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## “We are not amused”.

### The appreciation of British humour by British and American English L1 users<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

This empirical study investigates the differences in the appreciation of British humour by British English and American English L1 users. A total of 128 British and 95 American English L1 users (with 18 being bi-dialectal—having experiences in the UK) rated the funniness of two short extracts from two British television series and answered an open question on their perceptions. Results indicated that American English L1 users perceived British humour as less funny and were less able to “get” the ironic and sarcastic aspect of British humour than British English L1 users. This study highlights the role of emotion, as both a reaction during humour processing and a prerequisite prior to humour processing. Moreover, length of residence is not found to be related to the appreciation of humour in another dialect in this study.

#### 1. Introduction

A failed attempt at humour can have unpleasant social consequences. This is what happened to an unfortunate equerry who ventured during dinner at Windsor Castle to tell a story with a spice of scandal. According to courtier Caroline Holland in *Notebooks of a Spinster Lady* (1919), Queen Victoria remained po-faced and reputedly said, using the *pluralis maiestatis*, “We are not amused”, when he had concluded his story. The royal rebuke must have hurt, because, as Wickberg (1998) points out: “It is the horror of being named as lacking a sense of humour that has defined the value” (p. 85).

Being humorous in a familiar register (or dialect) in the first language (L1) can be a challenge, while in an unfamiliar L1 register, dialect, sociolect, L1 variant or in a foreign language (LX), it is truly daunting. Those who can be funny or who can perceive funniness outside their dominant register, dialect, sociolect, L1 variant or language have acquired this elusive part of sociopragmatic competence, “the social perceptions underlying participants’ interpretation and performance of communicative action” (Kasper

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and Rose, 2001, p. 2). The ability to make people laugh, and to laugh when appropriate is a powerful pragmatic skill.

However, the interplay of linguistic, cultural and emotional factors in humour makes the understanding and appreciation of humour challenging as it requires split-second detection and resolution of incongruities. Language proficiency plays a role in this process (Bell, 2005; Chen & Dewaele, 2019). However, due to its elusiveness and ambiguity, humour can easily fall flat as the poor equerry found out at the dinner with Queen Victoria.

Misunderstandings resulting from miscomprehension and miscommunication of humour is a favourite topic of the popular press. According to the *Evening Standard*, the Canadian singer Justin Bieber gave an honest answer about British humour, which is “I don't have a clue as to what's been going on for the past 20 minutes. I'm from Canada. I don't get all this humour. I don't know if you're making fun of me? I just don't get British humour” (*Evening Standard*, 2012). The British host assured the Canadian guest that he was just “taking the mickey” (i.e., making fun of his guest), adding to the confusion of Justin Bieber with the mysterious British word “mickey”.

YouGov survey recently reported how Americans often miss British sarcasm in everyday phrases. The largest difference lies in the understanding of the phrase “with the greatest respect”. British (68%) understood it as “I think you are an idiot”, whereas most Americans (49%) were more likely to take it at face value and thought it simply means “I am listening to you” (Smith, 2019). While sarcasm and irony can overlap, yielding “sarcastic irony”, and are used interchangeably sometimes, the former actually differs from the latter in its inherent negativity evaluation (Dynel, 2014).

Dewaele (2015) found significant differences in the semantic and conceptual representations of negative emotion-laden English words of American and British origin among British and American English L1 users<sup>1</sup>. In a follow-up study focusing on the American English L1 users, Dewaele (2018b) found that the semantic and conceptual representations of the words of British origin (“daft”, “bollocks”, “bugger”, “wanker”) had shifted significantly in the group of Americans who had lived outside the US. No change was observed in the representations of the words of American origin. This suggests that secondary socialisation in the new L1 variant or dialect causes subtle change in semantic and conceptual representations, including connotations and taboos, which could affect the ability to appreciate humour in the other L1 variant or dialect.

In the present study, we focus on the differences in British humour appreciation between L1 users of British and American English, and investigate how linguistic, cultural and emotional factors affect their humour appreciation.

## **2. Understanding humour**

### **2.1 Aspects of humour**

Researchers agree that humour involves a cognitive aspect and an emotional aspect. The perception of humour involves a cognitive shift or the detection of an unexpected incongruity between frames of references, category boundaries, schemas, scripts or codes, which is then reconciled either as a forced choice (e.g. Attardo and Raskin, 1991) or of listener's own volition (Veale, 2004), either sequentially (e.g. Suls, 1972) or simultaneously (see Martin, 2010). This incongruity-resolution theory of humour is

complemented by Veale's (2015) subversion view of humour, in which humour is taken as a compressed thought experiment of creative subversions at various levels including verbal meaning, conceptual mappings, figures of speech, pragmatic uses and cultural references.

The cognitive shift in humour processing is accompanied by a process of emotional shift. While perceiving humour, one goes through a process of subjective appraisal of humorous stimuli which triggers certain heightened emotional arousal, mainly mirth, with varying degree of intensity. A biological basis has been found for this emotional response in brain-imaging studies of humour using neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI (see Mobbs et al., 2003). Apart from mirth, other emotions are involved. The incongruity-resolution theory of humour emphasises the importance of "surprise" in the process of humour perception (Suls, 1972). Veatch (1998) argues that humour is an experience of "emotional pain that doesn't actually hurt" or "emotional absurdity" that is not actually absurd (p. 161). The *Benign Violation theory* proposed by McGraw and Warren (2010) captivates the transient feelings of being surprised, insecure, threatened or violated (because of the incongruities or violations) to being relieved and amused. The negative feelings could occur simultaneously with or prior to the positive ones. The changing of valence of emotions or the emergence of humour is caused if three conditions are met: the presence of alternative explanations, weak commitment to the violated norm and a certain psychological distance to it.

However, most of the approaches to humour perception suggest that the emotional aspect of humour is just a reaction, an accessory or a companion of the cognitive aspect of humour. According to Raskin and Attardo's cooperative-principle for joke telling, humour is a social construct and the success of it involves the collaboration of both the teller and the listener. In other words, the search for the needed incongruity and/or resolution requires the listener to be emotionally or psychologically prepared, be in a mind at the moment as playful as to turn the linguistic or cultural violations to benignness. The cooperative-principle for joke telling is a reflection of the Gricean Principle:

"... the speaker and the hearer [in explicit joke contexts] are not only both attuned to humor but also to each other. They are both actively, consciously – and cooperatively – engaged in the joke-telling non-bona-fide communication mode. ... [Hearers] perceive the intention of the speaker as an attempt to make them laugh. As a result, hearers will look for the necessary ingredients of the joke in the speaker's utterance." (Raskin and Attardo, 1994, p. 37)

## ***2.2 Humour, funniness and appreciation***

Humour differs from funniness but they also share similarities. One can be regarded as funny but not necessarily having a sense of humour. Humour involves both the quality of being amusing and the ability to detect, appreciate and communicate amusement.

Funniness is more a quality than an ability and often implies unpleasantness. Despite the difference, both terms refer to the quality of being amusement and participants' evaluation of funniness can be a measurement for the degree of humour (e.g. Ayçiçeği-Dinn, Şişman-Bal, and Caldwell-Harris, 2018). Also, how funniness is conceptualised

depends on both the humour in contexts and the perspective from which the humour is evaluated (Sinkeviciute, 2017c).

