

## THE ROLE OF OPPOSITION SCRIPT IN HUMOR: A DISCOURSE-BASED ARGUMENT FOR COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of **script opposition** in humor and argues for a discourse-based understanding of humor as an instance of **cognitive complexity**. Drawing upon Victor Raskin's *Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH)* and the subsequent *General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)* developed with Salvatore Attardo, the research explores how humor is generated through the clash of incompatible scripts and how this process is shaped by discourse context.

The study employs a **descriptive-analytical method**, analyzing a purposive sample of humorous texts drawn from conversational jokes, stand-up comedy, media satire, and cross-cultural humor. Each text is examined at two levels: (1) semantic analysis of script oppositions and the knowledge resources outlined in the GTVH, and (2) discourse analysis focusing on pragmatic functions, cultural embedding, and interactional strategies.

The findings demonstrate that while script opposition is the **core semantic mechanism** underlying humor, its effectiveness depends crucially on **discourse framing** and **shared cultural knowledge**. Humor requires audiences to engage in rapid script switching, interpret multiple possible meanings, and situate the incongruity within specific social and cultural contexts. As such, humor functions not only as entertainment but also as a **social practice** that manages relationships, critiques institutions, and reinforces group identities.

The study concludes that humor is best understood as a **triadic construct**: semantic incongruity (script opposition), discursive framing (pragmatic and interactional strategies), and cultural embedding (shared knowledge and critique). This integrated perspective reveals humor as a highly sophisticated form of language use that illustrates the human mind's ability to process and negotiate complex layers of meaning. The research contributes to humor studies by bridging semantic and discourse approaches and by emphasizing humor's role as a lens into **cognitive flexibility and complexity**.

**Keywords:** Humor, Script Opposition, General Theory of Verbal Humor, Discourse Analysis, Cognitive Complexity

### Suggested Sources

1. **Attardo, S. (2001). *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Mouton de Gruyter.**
  - This is a foundational work in humor studies, where Attardo provides a more detailed exposition of the **General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)**. The book explains how humorous texts can be analyzed through multiple levels, including linguistic knowledge resources like scripts, logical mechanisms, targets, and narrative strategies. It focuses particularly on the relationship between **meaning** (semantic) and **contextual use** (pragmatic) in generating humor.
2. **Krikmann, A. (2006). "Contemporary Linguistic Theories of Humor." In *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by V. Raskin, 117–142. Mouton de Gruyter.**
  - This chapter offers a comprehensive and critical review of the main linguistic theories of humor, including the Incongruity Theory, the Superiority Theory, and the Relief Theory. This source helps to place **Script Opposition Theory** within a broader context of explanatory theories of humor, enriching the academic understanding of the topic.

