

Fanni Mertaniemi

“YES, HE WAS SOME GUY”
Identifying the Functions of Chandler’s Humor in *Friends*

ABSTRACT

Fanni Mertaniemi: "Yes, he was some guy": Identifying the Functions of Chandler's Humor in *Friends*
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Language is a significant part of interaction between people in real life as well as in fiction. Language-based humor can be used, for example, to achieve certain functions in conversation or to develop a personality. This thesis investigates the functions of verbal humor produced by Chandler (Matthew Perry) in the American sitcom *Friends*. The character's witty quotes and clever jokes have survived to this day through the worldwide fanbase, and the popularity of the show has no end. This study helps to describe Chandler's character by studying the functions of his use of conversational humor.

The study is conducted by investigating the first two seasons of the show and analyzing both the form and the function of Chandler's lines containing verbal humor. The categorization consists of two main functions: attacking and amusing, and four main lexical relationships: polysemy, homonymy, homophony, and near homophony. The humorous instances are qualitatively analyzed from the perspective of Politeness Theory. The research questions are the following: What type of lexical relationship does Chandler use the most in his puns? What can be said about the functions of his use of verbal humor in interaction from a communicative perspective? What characteristics does Chandler appear to have according to his use of verbal humor?

The results of this thesis show that, by far, the most utilized lexical relationship by Chandler is polysemy, and the main function of his humor is to strengthen the bond between the members of the friend group and to reinforce the established relationships. His use of humor functions also as a way to avoid serious or difficult topics. The results indicate that Chandler is a sarcastic, smart, and quick-thinking character, which is how the viewers of the TV show generally describe him as well. More research about Chandler's linguistic choices in a wider scope would be beneficial to form a deeper understanding of his character and the significance of language in the characterization process.

Keywords: conversational humor, verbal humor, characterization, wordplay, sitcom, Friends

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Fanni Mertaniemi: "Yes, he was some guy": Identifying the Functions of Chandler's Humor in *Friends*
Kandidaatintutkielma
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Kieli on merkittävä osa ihmisten välistä vuorovaikutusta niin tosielämässä kuin fiktionaalisessakin maailmassa. Kieltä hyödyntävän huumorin avulla on mahdollista esimerkiksi saavuttaa tiettyjä funktioita keskustelussa tai kehittää henkilön persoonallisuutta. Tämä tutkielma tutkii Chandlerin (Matthew Perry) tuottaman verbaalisen huumorin funktioita yhdysvaltalaisessa tilannekomediasarjassa *Frendit*. Hahmon nokkelat heitot sekä vitsit tunnetaan yhä tänäkin päivänä maailmanlaajuisen fanikunnan ansiosta, eikä sarjan suosiolle näy olevan loppua. Tutkimalla keskustelussa käytettävän huumorin funktioita tämä tutkielma auttaa ymmärtämään Chandlerin hahmoa ja tämän suosiota.

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan sarjan kahta ensimmäistä tuotantokautta. Chandlerin vuorosanojen sanatyyppejä ja funktioita tutkitaan niistä kohdista, jotka sisältävät verbaalista huumoria. Kategorisointi jakautuu pääosin kahteen funktioon, jotka ovat viihdytys ja hyökkäys sekä neljään sanatyyppiin, joita ovat polysemia, homonymia, homofonia ja lähihomofonia. Huumoria sisältäviä kohtia analysoidaan laadullisin menetelmin kohteliaisuusteorian näkökulmasta. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat: Mikä sanatyyppi on yleisin Chandlerin käyttämissä sanaleikeissä? Mitä voidaan sanoa Chandlerin huumorinkäytön funktioista kommunikatiivisesta näkökulmasta? Millaisia luonteenpiirteitä Chandlerin huumorinkäyttö osoittaa hänellä olevan?

Tutkielman tulokset osoittavat, että Chandler käyttää polysemiaa huomattavasti enemmän kuin kolmea muuta sanatyyppiä, ja että hänen huumorin käyttönsä keskeisin funktio on ryhmän välisten jäsenten ystävyysiteiden vahvistaminen sekä jo vakiintuneiden ystävyysuhteiden lujittaminen. Hahmon tapa käyttää huumoria toimii myös tapana välttää vakavia tai vaikeita aiheita. Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että Chandler on hahmona sarkastinen, älykäs sekä sanavalmis, mikä vastaa katsojien yleistä kuvailua hänestä. Lisätutkimukset Chandlerin kielellisistä valinnoista laajemmin olisivat hyödyllisiä, jotta voitaisiin laatia syvempi ymmärrys hahmosta sekä kielen merkityksestä sen kehittämisessä.

Avainsanat: verbaalinen huumori, sanaleikki, tilannekomedia, *Frendit*

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla.

