JOKES AND THE INSTANTIATION OF CONFLICTING SCRIPTS

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Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to highlight that while joke reception entails the successive activation of two scripts which do not normally co-occur, the second script, triggered by the punchline is not opposed to the first, but suspends and challenges expectations created by the first script. This claim will be illustrated by discussing several jocular conversations from sitcoms.

1. Aim

The present paper is intended as a contribution to the analysis of jokes from two perspectives: 1) that of co-existing incompatible scripts, and 2) that of blended spaces accommodating expectation-challenging elements originating in two normally incongruent domains. By discussing a set of sitcom jokes, I endeavour to adjust Raskin and Attardo's approaches to humorous texts by introducing the notion of 'least expected co-occurring scripts'.

2. Jokes, duality and incongruity

A joke commonly consists of an initial portion (the *set-up*) which appears to have one interpretation, followed by a final part (the *punchline*) which forces the receiver to perceive a different interpretation of the set-up. (Ritchie 2003). The humorous effect arises when an alternative, non-favored and therefore *non-expected* interpretation is revealed as the appropriate one by means of the punchline (Dascal 1985: 95)

The humorous effect comes from the listener's realization and acceptance that their initial assumptions have been unsubstantiated and misleading. As Dolitsky puts it, "In humour, listeners are lured into accepting presuppositions that are later disclosed as unfounded" (Dolitsky 1992: 35). The punch annihilates expectations aroused by the initially activated script and forces an unexpected turn to our attention, refocused on the least expected script (Norrick 2003: 1338)

Recent linguistic theories of humour highlight the importance of duality and tension in humorous texts. In analysing humorous creativity Koestler (1964: 51) argues that: "The sudden *bisociation* of an idea or event with two habitually *incompatible* matrices will produce a comic effect, provided that the narrative, the semantic pipeline, carries the right kind of emotional *tension*. When the pipe is punctured, and our expectations are fooled, the now redundant tension gushes out in laughter, or is spilled in the gentler form of the sou-rire [my emphasis]."

This often quoted passage emphasises a claim extensively explored within contemporary theories of humour: a humorous text must relate to two different and opposing in some way scenarios; this duality is not detected at first by the person who is processing the text; a certain element in the text triggers the understanding of this duality, therefore the joke receiver grasps the duality at some point. Consequently, the tension between the two scenarios; the tension is cathartically translated into laughter. Otherwise put, in humorous texts, "the boundaries between opposing scripts are temporarily blurred until they are realised; the tension between these boundaries that is then released is what causes laughter" (Kyratzis 2003).

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A typical example of a humorous text (taken from Raskin 1985) is the following one-liner: "the first thing which strikes a stranger in New York is a big car". This text supports two different (opposing) scripts: that of a tourist being impressed by something in New York and that of a tourist being hit by something in New York. The opposition is that between the real and imaginary script. The blurring of the boundaries between the two scripts is achieved via the word 'strikes', which is ambiguous because it may pertain to both scripts.

Grasping verbal humor frequently requires the integration of information from distinct knowledge domains (Coulson 2001, Norrick 1986, Wu n.d.). For example, grasping the joke in a line such as, "The diamond is the hardest stone - to get," involves the projection of the comprehender's mental representations of courtship and precious stones, which, although unlikely to co-occur in non-humorous situations, need to be juxtaposed in the processing of humorous texts. Coulson (2001) argues that underlying frames or scripts play a crucial part in the appreciation of a joke. In Coulson's view, the seemingly and "habitually incompatible frames of reference" prove to be not so incompatible after all.

To achieve joke comprehension, the receiver needs to:

1) draw correspondences between structurally analogous elements pertaining to distinct scripts

2) select contextually relevant mental representations from a range of choices including activation of least expected script.

Such a claim is consonant the incongruity-resolution account of humour (Suls 1983), which postulates a two-stage process for the perception, comprehension and appreciation of humour. The first stage involves the comprehender's perceiving some incongruity, while during the second stage this incongruity is resolved. While "there is general agreement about the existence of this two-stage structure in the process of perceiving and understanding humour" (Ritchie 2003), there is little agreement about what constitutes "incongruity" or "resolution" (see Latta 1999).

