, which can - but does not have to - include all possible information about characters.

4. *Germans at Meat*

Let us examine two humorous story examples and one non-humorous story example to illustrate the way character frames operate and to see whether the

character frames of the former may be claimed to differ in some way from those of the latter. The first humorous story, Katherine Mansfield's *Germans at Meat* (1990), belongs to Attardo's category 4 and my category 1a, being an essentially serious story with relatively few humorous diversions, while the other humorous story, Steven Leacock's *Gertrude the Governess* (1983) could be best classified as Attardo's category 2 and 3 (it has an essentially humorous metanarrative fabula) and my categories 3b and 6 (it is both a narrative and a metanarrative). The non-humorous story, *The German Boy* by Ron Butlin (1987), will show the way character frames operate in non-humorous stories.

The Mansfield's story may be summarized as follows:

The English narrator talks to other guests of the pension in Germany over dinner table. She tries to be polite and make conversation, but they seem to be lacking in tact as they behave (they pick their teeth, clean their ears, drip soup on their clothes, openly wipe off sweat etc.) and talk about marriage, maternity, stomach disorders, vomiting, sweating and eating habits in such an 'emancipated' way that the narrator repeatedly tries to change the subject - without success. They eat a great deal and seem not to understand English irony. They openly criticise the narrator and the English for not eating enough, for warming their teapots, for being vegetarian, for not caring enough about food, for suffragetting, for their marital habits, for not having enough children, for not respecting family, for having a weak army, for fearing German invasion.

Here are some extracts from the story, followed by proposed frame analysis:

A. ... when I was living in a hotel in Leicester Square,' cried the Herr Rat.' It was a good hotel, but they could not make tea – now –'

'Ah, that's one thing I *can* do,' said I, laughing brightly. I can make a very good tea.

1) **The great secret is to warm the teapot.'**

'Warm the teapot,' interrupted the Herr Rat, pushing away his soup plate. 2)'**What do warm the teapot for? Ha! ha! that's very good! One does not eat the teapot, I suppose?**

He fixed his cold blue eyes upon me with an expression which suggested a thousand premeditated invasions.

'So that is 3) **the great secret of your English tea? All you do is to warm the teapot.'** (Mansfield 1990: 97).

B. 'Is it true,' asked the Widow, 4) **picking her teeth with a hairpin as she spoke**, 'that you are a vegetarian?'

'Why, yes; I have not eaten meat for three years.'

5) **'Im-possible! Have you any family?'**

'No.'

6) **'There now, you see, that's what you're coming to! Who ever heard of having children upon vegetables? It is not possible.'** (Mansfield 1990: 97)

C. Bread soup was placed upon the table. 'Ah,' said the Herr Rat, leaning upon the table as he peered into the tureen, 'that's what I need. 7) **My "magen" has not been in order for several days. Bread soup, and just the right consistency**. I am a good cook myself - he turned to me.

8) **'How interesting,'** I said, attempting to infuse just the right amount of enthusiasminto my voice.

'Oh yes - when one is not married it is necessary. 9) **As for me, I have had all I wan-tedfrom women without marriage.'** He tucked his napkin into his collar and 10) **blew upon his soup as he spoke.** 'Now at nine o'clock I make myself an English breakfast, but 11) **not much. Four slices of bread, two eggs, two slices of cold ham, one plate of soup, two cups of tea – that is nothing to you.'** ...

12) **I eat sauerkraut with great pleasure,' said the Traveller from North Germany, 'but now I have eaten so much of it that I cannot retain it. I am immediately forced to-'**

'A beautiful day,' I cried, turning to Frau Stiegelauer. 13/ **'Did you get up early?'**

'At five o'clock I walked for ten minutes in the wet grass. Again in bed. At half past five I fell asleep, and woke at seven, when I made an "overbody" washing! Again in bed. At eight o'clock I had a cold-water poultice, and at half-past eight I drank a cup of mint tea. At nine I drank some malt coffee, and began my "cure". Pass me the sauerkraut, please. You do not eat it?'

'No, thank you. I still find it a little strong.' ..

