Where Did All the Double Entendres Go?

A study of televised double entendres’ linguistic similarities and differences in connection to social norms and cultural differences...

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English Linguistics

Halmstad 2016-06-11
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A study of televised double entendres’ linguistic similarities and differences in connection to social norms and cultural differences between the United Kingdom and the United States.

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Spring 2016
Abstract
This essay will examine fourteen selected clips of double entendres, also referred to as sexual innuendoes, from English-speaking films and TV-shows between the 1960s/1970s and 2010s. The aim was to determine whether the double entendres’ linguistic similarities and differences could be connected to generational differences and/or cultural differences between the United Kingdom and the United States.

The linguistic focus of this study is mainly semantics and pragmatics. It includes the semantic aspects of meaning, ambiguity and puns in terms of homonyms, homophones, homographs, polysems, onyms, metaphors and, the pragmatic aspects regarding the generation and recovery of implicatures by audiences.

The results have shown that many of the double entendres’ similarities are connected to linguistic aspects. For instance, both semantic meaning and pragmatics aspects, such as context, influence the double entendres. However, the result reveals differences in the double entendres’ degree of explicitness; such differences may be connected to generational changes and cultural variation. The study has also indicated that the usage of double entendres as a comedic device has become outmoded and, in some cases, politically inappropriate due to changes in the social climate.

Key words: Double Entendre, Semantics, Pragmatics, Ambiguity, The United Kingdom, The United States, Cultural differences, Generational differences
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1. Introduction
An observation has been made that the British “Carry On” films produced their last film in 1997 (Farmer, 2015). According to the online newspaper, Mail Online, the films were iconic and famous for their “bawdy routines” (Farmer, 2015). In addition, the popular British sitcom, “Are You Being Served?”, had their last episode broadcasted in 1985 and the show was also memorable for using a large number of double entendres (Lawson, 2016). However, the “Carry On” films are set to return to the British cinema in 2017 (Farmer, 2015) and the comedy show “Are You Being Served?” is expected to re-appear in British television in the near future (Lawson, 2016). The use of sexual innuendos declined in the 1980s-1990s; however, the modern scriptwriters appear now to be attempting to reinstate double entendres in English comedy as a comedic device. Nevertheless, it has been observed there is a paucity of research on double entendres as a comedic device and there is little to explain why this popular comedic device has become less attractive in English comedy. Therefore, it would be insightful to investigate both early and modern examples of double entendres from English - speaking TV-shows and films, i.e. British and American, and compare these examples in regard of time period and origin of country. To be able to determine a possible explanation which accounts for why double entendres seem to be an outmoded comedic device, this study aims to answer three thesis questions:

- What linguistic similarities and differences can be detected in the usage of double entendres employed in comedy movies and TV shows between the 1960s/1970s and the present day?
- To what degree has change in social norms and the socio-political environment affected double entendres?
- How are the cultural differences between the United Kingdom and the United States manifested in the use of double entendres present in comedy movies and TV shows?

This study will begin by conducting a review of existing published texts and scholarly articles in order to form a theoretical basis for this research, and these will relate to the linguistic sub-disciplines of semantics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Having reviewed the existing academic sources relating to the construction of comedic devices in general, and innuendo in particular, a selection of examples will be identified, transcribed and analysed.
from the linguistic perspectives mentioned above and with references to the literature. The process by which the data will be selected will be described in the Methodology chapter and the findings will be outlined in the chapter entitled 'Data and Analysis'. In the Discussion chapter which follows, broader trends and patterns will be discerned and appropriate conclusions drawn in order to provide answers to the thesis questions shown above. A Conclusion chapter will summarise the process and findings, and suggest further research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Meaning
Lems claims, “Understanding jokes is part of the process of native language acquisition, and jokes are part of the charm that belongs to any language” (2013, p. 26). The meaning of words is linked to the given speech community’s culture, as language, in this case the English language, is a phenomenon based on social and cultural factors (Alm-Arvius, 2003). Therefore, people’s understanding of a word or expression may differ from culture to culture. According to Aarons, “meaning” is a frequently debated subject since there are various interpretations as to how people come to understand the meaning of a word or a phrase (2012). Empson explains the entanglement of meaning,

“Thus a word may have several meanings; several meanings connected with one another; several meanings which need one another to complete their meaning; or several meanings which unite together so that the word means one relation or process” (1995, p. 24)

The concept of “meaning” is often discussed in relation to both pragmatics and semantics. However, they use different approaches towards it (Leech, 1983). Pragmatics is a field in linguistics where “meaning” is displayed through utterance together with context (Aarons, 2012). The meaning of an utterance depends on situation, e.g., who is present, where and when it is situated, and not on the actual linguistic meaning. In other words, people can use language to say X, but mean Y. For instance, in pragmatics, “meaning” would consider what the speakers implicate to the receivers by their utterances (Leech, 1983) while, in semantics, meaning deals with words’ definitions and is not influenced by context (Leech, 1983). Aarons states, in relation to pragmatics, “in order for speakers and hearers to make
sense of what their interlocutors are saying, they need to rely on tacit knowledge about the way in which language is used to do things, e.g., make requests” (2012, p. 22). Using language to, for example, make requests, apologize, give orders or promises, is described in a theory by Austin (Aarons, 2012). Austin maintains that language can be used to do something, which he coined “Speech Acts” (Aarons, 2012). For instance, when a person who is currently indoors asserts that it is cold, the receiver can interpret it as a statement of fact and evaluate it in terms of truthfulness. Austin, however, would argue that the underlying intended meaning, or illocutionary act, could be a request to, e.g., close an open window in the room (Aarons, 2012). Hence, the meaning is only displayed if the receiver considers context.

Grice accounts for meaning in relation to human communication and introduces the Co-operative Principle, which offers an explanation as to how people co-operate in conversation to be able to understand each other (Aarons, 2012). The Co-operative Principle consists of four maxims which the participants will subconsciously follow in order to have a successful dialogue. These are: Quantity, do not give more or less information than is required; Quality, be truthful and do not say what you believe is false or lack evidence; Relation, be relevant; Manner, avoid both obscurity of expression and ambiguity, also, be orderly and brief (Leech, 1983). As Leech points out, “speakers often mean more than they say” during interaction (1983). For example, when information is withheld for a reason, or sarcasm is being used, the speaker is failing to abide by a maxim or maxims and, in some cases, this is to implicate an additional meaning. The additional meaning is what Aarons refers to as “speakers’ intention” or “speaker’s meaning”, which is different from linguistic meaning (2012).

Pragmatics deals with “language-use” (Leech, 1983), in other words, how people use language in interaction to convey an underlying meaning or intention. Semantics, on the other hand, is concerned with “language-meaning” (Alm-Arvius, 2003), that is to say, the meaning of words or sentences is connected to logic and is independent from context (Leech, 1983) Aarons refers to semantics as “the study of linguistic meaning” and emphasises the complexity in order to comprehend meaning, since there are several different approaches to understanding a word (2012). For instance, words with the same spelling or pronunciation can have various meanings or different words can have similar meaning. A word such as “heart” can thus be interpreted as the organ for blood distribution, the centre of an object or associated with love or compassion. Also, a “kiwi” can either be understood as a person who is from New Zealand, a bird or a fruit.
As previously mentioned, meaning is often related to both pragmatics and semantics, due to the difficulty in distinguishing between literal and the non-literal meanings since pragmatic factors constantly affect the semantics (Aarons, 2012). If a police officer says to a colleague at a crime scene that a deceased victim has no heart, it would probably mean the victim does not have the actual organ. However, in another situation, where a father says to his daughter that she has no heart, it would likely mean she is emotionless and cold. So, words’ linguistic meanings are often influenced by context and this can create misunderstandings or humour (Aarons, 2012). It could be argued that jokes in particular depend on meaning. That is to say, if the receiver does not fully understand the implied message behind a joke, it may not be successful and could be interpreted as a simple statement or a meaningless compound of words.

2.2 Ambiguity
The concept of “meaning” is immense and difficult to comprehend since the interpretation of words or expressions can vary among people due to context or linguistic meaning (Aarons 2012).

Empson analyses language and meaning in his critical work, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, published in 1930, and he explains “ambiguity” as “an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings” (1995). In other words, any speech or texts, which does not enclose one literal meaning but several, can create ambiguity. As indicated by the title, Empson approaches seven different types of ambiguity.

2.2.3 Types of Ambiguity
The first one Empson mentions is metaphors (1995). A metaphor is generated when one concept is used to describe another similar concept. The ambiguity is created when the two parallel ideas are aggregated and it is challenging to know which one to focus on (Empson, 1995). One example, which Empson associates with a metaphorical ambiguity, is a line from Shakespeare, “Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang” (1995, p. 21). Shakespeare compares the experience people have in church, sitting on a row and singing, with the birds’ experience. The birds also sit in a row singing, looking up into the sky where the sun shins back through the leaves, which is similar to the experience of sunshine through
the coloured windows in churches. Empson claims Shakespeare produces ambiguity, since it is difficult to distinguish which concept “to hold most clearly in mind” (1995, p. 21).

The second type of ambiguity is explained by Empson as occurring: “when two or more meanings are resolved into one” (1995, p. 69) An example of this type of ambiguity could be a statement, such as, “It feels like home”. The word “home” contains several meanings, i.e., a country, a city, a house or the earth, but all these meanings are contracted into one.

The third type of ambiguity can be found where one word has more than one denotative meaning, also recognised as a pun, and all the multiple ideas seem suitable for the context (Empson, 1995). If the pun is not recognised as a word with multiple meanings, Empson argues ambiguity will not occur (1995). However, the pun’s actual influence on the text does not need to be identified: only the observation of the word’s additional meanings is required (Empson, 1995). Examples of this type of ambiguity, i.e. puns, can be found below in Chapter 2.3.