2.1 Script-based ambiguity and its triggers

Coming back to Raskin's seminal study on jokes, one basic argument that needs being considered at this point is that any felicitous joke exploits the overlapping of the two scripts or schemata, instantiated by a specific 'header' or 'script-switch trigger' (Raskin in Attardo 1994: 211). The overlapping of the two scripts is not necessarily a cause of humour in itself; to have a humorous effect, the two scripts should be conflicting. Other types of discourse are equally based on the simultaneous instantiation of several scripts, yet, unless the respective scripts are conflicting, the respective discourses may be obscure, allusive or metaphorical, but not necessarily humorous (Attardo 1994: 204). In Raskin's view,

"A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the following conditions are satisfied:

(i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts

(ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite[…] The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to be fully or in part in this text" (Raskin 1985 in Attardo 1994: 197).

Otherwise formulated, a humorous text must be compatible with the two different overlapping scripts and the two scripts are necessarily opposite. I would venture to adjust Raskin's claim by arguing that the second script envisaged is not expected to be instantiated as a sequel to the first script envisaged. Jokes induce the first script , which is plausible and predictable to the receiver, then resorts to the punch line, which challenges the addressee'

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initial expectations and suspend their initially activated script only to replace it by another, considerably less likely to have been instantiated in the first place. Suspending the initially activated script and performing a spur-on-the-moment switch towards the least expected script yields thus humorous effects:

The funniness of a joke may be accomplished via the concurrent activation of rival scripts, leading right before the punchline to or script suspension and embarking in the less expected script (Cook 1994: 82).

'Headers' or 'triggers' vary in their 'predictive power' being more or less strongly associated with one particular script, while this very 'scriptal ambiguity' is precisely exploited in achieving the punchline of the joke. Let us see an example:

(1) "I'm telling you, you can't make me tell a lie. Truth must be served."
"Oh, please, can't you serve it later?"
"No, it's getting cold."

('Perfect strangers')

The example displays 'scriptal ambiguity' as to which of the two scripts the header 'serves' is meant to be activated. One script is related to serving food or beverage. The other is activated by a second meaning of the verb 'serve' – 'to render active service, homage, or obedience to (God, a sovereign, commander etc.)' and is not predicted as likely to succeed the first in the light of the receiver's initial assumptions.

Resuming Raskin's view on script co-occurrence and script clash, script oppositions fall into three major classes: 1) actual versus non-actual; 2) normal versus abnormal; 3) possible versus impossible.

Such classes are rooted in the primaeval opposition between real and unreal, and, its more tangible, culture-dependent, versions, such as life versus death, obscene versus non-obscene, high versus low status etc. In line with Cook's above claim and my own line of argument, I would add a fourth class, namely: *expected* versus *unexpected*. I will also attempt to highlight that set-ons and punch lines are likely to activate what I would call 'least expected co-occurring scripts'. The discussion of a set of sitcom jokes is intended to reveal how the concomitant instantiation of scripts minimally likely to co-exist may arouse humorous effects.

2.2 Script instantiation as comprehension guideline

Like any new experience, humorous verbal interactions are understood by being compared to acquired stereotypical versions and in terms of deviation from or conformity with this stereotypical version. Stereotypical mental representations take various denominations in cognitive linguistics and in cognitive psychology, where the investigation of such systematic and simplified cognitive representations gathered momentum in the 70s, with the expansion of Artificial Intelligence studies. Shank and Abelson's term 'scripts' describes cognitive representations in terms of their spacio-temporal dimension – location and sequence of actions/events: A script is a structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context… Scripts handle stylized everyday situations… A script is a predetermined, stereotype sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation (Shank and Abelson 1977 in Semino 1997: 145).