'[the Widow said]... you never have large families in England now; I suppose you aretoo busy with your suffragetting. 14) **Now I have had nine children, and they are all alive, thank God. Fine, healthy babies - though after the first one was born I had to-'**

'How *wonderful!'* I cried.

'Wonderful,' ... 15) **Not at all! A friend of mine had four at the same time. Her hus-band was so pleased he gave a supper-party and had them placed on the table**. (1990: 96, 97-8).

What is interesting about this story is that the character frames of the two Ger-man males (in fact there are more in the story) collapse into one stereotypical frame of a German male, and so do the frames of the two German females, which – being very similar - are further merged into a single frame. They are simply not developed well enough, and some of the characters even do not have indivi-dual names (they are referred to e.g. as the Traveller or the Widow): they are deliberately treated as stock characters, as the story is a typical satire. Some indi-vidualising features are present (such as Herr Rat's stomach disorder), but all the features (listed in the summary) contribute to the forming of a single German stereotype, esp. that this stereotype is clearly opposed to that of the English ste-reotype, embodied by the narrator. Here are then the collective frames of the Ge-rman guests and the individual frame of the narrator (based on the above texts).

Symbols used in the frames:

• slot labels are capitalized;

- the Personality Traits slot is put in bold face to emphasize its importance and the status that is relatively more permanent than other slots, which tend to fade away faster;

- numbers refer to humorous diversions/lines in the text (sometimes the expressions referred to are restated in the frames both for the sake of clarity and to emphasize their importance);

- italicized fillers are inferences. Notably, the fillers are marked as inferences only when they depart significantly from the original wording: a slight rewording for the sake of clarity is not treated as an inference. Presuppositions are not italicised either;

- question marks indicate possible inferences;
  ·references to scripts, which are inferred as well, are indicated by arrows and put in italics;

- for the sake of readability, the usual upper-case font for evoked scripts has been replaced with the lower-case font;

- script oppositions are marked in parentheses and separated by a slash;

- internal references to other slots within the same frame are marked with arrows followed by slot label (for simplicity's sake only some of these are marked);

- references to text-specific frames are underlined.

FRAME OF A GERMAN GUEST (STOCK CHARACTER)

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *bad*
NATIONALITY German
ASSOCIATED LOCATIONS: <u>GERMAN PENSION</u>
CONCERNS (defaults) need to be fed, to quench thirst
        need to satisfy sexual urge
        need to be healthy
RELATIONS TO OTHER CHARACTERS
    NARRATOR *contempt* (2,.3 making tea/eating teapot -> *ignorance*; 5
                meat/family, 6 children/vegetables -> *true/false)*
COGNITIVE FEATURES
    SPEECH (THINKING) CHARACTERISTICS *mocking* (3 tea/teapot),
    German words inserted (7 - magen), *direct, physiology-centred*
    (7 *stomach-disorder*, 9 *sex*,12 *vomiting*, 14 *childbirth problems*, 15 ba-

(8, 12, 14 German/English, polite/impolite,
appropriate/inappropriate ->cultured)
INTENTIONS/GOALS/PLANS *avoid talking about*
physiology 8, 12, 14
German/English, polite/impolite,appropriate/inappropriate -> cultured)
     OBSTACLES *the <u>German Guests</u> keep talking*
     about physiology (polite/impolite)
BELIEFS/OPINIONS/ASSUMPTIONS *it is uncultured to talk about*
       physiology (8, 12, 14 appropriate/inappropriate)
ATTITUDES/WISHES *wishes to make polite conversation*
     (8,12,14 - > English)
EMOTIONS *afraid of directness, conflict* (I cried 12, 14 - > *desperate to be*
     polite)
ESTHETIC RESPONSES *responds negatively*
     to <u>German Guests</u> behaviour?:
     picking teeth with a hairpin (4 *toothpick*/hairpin,
     appropriate/inappropriate ->
     bad manners), blowing upon soup when speaking
     (10 *appropriate/*
     inappropriate - > bad manners
PERSONALITY TRAITS *polite, self-ironic, cultured*
    LIFESTYLE/BEHAVIOUR *practices polite*
   conversation (1,8,12,14)

The fact that there are only these two opposed characters make the story less amusing than it might have been. What makes these frames typical frames of a humorous story is the presence of humorous oppositions evoked by the numbered diversions. Without them the frames would look like the characters frames of a serious story. We shall see further differences when the serious story is analysed in section 6.

