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LINGUISTIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS OF STAND-UP COMEDIES

The genre of comedy originates from ancient Greece. However, this fact does not prevent it from changing and taking new forms over the years. Stand-up comedy derived from variety shows and vaudeville and emerged as a new separate genre recently. Although the study of humour in its many genres has been conducted for centuries, the study of stand-up comedy has received little attention. This may be because of the fact that stand-up comedy is a relatively "young" genre of humour. Until the 1960s, stand-up comedians did not play a central role during the performance but served as a kind of filler for the pause, for example, before the arrival of a famous band or theatre group. Ever since stand-up comedians began appearing on TV shows launched during the 1960s and 1970s, the success of stand-up comedy as a true linguistic genre has begun to grow. People became interested in the work of stand-up comedians and expressed their interest by buying tapes with their performances. Over the years, stand-up comedy has become a well-known and popular form of humour that has risen growing interest.

Stand-up comedy has essential functions in the formation of society; its subgenres differ in the features of comic reproduction. Both verbal and non-verbal aspects in stand-up comedy attract attention. This article considers the verbal means of reproducing the comic, as well as the sociolinguistic aspect. The article considers the origins of the stand-up comedy genre, its main types and concepts, means of creating comics in the performances of English-speaking stand-up comedians, functions of stand-up comedy, features of performances, and analyses examples of jokes of English-speaking comedians.

Keywords: stand-up comedy, a joke, stand-up comedy functioning, sociocultural aspect.

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ЛІНГВІСТИЧНІ ТА СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНІ АСПЕКТИ СТЕНДАП-КОМЕДІЇ

Гумор є центральним аспектом нашої повсякденної розмови, і відомо, що всі люди природно беруть участь у гумористичній мові та поведінці. Жанр комедії бере початок з Стародавньої Греції. Однак ця обставина не заважає їй з роками змінюватися та набувати нових форм. Окремим новим жанром нещодавно стала стендап-комедія, що виникла на основі вар'єте та водевілю. Хоча дослідження гумору в багатьох його жанрах з наукової точки зору проводилося століттями, вивченню стендап-комедії приділялося мало уваги. Можливо, це пов'язано з тим, що стендап – це відносно «молодий» жанр гумору. До 1960-х років стендап-коміки не відігравали центральної ролі під час виступу, а служили своєрідним заповнювачем паузи, наприклад, перед виступом відомого музичного гурту чи театрального колективу. З тих пір, як стендап-коміки почали з'являтися в телешоу, запущених протягом 1960-х і 1970-х років на американському телебаченні, успіх стендап-комедії як повноцінного лінгвістичного жанру почав зростати. Глядачі зацікавилися творчістю стендап-коміків. Протягом багатьох років стендап-комедія ставала все більш відомим і популярним видом гумору, до якого й нині зростає інтерес по всьому світові.

Стендап-комедія має істотні функції у формуванні суспільства; її піджанри відрізняються особливостями відтворення комічного. У стендап-комедії до уваги беруться як вербальні, так і невербальні аспекти. У цій статті розглядаються словесні засоби відтворення комічного, а також соціолінгвістичний складова жанру стендап-комедії. До уваги також взято витоки стендап-комедії, її основні види та поняття, засоби створення комічного у виступах англomовних стендап-коміків, функції стендап-комедії, особливості виступів, а також аналізуються приклади жартів англomовних коміків.

Ключові слова: стендап-комедія, жарт, функції стендап-комедії, соціокультурний аспект.

Problem formulation

Although the concept of comedy was developed in ancient times, it did not manifest itself in all genres immediately. One of the newest comedy genres is considered to be a stand-up comedy, which originated in the United States in the 19th century. The impact of stand-up comedy on the audience, methods of creating comics, types of figurative language, and the significance of this genre for society are issues that have been explored and covered in this article.

Analysis of recent scientific papers

Research work on the topic of stand-up comedy was done by V. M. Fisher, O. K. Lobova, L. E. Mintz, C. F. Manwell, S. Lintott, A. Lindfors, I. A. Brodie, P. M. Robinson, M. MacGibbon, J. Limon, E. D. Pease, J. Defibaugh et al. Attention was paid to the influence of stand-up comedy on the audience, the functions of stand-up comedy, figurative language and artistic means in writing jokes, cultural aspects of this genre, and linguistic aspects of humour in stand-up comedy. This genre was also seen as a means of influencing society and a device of social mediation. In addition, the issues of ethics, interaction between the audience and comedians and the peculiarities of performance in the genre of stand-up comedy were considered. The interest of scientists in the study of stand-up comedy is growing every year as this genre is becoming increasingly popular worldwide, and therefore has more significant impact on society.

The aim of the research is the comprehensive investigation of linguistic properties and sociocultural aspects in stand-up comedies, revealing the means of creating the comic effect on the audience.