Nowadays a term like 'script' seems easier to accommodate by language users, given their assumed knowledge about film and MTV video scripts. Yet, familiarity with film and MTV texts may equally distort interpretation by making visualisation oversalient even distortive. In

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addition, 'script' needs distinguishing from 'frame', a term introduced by Minsky (1975). If 'frame' refers to memory structures that contain stereotypical knowledge about specific *situations*, the term 'script' is used by Schank and Abelson to designate knowledge about *sequences of events* perceived in the chronological order of their occurrence (see Short 1996: 228 and Semino 1997: 128).

According to Wu, in his discussion on frame-shifting in written jokes: "A *frame* in the present sense of the term is an abstract construct postulated in the attempt to account for peoples' ability to draw upon prior experience in order to arrive at inferences about new objects and events encountered in the environment" (Wu n.d.). Rumelhart (1980) uses the term 'schemata' defined as 'higher order cognitive structures' comprising 'generic concepts stored in memory' consisting of networks of interrelations. According to Rumelhart and Ortony (in Semino 1977: 131) "Schemata are data structures for representing the generic concepts stored in memory. They exist for generalized concepts underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, and sequences of actions. Schemata are not atomic. A schema contains, as part of its specifications, the network of inter-relations that is believed to generally hold among the constituents of the concept in question."

Schemata arise from repeated exposure to similar objects and situations, resulting in mental representations of typical instances (Cook 1994: 11). Schemata can explain omission of certain elements and provide missing or 'default elements'. Consequently, comprehension and communication alike depend on shared expectations about the default elements of the schema. As 'building blocks of cognition' (Rumelhart 1980: 33), schemata facilitate retrieval of generic concepts stored in memory and organisation of both existing and newly-acquired knowledge into *associative conceptual networks.*

As far as research into humour is concerned, the concept of 'script', is defined by Attardo (2001: 2) as "a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how a given entity is structured."

Having hesitated as to whether I should use the term 'schema' or the term 'script', I decided in favour of the latter, because scripts imply a higher degree of interaction, which is indispensable in the processing of humorous texts: "[…] interactive frames differ from knowledge schemas on the crucial point that they are fundamentally relational: they are brought to bear whenever a person enters into a relationship with another object, person, group, or event. Knowledge schemas, by contrast, reflect structure which is not contingent upon the presence of any external entity. An important implication of this distinction is that interactive frames are constituted not only by the background understanding which participants bring to the interaction, but also by the ways in which they regulate and tune their behavior" (Wu n.d.).

2.3 Jokes as expectation-challenging discourses

In the pages to come, I intend to show how overlapping and/or 'least expected co-occurring scripts' operate with a set of sitcom jokes extracted from series such as 'Perfect Strangers', 'Cybil', 'M.A.S.H.' and 'The Prince of Bel-Air'. I intend to discuss the particular scripts likely to be instantiated in each joke together with the way in such scripts are potentially expectation-shattering. It is equally in my intention to evincing the types of headers used and to unveil the mechanisms meant to simultaneously activate least expected scripts during the interaction with a jocular text.

As a rule, jokes are instances of expectation-challenging discourses: joke receivers may have their existing schemata contradicted by the joke text, even if these schemata are

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powerful to the point of having become clichés. An example of disrupted cliché is offered in example (2):

(2) Mr. Banks' son is worried about his admission in college, especially that he knows that he is not as good as his father or his cousin. His father tries to encourage him: "You don't have to prove anything, to impress anyone. You don't have to do what I do, or be like your cousin. Just be yourself!"
His son answers: "Oh, please, there's no need to be cruel!"
('The Prince of Bel-Air')

The father's advice, "Just be yourself", prompts the joke receiver to instantiate what Raskin calls a 'normal' script, i.e. a predictable and predictably assessable pattern of behaviour: acting natural is acknowledged, in most (western) cultures, to be a valuable, positive, rewarding attitude, which has been verbalized in the form of a cliché. The joke exploits the simultaneous possible activation of two contradictory scripts: the 'naturalness' schema, on the one hand, and the 'low self-esteem' schema on the other: for people with a poor personality, far from being rewarding, acting natural is disastrous. This switch from one 'normal' script, "be yourself" to a least expected, yet equally 'normal' script: refusal of mischievous teasing, changes the perspective on the advice. If initially, the father's recommendation was expected to be well-meant and kind, in the end it comes to sound thoughtless, even gratuitously scathing.