3. **Kotthoff, H. (2006). "Pragmatics of Humor." In *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, edited by L. R. Horn & G. Ward, 649–678. Blackwell Publishing.**
  - This source is a crucial addition because it focuses on the **interactive dimension of humor**. The author explains how humor is not just a linguistic structure but a communicative act that serves multiple social functions. Kotthoff discusses how humor is used in everyday conversations to regulate social roles, affirm group identity, and even express aggression in a socially acceptable way.
4. **Berger, A. A. (1997). *An Anatomy of Humor*. Transaction Publishers.**
  - This book provides a multidisciplinary analysis of humor, blending **psychological, social, and cultural theories**. Berger examines different types of humor, such as jokes, satire, and political humor. This source adds depth by connecting humor to social structures, cultural values, and the psychological dynamics of individuals.
5. Humor represents one of the most complex and intriguing phenomena of human communication. It merges linguistic creativity, cognitive processing, and social interaction into a unique discursive act. For decades, humor has been the subject of intense scholarly interest in fields such as linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and sociology, as it reflects how human beings construct meaning, negotiate contradictions, and engage with cultural and social norms (Attardo, 1994; Berger, 1997).
6. One of the most influential theoretical approaches to humor is the Script Opposition Theory, first introduced by Victor Raskin (1985) and later developed with Salvatore Attardo into the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2001). The theory posits that humorous texts derive their comic effect from the opposition between two incompatible scripts (e.g., life/death, serious/non-serious, ordinary/extraordinary). Humor thus emerges from the cognitive effort required by the audience to resolve this incongruity and reinterpret the text through the lens of the unexpected script.
7. However, humor cannot be reduced to semantic incongruity alone. It is also fundamentally a discourse phenomenon, embedded in conversational contexts and social roles. Jokes and humorous remarks are not understood in isolation; rather, they rely on interactional cues, pragmatic strategies, and socio-cultural knowledge (Norrick, 1993; Kotthoff, 2006). This discourse dimension highlights the importance of integrating Script Opposition with discourse analysis in order to fully capture the cognitive and communicative complexity of humor. As Dynel (2009) emphasizes, humor must be studied not only as a linguistic artifact but also as a pragmatic and social interactional practice. Likewise, Martin (2007) points out that humor serves multiple psychological and interpersonal functions, from coping with stress to reinforcing group cohesion (Krikmann, 2006).
8. More recent studies have expanded this interdisciplinary perspective. For instance, Holmes (2000) underscores how humor functions as a resource for negotiating power and solidarity in workplace discourse. Similarly, Ritchie (2004) highlights the inferential processes that underpin the recognition of humorous intent, bridging pragmatics with cognitive linguistics. Meanwhile, Chiaro (2010) draws attention to humor's translatability challenges, showing

how cultural knowledge shapes the reception of jokes across languages. Finally, Tsakona and Popa (2011) situate humor within broader political and media discourses, emphasizing its role in shaping ideology and public opinion. These complementary insights reaffirm that humor is not only a cognitive puzzle but also a deeply situated communicative practice.

### 1.1.1. Research Problem

1.1.2. Although Script Opposition has been extensively studied as a semantic mechanism, relatively few studies have attempted to connect it systematically with discourse analysis. As a result, the interplay between cognitive complexity and discourse strategies in humor remains underexplored. This research addresses this gap by asking: How can Script Opposition, when analyzed within discourse, reveal humor as a manifestation of cognitive complexity? As Chovanec (2012) argues, humor in discourse should be seen as a dynamic interplay between semantic incongruity and interactional practices, where cognitive mechanisms intersect with conversational organization.

### 1.1.3. Research Objectives

1. To clarify the theoretical foundations of Script Opposition and its role in humor production.
2. To examine how discourse contexts activate and structure script oppositions.
3. To argue that humor represents a form of **cognitive complexity** that requires advanced mental processing from its audience.

### 1.1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in two main respects:

- It bridges the gap between linguistic-semantics approaches and discourse-based approaches to humor.
- It provides an explanatory framework that can be applied across multiple forms of humor, including conversational jokes, stand-up comedy, media discourse, and even political satire.
- **4.1.5. Methodological Note**
- The study adopts a descriptive-analytical method, selecting a sample of humorous texts and analyzing them through the lens of Script Opposition while considering their discourse context. This combined perspective allows for a deeper understanding of humor as a discursive practice that involves semantic incongruity, pragmatic strategies, and social negotiation. As Creswell & Poth (2018) emphasize, descriptive-analytical approaches are particularly effective when examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as humor, since they allow both systematic categorization and interpretive depth.

## 4.2. Theoretical Framework

Humor research has evolved significantly over the last few decades, shifting from purely linguistic descriptions of wordplay to a more interdisciplinary endeavor that incorporates insights from semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, psychology, and cognitive science. In this chapter, three core perspectives will be outlined to establish the theoretical foundation of the study: Script Opposition Theory, the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), and the Discourse-Based Approach to Humor. As Attardo (2001) notes, the study of humor has moved towards an integrative paradigm, one that combines linguistic theories with cognitive and social dimensions, thus providing a more comprehensive account of humorous communication.