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1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to study Chandler's use of verbal conversational humor in *Friends*. More specifically, this thesis will focus on the way Chandler uses wordplay-based humor in conversations. *Friends* is an American situation comedy show created in 1994 by David Crane and Marta Kauffman. The sitcom was aired by NBC from 1994 to 2004, consisting of a total of 10 seasons and 236 episodes. The show has been an enormous success since its release as it has gained viewers worldwide, creating a fanbase who feel a real connection to the characters. Crane described the show by saying "when you're in your 20s, your friends are your family" (NBC News 2004 'Friends' creators share show's beginnings), which explains people's ability to personally connect with it so well. The perpetual popularity of this show is based on the likable and relatable characters with distinct characteristics, making each individual stand out in their own way.

Chandler's ability to produce and use humor is what separates him from the other members of the friend group. He is described as the sarcastic friend of the six and known for his constant joking around the group. In season 5, episode 11, the friends are making New Year's resolutions, and Phoebe urges Chandler to resolve to not make fun of his friends. Ross makes Chandler bet that he cannot go a week without making fun of them, which demonstrates how humor is a central feature of Chandler's character.

In television, humor can manifest itself in different forms, which is why it is necessary to define the focus of this study clearly. *Verbalized* humor, used, inter alia, in translation studies, refers to humor that simply uses language, instead of facial expressions, for example, to express itself, whereas an essential part of *verbal* humor is the specific focus on the linguistic form (Attardo 2020, 176). This study concentrates on verbal humor, as the focus relies on humor

based on wordplay, more specifically puns, where the linguistic form of single words or phrases is under scrutiny. A pun is a play on words where multiple meanings of either one word or multiple similar-sounding words are exploited to create a humorous effect (OED n.d., “pun”). Attardo (2020, 177) mentions that some authors consider wordplay to be an umbrella term subsuming pun. As they both refer to instances of words and multiple meanings, however, *wordplay* and *pun* will be treated as synonyms in this study for the purposes of simplification.

Friends is a situation comedy show, which means that a lot of the jokes in the show are situational and thus, appear as parts of the conversations. These are called conversational jokes: they appear in the middle of the conversation with no prefacing as the teller produces them in the moment. They differ from traditional canned jokes, where the narrator makes it clear that they are about to tell a joke which has probably been rehearsed before (Attardo 2001, 61-62).

Chandler’s use of language in *Friends* will be studied by looking at the functions of his verbal humor in conversations and analyzing them through the perspective of Politeness Theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1988). With the help of Politeness Theory, Chandler’s characteristics can also be further described by identifying how they are portrayed through those humorous instances.

Sitcoms and especially characterization or character construction through language have been of interest to many linguists in recent years. Quaglio’s (2009) work, for example, explains the similarities and differences between television dialogue and natural conversation with an analysis of *Friends*. The popularity and remarkability of *Friends* is also discussed in Kutulas (2018). Specific characterization has been studied by Bednarek (2012), who looks at another American sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*, focusing on Sheldon’s character. The linguistic construction of Sheldon’s character has also been studied by van Zyl (2016). Cao et al. (2021) studied how aggressive humor is used to construct a female character in the Chinese sitcom

Ipartment. Thus, *Friends*, as well as characters in other sitcoms, have been studied, but Chandler's character, however, does not seem to have been of interest to many researchers yet. Considering Chandler's popularity and his unique use of language, there are considerable opportunities for linguistic research on his character. With this study, I hope to provide inspiration for future research on the topic.

This subject will be studied by first presenting the theoretical background, including sitcoms, Politeness Theory, and some further discussion of humor, puns, and their functions. This is followed by an introduction of the methods and the analysis of the data. I will conclude with a discussion of the results and possibilities for further research.

2 Theoretical background

This section will present the theoretical background of the study, beginning with a presentation of the participation framework of sitcoms, progressing to humor and its functions and finishing with a presentation of Politeness Theory.

2.1 Participation framework of sitcoms

Friends is a sitcom that has a laugh track in the background, created by a live audience during the filming. Brock (2015, 36) proposes a participation model for sitcoms with a studio audience producing a laugh track, in which there are two Communicative Levels (CLs) – CL1 between the viewer and the production crew, and CL2 between the characters inside the show. In this model, the perspective of the camera allows the TV viewer and the studio audience to adopt the fictitious role of an overhearer in CL2. This imaginative position among the characters allows the viewer to submerge into the scene and “uphold the fiction” (Brock 2015, 34).

A character's identity can thus be said to construct on two levels: CL2, where it appears to the other characters in the TV show and CL1, where it appears to the TV viewer with the clear intention of the producers in mind. This study will mostly focus on CL2, as it defines the character through their interactions with the members of the friend group, mimicking real-life situations, in which the TV viewer can imagine themselves as an overhearer. The difference between these two communicative levels is demonstrated by two humorous interactions from the series involving Chandler's character:

Example (1) (Friends S1E20)

Ross: Four letters: "Circle or hoop".
 Chandler: Ring, damn it, ring!
 Ross: Thanks.

Example (2) (Friends S1E16)

Ross: Oh, Pheeb, I'm sorry, I've got to go. I've got Lamaze class.
 Chandler: Oh, and I've got Earth Science, but I'll catch you in Gym.