The fourth type of ambiguity occurs, according to Empson, “when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make a clear a more complicated state of mind in the author” (1995, p. 160). Compared to the third type, the receiver does not have the meanings in focus directly because all different meanings have to be combined to make sense (Empson, 1995). However, since people may interpret a statement in different ways, the outcome will also differ amongst them, which Empson claims creates ambiguity (1995). Empson uses a part of the poem, *A Valediction*, of weeping, as an example of this type of ambiguity. “Let me powre forth / My tears before thy face, whil’st I stay here, / For thy face coins them, and thy stampe they beare, / And by this Mintage they something worth, / For thus they be / Pregnant of thee, / Fruits of much grief they are, emblems of more, / When a tear falls, that thou falst which it bore, / So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse shore” (1995, p. 167). Empson argues the first impression of the metaphor of coining is a description of royal worth and beauty (1995). However, Empson states: “there is a shift of the metaphor in this, brought out by line 3, from the tears as a molten metal which must be stamped with her value to the tears themselves as the completed coin; ‘because,’ then, ‘you are so fruitful of happiness’; and in either case, far in the background, in so far as she is not really such a queenly figure, ‘because you are public, mercenary, and illegal’” (1995, p. 167).

When an idea is detected while the author or speaker is in the process of writing or speaking, the fifth ambiguity may become manifest (Empson, 1995). For instance, an
utterance may at first seem to intend one idea but, through writing or speaking, the author develops another idea. However, half-way between the two ideas, the author may use a simile which can represent both ideas (Empson, 1995). Empson has detected this type of ambiguity in one of Shakespeare’s play, Measure for Measure, “Our Nature do pursue / Like Rats that ravyn downe their proper Bane / A thirsty evil, and when we drinke we diew” (1995, p. 184). Empson argues, “Evidently the first idea was that lust itself was the poison; but the word proper, introduced as meaning ‘suitable for rats’, but also having an irrelevant suggestion of ‘right and natural’ (1995, p. 184). In other words, “proper bane” may either be interpreted as “rat-poison” or “natural death”. Empson claims, the humans’ “proper bane” is water, the natural poison which we can not live without, “by reflection, then, proper bane becomes ambiguous, since it is now water as well as poison” (1995, p. 184).

A meaningless statement is referred to by Empson as his sixth ambiguity (1995). If a word or sentence is irrelevant the receivers are compelled to create their own interpretations, which may not agree among each other and create double meanings (Empson, 1995). One of the examples, used by Empson, is “Zuleika was not strictly beautiful” (1995, p. 207). The dilemma is that the sentence does not successfully explain to the receiver Zuleika’s features (Empson, 1995). In other words, “not strictly beautiful” could be interpret as “ugly” or “common” or “un-admirable”, but the changeability between the choices of meaning creates ambiguity (Empson, 1995).

The seventh and last type of ambiguity mentioned in Empson’s work is what he refers to as “the most ambiguous that can be conceived” (1995, p. 225). The ambiguity occurs when a word contains two different ideas, which are opposites in meaning (Empson, 1995). Empson argues, “the idea of “opposites” is a comparatively late human invention” (1995, p. 227), which can result in various interpretations.

Additionally, another type of ambiguity would be the act of flouting Grice’s maxim of manner (Aarons, 2012). Flouting is an act of intentionally failing to abide by the maxims during conversation to be able to imply other or additional information (Aarons, 2012). The main aspect of the maxim of manner is to give clear statements and, according to Leech, one approach for successful clarity is to be unambiguous (1983). Aarons provides an example of a joke which demonstrates how flouting the manner maxim creates ambiguity (2012). The joke concerns two old friends having a conversation and one of them has his mother-in-law in the hospital. He is asked how long she has been there and he replies, “In three weeks time, please God, it’ll be a month” (Aarons, 2012, p. 27). The ambiguity is created because of the “please God”, since it may confuse the receiver how to interpret the utterance. The actual
flouting is done to imply that he wishes the mother-in-law would be hospitalised for the remaining three weeks as well (Aarons, 2012).

2.3 Puns
Puns are a special tool used in humour; they depend on language play and words with double or multiple meanings (Hermerén, 1999). According to the 1995’s O. Henry pun-world champion† (Talks at Google, 2013), John Pollack, puns are a way of “encoding more meaning into fewer words” (Talks at Google, 2013). The act of punning can be done both visually or verbally. The visual-pun is created through i.e. a photograph and the image itself, along with what is represents, thrives on double meaning (Hermerén, 1999). Lexical puns are what Aarons would call “linguistic humour” or “jokes the dicto”, which she refers to “jokes that are about words” (2012). In other words, “linguistic humour” is a type of humour which is based on language-play and represented through speech or text.

Puns, which are usually based on intentional ambiguity (Alm-Arvius, 2003), give a word or a phrase one literal meaning and one figurative meaning (Hemerén, 1999), which may be a challenge for Swedish people, or other people who have English as a second language, distinguish between. Lems (2013) examines the difficulties English language learners have in determining the figurative meaning in puns. Lems states, “most puns are expected to be understood within about a half second”(2013), which may not be an easy task for non-native English speakers. Thus, when a person who has English as a second language is exposed to a pun, that person needs to begin by identifying the denotation of the punning-word (Lems, 2013). Secondly, that person must be able to distinguish the word’s figurative meaning and finally unite and compare the different meanings with the context in which the word is used (Lems, 2013).

2.3.1 Classifications of Puns
There are four main classifications of puns, according to Lems, which she has named “soundalike puns”, “lookalike puns”, “close-sounding puns” and “texting puns” (2013). “Soundalike puns” are what linguists would recognise as homophones, which consist of words similar in pronunciation but carry differences in spellings and meanings (Aarons, 2013).

† The O. Henry Annual Pun-Off World Championship is a competition in which the contestants can either enter “Punniest of Show” or “Punslingers”. In “Punniest of show” the contestants have to present a ninethly seconds, self-prepared, punning material in front of judges. In “Punslingers” each contestant is given a topic and a time limit of five seconds to deliver a pun, which continues until all contestants, except one, fail to present a pun on time (O. Henry Pun-Off World Championships, 2016).
The humorous aspect is achieved when the confusion between the different meanings is recognised (Aarons, 2012). For instance, the sentence, “seven days without water make one weak” (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p. 146), plays with both the words “weak” and “one”. Alm-Arvius explains, the adjective “weak” has the same pronunciation as the noun “week”, which changes the sentence’s meaning (2003). Additionally, if “weak” were to be interpreted as “week”, the pronoun “one” would be understood as the number “one”, which is another type of pun based on homonymy or polysemy (Alm-Arvius, 2003).

Homonyms are words with the same pronunciation and spelling, but have different and non-related meanings (Alm-Arvius, 2003). A homonym functions as a pun when ambiguity is created, e.g. the word “bank”, which can both mean a building where money is being stored or the land at the edge of a river. For instance, “I saw him by the bank” (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p. 144) is a sentence where “bank” is recognised by Alm-Arvius as a pun (2003). The word “bank” is ambiguous and has two different and unrelated meanings which can easily cause confusion between speaker and hearer (2003).

The “lookalike puns” are what Lems refers to as “polysemous words” (2013). To some extent, these are similar to homonyms, since puns based on homonyms also “lookalike”. However, homonyms are independent words with identical spelling while polysemous words comprise one lexeme associated to multiple but related meanings (Nordquist, 2015). According to Alm-Arvius, written or verbal ambiguity is mainly caused by polysemous words since the different meanings are related they can easily overlap (2003). For instance, in Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary (2016) the word “blind” is defined as “unable to see” or “having no opening for lights or passage”. Therefore, “blind” is polysemic in the example by Lems, “Blind man – Window Blinds of Every Kind” (2013, p. 27), since “blind man” can either be related to a man without eyesight or a man who sells window blinds (Lems, 2013). Nevertheless, the two meanings of “sight” are still related in the sense of an absence of sight.

In addition, puns can be based on homographs. As with homonyms and polysemous words, homographs are words that have diverse meanings, but share the same spelling. However, homographic words are pronounced differently, which causes them to be more suitable for written humour than verbal (Alm-Arvius, 2003). For instance, “bow” is a homographic word, which can be used, i.e., “bow your head” or “tied in a bow” (Nordquist 2015). Verbally, homographic punning would be unsuccessful since the recipient would hear the difference in pronunciation and determine the correct interpretation.
The “close-sounding puns” mentioned by Lems are words with similar sound patterns (2013). Confusion occurs when a sentence or word sounds almost identical to another sentence or word, and the receiver cannot decide which one is the correct one (Lems 2013). Nordquist refers this linguistic aspect to the term “oronyms”, coined by Gyles Brandreth (2015). Unlike with texts, spoken language does not have a visual space between words, so a word’s sound could seem to combine with the latter word in the sentence and together create a phonetic form of another word (Nordquist 2015). For instance, “ice cream” can be interpreted as “I scream”, or “she took a nice cold shower” can be misunderstood as “she took an ice-cold shower” (Nordquist 2015).

Lems also defines “texting puns”, which are phenomena created through simplified spelling, i.e., using symbols and numbers (2013). For instance, “@mosphere” is a texting pun for “atmosphere” and “0 CRDT CHX”, used for a car insurance ad, is a substitute for “zero credit checks” (Lems 2013). Texting puns are often used by businesses to be original and inventive, but also to save money by using fewer letters (Lems 2013).

According to Alm-Arvius, “in a typical metaphor the literal description of a concrete, that is a directly perceptible, phenomenon or type of experience is used to outline something more general and abstract” (2003, p. 20). In other words, a metaphor occurs when one concept is used to describe another concept for the purpose of demonstrating their similarities. Goatly argues, when metaphors are used, the speaker and receiver need to cooperate for the receiver to have a successful interpretation (1997). The person who has used a metaphor is the only one who knows the intended meaning of it (Goatly, 1997). Therefore, to be able to understand a used metaphor, the interlocutors also have to understand the mind of the speaker (Goatly, 1997). Puns and metaphors are comparable in the sense that both are based on double or multiple meanings (Alm-Arvius, 2003). Since Empson argues that metaphor is a type of ambiguity (1995) and puns are based on ambiguity (Alm-Arvius, 2003), conclusions can be drawn that metaphor is also a kind of pun. However, for humour to occur, the metaphor has to be intentionally ambiguous so the receiver has difficulty in distinguishing between the literal and the more abstract meaning (Goatly, 1995).