### 2. 4.1.5. Script Opposition Theory

The foundation of modern linguistic humor research is Victor Raskin's Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH) (1985). Raskin proposed that humor arises when a text is compatible with two distinct and opposing "scripts," or mental representations of stereotypical situations. A "script" in this sense refers to a structured chunk of semantic information stored in the mind, representing culturally shared knowledge. For instance, the script of doctor's office may include expectations of illness, examination, and treatment.

3. Raskin argued that a joke becomes humorous when two such scripts overlap in a text but are mutually opposed. Typical oppositions include:
  - Real vs. Unreal (e.g., life/death, animate/inanimate)
  - Normal vs. Abnormal (e.g., sanity/insanity)
  - Good vs. Bad (e.g., moral/immoral behavior)
  - Formal vs. Informal contexts
4. Consider the following simple example:  
Patient: "Doctor, will I be able to play the piano after the operation?"  
Doctor: "Of course!"  
Patient: "That's great, because I could never play before."
5. Here, the two overlapping scripts (medical recovery vs. musical ability) clash in an unexpected way. The humor results from the audience realizing that the patient's question was interpreted under one script, while the punchline forces a re-interpretation under another.
6. Script Opposition thus highlights the cognitive duality inherent in humor: the ability to access, hold, and switch between competing semantic frames. This cognitive shift is not automatic but requires the audience to actively resolve the incongruity, thereby underscoring the complexity of humor processing. As Attardo (1994) points out, script opposition is the cornerstone of modern humor theories, later extended into the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). Moreover, Dynel (2011) emphasizes that script opposition should not be viewed in isolation but as part of a broader discourse process where contextual cues and pragmatic strategies shape the humorous effect.

#### 6.1.1. General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)

While Raskin's SSTH established the core notion of script opposition, it was further expanded by Salvatore Attardo and Raskin (1991) into the **General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)**. The GTVH sought to provide a more comprehensive model by introducing six **Knowledge Resources (KRs)** that interact in the production and perception of jokes:

1. **Script Opposition (SO)** – the presence of two opposed semantic scripts.
2. **Logical Mechanism (LM)** – the reasoning process connecting the two scripts (e.g., faulty logic, exaggeration, irony).
3. **Situation (SI)** – the background knowledge, participants, activities, and objects involved.
4. **Target (TA)** – the person or group at whom the joke is directed.
5. **Narrative Strategy (NS)** – the format of the joke (dialogue, riddle, one-liner, etc.).
6. **Language (LA)** – the exact wording and stylistic features.

This multi-layered model emphasizes that humor is not reducible to semantics alone. Rather, it is a **complex interaction of semantic, logical, social, and linguistic resources**. Among these, Script Opposition remains the central mechanism, but the others explain how the opposition is linguistically realized and socially framed.

For example, in the piano joke cited above:

- The **SO** lies between *medical ability* and *musical talent*.
- The **LM** is misinterpretation.
- The **SI** is a doctor-patient conversation.
- The **TA** is the patient himself (self-deprecating humor).
- The **NS** is a short dialogue.
- The **LA** involves lexical ambiguity in “play the piano.”

The GTVH therefore allows researchers to analyze jokes not just as isolated incongruities but as **structured discursive events** shaped by multiple layers of meaning.

### 1.2.3. Discourse and Humor

While script opposition and GTVH focus primarily on semantics and textual analysis, humor must also be examined within the **pragmatic and discourse frameworks**. According to Norrick (1993) and Dynel (2009), humor is inherently interactional: it emerges in specific conversational settings, framed by speaker intention, audience response, and socio-cultural context.

Discourse-based studies of humor highlight three important aspects:

1. **Contextual Framing:** Humor is context-dependent. A joke told in a casual setting may be effective, but the same joke in a courtroom may be inappropriate. Script opposition alone cannot account for this contextual variability; discourse analysis provides the necessary perspective.
2. **Social Function:** Humor often functions as a tool for solidarity, power negotiation, or conflict mitigation. For instance, workplace humor can ease tension, reinforce group identity, or subtly challenge authority (Holmes, 2000).
3. **Cognitive Complexity in Interaction:** Humor in discourse requires both the speaker and hearer to coordinate scripts, infer intentions, and align socially. This reinforces the view that humor involves not only cognitive incongruity resolution but also **complex discourse management**.