In (1), Chandler is anxiously waiting for a phone call, and Ross is doing a crossword puzzle. The conversation induces a laugh track from the live audience, as the word *ring* uttered by Chandler, talking to the phone, is the answer to Ross's crossword puzzle. This happens on CL1, as it is clearly the producers of the show who have created this situation with the intention to make the TV viewer laugh, as, based on their unchanging expressions, none of the characters in the show find this situation particularly funny or special. In (2), Ross is going to a Lamaze class together with his ex-wife, who is pregnant with their son. Chandler amuses the rest of the friend group by interposing a mention of Earth Science and Gym, both classes that are taken in school. This happens on CL2, as it is an interaction between the characters, where they laugh at a joke produced by Chandler. Again, the live studio audience produces a laugh track, reminding us that they are also part of the CL2.

2.2 Verbal humor

Verbal humor has been a subject of interest for many researchers as well as the base for multiple theories of differing approaches for decades. Raskin's (1985, 99) Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) is based on the requirements for a text to be humorous: there need to be two different, opposing semantic scripts that are present in the text. Raskin and Attardo considered the SSTH to be incomplete, as it lacks the explanation for when two jokes are the same and it does not differentiate between referential and verbal humor. The theory was thus further developed by Raskin and Attardo (1991), who created the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). This theory consists of six Knowledge Resources, the "components" of a joke: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language, whose special combinations contribute to the emergence of humor (Attardo 2020, 137-139). Theories of humor origin also include the violation of the Cooperative Principle and Gricean maxims (Grice 1975, Attardo 1994, 272). For further discussion about these theories, see Norrick (2003).

2.3 Puns

In his article about conversational joking, Norrick (2003) explains how puns contain two interpretations: "one meaning oriented toward understanding the preceding utterance and a second meaning also fitted to that utterance, but based on a contextually inappropriate analysis of it" (2003, 1346). The inappropriateness of the second meaning interrupts the primary topic of the conversation, and, according to Norrick, this unannounced disruptive feature of puns distinguishes them from other forms of conversational humor, such as joking or irony (2003,

1339). The various categories of pun will not be elaborated on in this thesis, as the focus is on the ambiguous words and their type of lexical relationship, not the type of pun.

Lexical ambiguity can be achieved in different ways by using words with multiple meanings. Puns can thus appear in many distinct forms in conversation, which will be elaborated on more in the following section.

2.4 Words with multiple meanings

Words can be categorized into multiple distinct groups according to the lexical relationships between their meanings. These relationships include, inter alia, antonymy, polysemy, homophony, homonymy, and synonymy. This study focuses on words with multiple meanings; thus, four different lexical relationships were chosen for this study: polysemy, homonymy, homophony, and near homophony.

Instances of homonymy and polysemy both entail the notion of multiple meanings. What differentiates these two, however, is the relatedness of these meanings: the multiple meanings of a polysemous instance are related, whereas the multiple meanings of a homonymous instance are not (Kreidler 2014, 36). *Heart*, for example, is a polysemous word, as it can have different but related meanings, such as ‘the hollow muscular organ which performs the function of a pump in the circulatory system, receiving blood from the veins and contracting to propel it into the arteries’ (OED, n.d., ‘heart’) or ‘the innermost part of anything; the centre, the middle’ (OED, n.d., ‘heart’) as in *the heart of the forest*.

In homonymy, the meanings of the words remain unrelated. For example, the words *top* ‘a shirt, sweater, blouse, or similar garment worn on the upper body’ (OED, n.d., ‘top’) and *top* ‘a toy, often in the shape of an inverted cone or flattened sphere’ (OED, n.d., ‘top’) both have the same spelling but unrelated meanings. This unrelatedness of meanings can be detected, for

example, by two words having separate entries in a dictionary. Homonyms are not always identical in spelling, however, which can be seen in the pair *right* and *write*, for example. As these words are only identical in pronunciation, they are called homophones (Kreidler 2014, 36). Near homophones are phonetically similar words with different meanings, such as *accept* and *except*.

All of the categories mentioned above enable multiple meanings or interpretations of one or more words. It is exactly this possibility of multiple interpretations that creates the humorous effect in ambiguous contexts (Charina 2017, 130). If the interpretations can be divided into a humorous and a serious meaning, the humor has a stronger effect (Charina 2017, 130).

2.5 Functions of conversational humor

Norrick states that conversational humor can help us present a personality and promote rapport between the participants by entertainment (2003, 1345). However, in addition to the positive, rapport-enhancing function, punning is sometimes deemed as a form of verbal aggression, as it can be aimed at a certain individual, creating a kind of attack (Norrick 2003, 1346). This thesis will focus on these two functions of amusing and attacking as broad categorizations. As Norrick states, the attack entails personal aggression in addition to the aggressive nature in disturbing the topical talk of the conversation (2003, 1348). The targeting of the attack at someone in the group requires a shared history of joking between the interlocutors to show that “the relationship need not stand on formalities” (Norrick 2003, 1348). The amusing and attacking functions are thus in complementary roles. “Conversational joking allows participants to perform for their mutual entertainment with a consequent enhancement of rapport. Humor can be seen as helping smooth the work in everyday conversation, as well as offering us a chance to play: to present a personality and create rapport in entertaining fashion.” (Norrick 2003, 1345)

Attardo (1994, 323) lists four distinct groups into which the communicative functions of humor can be categorized: social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalization. The social management function “covers all the cases in which humor is used as a tool to facilitate in-group interaction and strengthen in-group bonding or out-group rejection” (Attardo 1994, 323). Most of Chandler’s humorous comments are centered around the friend group and its members, which is why this function will also be of use in the analysis. The social management function consists of eight instances: social control, conveying social norms, ingratiation, discourse management, establishing common ground, cleverness, social play, and repair (Attardo 1994, 323-324).