2.3.2 Puns in Advertising
According to Tanaka, “It has been suggested that the British may be fonder of puns in advertising than any other nation in Europe” (1999, p. 62). Puns are frequently used in advertisements to create humour and build a relation with the audience (Tanaka, 1999). As
mentioned above, puns are based on word play and multiple meanings (Hemerén, 1999), so the receiver will have to examine the pun to determine the intentional meaning. Alm-Arvius states that this process of examination will affect the audience’s memory and build curiosity (2003). An advert requires the audience’s attention to be able to serve its purpose and advertisers use punning to intentionally cause confusion, which will maintain the addressees’ attention, since they spend time trying to solve the pun (Tanaka, 1999). Tanaka explains, “Puns attract attention because they frustrate initial expectations of relevance and create a sense of surprise (1999), p. 68). Moreover, puns are used in advertisements to create humour. Hemerén claims, “Humour generates shared amusement; it can suggest that speaker and hearer have common ground, that they are likely to share views and that the speaker’s message should be agreed on” (1999, p. 131). Advertisers can use verbal, written or visual puns, since a picture, as well as, words or utterances, can depend on double meaning (Hemerén, 1999). An advert created for Boots uses the headline: “Cheaper accident cover at Boots”, and has a picture of an infant’s lower body which can be seen wearing a nappy (Hemerén, 1999, p.133-134). Hemerén claims the picture is a visual pun in the sense that the advertisement is for nappies, but the wording is exchanged for “accident cover” (1999). The picture seems to either represent only the nappy which the baby is wearing, or the more humorous, how the nappy functions to prevent any accidents, involving ‘poo’, from happening (Hemerén, 1999). Additionally, Hemerén presents a polysemous pun used in an advertisement, “Introducing The Camera That’s Really Loaded For People Who Aren’t” (1999, p. 135). The word “loaded” is both connected to the camera’s features as well as the financial status of the potential buyers (Hemerén, 1999). In other words, regardless of the camera’s low price, it contains all the features in which will please the consumer.

2.3.3 Puns in Comedy

One of the reasons advertisers use puns is because of their humorous effect (Tanaka, 1999), and as mentioned previously, Hemerén states puns are a tool used in humour (1999). Additionally, Aarons refers lexical puns as “jokes that are about words” (2013). Aside from advertisements, the conclusion can therefore be drawn that puns are regularly used in jokes and for comedic effect. According to Pollack, puns have also been viewed for a long time as a sign of intellect, wit, insight and wisdom, and were especially popular during “the Shakespeare-era”, from the late 1500’s to the early 1600’s (Talks at Google, 2013). Shakespeare used many puns in his works; however, with the translation of Shakespeare’s
plays and sonnets into modern English, many of his puns have disappeared (Vulliamy, 2016). Vulliamy asserts that Crystal has studied the original pronunciation of Shakespeare’s plays and discovered lost puns which can only be detected by applying the accent of original pronunciation used in the time of Shakespeare (2016). For example, one of the lines in the preface of *Romeo and Juliet* contains a pun, “From forth the fatal loins of these two foes / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life”, “loins” had the same pronunciation as “lines” in original pronunciation, which creates two different meanings (Vulliamy, 2016). Vulliamy explains, “lines” alludes to bloodlines and “loins” refers to Romeo and Juliet’s sexual intimacy (2016).

In addition to Shakespeare, puns are also used in modern comedy. The *Carry On* film-series was on British cinema from the mid to the late 20th century and was, according to Chapman, “a cherished and much-loved national institution” (2012, p. 100). In the 1960’s, the production welcomed a new writer, Talbot Rothwell, who contributed puns to the series (Chapman, 2012). For instance, in *Carry On Cleo* from 1964, one of the creative puns, recognised as an onronym, can be established from the line “Infamy! Infamy! They’ve all got it in for me!” (Chapman, 2012, p. 106). Rothwell also used punning names for the characters, i.e., “Dr. Tinkle”\(^2\) and “Sergeant Bung”\(^3\) (Chapman, 2012, p. 107). The Monty Python sketches also made use of puns, i.e., Aarons mentions a sketch in Flying Circus were a joke is told by Hitler (2012).

> “Hitler: My dog has no nose.  
> Crowd: How does it smell?  
> Hitler: Terrible” (Aarons, 2012, p. 74)

The punning word “smell” refers either to “how the dog can detect a smell without a nose” or “the odour of the dog”, in this joke Hitler assumed the latter (Aarons, 2012). In other words, “smell” can be both an active and intransitive verb, and also a copular verb in which “terrible” would be the subject complement. In addition, “A history of the world in funny puns”, observes puns in the Bond-films (2016). For instance, in *Live and Let Die*, the enemy blows up like a balloon and Bond says, “Oh, he always did have an inflated opinion of himself” (A history of the word of funny puns, 2016).

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\(^2\) The colloquial meaning of the word “tinkle” is “to urinate” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

\(^3\) The colloquial meaning of the word ”bung” is a British slang for ”bribe” (Urban Dictionary, 2006)
2.4 Double Entendre

“Double entendre” is a loanword from French and is used in English as an expression for “double meaning”, also recognised as “innuendo”, particularly when one of the binary meanings has a sexual reference (Nordquist, 2015). Aarons claims, “An innuendo is an indirect remark or insinuation that can carry the suggestion of some impropriety” (2012, p. 108). According to Bell, there are two types of innuendos, which he has coined as “venomous innuendo” and “non-venomous innuendo” (1997). Venomous innuendoes have an opaque motive, since they are usually performed in public, especially in political discourse (Bell, 1997). Conversely, a non-venomous innuendo has a more obvious intention and is often used for sexual innuendo (Bell, 1997), which is what Nordquist refers to as double entendre (2015).

2.4.1 Double Entendre in Entertainment and Advertising

According to Hicks, “Sexual innuendo and double-entendres have been around forever” (2015). In addition to Shakespeare’s extensive use of puns, several double entendres have also been discovered in his plays and sonnets (Smith, 2006). For instance, in Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio says, “O here’s a wit of cheveril, that stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad!” (Smith, 2006). The word “wit”, during the Shakespeare-era, could refer to the male sexual organ, which would mean “that stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad” describes the size of the phallus (Smith, 2006). Hicks mentions some modern films, such as Pillow Talk from the 1950’s, The Pink Panther from the 1960’s, The Heartbreak Kid and What’s Up, Doc? From the 1970’s, which he claims all contain sexual innuendoes (2015). Despite puns, the Carry On films also contain several double entendres, i.e., “May the fertility of Sumaka swell your coconuts”, from Carry On Again Doctor in 1969, where the word “coconuts”, possibly alludes to testicles (Chapman, 2012). In a study of televised sexual exposure, Strasburger (2004) reports the average American adolescent is annually exposed to approximately 14,000 sexual references through television (2004, cited in Fisher, A.D., et al. 2009).

Advertisements frequently use sexual innuendo for humour effects and to interest the audience by using transparent sexual intentions (Bell, 1997). A direct, or indirect, allusion to sex will obtain the audience’s attention, since humans are more easily influenced and affected by such information than other, non-sexual, information (Tanaka, 1999). Bell refers to an example of how a sexual innuendo is used in an advert by Calvin Klein jeans (1997). The female actress says, “Want to know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing” (Bell, 1994, p. 56). It seems “comes between” has two meanings, one in which the woman
indicates there is no better jeans than her Calvins and is thereby metaphorical, while the other, hidden message, is intended to titillate by implying she is not wearing underwear. Bell argues one of the reasons for the advertisement’s success was the hidden message, which caused a controversy but was still opaque enough for the advertisers to claim deniability (1997).

2.4.2 Deniability
Innuendoes, like puns, have one literal and one figurative meaning (Bell, 1997). Nevertheless, the speakers use the literal meaning to conceal their real intentions, which is hidden in the figurative meaning (Bell, 1997). The figurative meaning’s intent is non-overt and not proposed for the receiver to recognise, since it is generally improper or vulgar, while the literal meaning is overt and has a more serious and plausible approach (Bell, 1997). Therefore, the speaker, as well as the receiver, has the ability to deny the figurative meaning if it is recognised, since the speaker misleads the receiver by hiding an insult or improper idea through a more serious and truthful statement (Bell, 1997). However, even though the figurative meaning is not supposed to be blatant, Bell argues an innuendo is most successful if the speaker’s insinuation is recognised on the level of suspicion so deniability can still function (1997). According to Tanaka, speakers use denial or ignorance to avoid responsibility for the supposedly inappropriate utterance, “the speaker still wishes to make certain assumptions manifest to the hearer, but he does not want to be held responsible for having done so” (1999, p. 42).

2.5 Cultural changes in the United Kingdom and United States
The Monty Python star, John Cleese, argues “political correctness is killing comedy” (Dunn, 2016). Political correctness is according to Oxford Dictionaries, “the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against (2016). Wagner claims comedians will fail to entertain their audience if they feel alienated or uncomfortable (2015). Dunn reports that political correctness has had a major impact on university campuses in the UK and that comedians, such as John Cleese, perceive people are easily offended and so they now avoid preforming in these venues (2016). The view on sex and gender appears to have changed in the UK. O’Hara argues the film, Carry On Cabby, demonstrated the “the battle of the sexes” in post war Britain (1997). Dassanowsky describes how the women’s liberation
movement and the sexual liberation of the 1960s have affected females’ roles in television, which allowed more sensuality and flirtation on screen (2007). In addition, a study in 2014 of 500 eighteen-year-olds in the UK showed, “a large majority of young people believe that people are more open-minded about sex and relationships nowadays” (Parker, 2014, p. 19).