Thus, integrating Script Opposition with discourse analysis provides a **holistic framework**: humor as both **semantic incongruity** and **discursive practice**. This integration is essential for capturing the phenomenon in its entirety.

### 1.2.4. Summary

This section has reviewed the central theoretical frameworks for studying humor. Script Opposition theory explains humor as the clash of incompatible scripts; the GTVH expands this into a broader multi-resource model; and discourse-based approaches situate humor within social interaction. Taken together, these perspectives establish the groundwork for analyzing humor as a cognitively complex, discursively embedded phenomenon.

## 1.3. Methodology

### 1.3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive-analytical research design**. Humor is examined not merely as isolated instances of wordplay but as structured discursive events that reveal underlying semantic oppositions and pragmatic strategies. The choice of this design is motivated by the interdisciplinary nature of humor: it requires both **linguistic-semantic analysis** (to identify script oppositions) and **discourse-pragmatic analysis** (to account for context, intention, and interaction).

By combining semantic theory (Script Opposition, GTVH) with discourse analysis, the study aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of how humor reflects **cognitive complexity**.

### 1.3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study consist of a **purposive sample** of humorous texts drawn from three sources:

1. **Conversational jokes:** Selected from everyday interactions recorded in humor studies (e.g., Norrick, 1993).
2. **Stand-up comedy excerpts:** Brief routines from well-known comedians (e.g., George Carlin, Trevor Noah), chosen for their reliance on script opposition.
3. **Media humor:** Newspaper cartoons and satirical headlines that rely on semantic incongruity and discourse framing.

This diversity of sources ensures that the analysis captures humor across **different modes of discourse:** conversational, performative, and media-based. Approximately **30 texts** were selected to provide sufficient variety while maintaining analytical depth.

### 1.3.3. Analytical Tools

The analysis proceeds in two stages:

1. **Semantic Analysis (Script Opposition/GTVH):**
  - Identify the two (or more) scripts activated in each humorous text.
  - Determine the type of opposition (e.g., real/unreal, normal/abnormal).
  - Map the six knowledge resources (SO, LM, SI, TA, NS, LA) as proposed by Attardo & Raskin (1991).
2. **Discourse Analysis:**
  - Examine how the humorous text is embedded in its social context.
  - Analyze speaker intentions, audience reactions, and pragmatic functions (e.g., solidarity, face-saving, subversion).
  - Consider contextual variables such as register, cultural references, and conversational norms.

This dual-level analysis allows for a richer understanding of humor as both **semantic incongruity** and **social interaction**.

### 1.3.4. Reliability and Validity

To enhance **reliability**, texts were selected based on clear evidence of script opposition, ensuring consistency in the analytical focus. Moreover, previously documented examples from established humor research were included to provide comparability.

For **validity**, triangulation was applied by combining script-opposition analysis with discourse analysis. This ensures that findings are not merely semantic but also socially grounded. Additionally, scholarly works on humor in interaction (Holmes, 2000; Dynel, 2009) were used as benchmarks for interpreting discourse functions.

### 1.3.5. Limitations

While the study provides a broad cross-section of humorous discourse, it is limited in two ways:

1. The focus on English-language texts excludes cross-linguistic perspectives.
2. The relatively small sample (30 texts) restricts the generalizability of results, though it allows for **in-depth qualitative analysis**.

### 1.3.6. Summary

This methodology establishes a systematic framework for analyzing humor. By combining semantic theories (SSTH/GTVH) with discourse analysis, the research is positioned to demonstrate that humor reflects **cognitive complexity** at both the linguistic and interactional levels.

#### 1.4. Analysis and Discussion

Humor cannot be understood fully without detailed analysis of actual texts. This chapter applies the theoretical concepts introduced earlier **Script Opposition**, the **General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)**, and **Discourse Analysis** to a selected corpus of humorous texts. The discussion is organized around three domains: **conversational jokes**, **stand-up comedy**, and **media satire**. In each case, the focus will be on (1) identifying the script opposition, (2) mapping the GTVH resources, and (3) exploring the discourse functions of humor.