Example (3) is based on a similar opposition of schemata likely to be instantiated by joke receivers:

(3) Carlton: Listen, I don't like this idea: driving like nuts on the highway, listening to loud music and all this stuff."
Will: ""Relax, brother, nothing will happen to you. After all, let's live a little; look at us: we're young, we're single, one of us is really attractive, the other one is you".
('The Prince of Bel-Air')

The first part of Will's last sentence ("…one of us is really attractive") is likely to activate an 'advantage' script, in which attractiveness is an asset. The second part of Will's repartee ("the other one is you") prompts a 'disadvantage' script, clashing with the first one. The implicature of this last sentence is not only that, presumably, 'the other one', i.e. his geeky cousin Carlton does not fit into an 'attractiveness' subscript, but neither in some 'compensatory', reasonably expectable script, of the type 'I/Will am attractive, you/Carlton are clever'. Since the compensatory element is missing, the joke may trigger an expectation-challenging effect on the joke receiver, brought about by the sudden instantiation of a least expected script , that of Will candidly imparting to his cousin Carlton his belief in Carlton 's constant cutting a poor figure. Example (4) exploits the same pattern:

(4) Two women are talking about their husbands. One of them says: "Oh, I know what you mean. My husband has only two moods: angry and angrier".
('Perfect Strangers')

At first, the joke exploits expectations likely to be triggered by the sentence: "my husband has only two moods", Background knowledge prompts the expectations that the two moods are different, if not opposite. This script of two opposite moods, expected to be verbalized by two

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antonyms, clashes with the script most likely to be activated by the punch, yet unlikely to have been initially anticipated. The script is to be instantiated by a comeback to the same lexical trigger: the adjective 'angry', yet used with two different degrees of comparison. Use of the same word shatters the listener's expectations, which initially was anchored in two opposites.

Instantiation of unlikely-to-co-occur scripts exploits what Raskin designates as the opposition between real and unreal situations. Example (5) illustrates Raskin's actual/non-actual dichotomy:

(5) Mr. Banks asks his son, Carlton, to help him fix the cradle. Since both of them are clumsy, it takes longer than they thought and Carlton is really annoyed. Mr. Banks asks him:
"Am I keeping you from something more important?"
"As a matter of fact, I have to study for my mid-term, to go to a party with the boys, and then I'd like to have a wife and kids and go on with my life."
('Prince of Bel-Air')

This joke is based on a possible/impossible opposition between short-term and long-term goals and on their unexpected juxtaposition. The first script likely to be instantiated invokes the adequate time for fixing a cradle (a short-term goal, normally not time-consuming). The second one, triggered by 'having a wife and kids…' is a script scaffolded by long-term, even lifelong goals and intentions, obviously impossible to fulfil during or instead of fixing a cradle.

(6) "You know, my husband gave up working as a stunt man, and, although he is unemployed, he wouldn't change his mind. He says that going back to stunts would be a step back."
"I understand what he's afraid of. You see, if he takes a step back, he'll get back to the caves again".
('Cybill')

This example is based on a high/low status script opposition. The first script, that of a high status person unwilling to give up this position is opposed to a second script, in which the same person is described as very close to the 'cave man', a widespread cultural epitome of atavism and brutish ignorance. Unlike in other jokes, there are no lexical triggers for the two scripts, but the whole text is responsible for activating the scripts in question. Usually, joke texts do contain a lexical header for the scripts; moreover, these headers are ambiguous, they may trigger two different scripts while leaving room for the least expected scripts to be successively instantiated.