Presenting the research material

In Aristotle's "Poetics" [5], the author points out that comedy is an image of all that is bad in a human being. Human defects are not reproduced in their entirety, but only to the extent that the absurd is part of the dissimilar; for the ridiculous is any mistake or disgrace, but not harmful or destructive.

The genre of comedy was not recognised immediately but only after it had acquired certain forms. There are also many opinions about how the term "comedy" was formed. One such theory is the theory of the Dionysian feasts [5]. The coded meaning of the first part of Dionysius was the sorrow of the Greeks over the absence of Dionysus. The tone of the tragedy corresponded to this mood. However, the joy of the Greeks would become more remarkable when the god of fertility finally returned to Greece (i.e., spring came, and nature came to life). This joy had to be not just expressed but also emphasised; and this corresponded to the tone of a fun show, which comedy was.

According to Aristotle [5], both comedy and tragedy arose from improvisation, closely related to the modern stand-up comedy genre. In general, the subgenre classification of contemporary English-language comic institutional discourse is quite broad and includes clowning, screwball comedy, stand-up comedy, comic musical, and TV-comedy (situation comedy).

It is also possible to differentiate comedy according to its types. There are high and low comedy, masque, comedy of intrigue and situations, comedy of characters, farce, sentimental comedy, and comedy of errors.

Stand-up comedy occupies a prominent place among the genres in comic discourse, as it integrates the general features of other genres, which was facilitated by the rich history of development and popularity in the English-speaking linguistic and cultural space.

Lawrence Mintz was considered the first to try to define the concept of "stand-up comedy", which is not accompanied by using costumes, props, decorations, etc. The scholar also emphasises the relative immediacy of communication between the comedian and the audience and the proportional importance of comic behaviour and dialogue, in contrast to the development of the plot and situation [11, p. 78–79].

A professor of stand-up comedy at the University of Kent, Sophie Quirk, defines stand-up as a complex interaction/dialogue that requires the audience to have interpretive competence and active participation. The comedian is responsible for organising and managing responses [14, p. 168].

The genre of English stand-up comedy is characterized by professional language, which means that stand-up comedians operate in communication with terms that are understandable only to representatives of the institute of humour, such as "*a heckler*" (a spectator who interferes in the performance of a stand-up comedian), "*a blue joke*" (a joke on an obscene topic), and "*a punchline*" (the culmination of a joke) [14, p. 28–35]. In stand-up comedy, you can also see strategic planning because the performance of a stand-up comedian is prepared in advance; he/she selects jokes and practices the technique of their presentation to the audience.

Stand-up is characterised by improvisation because a stand-up comedian can improvise with jokes during a performance if circumstances require so (for example, a heckler's spontaneous reaction to a comedian's mark). In the stand-up, the form of self-expression and emotionality reflects the author's worldview in a joke. That is why stand-up comedy is considered to be the most honest genre. Among the variety of types of stand-up comedy, true stories from the comedian's life, his personal experience or thoughts still prevail.

The interactive nature of stand-up comedy means close contact between the subjects because this genre is the result of the joint work of a stand-up comedian and a spectator, where the comedian always needs the audience's feedback in the form of approval, disagreement, respect, laughter, etc. Stand-up comedians touch on the most relevant topics, but jokes are excessively exaggerated to intensify the comic effect; comedians enrich the performances with acting situations.

The English-language stand-up comedy singles out comic speech genres: narrative jokes, single-line jokes, humorous monologues, and invective jokes result from a stand-up comedian's creative thinking. The primary speech genre in stand-up comedy is "a joke". All the told in the speech is called "material"; part of the material is called "routine" or "a bit" (several jokes combined into one topic) [9]. With the help of jokes, the contradictions of society and social unhappiness are revealed, as well as moral values are reflected.

Humour arises due to the disclosure of the compositional model of jokes, in which the following blocks are distinguished: introductory, complicated, and explosive. The blocks present linguistic-situational or linguistic contradictions, i.e., comic incongruence is realised, which arises due to violation of norms (ontological, logical-conceptual, etc.) [7, p. 49–58]. Typical linguistic resources of the comic in the jokes of stand-up comedians are varieties of language games based on incongruence, which is manifested at the phonetic, lexical, syntactic, and textual levels.

In the 20th century, a new generation of stand-up comedians appeared: Eddie Murphy, Bill Hicks, Robin Williams, Chris Rock and Louis C. Kay, who, with their atypical monologues, dismantled the existing stereotypes and mixed them up. The comedians absorbed the realities of the former truth, the genre acquired new stage techniques and methods, and in the process of bold experiments with this form, completely new formats of performance were born. Each of them has its peculiarities, advantages, and arsenal of distinctive means. Among the most famous types of stand-up comedy, it is necessary to note a holistic monologue, one-line (a set of short jokes), improvisation or an original approach (musical or visual).