According to Wihbey “American popular culture is now saturated with sexual imagery, and many interpret this phenomenon as a representation of changing habits and values across the population (2015). Wihbey argues Americans’ views on same-sex relationships, premarital sex and casual sex, have changed since the 1950s and became more permissive between the 1970s and 2010s. (2015). In similarity with the UK, political correctness in the US has become more conspicuous. Comedian Chris Rock has also perceived people today are keen to avoid offending others and are, in his view, too conservative (Silman, 2015). According to Silman, the modern audience of comedy has become more sensitive and easily offended (2015). According to The Huffington Post, “experts are split on the issue of political correctness. Some feel the culture is moving America in the right direction with a new attitude of tolerance and respect while others believe it violates the constitutional right of free speech” (Gleeson, et al. 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1 Linguistic Focus

The linguistic focus of this study is mainly semantics, though it also contains a limited section of pragmatics. It includes the semantic aspects of meaning and ambiguity in terms of; homonyms, homophones, homographs, polysemes, oronyms, metaphors and, the pragmatic aspects regarding context’s impact on “meaning” and receivers’ interpretations (See Chapter 2). In addition, there is an investigation concerning language-use and misinterpretations, that is, how the “meaning” of speech or text can be used to intentionally create misunderstandings for comical effects in “Puns” (see Chapter 2.3) and “Double Entendres” (see Chapter 2.4). The research is extracted with the most relevant facts conducted from semantic- and pragmatic-related sources, which concern the affects the English-language has on people's interpretations of words or whole sentences.
3.2 Method
In order to investigate the usage of double entendres in televised, English-speaking, comedy shows, this study will analyse fourteen clips from TV-shows broadcast in the UK and the USA. These will be selected on the basis of their respective popularity in the countries concerned and at the time they were first broadcasted, and can therefore be considered representative of their particular genre of entertainment. This will provide insights into both the types and applications of double-entendres in English language comedy, how they are constructed to be both humorous yet inoffensive, and any temporal and cultural trends that can be associated with the use of this popular comedic device. All selected clips which are used as primary data for this essay have been chosen on the basis of double entendres and was found on YouTube⁴.

The Data and Analysis chapter (see Chapter 4) will be divided into four sections:

- Meaning
- Ambiguity
- Puns
- Double Entendre

In each of the first three sections, three or four scenes will be analysed in consideration of their semantic and pragmatic aspects. The fourth section, “Double Entendre”, will be divided into two subsections, where the first section analyses double entendres in scenes broadcasted pre 1990 while the second section analyses double entendres in scenes broadcasted post 1990. The scenes selected for the analysis are derived from TV-shows or films broadcasted between the 1930’s and the 21th century and are outlined below in this chapter from the earliest to the latest broadcasted.

All the selected scenes will be viewed and transcribed separately in their chosen section and then analysed for the semantic or pragmatic features suitable for the section. In the discussion, there will be an attempt to establish from the analysis whether the scenes have any similarities or differences regarding linguistic aspects in their use of double entendres. Also, if it is shown that there are such differences, an attempt will be made to establish the degree to which they can be accounted for on the basis of time, i.e. a generational difference attributable to social change, and/or cultural differences which exist between the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁴ According to Online Oxford Dictionary, “YouTube” is a website were videos can be uploaded and shared among people (2016).
4.4 Data and Analysis

4.1 Meaning
In humour, verbal jokes may rely on the receiver’s interpretation of them. The speaker’s underlying meaning must be overt enough so the audience is able to understand it, otherwise the joke will be unsuccessful. The different meanings of words or sentences are individual and can be problematic since the receiver’s interpretation and speaker’s intention may differ (Aarons, 2012). In some situations, the speaker uses language in communication to convey an underlying or additional meaning (Leech, 1983). Words’ semantic complexities are due to the English language and how it contains several words which share the same spellings or pronunciations, but have different meanings. Nevertheless, Aarons claims this creates difficulties in separating the concept of “meaning” between pragmatics and semantics since the denotative meaning of a word is generally influenced by context, which may lead to misunderstandings or provide a humorous effect (2012). Comedy television shows have used and are still using humour to entertain their audience. The first choice of analysis is to
examine three selected quotes or scenes from televised English-speaking shows and demonstrate how “meaning” is conveyed in terms of pragmatics and semantics’ features.

The first scene originates from the British sitcom, *Are You Being Served?*, the “Christmas Special: Christmas Crackers” episode, broadcasted in 1975 (TheNabbit, 2013). In the scene, the staff have Christmas lunch and Miss Brahms sits at the table, while Mr Lucas stops behind Mrs Brahms and looks over her shoulder and says,

**Mr Lucas:** “Blimey! Now they get bigger every year.”
**Miss Brahms:** “Don’t be so personal!”
**Mr Lucas:** “I was referring to the crackers.” (TheNabbit, 2013)

The result purposes the scene’s intention is based on that both Miss Brahms and the audience believes Mr Lucas is referring to the size of Miss Brahms breasts and not the crackers on the table. If Mr Lucas’s wording in the first line is examined with a semantic approach, the misinterpretation is influenced by the words “they” and “bigger”. The meaning of the word “they” is problematic to detect since it is used as a pronoun without an antecedent. In other words, there is no noun used before the pronoun with which Miss Brahms can correlate it. The word “bigger” is a comparative adjective, which describes “they”, though, since the word “they” has no referent, it can only be interpret as if “something” is bigger than last year. According to Leech, the semantic approach towards the meanings of words and sentences are connected to logic (1983). However, since “they” cannot be identified with a single and unambiguous referent, the audience will seek for logic by adding context. Aarons asserts that meaning is often related to both semantics and pragmatics because pragmatic factors generally affect the semantics (2012). In this scene, Miss Brahms’s misinterpretation is undoubtedly influenced by Mr Lucas’s body language. He stands behind her and is looking down over her shoulder, so his usage of “they” will be connected with what the viewer perceives he is observing. The crackers are out of sight for the audience, so it appears as if Mr Lucas is inspecting Miss Brahms’s breasts. Context is added since Mr Lucas’s statement is not clear enough on its own, which causes Miss Brahms and the audience to misinterpret Mr Lucas and contributes a humorous effect.

The second scene is chosen from the American sitcom, *Will&Grace*, and the selected episode is from season one, “William, Tell”, which was broadcasted in 1998 (Onixya1969, 2009). In the scene, Jack is visiting Grace at work,
Grace: “Here, do me a favor. Sort these tassels.”
Jack: “Do you want me to sort them by color? By size?”
Grace: “By five a clock”
(A deliveryman walks in)
Grace: “Oh, you want to be useful. Help the man standing behind you with the big package.”
Jack: “Grace, don’t tease me.” (Onixya1969, 2009)

This scene demonstrates the difficulty in distinguishing between a literal and non-literal meaning, which Aarons claims is the reason to why meaning often is related to both semantics and pragmatics (2012). When Grace says “the man” and “big package”, she refers to the literal or semantic meaning, which is the actual parcel the deliveryman is delivering to the office. However, in this scene the context affects Grace’s wording in such a way that the meaning of her utterance is influenced by who is present. The character “Jack” is homosexual, which is recognised by both the audience and Grace. Pragmatic factors, such as, Jack’s sexual orientation and Grace’s awareness of it influence Jack’s interpretation of “big package”. Jack is also standing with his back to the deliveryman, which has an impact on his interpretation of “the man”, since he is not able to see exactly to whom Grace is referring. The figurative meaning of “big package” in this scene may be taken to allude to a male’s sexual organ, which is what Jack’s interpretation is of Grace’s utterance. The comedy is created through Grace’s serious statement and Jack’s misinterpretation of it.

The third scene is derived from the American comedy show, The Big Bang Theory, episode “The Speckerman Recurrence”, broadcasted in 2011. In the selected scene Leonard informs Penny and Sheldon a former bully of his has contacted him and wants to meet (N0neShallPa55, 2011).

Penny: “What are you going to do about your bully? Are you going to see him?”
Leonard: “I don’t know.”
Sheldon: “Wait! Is this the fella who peed in your Hawaiian punch?”
Leonard: “No. That was a different guy.”
Sheldon: “Was he the one who wedged you so hard, your testicle reascended and you spent your whole Christmas-break waiting for it to come back down?”
Leonard: “No. That was a different, different guy.”
Sheldon: “Was he the one who used your head to open a nut?”
Leonard: “No”
Sheldon: “Oh! Oh! Oh! Was he the one who made you eat your arm hair?”
Leonard: “No. Actually that was this guy’s sister.”
Penny: “What do you think he wants?”
Leonard: “I don’t know”
Sheldon: “You know. The holidays are just around the corner. Maybe he wants to see if he can ledge the other testicle up there?”

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Leonard: “I told you. That was a different guy.”

Penny: “That’s too bad. I could have spent New Years eve waiting for the ball to drop.” (N0neShallPa55, 2011)

Penny ends this scene with a joke which operates through two different meanings. The underlying meaning is conveyed through different factors. First, the audience needs to be aware of the “ball-drop” event⁵, which takes place at Times Square, in New York, every New Years Eve. As Alm-Arvius states, language is based on social and cultural factors and the meaning of words is linked to the given speech community’s culture (2003). Secondly, the audience has to recognise the pragmatic factor, which Penny uses by saying one thing but means another (Aarons, 2012). It appears she is not referring to the crystal ball, in Times Square, but to Leonard’s testicle. In pragmatics, “meaning” is conveyed through utterance together with context. In this scene, Penny’s intentional meaning of the word “ball” can only be displayed if the receivers consider Sheldon’s previous anecdote about Leonard’s re-ascended testicle: the joke is only successful if the audience is aware of the “ball-drop” event and can connect it with the idea of Leonard having one of his testicles ascended, which would drop like the crystal ball which appears in Times Square each New Year.

4.2 Ambiguity
Ambiguity is created when a word is used or, put together with other words, to intentionally mean several things (Empson, 1995). The speaker’s intention will not be obvious for the receiver since the word or sentence does not enclose one literal meaning. According to Empson, a speaker can intend to convey one thought while uttering an ambiguity unintentionally. However, ambiguity can also be used to convey two or more meanings, which may cause misunderstandings between a speaker and hearer.

This section of analysis will focus on three selected scenes, from English-speaking films and television-shows, which will demonstrate how ambiguity is used to create wit and comedy. The first scene is derived from the American film, I’m No Angel, broadcasted in 1933 (Katakalou, 2013).

Jack: “Let me take a good look at you. Ah, you were wonderful tonight.”