Humour is a complex concept which is defined not only by a degree of funniness, but a complicated relationship between recognition, understanding, appreciation and agreement. Appreciation, as Hay (2001) views, is gradient rather than categorical. It is not a matter of funny or not funny, but a degree of funniness. Focusing on audience interpretation, Hay (2001) analysed natural conversational data and discusses the four implicatures associated with full support (or full appreciation in this study) of humour: recognition of a humorous frame, understanding the humour, appreciating the humour, and agreeing with any message associated with it. The former three are in an entailment relationship, which means, for example, that the hearer may display recognition and understanding but deny appreciation. In other words, one may be aware of the intended humour but show no appreciation of it, or may indicate appreciation but disagree with the message. One example of such is self-deprecating humour which deprecates the speaker him/herself without any agreement from the hearer. This study however does not need any explicit agreement on the part of the audience (or participants), so an indication of funniness is sufficient to show appreciation which displays recognition and understanding.

### ***2.3 Factors affecting humour appreciation***

Three major factors affect both the cognitive and emotional aspects in humour processing: complexity of humorous stimuli, ease of understanding and emotional intensity (Raskin, 2008). A higher degree of complexity of references in humour—humour with characteristics of domain-specificity, complexity, novelty and subtlety—is positively correlated with the degree of funniness in humour (Raskin, 2008). Ease of understanding is negatively correlated with complexity and the time to resolve the incongruities in humour perception (Cunningham and Derks, 2005). This relationship applies to emotional arousal and humour perception as well (e.g. Godkewitsch, 1972). In other words, humour is perceived to be funnier when its difficulty level is neither too high nor too low but at a moderate level and the listener is moderately emotionally aroused. Research on factors affecting humour perception is still in its infancy and more factors need to be identified. Humour can also be understood as a phenomenon involving shared codes, knowledge and emotional significance (Chiaro, 2009). A dynamic interplay of language, culture and emotion affects the degree of complexity of humorous stimuli, the degree of ease of understanding and emotional intensity.

#### *Language*

Humour involves incongruity at various linguistic levels. Linguistic competence is crucial for comprehending the content of the humour as it allows the listener to detect humorous intentions (Carrell, 1997).

Vaid (2000) argued that semantic representations determine how incongruities are formed and resolved especially when core and peripheral word meanings are in competition.

Subtle variation in semantic and conceptual representations exist among users of different L1s and even those who use different dialects of the same L1. Dewaele (2015)

investigated the perception, use and understanding of emotion-laden words by British and American English L1 users. British English L1 users were found to have a significantly better understanding than American English L1 users of almost half of 30 emotion-laden words of British origin extracted from the British National Corpus. American English L1 users also reported using these words significantly less.

Chen and Dewaele (2019) found that humour with higher lexical and syntactic complexity hindered understanding and appreciation for both English L1 users and L2 users.

Detection and resolution of incongruities in humour also depends on the capacity to notice variation in pitch, stress, repetition, exaggerated prosody, marked linguistic forms, code, style, and register switching (Holmes, 2000; Norrick, 2007; Vaid, 2000).

### *Culture*

Dewaele (2015) argued that a speaker who had been exposed intensely enough to another variant of an L1 could be viewed as a “bi-dialectal” or “bi-varietal” monolingual, a specific kind of bilingual, and may have less stereotypical representations of the other culture. He found that British English L1 users gave significantly higher offensiveness scores to taboo words of British origin than American English L1 users, which reflected differences in semantic and conceptual representations and cultural connotations.

Humour itself can be culture-specific. It is impossible to draw definite borders as there are areas of overlap. First, even the so-called universal stupidity jokes which make fun of outsiders, simpletons and others on the fringes of society (Davies, 2011), are culturally specified, that is, nearly each nation has its own “butt” of stupidity jokes (McGraw and Warner, 2014). The English take pleasure at the expense of Irish, while in France, it’s the French-speaking Swiss or Belgians, in the United States the Polish (Davies, 2011).

Second, different cultures have different forms of joking relationships—the societal rules about who can joke with whom about what. For example, in East Africa, the Zaramu tribe can joke with the Sukuma tribe and Sukuma with Zigua members. Attempt at joking with the wrong person can be rude (McGraw and Warner, 2014).

Bi-dialectal users of English may be aware that humour in another culture of English may be different due to different history, values, customs etc. For example, there has been an old jibe that “Americans just don’t get irony” (Duffy, 2004), whereas irony and sarcasm are central in British humour. Comedian Simon Pegg contended that Americans do get sarcasm or sarcastic irony but just use it less frequently than the British. He compared British irony to kettle which is always on, whistling slyly in the corner of daily conversations, whereas irony to Americans is more like a nice teapot used only occasionally (*The Guardian*, 2007). This difference is best illustrated by the UK sitcom *The Office* and its identically named American adaptation. Wells-Lassagne’s (2012) microscopic qualitative analysis on the pilot episode of the two TV series revealed that humour in the US adaptation was more explicit (with less sarcastic irony) than the UK original and that self-deprecation and cruelty were more frequent in the latter. However, Pegg’s view was recently challenged by Diffrient (2020) who, adopting an autoethnographic approach, revealed how factors including class, distinction and the cultural capital or taste are potential to disentangle the culture specifics in British sitcoms.

## *Emotion*

The language in which humour is presented have different levels of emotional resonance in the multilingual listener, which can further affect its humour processing. LX users generally experience reduced emotionality, increased detachment in the LX compared to L1 users, and this includes weaker appreciation of humour in the LX (Dewaele, 2013; Dewaele et al., 2021). Therefore, an LX user may fail in recognising intended incongruities in humour, and in turn, not be amused. This may apply to bi-dialectal users as well in the other L1 variant. The lack of necessary positive emotions required for the appreciation of humour could cause the humour to fall flat. In other words, the listener needs to be emotionally prepared or in a playful state of mind to engage in humorous activities when searching for the needed incongruity and/or resolution (Veale, 2004).

### **2.4 Cross-cultural humour appreciation**

The last two decades have witnessed a growing awareness of the importance of humour appreciation across languages and cultures, mostly by L2 users, either in L2 user-L2 user interactions or in L1 user-L2 user interactions (e.g., Ayçiçeği-Dinn et al., 2018; Bell, 2005, 2009; Bell and Pomerantz, 2014; Erdodi and Lajiness-O'Neil, 2012; Neff and Rucynski, 2017; Pomerantz and Bell, 2011). With a few exceptions (see Sinkeviciute 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), intercultural humour appreciation among users of different dialects of English L1 has been under-researched. Sinkeviciute (2017a), for instance, focused on intracultural and intercultural humour in British and Australian contexts and found that the differences in jocular interactional practices between the two contexts are mainly qualitative rather than quantitative.

Another valuable work on this issue was conducted by Béal and Mullan (2013, p. 108). They were devoted to develop a humour model that provides a clear-cut criterion for classifying and comparing cross-cultural humour examples. Through analysing qualitative data—conversational French and Australian humour, they argued that there are four dimensions involved in humour concurrently: 1) The speaker/target/recipient interplay; 2) The language dimension: linguistic mechanisms and/or discursive strategies used by speakers; 3) The different pragmatic functions; 4) The interactional dimension.

However, most of these studies were conducted from an emic perspective only by adopting a qualitative approach, rarely using a quantitative approach or a mixed method. The present study aims to uncover the dimensions of British humour for the comparability between recipients from different cultures, by adopting a quantitative approach. The dimensions are then triangulated with qualitative data.

### **2.5 On British humour**

British humour, “subtle, airy, real but elusive, accepted as a national trait but apparently quite unexportable” (Jennings, 1970, p. 169), is pervasive in English culture and social interactions (Fox, 2004). It has a certain degree of unfathomability: there are no neon lights indicating that they are actually joking (Kiss, 2017). Self-deprecation and

understatement play an important role in British humour (Mikes, 2016). Self-deprecation is appreciated when the failings are minor and understatement is perceived to be a national trait (e.g., under-reaction and the use of polite words rather than the expletive).