Judging by the size of the comic category, the vast majority of researchers note its isolation from such related categories and phenomena as fun, hilarious, laughter, wit. The content of the comic type is a set of its variants. In this case, it is assumed that the comic is a generic term and includes meaningful varieties. It is appropriate to include black

humour in the traditional paradigm of comic types (humour, irony, satire, sarcasm), the criterion for which is the speaker's attitude to the object of laughter. The definition of this format is based, as in other varieties of comics, on pragmatic perspectives: black humour is the result of assessing the author's intentions (his level of laughter and cruelty) by the recipient [3]. The reaction to the comic is laughter as a consequence of words or behaviour and their "perlocution" effect.

Comic (in all its varieties) is a form of evaluative development of the world and a tool for destroying excessive stereotypes of thinking named the norm. As a rule, the comic is characterized by contrast or contradiction: form – content, purpose – means, action – circumstances, essence – its appearance, cause – a consequence, process – its result, reality – its idea [13]. The effect of waiting for the recipient is caused primarily by the content of the text, during the presentation of the events of which there is a logical failure. The recipient laughs at the perception of such information to which he is not prepared by previous content or personal experience.

A variety of the surprise effect includes various kinds of dissonant phenomena, in which the author deliberately violates the logical, semantic, or syntactic compatibility [10]. The most common technique is when in one row of homogeneous members are different objects and phenomena. In general, the reception of dissonance is characterised by the fact that a reasonably coherent and consistent image is formed, although the words are combined far and even opposite in meaning. The comic is unexpected; it emphasises and intensifies contradictions allowing us to see them in a new light and aesthetic form. All these techniques to achieve a humorous effect are based on the manipulation of content.

Among the linguistic means of representation and enhancement of the comic effect is the language game (playing polysemy, homonymy, synonyms, paronyms, antonyms, phraseology, chiasm) [3]. Stylistic means and methods of creating a comic effect include stylistic contrasts, i.e., the collision of different stylistic units, stylistic reprise, and parody.

The classification of criteria for differentiation of comic varieties, proposed by A. Bieliakov [1, p. 94–95]. The scientist uses aesthetic, social, biopsychological, and linguistic criteria to distinguish between comic varieties essential in their comprehensive description. Linguistic criteria contain linguistic and speech features and are divided into:

1) linguocognitive criteria, which are conceptual, cognitive features related to language and within which we distinguish the degree of intelligence (the degree of reason needed to generate and perceive a comic), the nature of the estimation (good/wrong), the degree of negativity (the degree of denial, rejection of something);

2) linguopragmatic criteria, i.e., communicative features, covering the nature of the expression of evaluation (implicit/explicit), perlocutionary effect (laughter as a biopsychological reaction of the addressee during the influence of the comic: innocent smile, cheerful laughter, scathing laughter, ruthless laughter), the degree of understanding (complete/incomplete) of the addressee comic (the addressee has a sense of humour);

3) the essential linguistic criteria, i.e., the basic linguistic features that combine the degree of contrast of the plans of expression and content (the relationship between what signifies and what is signified when creating a comic effect) and linguistic means of expression of the comic, prevailing in a specific variety comic.

Considering the features of the primary linguistic criterion, it is essential in the isolation and study of this type of comic linguistics. There are ambiguous, unexpected conclusions, puns, unusual interpretations of proper names, proverbs, allegories, metaphors, and irony, among the verbal forms of humorous wit.

The formal classification of humorous means proposed by S. Freud is based on three main methods [4, p. 184–186], such as:

1) condensation (with mixed word formation and with modification);

2) the use of the same material (whole and part; permutation; minor modification; the exact words that are used in a new sense and lose their original meaning);

3) ambiguity (designation of proper name and thing; the metaphorical and material meaning of words; play on words; double interpretation; ambiguity with a hint).

The functioning of stand-up comedy in the English-speaking linguistic and cultural space is due to the social need for the institution of comedy, which provides comic communication between comedians and spectators. The genre of stand-up comedy is characterized by a hedonistic metafunction that accompanies other functions [3]. This metafunction is axiomatic because it generates the intention of the comedian to affect the psycho-emotional state of the recipient positively. In addition, several stand-up comedy functions have been identified, including critical, review, axiological and detabooisation functions.