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⁵ In New York, Times Square, at 11.59 pm on New Years Eve, a lighten crystal ball descends around 21 meters (70 feet) on a pole, for sixty seconds. When the ball reaches the bottom of the pole at the stroke of midnight the lights will be turned off and the numerals of the year to come will shine above Times Square. (Times Square, n.d)
Tira: “I’m always wonderful at night.”
Jack: “Yes, but tonight you were especially good.”
Tira: “Well, when I’m good I’m very good but, when I’m bad, I’m better.” (Katakalo, 2013)

The result displays one type of ambiguity. The word “bad” is a word with multiple meanings. Empson would connect Tira’s usage of “bad” with his third type of ambiguity, which is when a word has more than one meaning and all the different meanings seem suitable for the context. (1995). Tira is a circus performer and when Jack flatters her; Tira responds by being ambiguous. The meaning of the word “bad”, in this scene, can either be associated with a bad performer, as in poor in quality or bad as in morally wrong or naughty. Empson claims ambiguity can be used to intentionally confuse the receiver with multiple meanings. In this scene, Tira seems to attempt to make Jack feel unsure about her intention, because both meanings are suitable for the context. However, it appears as if Tira is flirtatious since her sentence is associated with her particular body language.

The second scene chosen for this section originates from the British sitcom, Are You Being Served?, the “Christmas Special: Christmas Crackers” episode, broadcasted in 1975 (TheNabbit, 2013). The staff has an early meeting and one of the staff members, Mr Grainger, is arriving late.

Mr Grainger: “I do hope I’m not too late. I’m afraid Mrs Grainger failed to rouse me this morning.”
Mr Lucas: “No, that’s understandable Mr Grainger.” (TheNabbit, 2013)

Mr Grainger’s choice of wording, “rouse”, and Mr Lucas’s response demonstrates how a speaker’s can be unintentionally ambiguous. Similar to the first example, the different meanings of “rouse” seem to suit the context in this scene. Clearly, Mr Grainger wants to express that his wife failed to wake him up. However, “rouse” can also mean to cause someone who is tired to become active, which seems to be Mr Lucas’s interpretation, with an additional sexual reference to the meaning of “becoming active”. The humorous effect is caused by Mr Grainger’s unawareness of his own ambiguity and Mr Lucas reading of it.

The American version of the comedy-show The Office, broadcasted between 2005 and 2011, contains several “That’s what she said” jokes (Domosenseii, 2013). The speaker’s intention is never meant to be ambiguous; however, the hearer notices and reveals an additional sexual meaning to the utterance by responding, “That’s what she said”. This type
of joke is similar to Mr Lucas’s remark in the previous example, though, in The Office it is more overt.

**Michael:** “I say stuff like that, you know, to lighten the tension when things sort of get hard.”
**Jim:** “That’s what she said.” (Domoseeii, 2013)

The result exposes two ambiguous words. Michael’s utterance is not clear since the word “things” is inherently vague, and has no identifiable referent, which allows the hearer to interpret the word without any restrictions. According to Leech, the main aspect of the maxim of manner is to give clear statements, which in this scene is unintentionally flouted. The adjective word “hard” can also be ambiguous since it describes the degree of difficulty of an experience, either mentally or physically, as well as, describing a very firm object. When Michael is uttering “when things sort of get hard”, viewers would assume his meaning to be something like “when incidents sort of get difficult”. However, Jim demonstrates the ambiguity of the utterance by alluding to the male sexual organ when he responds, “That’s what she said”.

### 4.3 Puns

Puns are a special tool used in humour; they depend on language play and words with double or multiple meanings (Hermerén, 1999). However, there are different types of puns. As can be seen in Chapter 2.3, above, puns can be created by the use of homonyms, polysemes, oronyms and metaphors.

In this section of the analysis, there will be an examination of puns in four selected scenes from English-speaking television shows. The first scene originates from the British sitcom, Are You Being Served?, the “Christmas Special: Christmas Crackers” episode, broadcasted in 1975 (TheNabbit, 2013).

**Mrs Slocombe:** “I hope we are not going to be late tonight, because I’ve left Winston clinging to the curtain rail. He refuses to come down. The mere sight of my pussy drives him mad.”
**Mr Lucas:** “Is Winston a lodger?”
**Mrs Slocombe:** “No, no, no, no. He is my canary! He got out when I was changing his sandpaper.” (TheNabbit, 2013)
When Mrs Slocombe uses the word “pussy”, Mr Lucas is confused since it can either refer to the animal “cat” or to a more vulgar expression of the female sexual organ. The punning word used in this scene is a polysemy, since “pussy” is both spelled and pronounced the same, but has two related but different meanings⁶. The pun is detected when Mr Lucas asks if Winston is a lodger, which leaves both of the two meanings possible. Nevertheless, Mrs Slocombe resolves the uncertainty by confirming Winston is her canary. The pun provides a humorous effect to the scene, since Mr Lucas seems appalled by the possibility that Mrs Slocombe is referring to her sexual organ.

The second scene is from the American comedy show, *M*A*S*H*, episode “Of Moose and Men”, which was broadcasted in 1975 (Long, 2015). In this scene Captain Pierce has saved another man’s life and is praised by Major Houlihan.

**Major Margaret Houlihan:** “In the meantime, I would like to congratulate you myself, doctor.”

**Captain Benjamin Franklin Pierce:** “I’m honoured, touched, and aroused.”

**Major Margaret Houlihan:** “Why must you always spoil things?” (Long, 2015)

The result demonstrates Captain Pierce uses two polysemous puns in this scene. Major Houlihan is congratulating Captain Pierce for a successful operation on his patient and he responds, “I’m honoured, touched and aroused”. The word “honoured” is easily understood and carries one meaning. However, “touched” and “aroused” are two words which both contain different but related meanings. Firstly, the word “touched” can either be used as an adjective, to feel deeply moved, or as the past tense form of the verb “to touch”. Secondly, “aroused” can be interpreted as feeling sexual desire as well as feeling stimulated or affected by emotion. At first, it seems Captain Pierce uses “touched” as an adjective with the intention to thank Major Houlihan by saying he is deeply moved by her congratulation and, “aroused” would supposedly be understood as if he is affected with emotion. However, when Captain Pierce uses the word “aroused”, it seems to disappoint Major Houlihan, who has interpreted it as a feeling of sexual desire. The response, “Why must you always spoil things?” reveals Major Houlihan’s interpretation, which also affects the meaning of “touched” and changes its function to the past tense verb. In other words, Major Houlihan believes Captain Pierce is

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⁶ According to Online Etymology Dictionary “pussy” is a “slang for “female pudenda,” 1879, but probably older; perhaps from Old Norse *puss* “pocket, pouch” (compare Low German *puse* “vulva”), but perhaps instead from the cat word (see pussy (n.1) on notion of “soft, warm, furry thing;” compare French *le chat*, which also has a double meaning, feline and genital” (Harper, 2016).
saying he feels as if she has touched him physically, which has stimulated his sexual desire. The two puns demonstrate the personality of Captain Pierce’s character as well as representing his and Major Houlihan’s relationship. Major Houlihan wants to be sincere and Captain Pierce seems thankful at first but chooses instead to provoke her with puns, which contains sexual references, to display he has no interest in her compliment.

The third scene originates in the American version of *The Office*, broadcasted between 2005 and 2011. As mentioned above, in Chapter 4.2, the show contains several “That’s what she said” jokes. The provided example in this section will be examined for puns.

**Lawyer:** “How long have you known Miss Levison?”
**Michael:** “Six years and two months.”
**Lawyer:** “And you were directly under her the entire time?”
**Michael:** “That’s what she said.” (Domosenseii, 2013)

A punning word can provide both a literal and figurative meaning (Hemerén, 1999). This scene provides a polysemous pun, which is based on one literal meaning and one figurative but related meaning. The lawyer uses the non-literal meaning when he asks Michael, “And you were directly under her the entire time?”. The word “under” is supposed to be understood as “lower than Miss Levison in job position”. However, since the lawyer does not mention “job position” in his question, Michael has the ability to interpret the question literally. That is to say, Michael’s interpretation of the lawyer’s question seems to be, “if he has been positioned under her actual body”. The two ideas of “under” used in this scene are similar to each other, though the lawyer uses the concept of “under” with a figurative approach while Michael chooses to interpret it more literally.

The fourth and last example to be examined for puns is the same scene used in Chapter 4.1, from the American comedy show, *The Big Bang Theory*. The scene is from the episode, “The Speckerman Recurrence”, broadcasted in 2011 (N0neShallPa55, 2011).

**Penny:** “What are you going to do about your bully? Are you going to see him?”
**Leonard:** “I don’t know.”
**Sheldon:** “Wait! Is this the fella who peed in your Hawaiian punch?”
**Leonard:** “No. That was a different guy.”
**Sheldon:** “Was he the one who wedgied you so hard, your testicle reascended and you spent your whole Christmas-break waiting for it to come back down?”
**Leonard:** “No. That was a different, different guy.”
**Sheldon:** “Was he the one who used your head to open a nut?”
**Leonard:** “No”
Sheldon: “Oh! Oh! Oh! Was he the one who made you eat your arm hair?”
Leonard: “No. Actually that was this guy’s sister.”
Penny: “What do you think he wants?”
Leonard: “I don’t know”
Sheldon: “You know. The holidays are just around the corner. Maybe he wants to see if he can ledge the other testicle up there?”
Leonard: “I told you. That was a different guy.”
Penny: “That’s too bad. I could have spent New Years eve waiting for the ball to drop.” (N0neShallPa55, 2011)

The result demonstrates how Penny uses a metaphorical pun in this scene. In other words, she uses one concept to describe another similar concept. Penny uses the idea of people waiting for the ball-drop event in Times Square on New Years Eve (see footnote 5) as a metaphor for the idea of Leonard having an ascended testicle, which Penny would also wait for to drop on New Years Eve. In addition, Penny uses another type of pun, the word “ball” is a polysemous pun, since it both refers to a round object, a crystal ball and a testicle, so the different meanings are related. Goatly argues that, if a metaphor is to be successful, the speaker and receiver need to cooperate (1997), which Penny and Sheldon do since Penny’s joke is based on Sheldon’s anecdote about Leonard’s testicle.