Also, a sense of irony is viewed as a typical British feature (Norbury, 2011). The heavy use of sarcasm and irony in British humour, with a strong flavour of cruelty<sup>2</sup>, delivered in a deadpan manner, has been the focus in numerous studies. Kopper (2020), for example, discussed how the British used cartoons to ridicule the US for not joining WWI, demonstrating that irony and ridicule can go down as friendly ribbing among equal parties and play a conflict-mediating role. Beck and Spencer (2020) looked at British humour in international politics focusing on satirical and comedic narratives in the recruitment videos of armed forces. The specifics of British humour have also been used as good cases for more humour studies, such as Ajtony (2020), Jabłońska-Hood (2020), and Zhang and Pearce (2019).

## ***2.6 Implications for the present study***

In sum, previous studies suggest that the interaction of linguistic, cultural and emotional factors make the appreciation of humour challenging. To date, research probing into the humour appreciation of users in another L1 dialect is still rare. Therefore, the present study will consider humour appreciation among L1 users of British English and **American** English, using audio-visual video clips extracted from popular British sitcoms.

## **3. Research questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there any differences in the appreciation of British humour between British and American English L1 users?
2. Is there a link between length of stay in the UK and appreciation of British humour by the bi-dialectal American English L1 users?
3. What are the dimensions of British humour?
4. To what extent do British and American English L1 users differ in each dimension?
5. If there are differences, do bi-dialectal American English L1 users who have lived in the UK approximate the values of their British peers?

## **4. Methodology**

A video-embedded online questionnaire was used to collect data. Snowball sampling was adopted: potential participants were contacted and at the end of the questionnaire they were invited to spread the call for participation to their family, friends, and colleagues. The study received ethical approval from the authors' research institution.

### ***4.1 Participants***

A total of 223 English L1 users took part in this study. They included 128 UK-based British English L1 users and 95 US-based American English L1 users.

The 128 British English L1 users (77 females and 50 males, one undeclared) had an average age of 40 ( $SD = 17.2$ ), ranging from 16 to 74 years old. Participants in this group were generally highly educated, with 23.4% of them holding a PhD, 28.1% having a Master's degree, 38.3% having a Bachelor's degree and the remaining 10.2% having high

school qualification or equivalents. The predominance of female, highly educated participants is quite normal in language related survey, as participants were self-selected and only those highly motivated and having access to internet were likely to complete the survey (Wilson and Dewaele, 2010). Most had lived in the UK for their whole life. In addition, only 51 of them reported speaking English only and the other 77 of them reported to be bilinguals ( $N = 20$ ), trilinguals ( $N = 30$ ), quadrilinguals ( $N = 19$ ), pentalinguals ( $N = 6$ ) and sextalinguals ( $N = 2$ ).

The 95 US-based American English L1 users (64 females and 31 males) were also highly educated. Forty percent had a PhD, 34% a Master's degree, 23% a Bachelor's degree and only 3% had no more than a high school qualification. Mean age was 36 ( $SD = 15$ ), ranging from 16 to 72 years old. Eighteen participants had spent between 1 month and 40 years ( $M = 6.97$ ,  $SD = 11.6$ ) in the UK. They reported to speak up to 12 other languages.

## 4.2 Instruments

Participants started with filling out items concerning their background information presented above. They then completed two humour perception tasks. Firstly, they were presented with two one minute-long video extracts selected from two British sitcoms: *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Outnumbered* respectively (the same ones used in Chen and Dewaele, 2019). Both of them depicted real-life situations and used British English speaking actors. *Yes, Prime Minister*, an award-winning political satire, aired from 1986 to 1988, zoomed in on the relationship between two contrasting characters: Jim Hacker, the Prime Minister and Sir Humphrey Appleby, his Permanent Secretary. Based on various sources including inside government, contemporary news stories and published materials, the show was viewed as so resembling the reality that it was “unhealthily close to life” (Crisell, 2002, p. 201). The extract selected for this study was from the last episode “The Tangled Web”. The second sitcom, *Outnumbered*, aired from 2007 to 2014, portrayed a middle-class family in London. It centred on how Sue and Pete were outnumbered by their three unruly and raucous children. The scripts were semi-improvised so as to obtain as genuine and natural performances as possible from the children and to elicit their own voices (Tyers, 2007). The extract used for this study was from the episode “Keeping up with The Joneses”.

The video clip from *Yes, Prime Minister* shows a conversation between Sir Humphrey Appleby and the Prime Minister. It is a high wire act by the highly educated Sir Humphrey who accuses the (not-so-highly educated) Prime Minister of lying while avoiding a direct face threat. To do so, he resorts to euphemisms in a tangled, complicated, roundabout, impressive-sounding yet increasingly ridiculous sentence, with carefully chosen terms, longwinded technical jargon and circumlocutions.

The video clip *Outnumbered* shows a doorstep conversation between two middle class neighbours in plain English. It portrays a stark social contrast between the neighbour Barbara's well-behaved children who go to a private school, and Sue's children who swear and misbehave.

The two video clips share the ever-popular theme of social class in British humour. The English love to mock the aspirations and awkwardness of social climbers and make gentle

fun at the class system (Fox, 2004). The transcripts and URL to the video clips are available in the Appendix. Results of Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests showed that British English L1 users perceived the two video clips as equally funny ( $Z = -1.2, p = ns$ ). Each video clip was followed by three questions. First, participants were asked to rate the funniness of scenario in the video clip on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing “not funny at all” and 5 “extremely funny”. The deliberate use of one item was to elicit a holistic snap judgement of humour from the participants. In this study, we argue that humour, especially in multimodal form, should be an integrated entity with all aspects interconnected to each other. The interaction of all aspects contributes to the humour. Then, participants were presented with a second question which began with “you think it’s funny because...”, followed by 14 items regarding the possible reasons why the scenario in the video clip was funny. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent each reason had contributed to the humour, also on a 5-point scale, with one representing “not at all” and 5 “extremely”. The reasons had emerged from a previous study (Chen, 2019) that included interviews with British English L1 users. Reasons why scenario might be funny included: “the vocabulary (language)”, “accent”, “tone of voice”, “body gestures”, “facial expressions”, and “physical appearances” (items 1-6), or because it broke “moral principles”, “cultural norms” and “social norms” (items 7-9), or because “some contents (e.g., sexual, scatological, political) are socially inappropriate” (item 10), “something has been exaggerated”, “there are twists of logic”, “it’s ironic” and “it means to attack or demean someone or a group” (items 11-14). The last item could also be regarded as sarcasm or sarcastic irony.

It should be pointed out that irony can be a type of humour but does not necessarily share the meaning with humour, neither do a few other types of humour such as exaggeration and understatement. According to Dynel (2013b), conventional irony is considered humorous only when a few conditions are met—incongruity being accompanied by resolution, the display of innovativeness, expectations being violated (surprise) and the hearer having a playful frame of mind. The conditions coincide with the cognitive and emotional aspects of humour, together with the factors affecting the processing of humour, as mentioned in section 2.1 and 2.2. In the case of the stimuli used in this paper, the humour of irony or sarcastic irony is mostly enjoyed by the viewers or participants of this study. Therefore, irony in this study specifically refers to humorous irony.

Moreover, this study does not focus on one specific type of humour. Rather, we try to accommodate as many individuals’ taste of humour as possible and improve ecological validity by using multimodal humorous stimuli—video clips involving various types of humour at the same time, in a situational context. Irony, banter, understatement, self-deprecation and mockery can be found in both video clips—another feature of British humour. As Fox (2004) commented, “Most English conversations will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, mockery or just silliness” (p. 61).