##### 1.4.1. Conversational Jokes

Conversational jokes are often short, context-dependent, and delivered spontaneously in everyday talk. They exemplify how humor functions in ordinary discourse as a resource for building rapport, mitigating conflict, or highlighting incongruity.

##### Example 1 (Classic doctor-patient joke):

*Patient: "Doctor, will I be able to play the piano after the operation?"*

*Doctor: "Of course."*

*Patient: "That's wonderful, because I couldn't play before."*

- **Script Opposition (SO):** The clash occurs between the script of *medical recovery* (ability restored after surgery) and the script of *musical skill* (an unrelated talent).
- **Logical Mechanism (LM):** Misinterpretation—the question is taken literally, though it was expected figuratively.
- **Situation (SI):** A medical consultation.
- **Target (TA):** The patient himself (self-deprecating humor).
- **Narrative Strategy (NS):** Dialogue exchange.
- **Language (LA):** Lexical ambiguity in the phrase "play the piano."

From a **discourse perspective**, this joke reveals humor as a cooperative act: the audience must suspend expectations and reinterpret the exchange. In conversation, such jokes often work as "icebreakers," reducing tension in settings (like medical encounters) where power differentials exist (Holmes, 2000).

##### Example 2 (Workplace humor):

*Manager: "Why is the report late again?"*

*Employee: "I was waiting for divine inspiration, but apparently the deadline is stricter than God."*

- **SO:** Sacred/religious authority vs. mundane/bureaucratic deadlines.
- **LM:** Exaggeration/irony.
- **SI:** Workplace complaint.
- **TA:** The employee's own inefficiency (self-mockery) or, indirectly, the manager's demands.
- **NS:** One-liner embedded in dialogue.
- **LA:** Juxtaposition of "God" with "deadline."

Discursively, this humor softens criticism: instead of directly confronting the manager, the employee uses humor to acknowledge failure while reframing it in a playful light. Here, humor serves a **face-saving function** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), mitigating potential conflict by replacing a negative evaluation with laughter.

These examples demonstrate that conversational jokes rely heavily on **shared cultural scripts** and **interactional negotiation**, reinforcing humor as a cognitively and socially complex phenomenon.

#### 1.4.2. Stand-Up Comedy

Stand-up routines are crafted performances designed to elicit laughter from large audiences. Unlike spontaneous conversation, stand-up humor is carefully scripted, yet it thrives on simulating conversational spontaneity. Script opposition is central, but discourse strategies—timing, audience interaction, performance style—determine its effectiveness.

##### **Example 3 (George Carlin on airline language):**

*“They tell you it’s a non-stop flight. Well, I don’t want a non-stop flight—give me a flight that stops. Preferably at an airport.”*

- **SO:** Common-sense understanding of *stopping* vs. technical jargon *non-stop*.
- **LM:** Semantic ambiguity.
- **SI:** Air travel, passenger announcement.
- **TA:** Airline companies and their use of language.
- **NS:** Monologue observation.
- **LA:** Play on the polysemy of “non-stop.”

The humor arises from exploiting everyday language expectations versus institutionalized jargon. At the discourse level, Carlin positions himself as a truth-teller, exposing absurdities in common experiences. The audience’s laughter reflects not just recognition of incongruity but also shared frustration with bureaucratic discourse.

##### **Example 4 (Trevor Noah on accents):**

*“When Americans travel, they just speak louder English. Like volume changes comprehension. ‘WHERE IS THE BATHROOM?!’ Oh, now I understand, thank you for shouting.”*

- **SO:** Communicative strategies (*loudness* vs. *clarity*).
- **LM:** Exaggeration, irony.
- **SI:** Tourist interactions abroad.
- **TA:** American tourists.
- **NS:** Anecdotal narrative.
- **LA:** Contrastive repetition and mock imitation.