2.6 Politeness Theory

The Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson is based on the notion of *face*, “the public self-image,” and the assumption that everyone has one and is aware of others having one as well (1988, 61). The face is treated as the wants of individuals, referring to their basic desired needs as members of society, and these wants are generally at least partially respected and satisfied by others (1988, 63). In this respect, the wants can be divided into negative face: “the want of every ‘competent’ adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others” (1988, 62) and positive face: “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (1988, 62). Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are acts that do not adhere to the positive or the negative face wants of either the speaker or the hearer in the interaction (Brown and Levinson 1988, 65). According to Politeness Theory, the consideration of and the attention to the positive and negative faces of others enable valuable discourse analyses from multiple aspects.

3 The present study

There are six main characters in *Friends*: Rachel Green, Monica Geller, Phoebe Buffay, Ross Geller, Chandler Bing, and Joey Tribbiani. The show is based on the interactions between these friends and their experiences in life. Chandler is described as “the funny one” of the six, but it should be noted, however, that Chandler is not the only one to create humor through language. The other five characters are humorous as well, which is evident from the laugh track, indicating a response to humor. What specifically distinguishes Chandler’s humor from the rest, however, is his intentional creation of humor with puns, whereas the rest are often unintentionally funny. Chandler’s use of sarcasm and saying things he does not mean or saying something and meaning the opposite for humoristic purposes is also characteristic of only him.

3.1 Research questions

This thesis aims to analyze Chandler’s character by studying the humor he produces from both linguistic form and functional perspectives. The following questions were formulated to study this:

- 1) What type of lexical relationship does Chandler use the most in his puns?
- 2) What can be said about the functions of his use of verbal humor in interaction from a communicative perspective?
- 3) What characteristics does Chandler appear to have according to his use of verbal humor?

3.2 Data

The data in this study consist of the 48 episodes of the first two seasons of the TV show. These seasons were chosen for this study because the beginning of the series is important in many respects: it attracts the interest of the viewer, introduces the characters, and sets the scene for the rest of the show. Thus, the characters' traits and their differences must be visible to the viewer in the first seasons of the show.

The data were collected by finding the scripts of the episodes in question. The transcriptions used in this thesis were collected from a fan-administered website livesinabox.com ("Crazy for Friends - Scripts," n.d.), after which they were thoroughly scrutinized and corrected for errors and mistakes by comparing them to the original episodes on HBO Max. The script of each episode was read through to find instances of Chandler's use of humor created by wordplay. The instances that were excluded from this analysis did not fit the criteria of wordplay including only words with multiple meanings. These instances included, for example, rhymes, metaphors, and syntactic rather than semantic uses of verbal humor.

In total, a sum of 42 instances were chosen and further analyzed and categorized according to their function (attack, amuse) and form of lexical relationship (polysemy, homonymy, homophony, near homophony). See Table 1 and Table 2 for the distribution of the functions and the lexical relationships in the instances of verbal humor.