Lastly, an open question invited participants to voice their own opinions on the reasons why they had perceived the scenarios as humorous, if not already included in the 14 items. The collected qualitative data formed a corpus of approximately 3520 English words.

Results of Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data were not normally distributed ( $p < .01$ ). Hence, we used non-parametric statistical tests including Spearman's  $\rho$ , Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney  $U$  test, Friedman tests and Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests as alternatives for parametric tests. Principal Component Analyses were used to extract the major dimensions for the humour in each video clip. All the quantitative data were analysed with SPSS 25.0. In addition, feedback from the open question was analysed via thematic analysis and was used to complement the quantitative results.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 British humour appreciation among L1 users of different dialects of English

Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests showed that British English L1 users perceived the humour in both *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Outnumbered* as being significantly funnier than American English L1 users did ( $Z = -3.5, p < .001$ ;  $Z = -2.5, p < .05$ ) (Fig. 1).

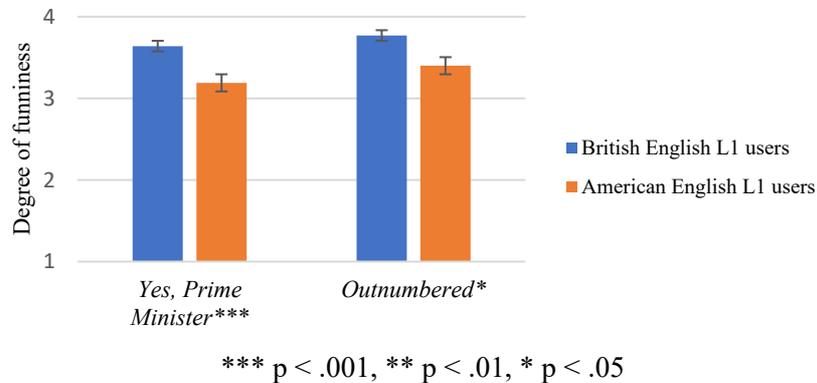
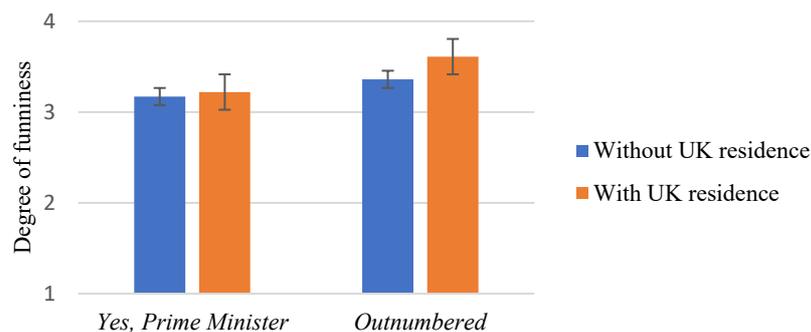


Fig. 1. Funniness ratings of British and American English L1 users

### 5.2 Effects of length of residence on British humour appreciation among American English L1 users

Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests showed that there were no significant differences in the appreciation of both clips of British humour (*Yes, Prime Minister*:  $Z = -.6, p = ns$ ; *Outnumbered*:  $Z = -1.1, p = ns$ ) between American English L1 users without ( $N = 77$ ) and with ( $N = 18$ ) naturalistic exposure to humour in the UK (see Fig. 2 for the mean scores of funniness in each group). Spearman's  $\rho$  rank correlation analyses indicated that length of residence in the UK was not significantly correlated with British humour appreciation (*Yes, Prime Minister*:  $\rho(18) = .243, p = ns$ ; *Outnumbered*:  $\rho(18) = .155, p = ns$ ).



**Fig. 2.** Funniness ratings of American English L1 users without and with UK experiences.

### 5.3 Dimensions of British humour

Prior to conducting Principal Component Analysis, the data was assessed for suitability and was shown to be highly factorisable: (1) all variables for both video clips had at least one correlation coefficient greater than 0.3; (b) the overall KMO<sup>3</sup> measure was 0.72 (*Yes, Prime Minister*) and 0.81 (*Outnumbered*) with most individual KMO measures higher than 0.73 (Kuo and Kaiser, 1966). KMO measures for items “cultural norm” and “social norm” in *Yes, Prime Minister* were 0.56 and 0.58 respectively; (c) Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

The procedure was repeated several times in order to eliminate cross-loaded items, meet the interpretability criterion and attain a parsimonious simple structure (i.e. simple rotated component matrix) (Thurstone, 1947). In the end, two three-component solutions explained 63.4% and 67.2% of the total variance of *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Outnumbered* respectively (Table 1 and Table 2) (major loadings of each item are in bold). The three components for each video clip reflected conceptually distinct dimensions in humour appreciation.

**Table 1**

Rotated Structure Matrix (*Yes, Prime Minister*)

		Rotated Component Coefficients			Communalities	
Item No.		Component				
		1	2	3		
3	Tone of voice	<b>.86</b>	-.00	.06	.74	<b>Table 2</b> Rotated Structure Matrix
5	Facial expressions	<b>.78</b>	.23	.01	.66	
4	Body gestures	<b>.77</b>	.16	-.03	.62	
1	Vocabulary	<b>.69</b>	.13	.07	.50	
2	Accent	<b>.62</b>	-.07	.20	.43	
13	Irony	.18	<b>.82</b>	.14	.72	
12	Twists of logic	.18	<b>.79</b>	.12	.67	
14	Attacking or demeaning	-.02	<b>.56</b>	.05	.31	
8	Cultural norm	.06	.17	<b>.90</b>	.84	
9	Social norm	.13	.13	<b>.90</b>	.84	

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

(*Outnumbered*)

		Rotated Component Coefficients			Communalities
Item No.		Component			
		1	2	3	
3	Tone of voice	<b>.88</b>	.13	.12	.81
5	Facial expressions	<b>.86</b>	.05	.23	.79
4	Body gestures	<b>.86</b>	.01	.25	.80
1	Vocabulary	<b>.70</b>	.21	.10	.54

8	Social norm	.07	<b>.85</b>	.11	.73
9	Cultural norm	.06	<b>.81</b>	.20	.71
7	Moral principles	.12	<b>.77</b>	.21	.66
10	Contents	.13	<b>.77</b>	.08	.56
13	Irony	.23	.06	<b>.76</b>	.64
12	Twists of logic	.27	.19	<b>.74</b>	.65
14	Attacking or demeaning	.06	.28	<b>.67</b>	.52

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

The first component in *Yes, Prime Minister* was named the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension (items 3, 5, 4, 1, 2 in Table 1) as the items loading on it reflect verbal and nonverbal cues of humour. The second component was named the Humour intentional dimension (items 13, 12, 14 in Table 1) as it reflects the underlying mechanism (incongruity in logic) or intention of humour (ridiculing on a personal or societal level). The third component was named the Sociocultural dimension (items 8, 9 in Table 1) as it reflects the incongruities resulting specifically from the violations of social or cultural norms.

The three-component structure for *Outnumbered* was similar, reflecting the same three distinct dimensions of humour but containing a few different items (Table 2). Therefore, they were named similarly.

The high internal consistency in the 6 dimensions (subscales) confirmed that each dimension was unidimensional. Regarding the dimensions in *Yes, Prime Minister*, Cronbach alpha was .812 for the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension, .616 for the Humour intentional dimension and .826 for the Sociocultural dimension. As to the dimensions in *Outnumbered*, Cronbach alpha was .829 for the Sociocultural dimension, .870 for the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension and .650 for the Humour intentional dimension.