4.4 Double Entendre
All the previous scenes, used for analysis in Chapter 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, have examples of double entendres. The French words “double” and “entendre” are combined and used as a term in English when a word or sentence carries double meanings and one of them has a sexual reference (Nordquist, 2015). Bell recognises “double entendre” as a non-venomous innuendo, which has a more overt intention (1997). A “double entendre” has one literal meaning and one figurative meaning in which the speaker’s intention is hidden (Bell, 1997). However, the intention should only be overt enough for the receivers to recognise it on the level of suspicion, since it is often improper or vulgar (Bell, 1997). The literal meaning is generally more overt than the figurative meaning, and has often a more serious approach, which allows the speaker, as well as the recipient, to deny any suspicion of, e.g., vulgarity or impropriety (Bell, 1997). The speakers’ possibilities to deny or ignore any suspected sexual reference also allow them to avoid responsibility (Tanaka, 1999).

In this section, three of the scenes which have been previously mentioned in sections above will be divided into two subsections, which represent whether the scene was either broadcasted “pre 1990” or “post 1990”. Despite the scenes which have been used in previous
sections, five additional scenes will be examined with the purpose of detecting their use of double entendres.

4.4.1 Early Broadcasted (Pre 1990)
The first scene of selected clips broadcasted before 1990 is derived from the American film, *To Have and Have Not*, broadcasted 1944 (Dacheva, 2013). In the scene, Marie has kissed Steve and is about to leave the room.

**Marie:** “You know you don’t need to act with me Steve. You don’t have to say anything or do anything, not a thing. Or maybe just whistle…You know how to whistle, don’t you Steve? *You just put your lips together and... blow*” (Dacheva, 2013)

The result demonstrates Marie uses a double entendre in her last sentence, “you just put your lips together and... blow”. The sentence contains both a literal and figurative meaning. The intention of the literal meaning is overt and serious as Marie instructs Steve how to whistle. The figurative meaning, however, seems to allude to instructions of how to perform oral sex on a man. The word “blow” is a polysemous pun, since it can be interpreted as “air in motion” or, it can be connected with the English slang for oral sex, “blow job”\(^7\). The act of putting your lips together can also be related to both the literal and figurative meaning. Steve’s and the audience’s possible suspicion of Marie’s more sexual intention in this scene is mainly caused by her choice of wording, but it is probably affected by her body language and intonation as well. Nevertheless, since Marie’s sentence can be applied to both the literal meaning of whistle blowing as well as to the figurative meaning of performing oral sex on a man, Marie is able to deny the more improper figurative meaning.

The second clip is taken from one of the British Carry On films, *Carry On Doctor*, broadcasted in 1968 (chatham43, 2009). In the selected scene, a man stands outside the hospital eating a pear and Nurse Sandra May walks by.

**Man:** “Good evening”  
**Nurse Sandra May:** “Hi! Oh, what a lovely looking *pear*”  
**Man:** “You took the words right out of my mouth” (chatham43)

7 According to Online Etymology Dictionary "blowjob" originates “from blow + job. Exactly which blow is meant is the subject of some debate; the word might have begun as an euphemism for suck (thus from blow (.1)), or it might refer to the explosive climax of an orgasm (thus blow (v.2))” (Harper, 2016).
This scene contains one double entendre, the word “pear”, which is used by Nurse Sandra May. The pear she probably refers to is the actual pear the man eats. However, the double entendre in “pear” seems to have the sexual reference which alludes to the nurse’s cleavage. The word “pear” is used in this scene as a pun which is dependent on context for the audience to be able to convey the underlying meaning. Nurse Sandra May is a blond, with a short skirt and large, pert breasts. Her style of walk is very pronounced feminine hip-swing, all of which is stereotypical of the 1960s “dolly bird” character and is suggestive of sexual availability.

When Nurse Sandra May is approaching the man and says: “what a lovely looking pear”, the man glances at her breasts twice before responding, “you took the words right out of my mouth”. The word “pear” is a homophonic pun, since it is pronounced the same as the word “pair”. Generally, women have two breasts, that is, a pair of breasts. Therefore, the viewer is likely to recover “pair (of breasts)” as a possible alternative meaning to “pear” by drawing from the scene’s visual cues. Even though Nurse Sandra May seems to recognise the sexual reference of the double entendre, it is easily deniable and not particularly overt for the audience since the man is eating a pear and Nurse Sandra May says “pear”. The only implication of a double entendre is her appearance and his body language, which he can easily deny since he only glances and not obviously starring at her breasts. The word “pear” can also be associated with women’s breasts for another reason. There are cultural parallels of breasts and fruit as when people refer to women’s breasts by their shape, i.e., “apples”, “melons” or “pear-shaped” breasts (Zivame, 2012).


**Mr Peacock:** “Mrs Slocombe, as head of the ladies’ section, you must have some ideas?”

**Mrs Slocombe:** “Well, I have been thinking about this, and I think we should have lots of trimmings. Something to make people sit up and take notice. Give us the real Christmas spirit! You know, snow round the display stands, (1) mistletoes in the fur mufffs, (2) a sprig of holly in the underwear!”

**Mr Lucas:** “If that doesn’t make people sit up and take notice, nothing will.”

(TheNabbit, 2013)

In this scene, Mrs Slocombe unintentionally uses two double entendres. However, Mr Lucas seems to have noticed them, considering his response. The first example of double entendre in Mrs Slocombe’s utterance is “(1) mistletoe in the fur mufffs” and the second, “(2) a sprig of holly in the underwear”. The literal meaning of example (1) is the suggestion of putting a
mistletoe, which is a type of plant, in the fur muffins, which are clothing accessories to warm and cover hands. However, the word “mistletoe” may also be associated with the act kissing and “muffins” can be used as an English slang for the female sexual organ. So, the possible figurative meaning Mr Lucas interprets of example (1) may be, “kissing in, or on, female’s sexual organs”. The literal meaning of example (2) is also a suggestion of putting a part of a plant, sprig of holly, in their displayed underwear. Nevertheless, the word “sprig” can both refer to a small twig as well as to an old word for “youth” or “young man” (Online Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Therefore, the figurative meaning, which Mr Lucas likely chooses to interpret, is that Mrs Slocombe suggests they should have young men in the women’s underwear-section or, young men dressed in underwear. However, since Mrs Slocombe seems unaware of the additional meanings her sentences produce, Mr Lucas is able to either deny his sexual interpretations, or blame Mrs Slocombe for her choice of wording.

The fourth scene was broadcasted in 1975 and is derived from the American comedy show, M*A*S*H, which is the same scene used for the examination of puns in Chapter 4.3.

**Major Margaret Houlihan:** “In the meantime, I would like to congratulate you myself, doctor.”
**Captain Benjamin Franklin Pierce:** “I’m honoured, touched, and aroused.”
**Major Margaret Houlihan:** “Why must you always spoil things?” (Long, 2015)

Major Margaret Houlihan congratulates Captain Pierce for a successful surgery and he responds, “I’m honoured, touched, and aroused” (Long, 2015). The double entendre used in this scene is created by the two polysemous puns detected in Chapter 4.3, “touched” and “aroused”. Major Houlihan interprets Captain Pierce’s utterance as if he feels physically touched and stimulated sexually. However, “touched” and “aroused” can also be interpreted as if he feels deeply moved and affected with emotions, which allows Captain Pierce to deny Major Houlihan’s sexual interpretation. Nevertheless, it seems the word “aroused” is used to expose the sexual implication. So, the double entendre in this scene is fairly easy to detect and Captain Pierce’s intention is obvious for both audience and Major Houlihan due to his choice of wording.

### 4.4.2 Newly Broadcasted (Post 1990)
In this section four scenes, which were broadcasted after 1990, will be examined for double entendres. The first scene originates from the American sitcom, *Will & Grace*, broadcasted in
1998. The clip was also used in Chapter 4.1, above, for examination of meaning. In the scene Jack is visiting Grace at work and a deliveryman walks in.

**Grace:** “Oh, you want to be useful. Help the man standing behind you with the big package.”

**Jack:** “Grace, don’t tease me.” (Onixya1969, 2009)

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4.1, Grace refers to the literal meaning, which is the deliveryman and the parcel he is delivering, when she says, “Help the man standing behind you with the big package”. However, even though Jack may be aware Grace is referring to the deliveryman, he is standing with his back to him, which allows him to interpret the utterance without any restrictions. The double entendre in this scene is recognised by Jack through his response, the meaning of “big package” proposes to allude to a male’s sexual organ, which is how Jack chooses to interpret Grace’s utterance. Even though Grace seems to unintentionally use a word with a sexual reference, it would still be deniable for her if she would intentionally use the double entendre, since the literal meaning is more suitable. Nevertheless, in this scene, Jack’s interpretation is overt enough for both the audience and Grace to recognise as sexual.


**Sheldon:** “I want to build a road, but I need (1)wood. Do you fellows have (1)wood?”

(Raj and Howard laugh)

**Sheldon:** “I don’t understand the laughter. The object the Settlers of Catan is to build roads and settlements. To do so requires (1)wood. Now, I have sheep, I need (1)wood… Who has (1)wood for my sheep?”

(Leonard interrupts)

**Sheldon:** “Now, where were we? Oh, yes! Does anyone have any (1)wood?”

(Raj and Howard laugh)

**Sheldon:** “Come on! I just want (1)wood! Why are you making it so (2)hard?”

(Time gap)

**Sheldon:** “And now that I’ve some (1)wood. I’m going to begin the (3)erection of my settlement”

**Raj** (whispers to Howard): “He is got to be doing this on purpose”

(Leonard interrupts)

**Sheldon:** “Now, back to our game…”

**Raj:** “Where you were in the middle of an (3)erection?”

**Sheldon:** “Oh, of course! It’s right here in my hand” (Penguin, 2013)

In this scene, the characters Sheldon, Howard and Raj play the board game, *The Settlers of Catan*. Sheldon plays seriously while Howard and Raj amuse themselves with detecting
Sheldon’s unintentional double entendres. The results display three different words which can be connected with a sexual reference. The examples of double entendres are Sheldon’s use of the words (1) wood, (2) hard and (3) erection. In example (1), Sheldon refers to the literal meaning, which is the material made from trees. The figurative meaning of the word “wood”, in this scene, is its possibility to allude to a phallus. In example (2), it is likely Sheldon refers to the feeling of difficulty. However, since he uses the pronoun “it”, with the possible antecedent of “wood”, before “hard”, “hard” can be interpreted as describing the “wood” or “phallus” as “firm”. In example (3), Sheldon probably refers to the process of building. The additional, and possibly more overt, meaning to the word “erection” is an allusion of a specific state in which a male’s sexual organ becomes firm due to sexual excitement. Sheldon’s intended meaning of the word “erection” is not particularly overt at the end of the scene, since “wood” and “hard” have already been interpreted as sexual by Howard and Raj.