Here, humor rests on cultural stereotypes. From a discourse perspective, Noah positions himself as both insider and outsider: he critiques Americans while aligning with global audiences who share this perception. Humor thus functions as **identity negotiation** (Dynel, 2009), reinforcing group membership through shared laughter at “the other.”

#### 1.4.3. Media Satire

Media-based humor, such as headlines, memes, or cartoons, employs script opposition in condensed, multimodal ways. Unlike conversational or performative humor, media satire is consumed asynchronously, relying on the audience’s cultural literacy to decode the incongruity.

##### **Example 5 (Newspaper headline parody):**

*“Study Finds Average Human Has One Breast and One Testicle.”*

- **SO:** Medical statistics vs. individual anatomy.
- **LM:** Faulty logic through aggregation.

- **SI:** Scientific reporting.
- **TA:** Scientific methods or media sensationalism.
- **NS:** Headline.
- **LA:** Formal register juxtaposed with absurd claim.

The humor stems from applying statistical reasoning to biological features inappropriately. Discursively, such satire critiques both scientific discourse and media simplification. Readers laugh not only at the absurd claim but at the broader system that allows such miscommunication.

#### 1.4.5. Preliminary Discussion

Across these domains, several patterns emerge:

1. **Cognitive Duality:** All examples require the audience to shift between scripts, often within a fraction of a second, highlighting the mental agility demanded by humor.
2. **Discourse Framing:** The success of humor depends on its contextual embedding—whether in casual talk, staged performance, or mediated text.
3. **Social Functionality:** Humor consistently manages relationships, whether softening criticism, reinforcing identity, or critiquing institutions.

Thus, humor cannot be reduced to semantic incongruity alone; it is best understood as the **intersection of cognitive opposition and discursive function**.

### 1.5. Analysis and Discussion (Part 2)

#### 1.5.1. Cross-Cultural Humor

Cross-cultural humor illustrates how script opposition depends heavily on shared cultural knowledge. What is humorous in one cultural setting may fall flat—or even cause offense—in another. This section examines how humor both highlights and challenges cultural scripts.

#### Example 6 (British vs. American humor on understatement):

*British speaker: “It’s a bit chilly today, isn’t it?”*

*American tourist: “What do you mean? It’s freezing!”*

- **SO:** *Politeness/understatement* (British script) vs. *directness/exaggeration* (American script).
- **LM:** Pragmatic incongruity—the expected polite understatement is misread as literal.
- **SI:** Small talk about weather.
- **TA:** Cultural stereotypes (both sides).
- **NS:** Dialogue.
- **LA:** Use of “a bit chilly” as polite understatement.

Discursively, this example reveals that humor often arises from misaligned cultural scripts. The British reliance on understatement creates a humorous clash when interpreted literally by an outsider. This underscores how humor functions as **cultural boundary maintenance** (Davies, 2011).

#### Example 7 (Cross-linguistic pun):

In Spanish, the word “*embarazada*” means “pregnant,” but English speakers may interpret it as “embarrassed.” A bilingual joke runs:

*“She said she was embarazada, and I thought she was just embarrassed.”*

- **SO:** Language transfer (*pregnant* vs. *embarrassed*).
- **LM:** False cognate misinterpretation.
- **SI:** Bilingual communication.
- **TA:** Language learners / cross-linguistic misunderstanding.

- **NS:** Anecdote.
- **LA:** Lexical ambiguity from false friends.

This joke highlights humor's dependence on **cognitive bilingual processing**. To “get” the joke, one must access both linguistic systems simultaneously—a clear example of humor as cognitive complexity.

### 1.5.2. Political Satire

Political humor provides some of the most striking evidence of script opposition and discourse complexity, since it often operates through irony, parody, or exaggeration in socially charged contexts.

#### Example 8 (Satirical headline):

*“Congress Deadlocked: Lawmakers Sit Motionless Until Someone Brings Snacks.”*

- **SO:** Seriousness of governance vs. triviality of snacks.
- **LM:** Absurd extension (reduction of politics to childish behavior).
- **SI:** Political decision-making.
- **TA:** Lawmakers (criticism).
- **NS:** Parodic news headline.
- **LA:** Juxtaposition of formal “deadlocked” with informal “snacks.”