#### ***5.4 Perceived differences in the dimensions between British and American English L1 users***

A new dimension value for each participant was obtained through computing the mean score of the items which had loaded on this dimension. Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 indicated the mean scores of each dimension between British and American English L1 users for video clip *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Outnumbered* respectively.

##### *Yes, Prime Minister*

Friedman tests and a series of Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests indicated that British English L1 users perceived both the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension and the Humour

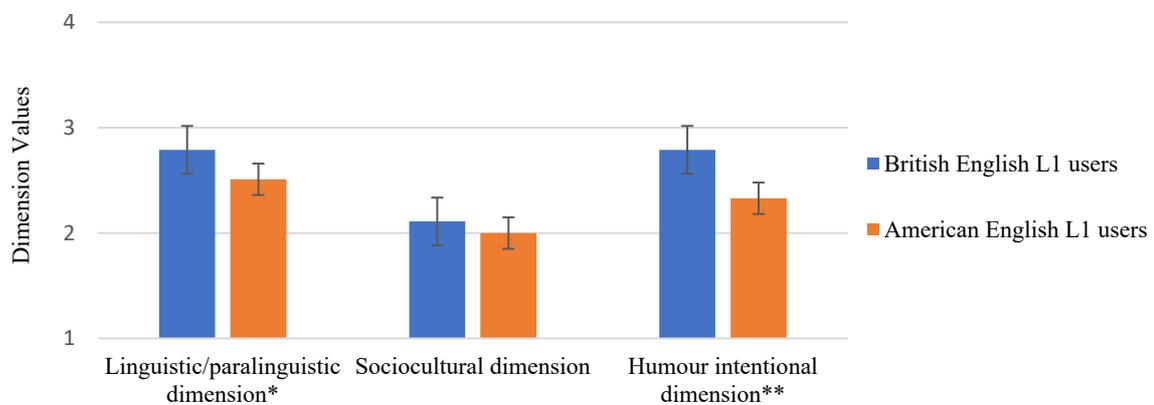
intentional dimension as significantly more important than the Sociocultural dimension ( $Z = -5.7, p < .001$ ;  $Z = -5.9, p < .001$ ). They perceived the former two dimensions as equally important ( $p = ns$ ). However, American English L1 users perceived the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension as the most important dimension, followed by the Humour intentional dimension, and lastly, the Sociocultural dimension ( $\chi^2(2) = 14.8, p < .01$ ).

Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests indicated that British English L1 users perceived the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension and the Humour intentional dimension as more important for contributing to the humour in *Yes, Prime Minister* than American English L1 users did, whereas no differences were found in the Sociocultural dimension between them (Table 3 and Fig. 3).

**Table 3**

Perceived differences in dimensions between British and American English L1 users (Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests)

Dimensions	<i>Yes, Prime Minister</i>		<i>Outnumbered</i>	
	$Z$	$p$	$Z$	$p$
Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension	-2.1	<b>.03</b>	-2.0	<b>.04</b>
Sociocultural dimension	-1.1	.27	-2.3	<b>.02</b>
Humour intentional dimension	-3.0	<b>.00</b>	-3.3	<b>.00</b>



\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

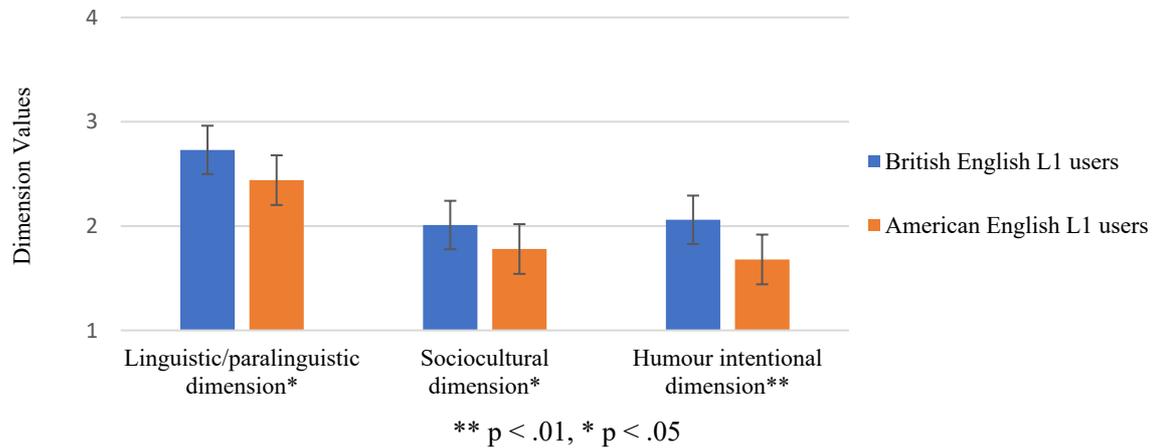
**Fig. 3.** Dimension values between groups for *Yes, Prime Minister*

### *Outnumbered*

Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests showed that British English L1 users perceived the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension as significantly more important for contributing to the humour in *Outnumbered* than the other two dimensions: the Sociocultural dimension ( $Z = -5.9, p < .001$ ) and the Humour intentional dimension ( $Z = -6.1, p < .001$ ). They perceived the latter two dimensions as equally important ( $p = ns$ ). Likewise, the results showed a similar picture for American English L1 users. They perceived the

Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension as significantly more important than the Sociocultural dimension ( $Z = -4.4, p < .001$ ) and the Humour intentional dimension ( $Z = -5.9, p < .001$ ), with the latter two dimensions being perceived as equally important ( $p = ns$ ).

Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests showed that British English L1 users perceived all three dimensions as more important as a contributing factor for the humour in *Outnumbered* than American English L1 users did (see Table 3 and Fig. 4).