5. *Gertrude the Governess*

The second humorous story, *Gertrude the Governess, Or Simple Seventeen* by Leacock, is of a different kind. It is a meta-narrative, or a story about a narrative, the point of which is to show that the romance narrative is funny in its simplicity. The question is whether the fabula, which could be summed up as follows:

> A simple governess falls in love with the son of the mansion's owner, overcomes the owner's rejection by turning the heiress to the mansion (due to unpredictable set of coincidences), and happily marries the owner's son,

can be regarded as serious. In my view, at this very abstract level it can, as the comic resides here not in the fabula itself, but in the way it is turned into a plot and, even more so, in the way the narrative is verbalised. The narrator's (or rather the implied author's) making fun of his own conventionalised telling of the story is best exemplified with two aspects of the story: its clearly exaggerated and contradictory descriptions as well as the "extraordinary coincidences". Let us look at an example of the former:

> **D.** Let us speak of Gertrude. Gertrude DeMongmorenci McFiggin had known neither father nor mother. 1/ **They had both died years before she was born**. Of her mother she knew nothing, save that she was French, was extremely beautiful, and 2/ **that all her ancestors and even business acquaintances had perished in the Revolution.**
>
> Yet Gertrude cherished the memory of her parents. On her breast the girl wore a locket in which was enshrined a miniature of her mother, 3/ **while down her neck inside at the back hung a daguerreotype of her father.** She carried 4/ **a portrait of her grandmother up her sleeve** and had 5/ **pictures of her cousins tucked inside her boot**, 6/ **while beneath her — but enough, quite enough.** (Leacock 1983: 3)

Based on this passage, the frame of Gertrude looks as follows:

FRAME OF GERTRUDE (G)

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *good?*
NAME Gertrude DeMongmorenci McFiggin *-French/Scottish?, actual/non--actual-* > SEX F
NATIONALITY French mother
FAMILY STATUS parents died years before she was born
(1 *possible/impossible*) -> *orphan -> unhappy?*
APPEARANCE - CLOTHES
    daguerrotype down her neck at the back (3 *comfortable/ uncomfortable, possible/ impossible*), portrait of her grandmother up her sleeve *(4 big/small, comfortable/ uncomfortable, possible/impossible)*, pictures of her cousins inside her boots (5 *comfortable/uncomfortable, respect/lack of respect, possible/impossible*), beneath her (6 *-> private parts?, polite/impolite, respect/lack of respect, possible/impossible, actual/non-actual ->* N-> IA
    RELATIONS TO
        FAMILY *devoted to family*

FATHER cherished his memory

MOTHER cherished her memory

GRANDMOTHER *cherished her memory* (4 *respect/lack of respect*)

COUSINS *cherished their memory* (5 *respect/lack of respect)*

INTENTIONS *to have family pictures on her all the time (3,4,5 sense/nonsense*)-> *emotional*

PERSONALITY TRAITS *devoted to family, unhappy?, emotional*

PAST EVENTS:

parents died years before she was born (1 *possible/impossible, actual/non-actual parents*), all her ancestors perished in the Revolution (2 *possible impossible, actual/non-actual origin*) - *nonsensical story/stereotypical romantic story* ->N->IA

An example of the coincidences motive (or 'strand' in Attardo's terminology) follows directly in the story:

E. Of her father Gertrude knew even less. That he was a high-born English gentleman who had lived as a wanderer in many lands, this was all she knew. His only legacy to Gertrude had been **7) a Russian grammar, a Roumanian phrase book, a theodolite, and a work on mining engineering**. . . . It was while musing one day upon her fate that Gertrude's eye was struck with an advertisement.

"Wanted a governess; **8) must possess a knowledge of French, Italian, Russian, and Roumanian, Music, and Mining Engineering**...."