The critical function is based on ridiculing the object of a joke by criticizing its behaviour. This function is actualized due to the formation of the addressee's negative attitude to the phenomena, events in society, and the heroes' actions, which are depicted in a joke. As a rule, two spheres are criticized: social and domestic. In the first one, stand-up comedians ridicule health workers and politicians, from congress members to prime ministers and presidents. Stand-up comedians raise issues of mutual understanding between the political elite and ordinary citizens, discrimination, instability of the economic situation. In such jokes, the comic is actualized through irony, sarcasm, paradox, homonymy, syntactic parallelism, and so on. For example, the Indian stand-up comedian Kenny Sebastian shares his thoughts about the government considering it as a person: "Why don't I do jokes on politics? Because our

government is super chill. Yay! Yay! Yay! Super chill, our government is. Our government is so bipolar; it's not even funny. If I dated someone like the government, I would break up on the first day" [12].

The second thematic block covers jokes in which the objects of ridicule are the people's actions, their illogical conclusions that contradict the norms of English-speaking society. Humour in jokes is built with the help of metaphor, oxymoron, paradox, antonomasia, alogism. Comedian Dave Chappelle tells a joke that is essentially a commentary on class and racial stereotypes. In his special issue, "For What It's Worth", he jokes to white people of his mixed-race after telling them he's studying white people. "*I know what you drink. See how quiet it got? Grape juice. Surprise mother*ckers! You didn't know I knew about grape juice, did you? Oh, don't play dumb with me. A lot of black people don't have the privilege to know what grape juice is...because they have a grape drink. It's not the same formula you get. Ain't no vitamins in that sh*t*" [6]. The comedian links racial and class privileges, suggesting that white people have the privilege of indulging in grape juice, while the black community is left and enjoys a less healthy "grape drink". Assuming that white people keep grape juice a secret, Chappelle points to the idea that this class division, based on race, is intentional and caused by white people. However, he never speaks about it directly but allows it to be covered in his jokes. The discomfort and humour that the audience feels are based on their acknowledgement of the truths hidden in what he says. By claiming that white audience members have black friends, Chappelle gives them a chance to feel interested in the joke; those in the audience who do not have black friends welcome the opportunity to at least imagine what they are doing in the face of the discomfort his joke causes them about feeling white.

The axiological function is manifested in the play on moral, spiritual, ethical values to create humour. The protagonists of jokes can appear in stand-up comedy as negative characters who violate the norms and principles of morality, or as positive in such cases, the characters ridicule those who undermine the importance of moral values.

"*Who was the first to bear arms? — Adam. He had two*" [7, p. 163]. In this example, the noun "arms" is used as a pun, because, in the question, it means "weapon", while, in the answer, it means "human limbs". In this example, a homonym is used (a form identical in spelling and pronunciation), only one meaning corresponds to the context of the joke, and the other meaning is used to express inconsistency.

The review function of stand-up comedy is expressed through the selection of meaningless and absurd situations. The objects of jokes fall into stereotypical, everyday situations, but stand-up comedians portray these episodes from a comic point of view. In the jokes, stand-up comedians discuss various situations related to social and domestic problems (issues of religion, drugs, abortion, parent-child relationships, illogical actions of ordinary citizens, politicians, or celebrities). The range of comic means used by stand-up comedians is diverse and includes contrast, hyperbole, presupposition disorders, amplification, irony, and paradox.

As an analysis of the American stand-up comedian Stephen Wright's material has shown, he mainly creates humour from incompatible elements arising from fictional situations presented as his real life. Most of them make the audience laugh because of the absurdity and unreality. Wright enhances the humorous effect of his jokes by using hyperbole to overestimate the ridiculousness and absurdity of his stories. This technique helps him ensure that most viewers understand the joke. An example of exaggeration can be found in the segment in which he talks about his friend Winny: "*All Winny did ... All day was practice limbo. He got pretty good. He could go under a rug*" [13]. Wright begins two introductory sentences with the pronoun "all". Obviously, Wright uses exaggeration to emphasize Winny's monotonous daily routine. He stimulates laughter, revealing the only absurd hobby of Winny, i.e., to practice limbo. In the following line, Wright stops exaggerating for a moment and uses an understatement when he adds, "*he got pretty good*". His goal is to interest the audience as he continues. Then he shows an fantastic stroke line, exaggerating Winny's skill when he emphasizes that he is so good in a suspended position that "*he could go under a rug*". This absurd and incompatible remark makes the audience laugh.

Conclusion

The stand-up comedy genre has long gained a definite form in English-speaking humorous discourse and popularity among English-speaking audiences. It has essential functions in society, such as axiological, review, critical, and the function of detabooisation. This genre involves both verbal and nonverbal means of creating the comic. Its features are figurative speech, the use of artistic means, and the acting skills of performers. For the integrity of the stand-up performance, one needs to use all possible manifestations of the comic in this genre, which is why stand-up comedians can be considered diverse artists.

Given that the stand-up comedy genre is relatively "young", it still needs detailed research in the narrow areas of creating a comic in the performance, comedian behaviour, improvisation, and interaction with the audience.

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