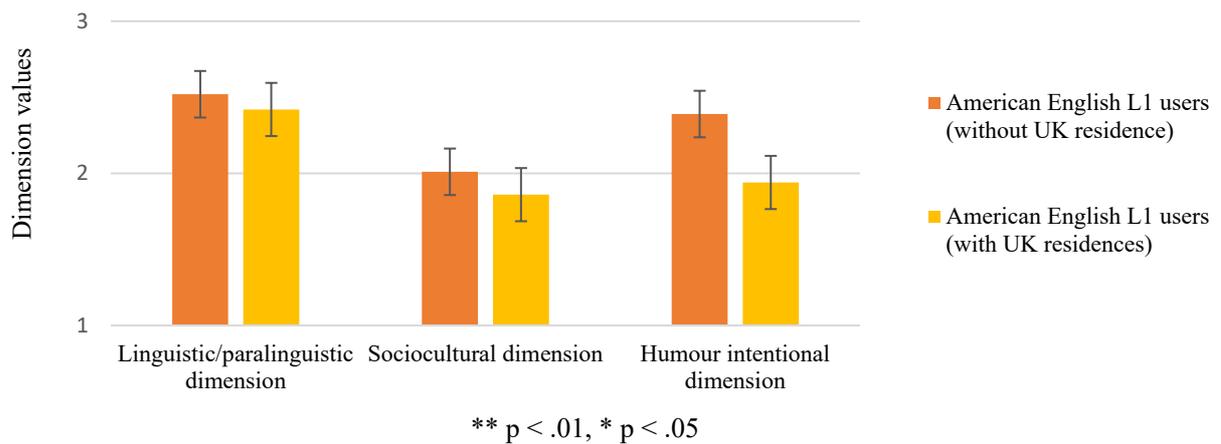


**Fig. 4.** Dimension values between groups for *Outnumbered*

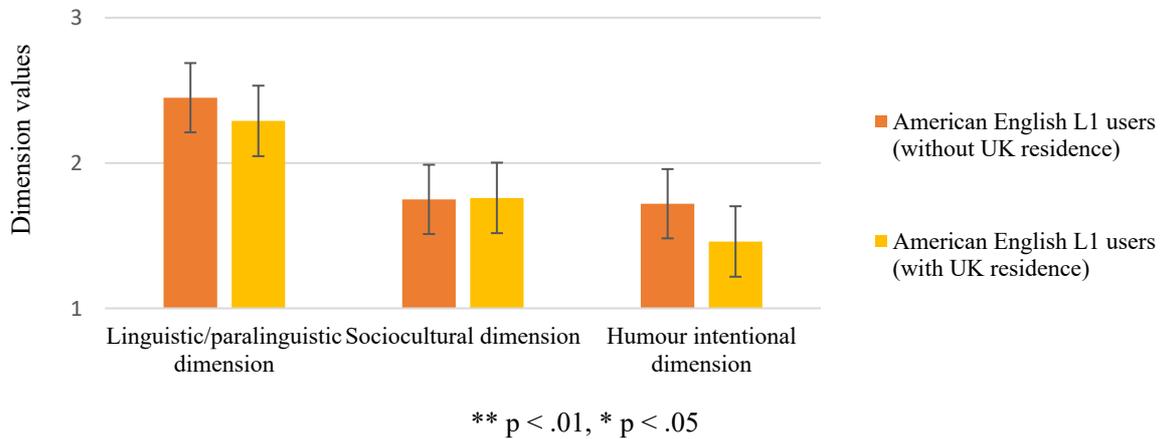
### 5.5 Effect of residence in the UK on differences in the dimensions

Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests showed no statistically significant differences between American English L1 users without and with residence in the UK in values on each of the three dimensions of humour in *Yes, Prime Minister: The Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension* ( $Z = -.5, p = ns$ ), the *Sociocultural dimension* ( $Z = -1.0, p = ns$ ), and the *Humour intentional dimension* ( $Z = -1.6, p = ns$ ) (Fig. 5).

Likewise, no statistically significant differences were found in the perception of each dimension of humour in *Outnumbered* between American English L1 users without and with UK experiences: The *Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension* ( $Z = -.7, p = ns$ ), the *Sociocultural dimension* ( $Z = -.4, p = ns$ ), and the *Humour intentional dimension* ( $Z = -.9, p = ns$ ) (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 5.** Residence in the UK and dimension values for *Yes, Prime Minister*



**Fig. 6.** Residence in the UK and dimension values for *Outnumbered*

## 6. Qualitative results

Analysis of participants' answers to the open question "Are there any other reasons why you think it's funny?" revealed a number of common themes which could occasionally slightly overlap with each other.

### 6.1 *Yes, Prime Minister*

Overall, 31 British and 32 American English L1 users answered the question, and 8 and 7 themes were identified in each group respectively (see table 4 for the overview). Two themes, "political satire" and "contrasting register" were the most frequent in both groups.

First of all, both groups noticed the ironic and derisive intention of the scenario in *Yes, Prime Minister*. The extract has a strong flavour of irony regarding the dishonesty of politicians. At the very beginning of the conversation in the extract, the Prime Minister, with a serious face, claimed that he had given "a clear, simple, straightforward, honest answer", which was then

confronted by the secretary, his subordinate, with a partially positive answer—the latter agreed most of the statement except for the last adjective “honest”. In order to avoid a direct face threat, the secretary resorted to euphemisms in a tangled, complicated and roundabout sentence. The sentence was then replaced by two simple words “a lie” after becoming aware that the Prime Minister lied without self-awareness as the latter kept asking questions like “a lie?” and “what do you mean, a lie?”, which coincides with the public knowledge that politicians lie with or without self-awareness. It further confirms the statistical finding that both groups, especially the British English L1 users, perceived the Humour intentional dimension as an important dimension contributing to the humour in *Yes, Prime Minister*. Second, the reported “contrasting register” included two levels. The first level was the discrepancy of language use—the use of long-winded, jargon-embedded and complicated sentence vs. the use of high-frequency words and simple sentence structures, confirming the role of the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension. The second was the intellectual capacity of the two characters, the insinuation that politicians lie with or without self-awareness and that those who govern are not always terribly intelligent—the Prime Minister failed to comprehend a sentence with carefully chosen terms, longwinded technical jargon and circumlocutions, confirming the role of the Humour intentional dimension. These were believed to be where the “punchlines” lie, as one of the British English L1 users mentioned:

“It's funny because lying is typically expected by politicians (although they are not allowed to call each other liars (they used to say things like “The honourable member has committed a terminological inexactitude” instead of accusing them of lying). The contrast between the very long and complex language used by the secretary and the straightforward and short word "lied" is funny, as is the fact that the minister doesn't seem to realise he has been lying.”

When the portrayed reality was not psychologically far removed enough (in terms of time and space), the violation might probably not be considered as benign, thus may not necessarily be funny (McGraw and Warren, 2010). The theme “topic” was mentioned three times by American English L1 users who did not perceive the scenario funny as they just went through a heated presidential election in the US when they took part in the study. Participating in this study might have “re-traumatised” some of them. In other words, they did not find this scenario funny presumably because they were not really in the playful frame of mind or not emotionally prepared, given that a large number of the American citizens found the result of the presidential election quite disappointing, as displayed on various social media (see Dynel, 2013b; Raskin and Attardo, 1994). For example, two of the American English L1 users commented:

“Not really. With Trump – the liar’s – victory in the US just now, it’s not really funny to me at all.”

“It’s two days after the American presidential election, sooooo...timing...:)”

Another noticeable difference is “delivery”. In this study, the working definition of “delivery” is the manner or style of conveying humour in terms of characters’ features of speech (e.g. speed, pitch, intonation), facial expressions (e.g. enthusiastic or calm) and

emotions (e.g. strong or detached emotions). It, together with themes including “accent” and “actors”, reflects the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension. The funniness of the scenario could be accounted by the incongruity formed by the “casual” manner when delivering an “exaggeratedly elevated register” (British English L1 users), further adding to the ironic effect — the Secretary was intellectually superior to the Prime Minister. However, the theme “delivery” was more frequently mentioned by American English L1 users than their British counterparts. This group difference is intriguing, as it differs from the statistical finding that British English L1 users perceived the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension as more important than American English L1 users did.

The differences between American English L1 users and British English L1 users could also be detected from the former’s high sensitivity to the culture-specific British humour. Some American English L1 users were able to recognize the specificity of British humour and had developed a taste for such kind of humour. However, British English L1 users, at least some of them, probably were not aware that they themselves were engaged in British humour, and then found it funny or not funny. Interestingly, American English L1 users were found to be divided in the appreciation of British humour in the sense that some of them attributed this factor to the success of the intended humour while others blamed it as one of the factors for the failure of the humour. For example, positive answers provided by American English L1 users included “seems very British”, “classic, subtle, dry-wit, British humour” and “Just personally, I prefer the dry humor of the British”. Negative answers included:

“It's dry British humor. I've seen a lot funnier.”

“I don't particularly think it's funny, although I feel that it perhaps has more underlying British than American humor.”

Unsurprisingly, other themes including “familiarity with the show” and “class” were heightened by the British English L1 users as reasons for the humour in *Yes, Prime Minister*. It suggests that the portrayal of politicians, the strong touch of irony and sarcasm are the perpetual sources of British humour and they never get old as jokes (Fox, 2004; Norbury, 2011). Also, class issue has preoccupied a great deal of everyday English humour (Fox, 2004).