Example (7) is equally relevant in this respect:

(7) Mrs. Banks: "Listen, Phillip, I've read in this magazine that these cradles are very dangerous. One of them threw a baby and he flew fifty feet in the air."
Mr. Banks: "Oh, relax, honey, I'm sure we can beat that".
('The Prince of Bel-Air')

The first script likely to be activated in the joke is that of "extreme danger"; the proportion of the danger is suggested by the 'fifty feet' header, which is not very accurately 'predictive' since it does not activate one specific script, but it can be common to various scripts. In the

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punchline, the same header is used to potentially trigger a least expected script: that of record breaking.

(8) "My grandmother is 106 years old and she is as strong as a sea-turtle."
"I wonder what I will be like when I am 106 "
"You'll have no problem; you already look like a sea-turtle."

('Perfect Strangers')

The joke is based on the overlap of two scripts, likely to be triggered by one lexical item: 'sea-turtle'. The sea turtle is a symbol displaying different connotations in different cultures: while with some it bears appreciative emotional connotations, and is regarded/intended as a compliment (in the first sentence), with others it is only an embodiment of decrepitude and old age. The last line is ambiguous: it seems to be bona-fide communication, but the implicature of using the verb 'look' instead of 'be' or 'behave' is: "you just look old, but you are unlikely to become mature/wise/strong".

Not only are joke receivers are inclined to activate different scripts during their encounter with the same text, but they manage to finally espouse the least expected script during the concurrent activation of potentially rival scripts. Example (9) illustrates this argument:

(9) Mother: "I can't believe that you and Carlton have graduated and are moving into your own place now. It seems to me that only yesterday was I wiping the tears off his little face."
Will: "Oh, but it was yesterday, aunt Viv. I told you he wasn't prepared to see <Jurassic Park>".

('The Prince of Bel-Air')

The joke is likely to urge listeners to activate the 'age' script, consisting of two mutually exclusive subscripts. The first is a 'maturity' subscript, triggered by mentioning graduation and moving to a place of on one's own. The other one is a 'childhood' subscript, whose headers are the 'crying when seeing a film' (implying the inability to distinguish between fiction and reality, fear of the unknown) and 'having Mummy wiping off the tears'. These two scripts are not incompatible when applied to different persons, but they are mutually exclusive when activated in relation to the same person. Their co-occurrence despite their mutual exclusion is expectation-challenging and it consequently feeds the punchline.

(10) Cybill enters a club for old celebrities and one of the retired actors there tries to make a pass on her.
Retired actor: "Listen, baby, do you know who I am?"
Cybill: "No, but I'm sure after a little nap you'll remember".

(Cybill)

In this joke, the 'age' script is the least probable to be instantiated, since the retired actor's repartee is not an honest question uttered in confusion and distress by an amnesic or senile person. It is a pick-up line, meant to reinforce his being both famous and irresistible. Cybil's answer, while feigning taking the actor's utterance for an honest question, expands on the 'age' script, with peculiar emphasis on the dottiness and forgetfulness as cruel yet unavoidable side-effects of aging. the 'fame and charisma' script is usually incompatible with the senility script, yet the latter is likely to be accommodated by the joke receiver, especially

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after Cybill has uttered the final, allegedly recomforting and morale boosting utterance on the benefits of a nap for the elderly.

(11) The night before an important exam, Balki and Larry decide to stay up all night and study. Naturally, they fall asleep and wake up at ten o'clock in the morning.
Larry:"Balki, wake up, it's ten o'clock, your history exam started an hour ago."
Balky: "Really? How am I doing?"
('Perfect Strangers')

Unexpectedness of script sequencing exploits Raskin's opposition between 'possible versus impossible' scripts. There are two mutually exclusive subscripts likely to be activated with an 'exam' script: taking it or not taking it, out of various reasons, one of which could be oversleeping. Although he is in the latter situation, Balki behaves as if the exam were in progress; the juxtaposition between 'possible' and 'impossible' scenarios underlines Larry's implying that Balki is late for his exam and consequently he must have failed.