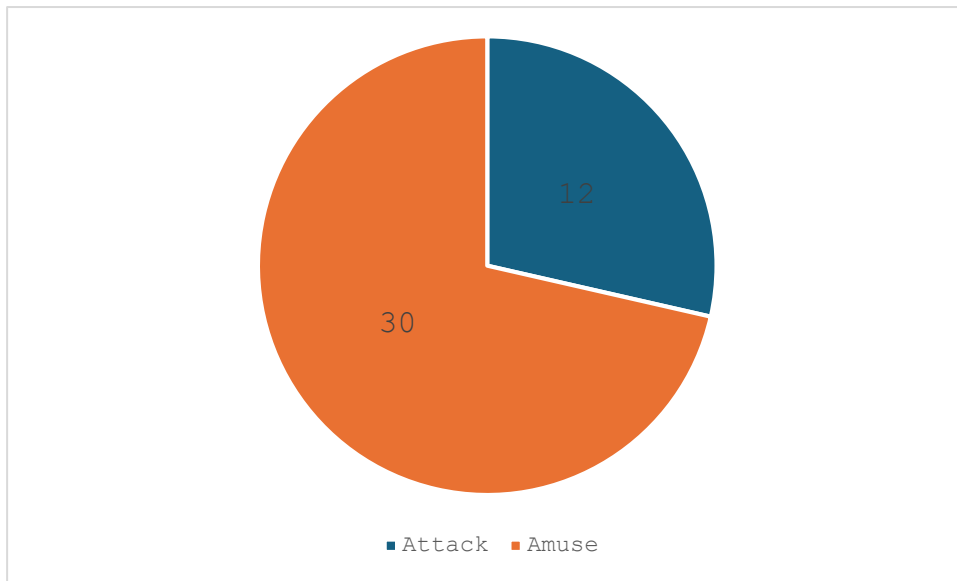


Table 1: Distribution of the Functions

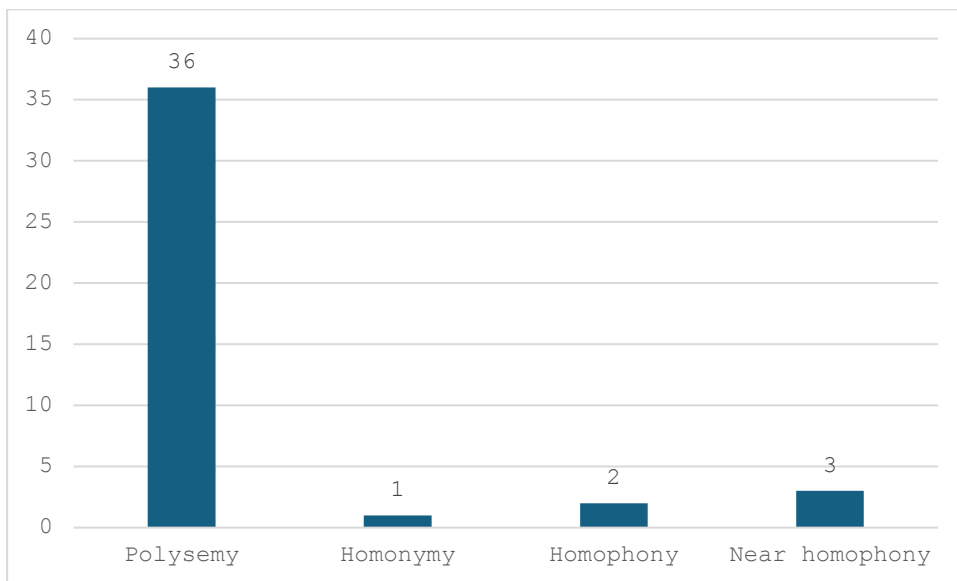


Table 2: Distribution of the Lexical Relationships

3.3 Methods and results

After categorizing the 42 instances with respect to both a form and a function, these instances were further analyzed from the perspective of the Politeness Theory. It should be noted that my

categorization of these instances might differ from someone else's as both the data and the criteria for it are open to interpretation.

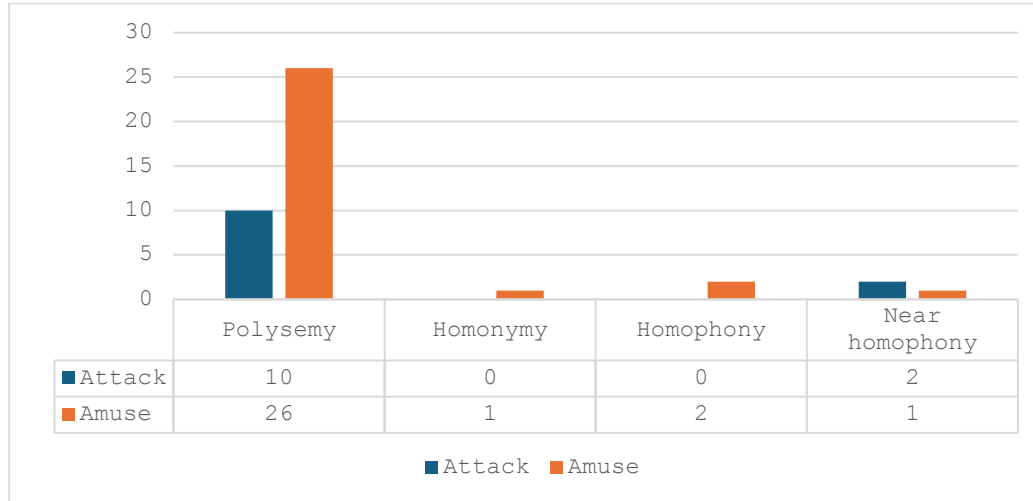


Table 3: Function and Lexical Relationship

As Table 3 demonstrates, most of the humorous instances function to amuse, and in most of those cases, Chandler uses polysemy to make the pun. Further analysis of this categorization of data will be discussed in the following sections. Let us first look at some instances of the attacking function of Chandler's humor.

3.4 Attacking

Joey is talking about his new acting role in a TV show. The other friends find this funny and start to make fun of him, initiated by Chandler:

Example (3) (Friends S1E6)

- Joey: I'm his butt double. Okay? I play Al Pacino's butt. Alright? He goes into the shower, and then- I'm his butt.
- Monica: (trying not to laugh) Oh my God.
- Joey: Come on, you guys! This is a real movie, and Al Pacino's in it, and that's big!
- Chandler: Oh no, it's terrific, it's... it's... you know, you deserve this, after all your years of struggling, you've finally been able to crack your way into showbusiness.

- Joey: Okay, okay, fine! Make jokes, I don't care! This is a big break for me!
- Ross: You're right, you're right, it is... So, you're gonna invite us all to the big opening?