**Table 4**

Main reasons of humour in *Yes, Prime Minister* and frequency in the two groups

British English L1 users		American English L1 users	
Theme	Freq.	Theme	Freq.
Political satire	16	Delivery	7
Contrasting register	10	Contrasting register	7
Familiarity with the show	5	Political satire	6
Language	2	British	5
Delivery	2	Topic	3
Class	1	Accent	3
Accent/tone	1	Actors (age and gender)	1

## 6.2 *Outnumbered*

Likewise, 39 British English L1 users and 43 American English L1 users answered the question and 6 themes were identified in each group (see Table 5 for the overview).

**Table 5**

Mains reasons of humour in *Outnumbered* and frequency of being mentioned

British English L1 users		American English L1 users	
Theme	Freq.	Theme	Freq.
Empathy	14	Empathy	18
Contrast	13	Contrast	13
Class	3	Social norm	3
Social norm	3	Politeness	3
British	3	Delivery	1
Politeness	2	British English language	1

“Empathy”—the fact that participants could relate to the scenario—and “contrast” (of behaviours and inner dynamics) were the most prominent reasons for the humour in *Outnumbered* indicated by both groups. It makes sense that participants who were middle-aged could relate to the most ordinary life scenarios—family, kids and neighbours—in their daily lives. They could probably empathise with the actors. Examples of “empathy” included:

“It paints a very ‘human’ picture.” “Because I have had teenagers so it resonates.” (British English L1 user)

“Been there and sympathise.” (American English L1 user)

Since the psychological distance between the participants and the scene was small (they had experienced something similar), yet far removed enough (they were watching someone else’s life), the violation could be interpreted as benign (McGraw and Warren, 2010). In other words, the participants were emotionally engaged to find the scenario discomfoting, but in the meanwhile, they were not emotionally engaged enough as viewers, thus finding it humorous (cf. Dynel, 2013b).

The stark “contrast” could be understood at two levels. First, the contrast between Sue’s rambunctious children and Barbara’s well-mannered children could be easily observed through linguistic and paralinguistic displays. Second, it was also easy to notice Sue’s failure in handling her children and hiding her embarrassment, and Barbara’s success in appearing as a perfect parent and a considerate neighbour. What is interesting is that they still remained polite or attempted to remain polite in this awkward situation, whereas the dynamics of their inner thoughts indicated otherwise.

“Politeness” has been deployed as a mask for what was going on ostensibly. “Self-deprecation”, “understatement” and “cruelty” were all manifested in their politeness. For example, Barbara made an understatement that the bad behaviours of Sue’s children were due to the fact that children were excitable. She made a similar comment on her children – “Mine

are just the same.” – which was self-deprecation. Understatement was also displayed when Barbara handed over the “one of the two things that had landed in the garden” which, in fact, was a big box loaded with items, some of which, such as the teapot, seemed incongruous with the context. The box was labelled as “next door”, indicating the high frequency of Sue’s children throwing things over the fence, to the shame of the mother Sue. It also demonstrated “cruelty” in the sense that all the politeness and serenity on the surface actually highlighted the conflicts and turbulence underneath. The politeness and patronising attitudes of Barbara was cruel not only to Sue who struggled to keep her composure but also to the audiences with similar experiences. Therefore, it demonstrated the powerful role of the Humour intentional dimension in *Outnumbered*.

“The contrast between the extreme politeness between the two middle-class parents and the smiles and the very rude language used by one set of children (that the mother is extremely embarrassed about but doesn't know how to deal with in front of the ‘good’ mother) is very funny.” (British English L1 user)

Interestingly, the variation in emotionality or social force embodied by the English language of different variants could also lead to humour. A participant speaking American English seemed to have attached higher degree of emotionality and social force to certain swearwords in British English. For example:

“I will say that, coming from the US, I don't think I appreciate the social strength/force of the word "bloody" as used in the UK. Otherwise, it is possible such words might have played a factor.” (American English L1 user)

In real life humour situations, it is highly likely that this American English L1 user would be offended by the British intensifier “bloody” and hence would not perceive the intended humour as funny as the violation was too strong (for a review of studies on “bloody” in different varieties of English, see Ardington, 2011 and Dewaele, 2015).

## 7. Discussion

The answer to the first research question was positive. British English L1 users perceived the humour in both *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Outnumbered* as significantly funnier than American English L1 users did. It confirmed that subtle differences in the language combined with factors such as culture and emotion make humour appreciation challenging in another L1 dialect.

Regarding the second research question, it turned out that residence in the UK did not make any difference in the appreciation of British humour among bi-dialectal American English L1 users. Indeed, long residence abroad does not necessarily imply acculturation (Hammer, 2017). Moreover, it remains unclear to what extent acculturation is the result of an individual’s own volition or whether it happens in a subconscious way. [We can only assume that American English L1 users who are willing to be, or have engaged in high-quality intercultural interaction, especially humour interactions, with British English L1 users are](#)

probably more sensitive to certain features of British humour. The data in this study does not allow us to make any conclusions, only speculations. Future studies on this issue are advised to rely on a larger sample and data with special focus on quality of humour interaction.

The third research question probed into the aspects of British humour. Three dimensions—the Linguistic/paralinguistic, Sociocultural and Humour intentional dimensions—emerged from the Principal Component Analysis. Together, these dimensions accounted for around two thirds of the variance in the data. Firstly, the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension reflects the humour resulting from incongruities in verbal and nonverbal aspects (Vaid, 2000). It was perceived as the strongest contributor to the humour in both clips by both British English and American English L1 users. This makes sense as both clips, especially *Yes, Prime Minister*, relied heavily on the language used (i.e., the longwinded, complicated sentences produced by Sir Humphrey versus the Prime Minister's short ones) (cf. Chen and Dewaele, 2019).

Secondly, the Humour intentional dimension reflects the underlying mechanism and the intention of humour (ridicule at a personal or societal level). Both groups agreed on its importance in both clips and it was confirmed in the qualitative data with themes such as “political satire”, “politeness” and “contrast”. Humour in both video clips relied heavily on “irony” (or sarcastic irony, see Dynel, 2014) which related to “cruelty”—disparaging someone or a group and taking delight in it. It lends evidence to Mikes' (2016) observation that British humour carries a strong streak of cruelty. Finally, the Sociocultural dimension reflected the observation that humour results from the violation of social or cultural norms to some degree, which seemed to be least important for British L1 users.

The three dimensions, to some degree, overlap with Béal and Mullan's (2013) four-dimension model of humour. The Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension is partly in line with Béal and Mullan's (2013, p. 108) “language dimension: linguistic mechanism and/or discursive strategies used by speakers”. Also, the Humour intentional dimension can be argued to be partly in line with “The different pragmatic functions” and “The speaker/target/recipient interplay”. The three-dimension model in this study is likely to shed light on future studies on the analysis of culture-specific humour, which further provides references for cross-cultural humour appreciation.

The fourth research question concerns the possible differences in the perception of each dimension between British and American English L1 users. Regarding the humour in *Yes, Prime Minister*, results revealed that British English L1 users attached more importance to the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension and the Humour intentional dimension than American English L1 users did. No difference existed between both groups for the Sociocultural dimension.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data confirmed the importance of the Linguistic/paralinguistic dimension. The theme “delivery” was a salient feature for the American English L1 users who, contrary to the British English users, failed to consider it as a factor contributing to the humour in *Yes, Prime Minister*. The flat, emotionless, deadpan delivery of British humour can be appreciated the most when one is emotionally or psychologically prepared. It confirms Veale's (2004) argument that emotion or emotion preparedness is a prerequisite of humour perception, and confirms the hypothesis on the mechanism of humour perception that one has to be in a positive or playful emotional or psychological state before engaging in humorous activities (also see Dynel, 2013b).