The third selected scene, which was also examined for puns in Chapter 4.3, originates in the American version of The Office, broadcasted between 2005 and 2011 (Domosenseii, 2013). As previously mentioned above, in Chapter 4.2 and 4.3, the show contains several “That’s what she said” jokes. This type of joke is used for creating double entendres from serious statements, which are not intended to be sexual by the speaker. However, the receiver interprets it and acknowledges the double entendre by responding, “That’s what she said”. In this scene Michael is being questioned by the lawyer of his boss, Miss Levison.

**Lawyer:** “How long have you known Miss Levison?”
**Michael:** “Six years and two months.”
**Lawyer:** “And you were directly under her the entire time?”
**Michael:** “That’s what she said.” (Domosenseii, 2013)

The double entendre is detected through Michael’s response, “That’s what she said”. He seems to interpret the word “under” as under her actual body, probably alluding to a sex-position. However, the lawyer’s intention is to ask Michael if he has had a lower job position than Miss Levinson (see Chapter 4.3) with no underlying sexual reference. The audience can understand the seriousness in the lawyer’s statement because of his job title since a lawyer would generally not use double entendres intentionally in their statements. Without Michael’s response, the double entendre in this scene would probably not be acknowledged. The lawyer can easily deny the sexual reference, since it is improper for the situation.
The fourth scene is derived from the British comedy-show, *Red Dwarf*, episode “Dear Dave”, which was broadcasted in 2012 (Who, 2014). In the scene, Arnold is annoyed with Dave because of his moping.

**Arnold:** "You can’t even be bothered to get yourself a cup of tea any more. You dunk your biscuits in the fish tank! I see you."

**Dave:** “I was watching TV.”

**Arnold:** “As long as (1)it is wet and melty, you don’t care where you (3)stick (2)it”

(Who, 2014)

Bell states, a “double entendre” has one literal meaning and one figurative meaning in which the speaker’s intention is hidden (1997). In this scene, the double entendre is detected in Arnold’s last line. The pronoun “it” can contain several meanings if nothing is being directly addressed. The first “(1)it” is ambiguous since it is a pronoun without an antecedent. However, if the audience recognise “(1)it” as something not improper or sexual, the viewer is probably referring “(1)it” to similar everyday-objects as the fish tank, i.e., the toilet, a sauce or melted cheese. The second “(2)it” is also ambiguous but can presumably be referred to as a biscuit. Conversely, the alternative meaning in a double entendre is often vulgar or improper. However, in this scene both “(1)it” and “(2)it” can refer to almost anything, which allow the audience to each have their own interpretation. They key word in this which points to the vulgar alternative is "(3)stick”, because it triggers a well-known idiom to English speakers, i.e. "stick it up … (your bottom)". Therefore, the viewer may recognise the alternative meaning of “(2)it” as “in your bottom” and the “(1)it” as “a wet and melty biscuit”. However, the most important factor for the double entendre to be successful in this scene is that at least one of the two instantiations of it are interpreted with a vulgar reference. Nonetheless, the double entendre is still deniable from any suspected vulgarity and the receivers can be blamed for having sexual thoughts since “it” can have infinite different meanings, and it is the viewers’ own interpretations.

**5. Discussion**

The aim of this study is to establish whether time and cultural differences have had an influence on the usage of double entendres and what different effects it has had on English speaking comedy. The focus of this essay is to attempt to detect similarities or differences regarding linguistic aspects in double entendres used in English speaking TV-shows and films. There will also be an attempt to connect these possible differences to generational differences or cultural differences between the United Kingdom and The United States.
In view of the scope of this essay and the time constraints involved, it has only been possible to collate and analyse a relatively small quantity of data. Nevertheless, having regard to these limitations, the selected scenes used for this research appear to have similar methods in disclosing meaning for the audience. The additional meaning of a word or sentence appears to be dependent upon pragmatic factors in the majority of televised double entendres; the double entendres’ underlying meanings appear often to be influenced by context or a character’s body language. The humorous effect produced by double entendres seems to be mainly achieved through the misunderstandings between characters. This study has also shown a common pattern of unclear statements in the scenes. For instance, many double entendres consist of pronouns which cannot be connected to an antecedent by the viewers. Hence, this allows the audience to interpret the ambiguous words without any restrictions. Furthermore, the analysis also indicates many scriptwriters use polysemous puns as a linguistic feature in double entendres more frequently than any other type of pun.

In terms of differences, the research has shown contrasts between both the British and American comedy shows, and between early and modern usage of double entendres. Firstly, modern American TV-shows appear to use more explicit double entendres than the British. Secondly, the degree of vulgarity seems to have increased over the years in both the United Kingdom and in the United States. However, the analysis indicates the usage of double entendres, as a comedic device, has decreased in modern English comedy shows.

Alm-Arvius states (see Chapter 2.1) that pragmatics deals with how people use language in interaction to convey an underlying meaning or intention (2003). This can be connected to the examined examples of double entendres used for this essay’s analysis. As previously mentioned, the result indicates the underlying meaning of televised double entendres seems to be dependent of context in English speaking comedy. A double entendre is based on double meaning; it consists of one literal and one figurative meaning in which the speaker’s intention is hidden (Bell, 1997). Therefore, pragmatic factors, such as body language, are probably included in the scenes to assist the audience to convey the double entendre’s intention. In other words, the audience members have to use both their semantic and pragmatic knowledge when they are exposed to a double entendre on TV to be able to convey the speaker’s intention and receiver’s misinterpretation, which can have a positive influence on the audience since it may generate within them a feeling of satisfaction which is the reward for recovering both meanings contained within a double entendre. In addition, pragmatic factors can also be used to create humour (Aarons, 2012). Many of the examined double entendres in the research, above, appear to produce their humorous effects through
misunderstandings between characters, which can be connected to what Aarons argues in Chapter 2.1: words’ semantic meanings are often influenced by context and this can create misunderstandings or humour (2012). 

Another method which, according to Aarons (see Chapter 2.2), can be used by a speaker to imply an additional meaning is flouting Grice’s maxim of manner (2012). One aspect of flouting the maxim of manner is to be intentionally ambiguous or unclear. In the view of the results, the English comedy seems to use this type of ambiguity in their double entendres since many of the scenes contain unclear statements. For instance, the scriptwriters seem to frequently use the pronoun “it” without an antecedent to allude to a sexual reference and intentionally confuse the audience and allow them to interpret the double entendre without any restrictions.

Furthermore, the analysis has indicated the polysemous pun is more frequently used for double entendres in English comedy than any other type of puns, which can be connected to what Alm-Arvius states in Chapter 2.3. She argues written and verbal ambiguity is mainly caused by polysemous words; since the different meaning are related, they can easily overlap (Alm-Arvius, 2003). The other types of puns, such as homonyms and homographs, have different meanings which are not related and are probably not easily overlapped (see Chapter 2.3). In a double entendre, the intention should only be overt enough for the receiver to recognise it on the level of suspicion (Bell, 1997), which suits polysemous puns since the two meanings easily overlap and will confuse the audience. Therefore, a pun which has different and unrelated meanings may be more difficult to use as double entendres since one of the meanings will probably be too overt and unsuitable for the situation or else the receivers will fail to recognise the duality of meaning.

This investigation of double entendres used in English language comedy has also shown a similar trend of male sexual frustration as a humour device in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Tanaka argues (see Chapter 2.4) a direct or indirect allusion to sex will maintain the audience’s attention (1999). The English comedy shows appear to contain many statements which often have a serious intention by the speaker; however male characters, such as “Mr Lucas”, in Are You Being Served?, and “Michael”, in The Office, are constantly referring anything said to them as sexual and acknowledge the double entendres for the audience, who will then maintain their attention according to Tanaka. The majority of analysed clips in this essay have one male character who is the one that will either use, or acknowledge the sexual reference, with exceptions of the scenes broadcasted before the 1950’s where it is mainly the female character who uses them instead. Bell argues (see
Chapter 2.4) an innuendo is most successful if the speaker’s insinuation is recognized on the level of suspicion, so deniability can still function (1997). Therefore, English comedy may use double entendres to emphasise a character’s sexual frustration, since it is a characteristic a person would possibly deny and not talk about openly. In addition, the males’ sexual frustration can be connected to Dassanowsky’s argument (See Chapter 2.5) that the women’s liberation movement and the sexual liberation of the 1960s have affected females’ roles in television (2007), which allowed women to be more flirtatious and sexually open on screen.

A tendency towards the use of double entendres which are suggestive of intimate body parts has been detected in this research in respect of both the UK and US comedy shows and films. For instance, many of the ambiguities can be understood as offering meanings which suggest male or female sexual and/or excretory organs, but female breasts are also intimated. However, the British TV-shows have demonstrated a more subtle usage of double entendres where the audience must closely monitor the interactions to be able to detect them. The ambiguous word or sentence is often non-overt and mentioned quickly in the scenes derived from the UK, whereas the usage of double entendres in the modern American TV-shows are generally more obvious and explicit. There have been examples mentioned in the research, above, where a character either repeats the double entendre until it is practically undeniable or relate the double entendre to an overt sexual word which has been mentioned earlier in the same scene. There is also an indication that American comedy shows use more ambiguous words which are usually associated with the sexual meaning rather than the innocent meaning. One example is from *The Big Bang Theory* (see Chapter 4.4) where Sheldon uses the word “erection” as “the process of building”; however, “erection” is admittedly more often associated with a state of sexual excitement. It could be argued the British comedy shows allow their audience to interpret a character’s sexual innuendoes more freely, while the American shows aim to prevent any double entendres from by-passing their audience and therefore have more direct sexual innuendoes. In addition, since the double entendres appear to be more explicit in the United States than in the United Kingdom, it may be one of the reasons why the study, which is mentioned in Chapter 2.4, reports the average American adolescent is annually exposed to approximately 14,000 sexual references through television (Strasburger 2004, cited in Fisher, A.D., et al. 2009).