Chandler uses the polysemous word *crack* to make fun of Joey's new role. The interpretations of 'achieving something' as well as the notion of *crack* as 'butt' to joke about Joey's role create a double interpretation, with a serious and a humoristic counterpart. Chandler's joking in the situation also invites Ross to make another, similar joke about the role with the words *big opening*. This creates a situation where Joey is made the target of the pun, while the others as a group can enjoy their mutually created joy together. According to Attardo's (1994, 323) categorization, this humorous passage functions as social management, where humor is used to strengthen the bond between the in-group (Chandler and Ross) and to reject the out-group (Joey). However, this conversation is very light in the sense that Joey's feelings are not necessarily hurt, as he is seen laughing as well at the end of the conversation. A tease, such as this, is humorous both to the speaker and the hearer (Dyner 2008, 249). This interaction reinforces the relationship between the members of the group by conveying positive politeness, "showing the relationship need not stand on formalities" (Norrick 2003, 1348).

An essential element of Chandler's humor is responding to the less obvious interpretation, where there are two or more possible meanings to derive from an utterance. In the following situation, Joey is opening up to Chandler about his doubts and fears of not being able to commit to one woman after finding out about his father's affair as a married man. The conversation is more personal and serious than usually, and Chandler sees an opportunity to make a joke:

Example (4) (Friends S1E13)

- Joey: I've been thinking, you know, about how I'm always seeing girls on top of girls...
- Chandler: Are they end to end, or tall like pancakes?

- Joey: You know what I mean, about how I'm always going out with all these women. And I always figured, when the right one comes along, I'd be able to be a stand-up guy and go to the distance, you know? Now I'm looking at my dad, thinking...
- Chandler: Hey, you're not him. You're you. When they were all over you to go into your father's pipe-fitting business, did you cave?

With his humorous response, Chandler intentionally misunderstands the intended meaning 'one after another' of the polysemous phrase *on top of*, and responds with a literal answer to it, asking about the layout of the girls Joey is talking about. Joey's confiding in Chandler threatens his negative face as it pushes into his "territory" and requires some kind of response in return, so Chandler uses humor to defuse the potentially serious conversation and to protect his own negative face. This kind of social management function is called repair by Attardo (1994, 324). According to Attardo, this kind of humorous commenting in unpleasant situations connotes "positive attitude, in-group bonding, and levity" (1994, 324). As we can see from the rest of the passage, Chandler does console Joey and convince him that he does not need to worry. Even though the situation is made light and humorous by Chandler, he shows sympathy and care for his friend as well, thus adhering to Joey's positive face.

Another example of Joy being the target of an attack is demonstrated in (5):

Example (5) (Friends S1E18)

- Ross: Uhh... Joey cried last night.
 Joey: Thank you.
 Chandler: We were playing poker, alright...
 Joey: There was chocolate on the three. It looked like an eight, alright?
 Ross: Oh, guys, you should've seen him. 'Read 'em and weep.'
 Chandler: And then he did.

Ross uses the gambling phrase *Read 'em and weep*, which, in poker terms, is "used to express smugness or satisfaction at triumph over one's opponents when displaying a winning hand of

card or roll of the dice” (OED, n.d., ‘read’em and weep’). Chandler uses the literal meaning of the polysemous word *weep* to refer to Joey crying. This humorous input makes Joey the target of the pun, enhancing in-group bonding of the other friends by making them laugh. This is, again, an FTA against Joey’s positive face, as Chandler ridicules him and his sensibility.

Joey is not the only character that is attacked by Chandler’s use of linguistic humor. Chandler utilizes polysemy again to create a pun, this time on the word *settle* in a conversation with Rachel after a poker game:

Example (6) (Friends S1E18)

Chandler: Rach, Rach, we’ve got to settle.
 Rachel: Settle what?
 Chandler: The... Jamestown colony of Virginia. You see, King George is giving us the land, so...
 Ross: The game, Rachel, the game. You owe us money for the game.

In this dialogue, two different meanings of *settle* can be interpreted: ‘to end the game’ and “to take up residence” (OED, n.d., ‘settle’), of which Chandler refers to the latter, less obvious interpretation. Chandler is utilizing Rachel’s unfamiliarity with the established terms and rules of poker, thus making her the target of the pun, and enhancing the in-group bonding between the other members of the group. This ridicule is threatening Rachel’s positive face, as Chandler’s humor highlights Rachel’s confusion and scarce knowledge about poker.

There are a couple of passages where the decision between categorizing the instance of humor as attacking or amusing is not as transparent as with the others. In (7), Chandler targets both Phoebe and Joey during the same interaction. Phoebe’s made-up word *testosteroney* invites Chandler to joke about the word, which sounds quite like *Rice-A-Roni*, “the real San Fransisco treat”. As the scene continues, Joey’s comment about the answering machine triggers Chandler to attack him, too:

Example (7) (Friends S1E20)

- Phoebe: Oh, God, just do it! Call her! Stop being so testosteroney!
 Chandler: Which, by the way, is the real San Francisco treat. (Calls her, then hurriedly hangs up.) I got her machine.
 Joey: Her answering machine?
 Chandler: No, interestingly enough, her leaf blower picked up.