Moreover, American English L1 users differed from their British peers in the topic (political satire) the scenario depicted, which reflects the role of psychological distance (McGraw and Warren, 2010), or the degree of incongruity and emotional arousal, in humour appreciation. The unique “delivery” including prosody, the persuasiveness of irony marked the culture-specificity of British humour.

Regarding the humour in *Outnumbered*, statistical results revealed that British English L1 users perceived all three dimensions as significantly more important than American English L1 users did. First, linguistic features such as understatement seemed to be cues of humour to British English L1 users. As Mikes (2016) viewed, “understatement” is one of the three faces of British humour, and could be missed by American English L1 users. Second, from the results of qualitative analysis, themes like “contrast” and “politeness” in *Outnumbered* demonstrated all the three faces of British humour: “self-deprecation”, “understatement” and “cruelty” (Mikes, 2016), all pointing to the ironic aspect of the humour (sometimes the sarcastic aspect of the humour. See section 1). It demonstrated that “most English conversations will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, mockery or just silliness” (Fox, 2004, p. 61). Our findings suggest that American English L1 users seem to appreciate understatement and irony (or sarcastic irony) less, despite ample exposure to it.

However, the finding that the variation in emotionality or offensiveness of the word “bloody” between British and American English has contributed to the humour in *Outnumbered* could be an indication that variation in conceptual representation and emotionality could affect humour perception in another variant. Americans may have been more offended by the word “bloody” and then failed to find the humour funny, which could result from the possibility that humour is most appreciated when one is moderately emotionally aroused (Godkewitsch, 1972). Besides, the liberating effect of the emotion-laden word “bloody” in humour is in line with Dewaele’s (2013) finding that decreased emotionality of emotion-laden words has helped LX users overcome cultural restrictions. The findings in this study showed that this liberating effect also exists among L1 users of different variants, or bi-dialectal or bi-varietal monolinguals (Dewaele, 2015, 2018b).

Lastly, the American English L1 users had not yet become entirely bicultural, as they failed to perceive or appreciate the class-related humour that is a constant source of British humour (Fox, 2004). Therefore, even though American English L1 users could relate to the scenarios in the video clip, as indicated by “empathy”, they still faced an extra cultural hurdle.

The answer to the last research question on intra-individual variation in the group of bi-dialectal American English L1 users was negative, as residence in the UK did not make any differences in the perception of each dimension. In other words, bi-dialectal American English L1 users who have resided in the UK do not approximate the values of their British peers. It further supports the saying that Americans do not get irony and sarcasm as much as the British do. Speaking or using the same L1 do not translate to the full appreciation of humour in another variant of the L1. However, cautions should be taken when making generalisations as the small sample size makes the analysis only exploratory.

This study is not without limitations. Using two short video-clips from sitcoms aired in different eras can only provide a very partial glimpse of British humour. The laughter track in *Yes, Prime Minister* might have slightly influenced participants’ experiences of humour

ratings, as other people's laughter, especially real laughter, influences the process of humour perception by setting a tone and a mood and creating a community experience (Cai et al., 2019). Future studies may expand this exploration using a wider range of stimuli in a larger variety of contexts and stimuli without a laughter track.

## **8. Conclusion**

This empirical study explored the perception of British humour between British English and American English L1 users. A Principal Components Analysis revealed that three dimensions accounted for two thirds of variance in items reflecting possible reasons for humour. The Humour intentional dimension turned out to be most important for British participants, while American English L1 users struggled with it. Further analysis of qualitative data suggested that language, culture, and emotion play an important role in the detection of incongruities and the search for humour during humour processing. American English L1 users found British humour less funny than the British peers despite familiarity with British English. It seems that becoming bicultural in another English culture takes time. Moreover, residence experiences do not seem to be related to the appreciation of humour or the perception of the dimensions of humour in another dialect in this dataset.

To conclude, the present study suggests that speaking and using dialects of the same L1 does not guarantee the full appreciation of humour in another dialect. Subtle differences in semantic and conceptual representation of emotion and emotion-laden words and variation in cultural values make the appreciation of humour challenging in an unfamiliar variant. American English L1 users run an increased risk of hearing the current monarch mumble "We are not amused" after telling a humorous anecdote at the dinner table in Windsor Castle.

## **Appendix**

### ***Yes, Prime Minister* — The Tangled Web**

#### Transcription

James Hacker: JH; Sir Humphrey Appleby: HA

JH: Well, obviously. It was the one question today to which I could give a clear, simple, straightforward, honest answer.

HA: Yes. Unfortunately, although the answer was indeed clear, simple and straightforward, there is some difficulty in justifiably assigning to it the fourth of the epithets you applied to the statement inasmuch as the precise correlation between the information you communicated and the facts insofar as they can be determined and demonstrated is such as to cause epistemological problems of sufficient magnitude as to lay upon the logical and semantic resources of the English language a heavier burden than they can reasonably be expected to bear.

JH: Epistemological? What are you talking about?

HA: You told a lie.

JH: A lie?

HA: A lie.

JH: What do you mean, a lie?

HA: I mean you ... lied. Yes, I know this is a difficult concept to get across to a politician.

You ... ah yes, you did not tell the truth.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8keZbZL2ero>

### ***Outnumbered* — Keeping Up with The Joneses**

Transcription

Barbara: Hi Sue.  
Sue: Hi Barbara.  
Barbara's kid #1: Morning Sue.  
Barbara's kid #2: Morning Sue.  
Barbara's kid #3: Hi Sue.  
Sue: Hi kids.  
Jake: Shut it you little prick. Shut up you bloody idiot.  
Sue: Boys!  
Ben: I am gonna kill you.  
Ben: Just because you're bigger than me...  
Barbara: Lucy, get that box by the door. It's just one of the two things that came over the fence.  
Sue: Oh just, boys, please, just chuck them back over.  
Barbara: But the teapot might break.  
Sue: huh...get in the car!  
Sue: Thanks. Obviously, we'll do the same thing for you, should your children throw anything in our garden, ever.  
Sue: (to boys) Can you get in the bloody car please?  
Barbara: They do get excitable, do they? Mine are just the same.  
Sue: (to herself) I think not.  
Pete (Sue's husband): How did she do that? Is it witch craft? Ben!!! I told you never touch the ignition.  
Ben (Sue's kid #2): I was only trying to help.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qc7P5iOXGA>

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms “first language (L1) users” and “second or foreign language (LX) users” which are free of the ideological connotations of the terms “native versus non-native speaker”. Proficiency in both groups can thus range from minimal to maximal (Dewaele, 2018a).

<sup>2</sup> Cruelty is related to the aggressive aspect of humour like sarcasm and schadenfreude. The notion is taken from Mikes' (2016) elaboration on the three faces of British humour—laughing at yourself, understatement and cruelty. He believes that “aggressiveness in humour is a general phenomenon; cruelty in humour is more specifically English”. He also explains that being cruelty in humour means being indifferent to the suffering of others, or else taking special delight in it. It differs slightly from affiliative humour in that an aggressive person means to hurt often for good or at least subjectively valid reasons, whereas a cruel person hurts out of no obvious reasons (cf. Dynel, 2013a).

<sup>3</sup> KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) test measures the suitability of one's data for Factor Analysis through measuring sampling adequacy for each variable in the specific and the complete model. A value of KMO over 0.5 is considered as acceptable (Kuo and Kasiser, 1966).