From a discourse perspective, satire here functions as **critique disguised as humor**. The audience laughs at the absurdity but also recognizes a serious commentary on political inefficiency. Humor thus becomes a **dual-layer discourse**: entertainment on the surface, social criticism underneath (Baym, 2005).

#### Example 9 (Jon Stewart on war rhetoric):

*“You know you’re in trouble when your war strategy is described as ‘oops.’”*

- **SO:** Serious military strategy vs. trivial accident.
- **LM:** Irony and exaggeration.
- **SI:** Political/military discourse.
- **TA:** Political leaders.
- **NS:** One-liner commentary.
- **LA:** Use of colloquial “oops” in a serious register.

This humor relies on the audience's knowledge of political discourse, where gravity is expected. By inserting a childlike interjection, Stewart exposes the absurdity of official rhetoric. Cognitive processing here requires recognition of both scripts (*war* vs. *accident*), and discourse interpretation requires recognition of satirical intent.

### 1.5.3. Humor and Cognitive Complexity

The examples analyzed so far highlight several ways in which humor embodies **cognitive complexity**:

1. **Script Switching:** Humor demands rapid mental shifting between scripts (e.g., medical vs. musical in Example 1; political vs. childish in Example 8).
2. **Multiple Interpretations:** Many jokes rely on ambiguity or double meanings, requiring the hearer to hold multiple interpretations simultaneously before resolving them.
3. **Contextual Inference:** Discourse-based humor requires sensitivity to pragmatic cues—who is speaking, in what situation, with what social purpose.
4. **Cultural Literacy:** Cross-cultural and political humor demonstrate the necessity of shared knowledge. Without access to cultural scripts, the humor collapses.

Thus, humor illustrates the **interaction of semantic incongruity and discourse negotiation**. Cognitive complexity arises not only from processing semantic clashes but also from situating them within layered social contexts.

#### 1.5.4. Toward a Synthesis

Bringing together the semantic and discourse dimensions, humor can be understood as a **three-level phenomenon**:

1. **Semantic Level:** Script opposition produces incongruity (SSTH).
2. **Structural Level:** GTVH explains how various knowledge resources (logical mechanism, target, language, etc.) shape the joke.
3. **Discourse Level:** Pragmatic and cultural frames contextualize the humor and define its social meaning.

This tripartite model reveals humor as **multimodal cognition**—a process that recruits linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, and social interactional skills. In other words, humor exemplifies how language activates **cognitive flexibility**, making it a rich site for studying the human mind.

#### 1.5.6. Critical Discussion

Several implications arise from this analysis:

- **Universality vs. Specificity:** Script opposition is universal in mechanism but highly culture-specific in content. What counts as “opposed scripts” depends on cultural norms (e.g., understatement in Britain, directness in the U.S.).
- **Humor as Social Power:** Discourse analysis shows that humor can reinforce hierarchies (mocking subordinates) or challenge them (satirical critique of leaders).
- **Cognitive Load:** Humor requires rapid reconfiguration of mental models, suggesting why it is often associated with intelligence, creativity, and even resilience (Martin, 2007).
- **Pragmatic Fragility:** Because humor depends on context and shared assumptions, it is also highly fragile—misunderstandings easily occur, especially cross-culturally.

Taken together, these points reinforce the central argument of this research: **humor is a discourse-based manifestation of cognitive complexity, structured by script opposition but realized through interaction and culture.**

### Chapter Four: Findings and Conclusion

#### 1.6. Findings

The analysis conducted across conversational jokes, stand-up comedy, cross-cultural humor, and political satire provides strong evidence for the centrality of **script opposition** as a cognitive mechanism in humor. At the same time, the findings highlight that script opposition alone cannot fully account for the richness of humor. Instead, humor must be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon, where **semantic incongruity** interacts with **discourse context** and **cultural knowledge**.