Rice-A-Roni is a product advertised as “The San Francisco Treat” by PepsiCo (Rice-A-Roni, n.d.). *Rice-A-Roni* and *testosteroney* both end in similar sequences *roni* and *roney* with an identical pronunciation [rooni]. This identical ending is enough for Chandler to compare the two words to each other, perhaps not as near homophones, but in lack of a better categorization, that is what this will be categorized as. Chandler thus attacks Phoebe and makes fun of her made-up word by comparing it to another word. He, however, does this without implicitly targeting Phoebe, per se, but by simply pointing out the oddity of Phoebe’s announcement. This could be Chandler’s way to adhere to his own positive face by reinforcing his self-image and personality as “the funny one” of the friend group. What is also noteworthy about Chandler’s line is that he does not explicitly mention the word Rice-A-Roni, but only describes it as “the San Francisco treat.” This is only understood by the hearer if they are familiar with the product called Rice-A-Roni. Chandler is thus demonstrating his quick-thinking and cleverness with this line as well. According to Attardo, “humor requires extra processing, so producing and understanding it connote cleverness” (1994, 324). Cleverness is a subtype of the social management function of humor presented by Attardo (1994, 324).

The second part of the conversation in (7) between Chandler and Joey demonstrates an attack on Joey by using a double interpretation of the polysemous word *machine*. From the context, it is clear that Chandler called the girl and her answering machine picked up. Joey, however, responds with *Her answering machine?* which enables Chandler to make a pun targeting Joey and his apparent inability to understand the word from the context in which it

was mentioned. Chandler uses the hypernym *machine* and the hyponym *leaf blower* to create a sentence that is non-sensical in the context of the conversation, but which makes the double interpretation of *machine* evident and emphasizes its incompatibility with the rest of the conversation while making fun of Joey's response. This is an FTA toward Joey's positive face, as Chandler ridicules him. In this scene, Chandler is obviously nervous about talking to the woman, because he hangs up before saying anything. He appears, thus, also to be protecting his own negative face by attacking Joey and avoiding the conversation about why he did not leave a message to the machine.

Another example of Chandler using humor to amuse by attacking is evident in the following scene where Joey is sharing an intimate experience he had with a woman:

Example (8) (Friends S1E24)

Joey: It was amazing! And not just for her, uh-uh. For me, too. It's like, all of a sudden, I'm blind. But all my other senses are heightened, you know? It's like... I was able to appreciate it on another level.
 Chandler: I didn't know you had another level.
 Joey: I know! Neither did I!

Chandler responds by using the polysemous word *level* to make fun of Joey by implying that he is dumb. Joey clearly does not respond to that interpretation, but instead considers Chandler's response genuine. To the TV viewer this is humorous because Joey misses the second interpretation of Chandler's response, thus accidentally reinforcing and validating that statement of him "not having another level". The attack is therefore not visible to Joey, saving him from consciously acknowledging his positive face being threatened by Chandler. Chandler is reinforcing his own positive face and personality as the funny character.

3.5 Amusing

Chandler amuses the group by making fun of Rachel's comment on the guys entertaining themselves by winning money and taking it from their friends:

Example (9) (Friends S1E18)

- Rachel: So basically, you get your ya-yas by taking money from all of your friends.
 Ross: (pause)... Yeah.
 Chandler: Yes, and I get my ya-yas from Ikea. You have to put them together yourself, but they cost a little less.

According to the OED (n.d., 'ya-yas'), "To get one's ya-yas out and variants" is slang for 'enjoying oneself uninhibitedly.' Obviously, in this conversation, Chandler does not refer to this particular interpretation when he repeats the word *ya-yas* in his humorous response. The homophones *ya-ya* and *ja, ja*, 'yes, yes' in Swedish, are used here to refer to the Swedish brand Ikea. Chandler exploits the Swedish word *ja* 'yes' and makes a connection to Sweden by referring to the furniture store Ikea, where the products are all named after different Swedish words. Some might see this as Chandler attacking Rachel for her conspicuous choice of words. The justification, however, for categorizing this as amusing rather than attacking lies in the context: the atmosphere is tense because Rachel has to pay the guys and she seems irritated and offended by the way they are collecting money from their friends. Chandler's line is supposed to release the tense of the situation by saying something irrelevant but humorous in the middle of the conversation. Chandler's humor can be seen as adhering to the positive faces of the friend group by joking to claim common ground and strengthen the bond between the group (Brown and Levinson 1988, 124). In this case as well, Chandler's reference to Ikea and Sweden must be understood by the hearers for them to find it funny, which, again, makes Chandler appear smart and knowledgeable.

In the following scene, Monica tries to take Chandler out on a run to do a workout with her, but Chandler is not willing to join her:

Example (10) (Friends S2E7)

Chandler: Monica, It's 6:30 in the morning. We're not working out. It's over.

Monica: No way, with one pound to go, come on! We're workin', we're movin', we're in the zone we're groovin'.