Jokes often exploit juxtaposition of unexpectedly co-occurring scripts rooted in social practices and cultural norms, as is the case of the humorous dialogue below:

(12) "Isn't it too long a trip for a woman who is 106?"
"Are you kidding? My grandmother wakes up every day before sunrise, goes ten miles up the hill with the goats and grazes them, then goes down the hill ten miles, cooks breakfast for 26 men and, after they go to work, she does 45' of aerobics."
('Perfect Strangers')

Processing the joke may lead to activation of two opposite scripts - 'actual versus non-actual' is Raskin's classification - based on a cultural incongruity: the image of an overworked woman, subordinated to men, toiling in a rural environment in Mypos, suggested by the first sentences, and the image of the American, emancipated urban woman of the 80's and her interest in body-building, ("she does 45' of aerobics"). The unpredictable juxtaposition emerging is that between the commonly entertained image of a 106 year old and the activities she is said to engage in, mentioned in a least expected succession, yields a combination of unlikely-to-co-occur scripts which is inevitably humorous.

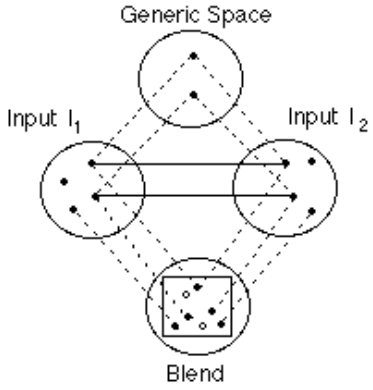
3. Juxtaposition of incompatibles and blends

According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002) a wide variety of cognitive phenomena involve the conceptual combination of information pertaining to clearly delineated domains, known as 'mental spaces'.

Blending is a process of conceptual mapping and integration that pervades human thought. A mental space is a small conceptual structure serving specific thought and action goals. A 'conceptual integration network' is network that contains one or more mental spaces, among which a 'blended mental space' or a 'blend' A 'blend' is an integrated space that receives input projections from other mental spaces in the network and develops a new emergent structure, otherwise not available from the inputs.

As the figure above reveals (adapted from Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 46), the two input spaces at the centre of the diagram roughly correspond to the source and target domains. The third space, the blend, is created with elements projected by both input spaces. Although the blend integrates elements from the two input spaces, it may acquire its own *emergent*

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structure. The fourth space, the generic, is a schematic representation of the elements shared by all spaces. Consider the following example:

(13) My surgeon is a butcher,

The generic space will have elements such as *agent*, *event*, *outcome,* common to all other spaces. The two input spaces will be that of SURGEON and BUTCHER, which project elements such as *surgery, butcher's knives etc.* onto the blend. The blended space discloses a surgeon keen on reaching their ends by butcher-like procedures. Thus, "it is this unique combination of elements that creates the emergent structure in the blend and the notion of incompetence appears" (Kyratsis 2003).

According to conceptual integration or blending theorists, blends or mental representations constructed within the joke legitimize incongruity between the two incompatible domains or spaces which co-exist in the joke. Coulson (2003: 3) discusses in terms of blending the classic joke below:

(14) "Why did the chicken cross the road?"
"To get to the other side."

She maintains that the humour of the joke relies on the incongruity of the fact that chickens are not normally found in streets and do not have directional intentions. This incongruity is, however, legitimate within the blend (which is the world the joke constructs) where the chicken is still a chicken, but with human-like intentions.

In order to adapt apparently incompatible skills, metaphorical transfer may take place as in the following example:

(15) "Well, nice to meet you guys, but I must be going now."
"Won't you stay for dinner? We have "ambush stew". It attacks you when you least expect it."

('M.A.S.H. 4077')

The unusual collocation 'ambush stew' and the explanation given are based on the alleged incompatibility between two scripts likely to be activated by hearers: the 'dinner' script, embedding the 'bad food' subscript, and the 'war' script. The metaphorical transfer from the war jargon onto the eating script (reinforced in the subsequent explanation: "It attacks you when you least expect it") is likely to bring about juxtaposition of least-expected-to-co-exist scripts, which obviously revigorates the expectation-challenging potential of humorous discourses.