Gertrude was a girl of great natural quickness of apprehension, and 9) **she had not pondered over this announcement more than half an hour before she was struck with the extraordinary coincidence** between the list of items desired and the things that she herself knew. (Leacock 1983: 3-4)

Here are the frames after this passage:

FRAME OF GERTRUDE (G)

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *not very good*

NAME Gertrude DeMongmorenci McFiggin ->*French/Scottish?, actual/non--actual*-> SEX F

NATIONALITY French mother

FAMILY STATUS parents died years before she was born (1 *possible/impossible*) -> *orphan* -> *unhappy*

APEARANCE - CLOTHES

daguerrotype down her neck at the back (3 *comfortable/ uncomfortable, possible/impossible*), portrait of her grandmother up her sleeve *(4 big/small, comfortable/ uncomfortable, possible/impossible)*, pictures of her cousins inside her boots (5 *comfortable/uncomfortable, respect/lack of respect, possible/impossible*), beneath her (6 - *private parts?, polite/impolite, respect/lack of respect, possible/impossible, actual/non-actual) -> N-> IA*

RELATIONS TO

FAMILY *devoted to family*

FATHER English -> *Scottish?*, cherished his memory, left her a Russian grammar,

Roumanian phrase book, a theodolite, a work on mining engineering
(7 *useful/useless, possible/impossible, legacy/useless items*)

MOTHER cherished her memory

GRANDMOTHER *cherished her memory* (4 *respect/lack of respect*)

COUSINS *cherished their memory* (5 *respect/lack of respect)*

INTENTIONS *to have family pictures on her all the time (sense/nonsense)-> emotional*

PERSONALITY TRAITS *devoted to family, unhappy, emotional, slow in thinking (9)*

PAST EVENTS

parents died years before she was born (1 *possible/impossible, actual/non-actual parents*),

all her ancestors perished in the Revolution (2 *possible impossible, actual/non-actual*

   origin) - nonsensical story/stereotypical romantic story ->N-> IA

   NARRATOR'S (N) FRAME

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *unreliable?*

INTENTIONS *tell the events which do not make sense, are impossible, and pretend this is a true story - possible/impossible story -> IA*

ATTITUDES *mocks G*

IMPLIED AUTHOR'S (IA) FRAME

INTENTION *make fun of the story convention, make fun of N, entertain*

ATTITUDE *romantic stories are funny as they are so schematic (impossible coincidences, contradictions, form/content)*

The implied author is making fun of the stereotypical romance novels, which had to follow a given pattern and style and had to invoke certain emotions and

involve complications, in order to arrive at a happy ending. The fun is innocuous as the authors of these novels seem to be targeted only marginally, the humour being derived largely from self-contradictory descriptions which may be ironic, but do not have to be satirical. Although Leacock's stories are sometimes referred to as "cheerful nonsense" (e.g. Muir 1992: 437), they do allow readers to dwell upon the essence of novel writing and the novel genre itself. The story is in fact an anti-story: there is no real character development, there is no psychological exploration on the level of characters as characters are as self-contradictory as they can be (in later passages Gertrude acquires completely new personality features which bear no relation whatsoever to her previously evoked traits) and the story has a purely humorous plot. It is this which allows readers to reflect on the nature of the parodied novel genre.

So far we have seen the frames postulated for humorous stories. What seems characteristic for humorous stories is not only the presence of humorous oppositions, but also their sheer number (esp. in Leacock's story, which seems richer in that respect), as well as the number of inferences, which suggests frantic mental activity of the readers, bursting out at the humorous lines (diversions). The relations between characters are obviously shared by non-humorous stories, but the way they converge on humorous lines appears to be unique – humour works in bursts, while serious texts seem to develop more regularly towards the culmination and then smoothly wind up (without punch lines; there is no room to develop this idea here; cf. e.g. Chlopicki 2000).

The role of surface (uninferred) elements is also interesting – they seem to play a very important role in humour, as the particular wording evokes particular scripts and a particular chain of connotations, but they are not unique to humour (cf. the culmination of Butlin's story in the next section).