The polysemous phrase *work out* offers the double interpretation of either 'exercising' or 'succeeding in a relationship'. By using this, Chandler does not only amuse the TV viewer but also attempts to get out of the situation by the help of humor. This is even further strengthened by the addition of *it's over*, often used when ending a relationship with someone. Chandler threatens Monica's positive face by refusing to do what she wants, while Monica is simultaneously threatening Chandler's negative face by trying to get him to do something he does not want to.

Another example of Chandler trying to avoid a difficult situation or manage strong emotions by amusing others is when Joey moves out and Chandler has already gotten a new roommate, Eddie, to move in Joey's place:

Example (11) (Friends S2E17)

Joey: Well, I uh, got what I came for. [puts on a moose hat] I'll uh, I'll see you guys.

Chandler: Hey Jo. When'd you start using mousse in your hair?

Eddie: Is this guy great or what?

Joey: Yeah, he is.

Chandler tries to use joking and positive politeness strategies to claim the common ground he shares with Joey as friends and former roommates with the homophony pair *moose* and *mousse*, but only succeeds in amusing Eddie (and perhaps the TV viewer as an observer). Chandler's

humor is also an attempt to protect his own negative face by hiding his true emotions in the situation, as he feels sad about Joey leaving.

Chandler's jokes are not always targeted toward anyone. For example, in (12), Chandler is boosting his own ego while amusing the TV viewer by exploiting the multiple meanings of the polysemous word *some*:

Example (12) (Friends S1E7)

Jill: (on the phone) I'm fine. No, I'm not alone... I don't know, some guy.
 Chandler: Oh! Some guy. Some guy. Hey Jill, I saw you with some guy last night. Yes, he was some guy.

Chandler has been locked in an ATM vestibule with Jill Goodacre due to a power blackout. Chandler's lines in this passage are only expressed as his thoughts as he is not uttering them aloud, which gives the TV viewer an insight into what he thinks about himself. This demonstrates how he is convincing himself that he is a spectacular guy, repeating the word *some*, ultimately changing the meaning from "undetermined or unspecified" to "remarkable" (OED, n.d., 'some'). This change of meaning can also be detected by the shift of stress from the word *guy* to the word *some*. Chandler's positive face is reinforced as his positive self-image is strengthened. This self-assurance gives him the confidence to approach Jill.

Even though many of the puns Chandler makes are targeted toward the other members of the friend group, he also makes self-deprecating puns targeted toward himself. In the following situation, the friends have gathered around Ross's newborn baby Ben:

Example (13) (Friends S1E23)

Rachel: Oh, God, I can't believe one of us actually has one of these.
 Chandler: I know, I still am one of these.

With *one of these*, Rachel is referring to the baby, which Chandler repeats to make a humorous comment on himself. Chandler is saying that he is still a baby, utilizing the polysemy of the word *baby* to refer to himself as a childish person, not an actual infant. Holmes shows how self-deprecating humor can express positive politeness, protecting the speaker's positive face needs (2000, 167). Chandler is thus making himself more likeable by amusing others.

4 Discussion

This thesis set out to study Chandler's use of verbal humor and its functions by an analysis of examples from the first two seasons of *Friends*. As has been demonstrated above, language and humor are an essential feature of Chandler's character. In the instances discussed above, it was found that many of the puns he makes are targeted toward someone, whether it is a member of the friend group or himself.

Let us return to and answer the research questions of the thesis: What type of lexical relationship does Chandler use the most in his puns? What can be said about his puns in interaction from a communicative perspective? What characteristics does Chandler appear to have according to his use of verbal humor?

By far, the most prominent type of lexical relationship utilized by Chandler is polysemy. This refers to words or phrases with multiple, but related, meanings. The other types of lexical relationship included in this study, homonymy, homophony, and near homophony, were found to be significantly rarer. This is perhaps because, after all, it might be easier to produce a word that has two meanings rather than coming up with two completely different words that simply happen to be identical in spelling or pronunciation. By extending the categories of this study to include several other types of lexical relationship, such as paronymy, antonymy, synonymy,

and malapropism, for example, the instances of Chandler's humor might prove to be even more varied.

Chandler's puns function both to amuse and to attack. However, it is reasonable to take into more detailed account the effect that his humor has: it amuses the interlocutors, which strengthens the bond between the group and reinforces the established relationship between the members. Even in the instances of attacking a member of the friend group, it can be argued that the positive face wants of being approved of and liked by others are strengthened by the display of friendly teasing and banter between the friends, as joking is "based on mutual shared background knowledge" (Brown and Levinson 1988, 124). In addition to attacking and amusing, Chandler's use of humor functions as social management: his humor functions as a tense-reducing factor in conversations, where the topic is either too sensible or difficult for Chandler to approach without the help of humor to protect his negative face.

By his use of verbal humor, Chandler appears to be a sarcastic, smart, quick-thinking, caring, and, at times, insecure character. This meets his character descriptions in most news articles, fan-administered websites, and other sources where the series is described. These characteristics are one of the main factors in the creation of Chandler's character and his continuous popularity.

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