Furthermore, there is a clear difference in the degree of vulgarity in terms of time period, which can be connected to the result of the study conducted in the UK (see Chapter 2.5) that showed “a large majority of young people believe that people are more open-minded about sex and relationships nowadays” (Parker, 2014, p. 19). The double entendres, which
were used pre 1990 are, in general, more subtle and therefore less likely to be controversial, while the post 1990’s sexual references have adopted a more vulgar approach. The earlier American examples of double entendres, pre the 1950s, were still obvious to some degree, like the modern examples, though the innuendo is more covert and less likely to be perceived as vulgar. However, it could be argued the view of vulgarity has changed through time and what is not considered offensive post 1990 may have been before 1950. Social norms have changed since the 1950’s, i.e., the legalisation of homosexuality started in the 1960’s in both the UK and the USA\(^8\) which may have had an effect on comedy and the use of comedic devices including double entendres. In the British comedy-show, *Are you being served?*, the character “Mr Humphries” is a homosexual man; however, this is only implied by non-overt double entendres. Mr Humphries’s sexual orientation is never explicitly relayed to the viewers in the series. Since homosexuality was legalised in England 1967 and the show was broadcasted in the 1970’s, this particular topic was probably still sensitive to televise during this time period. However, if the audience were uneasy in interpreting Mr Humphries as openly homosexual, the show was able to deny or ignore the issue because of the double entendres. Since then, the unambiguous presentation of homosexuality has become more acceptable in modern TV. The American show, *Will&Grace*, has two homosexual men as main characters and was broadcasted post 1990 (see example in Chapter 4.1 and 4.2). This show contains more obvious double entendres which expressly articulate the character’s sexual orientation rather than only implying it.

An argument will be made that the use of double entendres has become an obsolete comedic device in modern televised shows and films in both the UK and the USA. One reason for making this argument is the fact that it was difficult to gather data for this research from modern English-speaking comedy TV-shows, especially modern British examples, which contained double entendres. Nevertheless, having regard to these limitations, the material that examined indicates that double entendre was a more popular comedic device in the 1970s, since it was easier to find examples from TV-series broadcasted in that time period. In addition, the scriptwriters may avoid using double entendres to be able to avoid offending their audiences since political correctness has become more conspicuous in both

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1967 in the UK, “The Sexual Offences Act decimalised homosexual acts between two men over 21 years of age in private in England and Wales, but not in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, where all homosexual behaviour remained illegal” (Digital Theatre, 2016)
the UK and the US (see Chapter 2.5). When the modern scenes, which were broadcasted post 1990, were examined they showed to be both obvious and vulgar. According to Bell (see Chapter 2.4) an innuendo is most successful if the speaker’s insinuation is recognised on the level of suspicion (1997). However, since the results indicate modern English comedy uses double entendres which are obvious in their sexual intention, they are not successful according to Bell. The modern audience are not as accustomed as previous generations in applying their linguistic knowledge, i.e. pragmatic or semantic aspects, to interpret the full range of speaker meanings since the double entendre is either too overt and explicit, or else it is repeated until the underlying intention is undeniable. This may also deny the audience the feeling of satisfaction which is the reward for recovering all the double entendre’s meanings.

Another reason the usage of double entendres seems to be a dated comedic device in modern English comedy may be the change in social norms. Before 1990, a direct or indirect allusion to sex may have been seen as mischievous; this made it more exciting to use double entendres, since the writers and actors could deny any suspicion from the audience. However, in modern English comedy, an allusion to sex is no longer an uncommon or exclusive comedic device. Wihbey claims (see Chapter 2.5) “American popular culture is now saturated with sexual imagery, and many interpret this phenomenon as a representation of changing habits and values across the population (2015). According to Bell (see Chapter 2.4), advertisements also frequently use sexual innuendo for humourous effects and to interest the audience by using transparent sexual intentions (1997). Modern society appears to have become more accepting of sex and sexual references, which may allow scriptwriters to use more explicit references post 1990 than pre 1990. It thus follows that modern English comedy may not use double entendres as a comedic device as commonly as before since the audience may feel the sexual innuendoes are too vulgar or the show is not innovative enough.

This study has shown that many of the double entendres’ similarities are connected to linguistic aspects. For instance, the double entendres which have been used in English comedy as comedic devices are not only based on word play and semantic meaning; the majority of them are also influenced by context. This study has also indicated a similar trend of using polysemous puns and pronouns without an antecedent as double entendres.

In terms of differences, the research has detected a difference in the double entendres’ degree of vulgarity both between the UK and the USA and between the early and modern English comedy shows. These differences could be connected to both cultural and generational differences, since allusions to sex have become more acceptable today. The American examples have appeared to use more explicit double entendres than the British
examples. The result has also indicated that the usage of double entendres as a comedic device has become dated due to social change.

6. Conclusion
The purpose of this study was to research what different types of semantic and pragmatic aspects the English speaking TV-shows and films use in the United Kingdom and the United States to create double entendres. There was also an aim to detect linguistic similarities or differences and establish the extent to which time and cultural differences have had an influence on the usage of double entendres. In addition, this research was an attempt to connect these linguistic similarities and differences to generational differences or cultural differences between the UK and the USA. The reason this research was undertaken on double entendres was a personal curiosity on the subject of ambiguity in the English language and how it is used in jokes.

This research began with secondary data gathering, which consisted of various books related to semantics and pragmatics, to be able to provide an essential background on linguistic aspects connected to double entendres. The primary data consisted of fourteen clips from popular English-speaking TV-shows and films which were gathered from the website, YouTube (see footnote 4), on the basis of double entendres. The selected scenes were then transcribed and examined separately in the “Data and Analysis” chapter. Firstly, clips were analysed for different linguistic aspects to determine whether they showed any similarities or differences between the UK and the USA as well as between the early and modern usage of double entendres. Secondly, in order to determine how the passage of time has influenced the types and applications of double entendres, scenes were divided into two subsections which either represented scenes broadcasted pre 1990 or post 1990. The findings were discussed with regard to linguistic similarities and differences and an additional attempt to connect the changes in double entendres to generational differences and cultural difference.

The examined double entendres showed various similarities in terms of semantic and pragmatic aspects. Many of the analysed examples created ambiguity through polysemous puns and pronouns without an antecedent. However, although the double entendres seemed to use semantic devices to create double meaning and ambiguity, the additional meaning or the speaker’s underlying intention was often conveyed through context, and non-linguistic signals such as body language. The research did not show any major differences in terms of linguistic aspects. Therefore, it seems English-speaking comedy uses similar linguistic applications when creating double entendres.
Nevertheless, there was an indication of more explicit double entendres used in the United States than in the United Kingdom. For instance, clips from the US was examined which both had a character repeat the double entendre until it was undeniable and a character who used ambiguous words where the sexual reference is better known by the viewers than the serious alternative meaning. The research also showed generational differences in the view of vulgarity between the early and modern usage of double entendres due to a change in social norms and that people are more open in speaking about sex. For instance, the early examples are more subtle than the modern ones and they use more covert innuendoes which are less likely to be perceived as vulgar. Two of the examined clips originated from shows with homosexual characters, but they used double entendres differently. The scene that was broadcasted more closely to the time at which homosexual acts were decriminalised in the US and UK (i.e. during the 1960s) used non-overt double entendres to imply the character’s sexual orientation, since the character was not openly homosexual. However, the other scene, which was from a show broadcasted during the 1990s, used more overt double entendres to emphasise the character’s sexual orientation.

The research has also indicated that double entendres had, in the interim, become an obsolete comedic device in both the United Kingdom and the United States due to limited findings of modern double entendres, especially in British comedy. In addition, the modern double entendres’ intentions have become too obvious and no longer fulfil their purpose of being deniable or creating suspicion among the viewers, which can be connected to the change of social norms and people’s view of vulgarity. In modern English comedy, as with English society in general, an allusion to sex is no longer uncommon, and this has the effect of eroding their degree of outrageousness. Since the sexual references have become obvious, the audience no longer need to use their semantic or pragmatic knowledge. Furthermore, the scriptwriters may decide not to use double entendres to avoid offending an audience’s ideological sensibilities since the result has also indicated that political correctness has become more prevalent in both the UK and the US.

It has only been possible to collate and analyse a relatively small quantity of data for this essay because of time constraints and, if a more comprehensive study were to have been conducted with an extensive data collection, the outcome may have been different. For instance, more extensive data could have been gathered if a platform other than YouTube had been used. YouTube was a useful medium for this essay due to its ease of access and wide range of videos. However, the research was restricted since it was dependent on the selection of videos uploaded on the website. If time limits had not been an obstacle, there would have
been the possibility to have watched complete films and selected TV series rather than having to settle for a small number of YouTube clips. Clearer patterns and contrasts may have been detected had this kind of research been undertaken.

In this essay, it has been claimed double entendres are also used as a comedic device in advertisements. It would be informative to conduct a further research project into how double entendres are used in advertising, again to determine the nature of any similarities and differences between the UK and the USA. Research could also examine double entendres’ similarities and differences between TV-shows and advertisements. It would also be insightful to research double entendres used in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia or South Africa. Lastly, it has been mentioned above (see Chapter 1) that both a new “Carry On” film and new season of “Are You Being Served?” are to be produced and will appear on British TV screens at some point in the near future. It would be enlightening to conduct analyses of the construction and use of double entendres, to compare and contrast them with their counterparts from the earlier generation, and to account for any differences through social and cultural evolution.
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Hi,
my name is Rebecca Flander and I'm studying at Halmstad University, Linguistics 180hp.
I would like to take this opportunity to show my gratitude to my supervisor, Stuart Foster. Thank you so much for you help, guidance and interest in this essay.