6. The German boy

The serious story I have selected for analysis (Butlin's *The German Boy*) partly seems to corroborate these findings, although the number of inferences does not appear to be significantly lower than in humorous stories. As will become clear below, numerous inferences are evoked by the vague culmination passage of the story which could perhaps be considered a functional equivalent of the final punch line in stories structurally similar to jokes (category 1 in Attardo's 2001 classification), the main differences being the non-final position of the former in the story and the non-binary (non-contrastive) nature of inferences involved.

The story can be summarised as follows:

The narrator, who manages a company which is in great financial difficulties, sits in his office looking outside and observing a lady standing in the rain. She reminds him of a German boy, Klaus, who was once his classmate and friend at school, because of her lonely and unloved expression on the face. The boy was different from his class because he was timid, spoke German and, most importantly, was of a lower social class. After some time he spent in the school, he suffered a mental breakdown and refused to speak English any more, only repeating a German phrase "Zwei Minuten" and ːfusing to obey the teacher. The narrator himself shied away from telling his wife about their financial difficulties, and was just as 'suspended' as Klaus was at the time of his breakdown – "Zwei Minuten" rang in his ears and meant lifetime for him now.

It is a good, evocative story, with six major characters, four of them (the narrator, Klaus, the headmaster and the arithmetic teacher) being active and being quoted as saying things. For the sake of the argument it is sufficient, however, to concentrate on the title character, Klaus, here.

Here are a few key passages from the story:

F. Klaus looked different and, even though he wore the same clothes as us, somehow he seemed to be dressed differently. Everyone looked at him and he looked at the floor. He had fair hair, very pale skin and was quite tall. His shoulders were trembling – an action his long arms increased proportionally making his hands jerk as if they were receiving a series of small electric shocks.

'This is Klaus, he is going to join your class.' The headmaster was a small red-faced man who always looked as if he was too small and too red-faced to be comfortable. When he died a few months later from sunstroke I imagined him as having simply exploded one very hot afternoon. ... The headmaster ushered lːm to one side of a map of the world which had the British Empire coloured red, 'an unfortunate choice of colour' my aunt had observed during her visit. Then he indicated Germany and spoke to Klaus in German: he replied , '*Ja, mein Herr* ' without raisiːg his eyes from the floor. (Butlin 1987: 19)

G. The next class was arithmetic and near the end of the lesson our teacher began going over the problems out loud.

'Klaus, No. 4 please, the one about the reservoir.' Klaus stood up to give his answer. He seemed uncertain and he mumbled. The teacher asked him to repeat it. He spoke more clearly this time: '*Zwei Minuten.* ' The class laughed and even the teacher joined in a little before asking him to repeat it in English.

'*Zwei Minuten.* ' The class laughed even louder, but this time the teacher didn't even smile. ...

'*Zwei Minuten.* ' Klaus repeated; his fingers were gripping the sides of the desk-lid and his body shook.. The teacher did not know what to do ... He told Klaus to sit down and he wouldn't. To be quiet and he wouldn't. To stand in the corner and he wouldn't. '*Zwei Minuten Zwei Minuten...* ' Tears were running down his cheeks and his voice was choking but he couldn't stop. Finally, he was taken to the sick-room. (Butlin 1987: 21-22).

H. I have sat down in my executive leather chair. At any moment the telephone may ring or my secretary announce someone to see me – until then I will do nothing except rest my feet on the desk. For how long? I wonder.

'Zwei Minuten Zwei Minuten...' I hear Klaus say – which I now understand as meaning a lifetime, or as good as. (Butlin 1987: 22).

Here is the frame of the German boy of the title.

FRAME OF KLAUS

READER'S ASSESSMENT SCALE *neutral*
NAME Klaus -> SEX M
AGE *ca 10*
NATIONALITY German
SOCIAL/FINANCIAL STATUS lower class
ASSOCIATED LOCATIONS Germany, SCHOOL
APPEARANCE looked different
    features not controlled: tall, fair hair, very pale skin
    features under control: trembling shoulders
CONCERNS (default) need to feel safe,
    need to be accepted (loved) by others, esp. family
RELATIONS TO OTHER CHARACTERS
    TEACHER *hated the teacher?*
COGNITIVE FEATURES
    BASIC FEATURES lacked motor control-*nervous*
    SPEECH (THINKING) CHARACTERISTICS
    spoke German (Ja mein Herr,
    Zwei Minuten-> *protest -> mental breakdown*)
    INTENTIONS/GOALS/PLANS *return to Germany?*
        OBSTACLES *attended English boarding school*
ATTITUDES/WISHES refused to speak English -*hated school?*
EMOTIONS trembling shoulders, shaking body, tears - *nervous, home-sick*
PERSONALITY TRAITS *shy (*looked on the floor), **nervous,**
home-sick?, hated school?
        MOTIVATION/DRIVES *home-sickness? hatred?*
PAST immigrated from Germany, *suffered a breakdown in England*