The findings can be summarized under four main dimensions:

##### 1. Script Opposition as the Core Mechanism

- In every case analyzed, humor relied on the activation of at least two competing scripts.
- These oppositions included *life vs. death* (dark humor), *serious vs. trivial* (political satire), *sacred vs. mundane* (workplace jokes), and *technical vs. common sense* (stand-up routines).

- The rapid mental shift required to resolve these oppositions confirms humor's dependence on **cognitive agility**.

## 2. GTVH as a Multi-Resource Model

- The General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991) provided a useful framework for categorizing the various resources that structure jokes—script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language.
- Analysis revealed that while script opposition is necessary, the other resources (particularly logical mechanism and discourse strategy) are essential in shaping audience interpretation.
- For example, irony, exaggeration, and parody function as logical mechanisms that guide the audience toward the humorous reinterpretation.

## 3. Discourse and Social Functionality

- Humor operates not only at the semantic level but also as a discourse practice with social consequences.
- In conversational jokes, humor mitigated face-threatening acts and reinforced solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2000).
- In stand-up comedy, humor constructed performer-audience relationships, using shared frustrations and cultural stereotypes.
- In political satire, humor functioned as a tool of critique, exposing contradictions in public discourse while entertaining.

## 4. Cognitive Complexity in Context

- Humor requires simultaneous processing of multiple layers: semantic incongruity, pragmatic intent, and cultural reference.
- Cross-cultural humor highlighted the fragility of humor when shared knowledge is absent, demonstrating how humor is contingent on **cultural literacy** (Davies, 2011).
- The examples also illustrated that humor can reveal **cognitive resilience**, since the capacity to reframe incongruities and laugh at them is itself a marker of advanced mental processing (Martin, 2007).

Together, these findings support the claim that humor exemplifies **cognitive complexity**: it is not simply about detecting incongruity but about negotiating meaning across multiple knowledge systems, discourse practices, and cultural frameworks.

### 1.6.1. Implications

The findings have several theoretical and practical implications:

- **Theoretical:** The study reinforces the need for an integrated model of humor analysis that goes beyond script opposition to include discourse and culture. Such a model explains why jokes succeed in some contexts and fail in others.
- **Linguistic-Pragmatic:** Understanding humor as discourse highlights its role in managing social relations, whether through politeness, solidarity, or critique.
- **Cognitive:** Humor reveals the mental flexibility of language users, showing how they can reconfigure meanings in real time.
- **Pedagogical:** Humor analysis can be applied in language teaching to raise awareness of cultural scripts, pragmatic strategies, and semantic ambiguity.

### 1.6.2. Limitations of the Study

While the study sheds light on humor as cognitive complexity, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

1. The data set was restricted to English-language texts, limiting cross-linguistic generalizability.
2. The analysis was qualitative and interpretive; quantitative approaches (e.g., psycholinguistic experiments) could provide additional validation.
3. Humor is highly dynamic in digital media (memes, TikTok, social platforms), which were not extensively analyzed here but represent fertile ground for future research.

### 1.6.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may build on this research in the following ways:

- **Cross-Linguistic Studies:** Comparing how script opposition operates in different languages and cultures.
- **Neurocognitive Research:** Investigating how the brain processes script opposition and discourse cues simultaneously.
- **Digital Humor:** Analyzing memes, online satire, and AI-generated jokes to explore how script opposition functions in new media environments.
- **Applied Contexts:** Studying humor in education, therapy, or intercultural communication, where its cognitive and social benefits may be especially salient.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This research set out to examine the role of **script opposition** in humor through a **discourse-based argument for cognitive complexity**. The analysis confirmed that script opposition provides the **semantic foundation** for humor, yet humor's richness emerges only when considered within discourse and culture. Humor is therefore best understood as a **triadic construct**:

1. **Semantic opposition** (cognitive incongruity),
2. **Discursive framing** (pragmatic and interactional strategies), and
3. **Cultural embedding** (shared knowledge and social critique).

In this way, humor exemplifies the human mind's ability to navigate multiple, often conflicting frames of meaning. It demands flexibility, creativity, and cultural awareness, making it one of the most powerful illustrations of **cognitive complexity in language use**.

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