In the joke below, switch of register may equally contribute to legitimising co-occurrence of speech acts belying scripts that would appear more often than not as mutually exclusive.

(16) "Hey, man, what are you doing? Are you crazy?
"I prefer the term "emotionally challenged".

('The Prince of Bel-Air')

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The utterance 'are you crazy', which is an indirect way of reprimanding somebody for being unreasonable, is likely to activate an 'irrational behavior' script. Reprimanding somebody by questioning their sanity expectedly entails backlash, protest, denial. In this case, the least expected repartee is that of declaring the speaker's linguistic preference, i.e. his wish to replace 'crazy' by its politically-correct synonym 'emotionally challenged'. The normally assumed opposition between insane behaviour and politically-correct stance collapses in the switch of register, which reconciles scriptal incompatibility.

As the joke below reveals, puns may engender incompatibility while later on reconciling seemingly incompatible scripts in a space that allow them to 'blend', i.e. to co-exist during the joke.

(17) Mr. Banks: "Oh, hello, Vivian, how are you? You look great, did you lose some weight?"
Vivian: "Yes, and it seems to me that you have found it."
('The Prince of Bel-Air')

Punning the verb ('to lose') is a device meant to generate successive activation of unlikely-to-co-occur scripts). In Mr. Banks's repartee, the verb is used as part of an idiomatic structure ('to lose weight'). In his wife's repartee, the verb preserves its lexical meaning and its semantic relations with the other words, in this case, the antonym 'to find', likely to trigger what Ruskin calls 'an impossible' script, that of somebody literally finding the weight some other person must have 'lost'.

Certain jokes involve the creation of a blend which encompasses metaphorical meanings and accommodates more than one instance of incompatibility. Consider the joke below:

(15) "My job is shooting naked celebrities, you know."
"Oh, is it difficult?"
"Yes, it is. For instance, today we've been shooting La Toya Jackson, and we had to turn off the lights, because she was melting."
('Prince of Bel-Air')

To comprehend the joke some background knowledge on La Toya Jackson is indispensable: she is an extremely appealing Afro-American pop star, whose skin color and her renowned sex-appeal allow the mapping of attractiveness into "sweetness", hence La Toya's being associated with chocolate in the 'blend' of the joke. The first script likely to be activated by the joke receiver is that of shooting/filming, which implies light and heat as indispensable elements and which implicitly exclude darkness. With the blending of sex-appeal into 'chocolate' a second instance of co-occurrence of incompatibles emerges in the 'blend', that between hot and cold. It is common knowledge that chocolate has to be kept in cold, dark places in order not to melt. Consequently, joke receivers are confronted with more than one incompatibility: the filming script is not incompatible to the chocolate script, but with two 'impossible' subscripts: turning off the lights makes filming impossible, keeping the lights on will melt the 'chocolate'.

4. Concluding remarks

The above analysis of a corpus of jocular exchanges from sitcoms has endeavoured to partially adjust Raskin's (1985) and Attardo's (2001) claim as to the presence of two co-

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occurring scripts and of oppositeness of such scripts as triggerers of humorous effects with jokes. While agreeing with the two scholars as to jokes enabling instantiation of a first script, plausible and predictable to the receiver, and as to the punch line, which suspends the initially activated script, I would emphasise that this second script is not opposite to the first, but appears as 'the least predictable' in relation to the first. Switching receivers' expectations towards expectation-challenging scripts generates co-occurrence of normally incompatible scripts within innovative blends. Suspending the initially activated script and performing a spur-on-the-moment switch towards the least expected script yields thus humorous effects. Obviously, aaccurately defining 'unpredictability' and measuring degrees of unexpectedness requires further insight into psychological mechanisms of humour reception, which transgress the scope of this paper.

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