The frame of Klaus does not seem to be very rich in inferences, although it is clear that the main evocative element of the story, the puzzling "Zwei Minuten"

episode, evokes a good number of inferences and possible inferences (protest, mental breakdown, nervous, home-sick, hated school, intends to return to Germany). There are only few other inferences in the frame. So this passage is just as open-ended as some lines in humorous stories, e.g. line 8 in Leacock's story: "Wanted a governess; must possess a knowledge of French, Italian, Russian and Roumanian, Music and Mining Engineering..". There are a lot of inferences evoked here, and there is no clear explanation in the text while the governess should teach the children mining engineering - this is simply a "reduction to absurd" line, evoking a strange world where children learn mining engineering; on the other hand, the "Zwei Minuten" passage has some justification: the words might have been the answer to the arithmetic problem that Klaus was supposed to have solved, or they might have been words directed at the teacher to give Klaus some time to answer, or perhaps they were significant in some other context totally remote and different, accessible only to Klaus himself. There is indeed some similarity; nonetheless, the Zwei Minuten passage is clearly not humorous and does not have the structural features of a humorous passage (it develops smoothly not in bursts, as Leacock's story does).

To conclude, here are the postulated distinguishing features of humorous stories as they are visible in the character frames:
 – presence of humorous oppositions evoked by lines of the text (the larger the number of humorous oppositions the funnier the text, as each opposition allows further inferencing)
 – presence of a large number of inferences – presence of a large number of pieces of text quoted verbatim (as they are humorous lines/diversions)

The question of distinguishing between humour and non-humour is more difficult to solve when one deals with multi-line short stories rather than single-line jokes, and I do not claim to have solved it complete, but I hope that this article will stimulate the discussion in this area.

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Opowiadania humorystyczne a niehumorystyczne – podobieństwa i różnice

Problem doboru kryteriów, które pozwalałyby odróżnić elementy humorystyczne od pozostałych elementów tekstu jest często pomijany przez badaczy humoru, mimo że jest problemem zasadniczym. Artykuł stanowi próbę porównania opowiadań humorystycznych i niehumorystycznych w oparciu o proponowane konstrukty mentalne, zwane ramami postaci (*character frames*), które mogą ułatwić sformułowanie różnic w odbiorze tych typów tekstów. Konstrukty te są postulowane jako przydatne zarówno przy analizie postaci fikcyjnych jak i rzeczywistych.

Po przedstawieniu dwóch alternatywnych klasyfikacji opowiadań humorystycznych i porównaniu podejścia ściśle tekstualnego (Attardo) i podejścia nastawionego na odbiorcę (Chłopicki), opisane jest narzędzie analizy, czyli rama postaci. Przy jej pomocy przeanalizowane są następnie fragmenty trzech opowiadań, dwóch humorystycznych, *Germans at meat* K. Mansfield i *Gertrude the governess* S. Leacocka oraz jednego niehumorystycznego *The German boy* R. Butlina.

Na podstawie tej analizy, proponuje się do dalszej dyskusji w środowisku humorologicznym następujące wnioski. Cechami charakterystycznymi opowiadań humorystyc-

znych widocznymi w ramach postaci są: obecność opozycji skryptowych i łańcuchów opozycji, obecność dużej liczby inferencji (większej niż przy opowiadaniach niehumorystycznych) oraz dużej liczby oryginalnych (nieprzetworzonych w trakcie analizy) fragmentów tekstu w ramach (to zwykle partie humorystyczne tekstu, które silnie opierają się na frazeologii tekstu).